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Theories of State Formation

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The history of research into state formation in ancient Egypt goes almost as far back as the history of Egyptology, and numerous attempts have been made to explain the transition from Palaeolithic hunters and gatherers to the state system of the Old Kingdom. To bridge the gap between these two chronologically, but, more importantly, socially, politically, and economically disparate modes of ancient human existence inescapably means to consider a wide range of archaeological data and to take into account social evolutionary theory in order to determine when and to explain how and why this change occurred.

Early scholarship relied heavily on insights and answers provided by the ancient Egyptians from different periods, such as Manetho's account of the history of the pharaohs, king lists, religious and mythological texts, as well as art representations which potentially relate to the emergence of kingship and the state in Egypt. The underlying tenor of this ancient tradition is that before Menes, the first king of Egypt and himself a southerner, conquered the north, founded the capital Memphis, and in doing so unified the country under his rule, Egypt was divided into two or more kingdoms. This basic historical narrative was the backbone of research during the twentieth century, when archaeological evidence was gradually added to the historical inquiry into what was then generally referred to as the "unification of Egypt." Early scholarship therefore very much focused on the search for the historical Menes and on aspects of warfare and conquest as represented on the monuments of the period, such as the Narmer Palette. The second half of the twentieth century brought forward a discourse on the validity of these early sources which was later expanded when the slowly emerging archaeological evidence from northern Egypt was progressively taken into consideration (Kaiser 1956, 1957, 1964, 1990, 1995; Köhler 1995, 1996, 1998; Kroeber and Wildung 1985; Seeher 1991; Von der Way 1991).

This discussion was later fueled by the introduction of modern archaeological and anthropological theory, which led to the conclusion that the "unification of Egypt" was in essence a process of state formation and the emergence of complex

society in Egypt which could be investigated on a much broader social, political, and economic basis and in comparison with other cultures. In this tradition, numerous theoretical approaches were added to the spectrum of the scholarly inquiry, including both conflict as well as integration theories, such as Carneiro's geographic circumscription theory (Bard and Carneiro 1989; Carneiro 1970, 1981), Wittfogel's "oriental despotism" (Atzler 1981; Wittfogel 1957), Renfrew's "multiplier effect" (Hoffman 1979; Renfrew 1972), game theory (Kemp 2006), and many others. In this context, conflict theories have been a recurring and popular theme considering that many of the ancient Egyptian sources feature early rulers in association with warfare (e.g. Campagno 2004; Hendrickx and Friedman 2003; Kahl 2003; Kaiser 1956, 1957, 1964, 1990, 1995).

However, many of these approaches, be they historical, theoretical, or archaeological, have only ever been partly successful, which has many reasons. One of these is the limited quantity of archaeological evidence covering all aspects of material culture as well as the different regions of Egypt. The overrepresentation of mortuary data in southern Egypt still restricts the scope of the various attempts at modern statistical approaches, which only ever succeed in explaining social or economic development in this region (e.g. Bard 1994; Wilkinson 1996), but cannot account for changes outside the sphere of funerary customs or in other parts of Egypt. Therefore, the debate has only very recently become more viable and productive, because the abundance of theories is gradually being complemented by archaeological evidence from the more intensive and more systematic exploration of the north and modern re-evaluation of existing evidence in the south. The current discussion has also benefited from an enhancement in the theory of social evolutionary inquiry and from a sound review of previous theories and models of state formation (see the summary in Yoffee 2005).

In addition, what many Egyptologists have often not recognized, and this applies to scholars dealing with both the formation and the collapse of the Egyptian state, was that the historical narrative as suggested by ancient sources was ultimately the result of the ancient Egyptians' *idea* of the state, namely that a unified territorial state under one king was the only possibility, a god-given law to maintain order and the object of royal intervention. Unwittingly, many Egyptologists therefore also failed to see that the formation of the state in Egypt preceded the time when this ideology was created and that state formation in Egypt needs to be clearly separated from the concept of the "unification of the two lands" and its associated ideologies.

As will be outlined in the following, the emergence of the state and of complex society in Egypt was a far more complicated process than the historical narrative of the ancient Egyptian tradition or any of the theories offered so far could ever account for. It was a multi-linear process that took place over a long period (see Table 3.1), in different parts of Egypt, with different causes and agents and at different times, and that only eventually resulted in the world's first territorial state. For this reason, this chapter will not reiterate, criticize, or test existing theories of state formation in Egypt, but instead will focus on the relevant archaeological evidence and how it can be contextualized and interpreted based on archaeological theory.

Table 3.1 Chronological table of the cultures in the Egyptian Nile Valley

<i>Absolute date in years BCE</i>	<i>General cultural-historical phase</i>		<i>Relative chronology</i>
2650–2100	Old Kingdom		
2700	Early	Early Dynastic	Naqada IIIC–D
3100	Bronze	(Dynasties 1–2)	
3300	Age	Protodynastic	Naqada IIIA–B
3600		Late Chalcolithic	Naqada IIC/D–IIIA
3900		Early Chalcolithic	Naqada IB/C–IIB
			Naqada IA/B
4500		Late Neolithic	Badarian
			El-Omari
			Merimde Benisalame
5100		Early Neolithic	Fayum A
7000		Epipalaeolithic	
10,000		Palaeolithic	
500,000			

The Evidence

Modern social evolutionary theory distinguishes between non-state and state systems on the basis of a range of criteria that usually involve the varying degree of complexity, be it economically, socially (both vertically and horizontally), or politically. These divergent degrees of complexity can be measured archaeologically by investigating a range of interdependent areas or “subsystems,” which, at a certain level of development and in combination, help to distinguish a state from a non-state system. These are, for example, specialized craft production and political economy, long-distance trade, social complexity, bureaucracy and centralization, as well as a well-defined state ideology (Bard 1994; Earle 1997; Hoffman 1979; Johnson and Earle 1987; Renfrew 1972; Sahlins 1972; Trigger 2003; Wilkinson 1996).

Economy, specialized craft production and trade

The ecology of the Nile Valley, with its annual inundation and rich fertile soils, provided a relatively secure environment to allow for the development of a subsistence economy from the early Neolithic period that was based primarily on a combination of agriculture and animal husbandry, supplemented by fishing, fowling, and to a much lesser extent hunting, and that normally did not require much control or management. Only during those periods when the floods were either too high or too low and thus threatening the success of the crops was some form of managerial activity required of the villagers in order to engage in hydraulic works and to direct water flow. For most of the time, however, the families would have produced their own goods to meet household needs or to accumulate limited surplus for emergencies. This “domestic mode of production” provided a relatively

stable subsistence environment for a steady growth in population. Over time, this subsistence economy was gradually intensified, and in the Chalcolithic it developed into a wealth- and staple-financed economy, which encouraged the introduction of craft specialization and which served the accumulation of surplus for the emerging elites (Earle 1997; Johnson and Earle 1987:11–13; Sahlins 1972).

Among the earliest evidence for specialized craft production is pottery manufacture in southern Egypt (Friedman 1994). With the early Chalcolithic period the primary household industries became progressively more standardized, and as demand increased in areas with higher population density the potters had the opportunity and economic viability to establish full-time industries, initially supplying the local markets at the early commercial centers and to a lesser extent also the peripheral areas in their surroundings, where such ceramic wares appear with less frequency. Over time, these workshops achieved an increasingly wide regional and interregional distribution, reaching as far north as Maadi, where small quantities of these southern wares have also been found (Rizkana and Seeher 1987:29–31). During the same time period numerous other industries, such as the manufacture of flint tools and stone vessels, developed in the regional centers, where the workshops had the required supply networks and the demand for their products. At this early stage already, the emerging elites in the early centers played an important role in supporting these industries. For example, the so-called fish-tail and rhomboidal flint knives were manufactured by highly skilled flint knappers who seemed to have catered for a rather exclusive market along the Nile Valley. Given their relative scarcity, their extremely fine quality, and limited function, these knives were obviously luxury items for consumption by the elites (Hikade 2003).

Access to resources, demand, and expertise are significant factors in determining whether or not an industry could operate on a specialized and full-time basis. This is especially evident in the context of metallurgy. The significance lies in the technological requirements of mining and smelting copper ore and of casting the objects into the desired shape, a process which demands the appropriate amount and quality of fuel, infrastructure, and, importantly, the skills and expertise which can only be warranted in the context of a specialized craft industry (Costin 1991; Golden 2002). The earliest evidence for the different stages of this process comes from early Chalcolithic Maadi, where copper ore as well as cast copper ingots and utensils were found (Rizkana and Seeher 1989:13–18; Seeher 1991).

The craft industries in the various parts of Egypt further developed during the late Chalcolithic as the regional centers became more densely populated and as the elites took an increasing interest in their success and economic viability. The elites benefited by gaining access to the interregional exchange networks and thus to prestige goods, which served their desire to publicly display their position and to validate their status (Bard 1987, 1994; Hoffmann 1979). Some potters' workshops expanded or altered their production output by specializing in the manufacture of marl clay ceramic vessels of the decorated and wavy-handled classes which followed the established trade routes along the Nile Valley and traveled even beyond, for example into the southern Levant (Oren and Yekutiely 1992). It is very possible that these vessels were primarily manufactured as containers for valuable commodities, such as oils, which in turn may have also been produced

by specialized industries. Such combined and attached industries are particularly well documented in the Early Dynastic period. There is evidence from early inscriptions that both the king and wealthy private individuals had estates in different parts of the country that not only manufactured commodities from agricultural produce, such as bread, beer, wine, oil, and textiles, but also a range of other associated goods such as pottery and stone vessels, perhaps primarily for mortuary needs (Wilkinson 1999:109–111). Further, there is explicit archaeological evidence for specialized industries which were attached to religious and/or administrative institutions. For example, in Buto a stone vessel workshop was found in association with a building complex whose size and architectural complexity suggest either a religious or an administrative function (Von der Way 1997:147).

As with most cultures where society can be traced over a considerable period of time and across different stages of social development, specialized craft production in early Egypt must be seen not in isolation but in a complex interplay between the social organization, the emerging elites and the state, interregional trade, and a centralized political economy (Brumfiel and Earle 1987; Costin 1991; Earle 1997).

The elites had a strong interest in sponsoring and controlling the economy and the various craft industries within their polities, especially in order to partake in inter-polity exchange and interregional trade to acquire prestige goods and to procure raw materials that were not locally available (Earle and Ericson 1977; Renfrew & Cherry 1986; Sabloff & Lamberg-Karlovsky 1975). A range of goods were imported from outside the Nile Valley proper: copper ore and ingots, cedar wood, oils and resins, wine and containers from the Levant, precious stones such as lapis lazuli from northern Mesopotamia, other luxury goods such as gold, silver, turquoise, and other semi-precious stones from the Sinai and Eastern Desert, incense, exotic animal skins, elephant ivory from Nubia and Africa, and obsidian from Anatolia or Abyssinia (Hartung 1998; Hendrickx and Bavay 2002).

Initially, the trade routes would have been traveled by independent donkey caravans and merchants who supplied goods that came into their possession as a result of direct, indirect, or down-the-line trade (Levy and van den Brink 2002). With the emergence of the regional commercial centers, located at the intersection of trade routes, where the craft industries acquired their raw materials and exchanged their products, and with the vested interest of the elites, these merchants would have found the necessary demand and economic platform. Evidence of the presence of foreign traders can be seen, for example, in the unusual subterranean structures at Maadi, whose architecture is unknown in Egypt and clearly derived from a Levantine tradition. Especially noteworthy here is a large semi-subterranean stone building that may have been used for some form of specialized central storage (Hartung et al. 2003).

The elites, and later also the state, took increasing control over this interregional trade and started to organize their own trading expeditions. There is inscriptional evidence from Dynasty 1 suggesting that ships were sent across the Mediterranean to the Levantine littoral in order to procure cedar wood (e.g. for the large-scale construction projects of the royal tombs and of temples) as well as a range of other goods such as resin, oils, and their containers (Wilkinson

1999:161). These imported commodities were subsequently distributed within the royal court to officials presumably in return for their services to the government, who then incorporated them in their tomb assemblages. Interestingly, however, imported goods are not exclusive to the tombs of the highest elites in the Early Dynastic period at Saqqara, but can occasionally also be found in the tombs of lower-class Egyptians, such as in the large necropolis at Helwan (Hendrickx and Bavay 2002). Although it is uncertain how these prestige items came into their possession, the evidence on the whole does indicate a well-established long-distance trade network at the beginning of the historical era in Egypt. This trade network became part of the overall economic system of the centralized government that collected taxes on a regular basis, and redistributed this government income to state officials, the royal treasury, and the operating administrative apparatus for production and storage (Wilkinson 1999: 126).

Bureaucracy and administration

Administration in Egypt is one of the key areas of research whose object reflects on the organization of the government and the complexity of the centralized economy as well as of society. Its evidence almost entirely rests upon textual evidence that contains information about the titles and hierarchy of officials, their responsibilities and administrative units, and the nature of the bureaucratic transactions involved. Therefore, at the most basic level, administration deals with the recording of bureaucratic processes in the form of written records.

The earliest evidence for such bureaucratic processes relates to the recording and controlling of access to goods, evident in the form of cylinder seals and clay sealings of the late Chalcolithic period (Hartung 1998). This evidence suggests that certain commodities were produced, packed, and stored under the control of a person or an institution whose interest it was to monitor access to this commodity. It is therefore conceivable that such control was exerted by the elites, who not only had a strong interest in supporting and controlling the craft industries, markets, and trade, but who also needed to accumulate revenue for economic and political leverage (Earle 1997; Johnson and Earle 1987). It is also not by coincidence that this earliest evidence comes from two of the known regional commercial centers in southern Egypt: Abydos and Naqada. Especially at Naqada South, there is evidence for a large building complex associated with significant quantities of clay sealings that would document the existence of the infrastructure and personnel to store and administer large quantities of goods (Barocas et al. 1989; Kemp 1977). However, this late Chalcolithic administration still operated without a writing system as the seals carried largely pictographic and geometric signs that hardly bear any relation to the later hieroglyphic writing system. Such evidence only comes from the early stages of Naqada III or the Protodynastic period.

The earliest evidence for phonetic hieroglyphic writing currently comes from cemetery U at Abydos, where the relatively recent discovery of tomb U-j, dating Naqada IIIA, contributed most significant results (Dreyer 1998). The evidence primarily comes in the form of commodity labels, which were originally attached to goods, such as oils and textiles, and which denote their quantity or their

provenance. This would indicate that the owner of this tomb received commodities from different parts of Egypt, where they were manufactured and either recorded by an authority at the point of production or when they arrived at the tomb owner's storage. There were also ink inscriptions on ceramic vessels which show a variety of specific signs in combination with a plant sign, which the excavator has identified as the estate names of early rulers. From then on, hieroglyphic writing developed quickly as a means of administrative control. While the realm of writing remained largely in the context of state administration and religion, private individuals also occasionally employed it for the purpose of administration of their own estates, for funerary inscriptions, or simply to denote ownership of certain goods.

On the whole however, early hieroglyphic writing was deeply embedded within the administration of the centralized bureaucracy, which would have been operated on a continuous basis with clearly defined administrative units and personnel. Of major concern to the central administration was the collection of revenue in the form of taxes and surplus gained from the various craft industries, their quantification, the regular recording of storage inventories, and the documentation of expenses. In this context, one of the most important early titles was that of royal seal bearer that appears in the written form early in Dynasty 1, but that may be evident already earlier in the form of royal seals, such as one from Helwan dating back as far as Naqada IIIA/B (Köhler 1999). Other inscriptional evidence clearly indicates that by the Early Dynastic period there was a structured administrative hierarchy with defined institutions and specifically allocated personnel. These personnel appear to have had a high social status, which may have been the result of kinship relations with the ruler, and therefore ascribed, or may have been attained through special professional competence, ability, and skills.

Social complexity

It is today understood that one of the key factors to be considered in the formation of the state is the organization and complexity of society. In spite of the many criticisms that social evolutionary theory has received over the past several decades, I consider Egypt as one area of research where an evolution and integration of society from a less complex to a more complex structure, both horizontally and vertically, can be observed over time that eventually resulted in the Old Kingdom state. It should be pointed out that I do not intend to contribute to archaeological theory, but instead aim to engage in a "mining-and-bridging exercise" (Yoffee 2005:182) by exploring several models or theories that I consider helpful and that assist in interpreting archaeological evidence. I also acknowledge the difficulty in applying certain classification systems, be it Service's band, tribe, chiefdom, and state (1962), or Fried's egalitarian, ranked, and stratified (1960). While some of the categories might lend themselves better to the classification of a society than others and while the lines between them are often difficult to draw, these criteria nevertheless can be applied in conjunction quite effectively to the different stages in the development of society as it can be observed in early Egyptian civilization.

The simplest or least complex form of social differentiation in Egypt can be placed in the Palaeolithic, when we can safely assume that population density was so low that the largest social unit would have comprised a nuclear family of mobile hunters and gatherers. This stage of social development is best classified under the terms of band or egalitarian society. When early Neolithic farmers became fully sedentary in villages such as at Merimde Benisalame, we can observe the first evidence for larger communities living permanently in one place and thus forming social units greater than the family unit, and for increasing social segmentation. The latter is possibly indicated by specialized activities, such as flint knapping, pottery manufacture, or basketry, which are, however, at this stage not subsistence activities. The economy is largely based on reciprocal exchange. Unequal distribution of wealth is often an indicator of social inequality and, for example, observable among the late Neolithic Badarian burials. Here, a small number of the graves (8 percent) display greater material wealth than the vast majority (92 percent), thus suggesting an early form of social distinction and a two-tiered or ranked society (Anderson 1992). Such ranking often reflects differential access to resources, but can also be found in tribal societies that accommodate age-grade associations, such as village elders who hold a certain esteem within their community and oversee ritual activities. It is possible that there is evidence for such an individual from the Neolithic site of el-Omari, where the burial of an adult male, A35, displays unusual features that cannot be matched by any other grave at this site (Debono and Mortensen 1990:67). Although his grave is no different by means of size or number of grave goods, it is marked on the surface by rows of posts, forming either a fence or a hut. Further, unlike any other on the site, his grave contained a c. 30 cm-long wooden staff, which was located in front of his body. As it does not appear to have served any practical purpose, it is possible that this staff was a marker of social distinction.

The next important step in the social development of early Egypt is indicated by the introduction of specialized, full-time craft industries, a redistributive or political economy, and centralization, which are all intertwined with the organization of society. Although this form of society could still be classified as ranked, the difference lies in the access, control, and distribution of resources that are now in the hands of high-status persons or elites. These criteria would thus enable us to term this form of society a chiefdom society, although the concept of the “chiefdom” as a universally applicable term has received sound criticism over the years. Many archaeologists nevertheless persist in using it, often “for lack of a better word” and because of the need to insert a term that reflects less complexity than a state and more complexity than a ranked society (see the summary in Yoffee 2005). There are a number of criteria that are often applied to chiefdoms and that can be ascertained from archaeological evidence in different parts of Egypt, such as Hierakonpolis, Naqada, Abydos, and probably also Maadi, Girza, and the Nile Delta. Especially in the south, where there is an abundance of well-documented mortuary data (e.g. Bard 1994; Wilkinson 1996), there is evidence for clearly distinguished elites whose graves are larger and architecturally more elaborate than normal, richly endowed with large quantities of grave goods such as pottery and stone vessels containing food and drink, tools and weapons, ornaments and personal belongings, many of which were imported. The elites and their kin literally

distanced themselves from the commoners in separate burial grounds, such as cemetery T at Naqada, cemetery U at Abydos, and Locality 6 at Hierakonpolis.

From here the pace at which social development proceeds increases rapidly. Towards the very end of the Chalcolithic and thereafter, there is evidence for a further rise in social inequality and diversity at various sites in Egypt and the beginning of social stratification which takes Egyptian society well beyond the chiefdom level. The difference lies in the distinction between a ranked or two-tiered society, comprising of elites and commoners, and a multi-tiered or stratified society with several distinct social ranks or classes. An indication for the latter is, for example, given, when economic control and administration are no longer in the hands of the ruling elites alone, but are delegated to qualified individuals who are not necessarily kin members of the elite – Fried’s organization of power “on a supra-kin basis” (1960:728). The population size of the polities of stratified societies is usually substantial, including a primary center where the power resides and secondary or even tertiary centers, depending on the size of the territory (Nissen 1988). While the hinterland produced the agricultural revenue, the centers accommodated, to a varying extent, the infrastructure and delegated personnel of the central administration, including storage and production facilities, officials, craftsmen, artisans, and workers, which directly implies a far more complex social organization than a chiefdom society could accommodate. Therefore, the process of state formation has now arrived at a crucial stage that for the first time allows us to speak of a state system. However, it must be noted that this process has taken place at a regional level first and initially does not have any effect on the political organization of Egypt as one polity. While we may now speak of Egyptian civilization under Norman Yoffee’s terms (2005:17), this is not yet an Egyptian state. Instead, we are dealing with several regional states, “micro states” (Yoffee 2005), “proto-kingdoms” (Kemp 2006), or “proto-states” (Campagno 2002) that were headed by powerful monarchs, who had almost unlimited resources at their disposal and who shared a common material culture and ideology. A good example is the evidence from the elite cemetery U at Abydos and especially tomb U-j, which was occupied by one of the best-documented early rulers of the time. The tomb is subdivided into twelve mudbrick chambers within a large pit covering an area of more than 60m², which makes it the largest tomb of the period (Dreyer 1998). Although U-j was plundered, there was still significant evidence left that allowed the excavator to conclude that its owner truly was a monarch. It contained several hundred wine jars imported from Syria–Palestine, thus suggesting not only a well-established infrastructure and long-distance trade contacts, but also a significant amount of wealth required for their acquisition. It also contained large quantities of exquisite artifacts of obsidian and ivory manufactured by skilled artisans and craftsmen, an ivory *heka* scepter, symbolizing rulership, and, above all, numerous commodity labels and inscribed pottery vessels that demonstrate the existence of an administrative apparatus. The society in this person’s polity was clearly stratified: it was headed by a powerful and wealthy ruler, probably surrounded by a small circle of family members who oversaw the government with him, and assisted by a small number of officials running the central administration and economy on his behalf. The bulk of society that formed part of this Abydene monarch’s polity was made up of artisans, craftsmen, farmers, and laborers.

There is some evidence that as a result of inter-polity competition during the Protodynastic period the territory of Naqada was gradually integrated into the polity of either Abydos or Hierakonpolis and that these two subsequently competed for access to local resources, a share in the interregional and long-distance trade networks, and ultimately dominion in southern Egypt for about 150–200 years until the beginning of Dynasty 1. Parallel to these processes in southern Egypt, there is also evidence in northern Egypt, though less tangible and well documented, pertaining to the independent formation of regional polities, which also display the necessary criteria for the stratification of society, whose complexity further increases as we approach the Early Dynastic period. Particularly significant is the wider region around Memphis, which later became the capital of the territorial state of unified Egypt. The region experiences a distinct growth in population during the Protodynastic period which is indicated by the increase in the number of cemetery sites in early Naqada III (Mortensen 1991). Of special interest are the sites of Tarkhan, Helwan, and Saqqara, which provide relevant information for the increasing stratification and nature of society.

Tarkhan is a relatively large cemetery with some 1300 graves dating between Naqada IIIA and IIIC. The detailed publication of this site, which was excavated by Petrie early in the twentieth century, allows for statistical analyses such as those conducted by Ellis (1996) and Wilkinson (1996). These revealed that there is a high degree of social distinction among the graves, measured by grave size and wealth, and that this social inequality increased from Naqada IIIA onwards, but reversed in Naqada IIIC (Ellis 1996:156–157). Some of the early tombs, dating to Naqada IIIA–B, were very large and well equipped with grave goods, such as tomb 315, which is unusually large, exceeding 6 m^3 , and which also contained a ceramic vessel with the name of a local ruler. This could possibly indicate that the owners of such large early tombs were high-status persons (Wilkinson 1996:72) and members of the elite who benefited from the distribution of centrally produced commodities within this ruler's polity.

Of similar significance is the necropolis of Helwan, which allows for the observation of a number of equally relevant processes. The site is located on the low desert ridges along the east side of the Nile Valley and contains over 10,000 tombs, most of which presumably date to the Early Dynastic period (e.g. Saad 1969). Its earliest occupation as a cemetery goes back at least to Naqada IIIA, and at this point in time already with evidence for elite burials. For example, tomb 563.H.11 measures almost 8 m^3 and is thus one of the largest in the region; it also contained numerous pottery and stone vessels, jewelry, and apparently had a superstructure made of mudbrick (Köhler 2004:307). Considering its size and equipment it is equivalent with the contemporary elite tombs at Tarkhan, and we can conclude that Helwan also served as an elite cemetery within a distinct polity at the beginning of the Protodynastic period. As time progresses the site becomes densely occupied by members of different classes of early Egyptian society. The highest-ranking occupants are identified by their names and titles in inscriptions, especially on forty or so funerary reliefs, naming sons and daughters of the king, officials, priests, and craftsmen. Many of the largest tombs are elaborately built employing architectural features and construction methods that rival those of the kings and the highest-ranking elites. Importantly, though, the necropolis also

contains the thousands of burials of un-named commoners, probably lower-ranking bureaucrats and priests, craft workers, farmers, and unskilled laborers who lived in the nearby city of Memphis and its surroundings.

With the beginning of Dynasty 1 the cemetery of the upper-class elite appears to have shifted to the opposite side of the valley with its steep desert plateau at Saqqara. Here, several dozen monumental niched mastaba tombs lined the escarpment overlooking the city. They were so richly endowed with grave goods that their early excavator, Walter Emery, initially mistook them for royal burials (e.g. Emery 1961). Indeed, they did contain numerous royal inscriptions on commodities which clearly indicate that their owners had close connections to the court, but, importantly, also often provide the personal name of these tombs' occupants and detail their position at the court. For example, Merka was the owner of tomb 3505 and lived during the reign of king Qa'a of late Dynasty 1. He was a royal kinsman, indicated by the title *jrj p'rt*, and held numerous important administrative and religious offices which are inscribed on his funerary stela. Another interesting individual was Hemaka from the time of King Den, for whom there is no indication that he may have been a member of the royal family, which means that his status was possibly not ascribed, but who held some of the highest administrative offices of his time, such as controller and administrator of several royal foundations and especially royal seal bearer.

In comparison with the contemporary tombs at Helwan and the many other cemeteries of the Memphite region, the tombs at Saqqara stand out by their sheer size, wealth, and the illustrious identities of their occupants. Given the high status of these individuals, it is possible to conclude that the Saqqara tombs housed members of the royal family as well as of the aristocracy of the Early Dynastic period.

In conclusion, it is now possible to describe Egypt of Dynasty 1 as a highly stratified, complex society that can best be portrayed with the metaphor of the social pyramid, comprising the king at its top, followed by the members of the royal family, the aristocracy, and high officials, thus forming the upper class. The middle section of the pyramid is made up of lower-ranking officials and priests, scribes, and other full-time specialists and craft workers. Finally, the base of the social pyramid, and thus the vast majority of the population, is formed by commoners such as farmers, servants, and unskilled laborers. This form of Early Dynastic society, whose foundations were laid in the different regions during the Protodynastic period, however, is also the result of the significant political and economic changes that took place when Egypt gradually transformed into a territorial state, which requires further attention.

Centralization and urbanism

It has already been noted previously that the development of specialized craft production, interregional trade, and intensified political economy go hand in hand with the growth of population in certain parts of Egypt, where the right ecological conditions existed, such as proximity to resources and sufficient agricultural hinterland as well as the intersection of trade routes connecting the Nile

Valley with lateral areas in the eastern and western deserts and beyond. Such favorable conditions were given in various places along the southern Nile Valley, near the Fayum, at the apex of the Nile Delta, and on the river branches near the Mediterranean coast, where, indeed, early centers emerged (Bard 1987; Hoffman et al. 1986). These centers primarily accommodated the infrastructure and personnel for specialized industries, the markets for trade and exchange, centralized storage facilities for the accumulation and redistribution of surplus controlled by the elites, and later their administration. For a large part these centers were inhabited by the non-agriculturally productive members of society, that is, the elites, their retainers and personnel, bureaucrats, craft workers, and their families. In contrast, the areas surrounding the centers up and down the floodplain comprised smaller villages and hamlets that were inhabited by farmers who supplied the agricultural produce for each polity. It has been observed that the size of the various polities at the end of the Chalcolithic period increased in territory and with it in population. As neighboring smaller polities were gradually integrated into a larger regional polity, the former centers assume a secondary and tertiary role whereas the center of the prevailing polity maintains its primacy and assumes a more and more urban character. Thus, the polities become increasingly diverse and horizontally differentiated as they incorporate a range of social groups. The social and economic diversity was probably greatest in the primary center and declined in an outwards direction, which explains why the villages in the periphery or province, when observed in isolation, often appear to be less complex (Nissen 1988).

During the Protodynastic period there existed a number of independent regional states with well-populated primary centers along the stretch of the Nile Valley, most notably Hierakonpolis, Abydos, Tarkhan, possibly in the Memphite region, and in various places in the Nile Delta. What happened next is a most difficult process whose details are still ill understood. It appears as if in the course of their peer-polity competition, either through warfare and coercion, economic force, or consensual and voluntary alliance, at the beginning of Dynasty 1 the Abydene polity assumes supremacy first in the south and later also in the north. But instead of maintaining its capital in the core territory at Abydos, the primary center of the now territorial state of Egypt is moved north to Memphis, where the already existing commercial center is turned into the capital of an entirely new and highly diverse polity (for possible reasons, see Campagno 2002:57; Yoffee 2005:37). This process cannot be considered the result of a gradual development involving the afore-described natural growth of a polity; it is a move that radically changes the political and economic organization as well as the face and nature of this polity. It should therefore be considered a genuinely distinct process and the creation of a new form of state system, the territorial state of Egypt, which is, at this point in time, unparalleled in world history.

The area where the new capital was to be located was not unknown to the Abydene rulers as their Protodynastic predecessors of Dynasty 0 had already maintained relatively close relations with it. This is indicated by a number of objects inscribed with their names and found, for example, at Helwan, such as ceramic vessels or the afore-mentioned royal cylinder seal. The seal is very significant as it probably indicates that an individual who resided and was buried at

Memphis undertook economic transactions on behalf of a ruler who was based at a distance of several hundred kilometers south at Abydos. One could argue that maybe the primary center was already founded by the Dynasty 0 rulers, except that they were not the only ones with whom the inhabitants of early Memphis had contacts. To the contrary, it appears as if this area maintained close relations also with a variety of other Protodynastic states in the north and the south and that the Abydene Dynasty 0 was not necessarily more dominant than the others (Köhler 2004).

The effects of the move of the primary center to Memphis can be gleaned from the trend that was observed earlier at sites such as Tarkhan, located at a distance of c. 40 km south of Memphis. In the Protodynastic period, Tarkhan was probably part of a monarchy that was headed by a certain Horus Crocodile, whose name was found on a ceramic vessel from the cemetery (Dreyer 1993). It was noted that social inequality at Tarkhan first increased during early Naqada III and then decreased, together with the number of graves, in Naqada IIIC. This was just at the time when things started to change in Memphis, resulting in a situation at Tarkhan where the vast majority of commoners were opposed by a very small number of very wealthy individuals buried in large mastaba tombs. It is possible that this development reflects an overall process of concentration in the new primary center. Tarkhan, which was an independent polity in the Protodynastic period, gradually declines in size and diversity whereas the reverse is true of the cemeteries in the direct vicinity of Memphis. While Memphis becomes the primary center of the new territorial state, Tarkhan is possibly turned into a secondary center in the periphery of Memphis and administered by members of an elite who act on behalf of the central government in the capital. It is possible that the decline of the middle section of the social pyramid at Tarkhan can be explained with the characteristic gravitational forces that primary centers tend to have, with the creation of a central government and all its new institutions, infrastructure, and new offices necessitating more personnel and providing better economic opportunities, and thus social mobility, for able workers and specialists.

In the Early Dynastic period, Memphis is an urban center with a highly diverse population, socially and economically, comprising all layers of the social pyramid and many different social groups. Although there is no specific archaeological evidence from the city itself, as it is covered by impenetrable deposits of alluvial silts and may also have been partially washed away by the changing river bed of the Nile, its surrounding cemeteries allow us to reconstruct its former appearance (Jeffreys and Tavares 1994). It housed the central government and administration, including storage facilities for the collection of the state revenue, the king's palace and court, major temples with associated economic institutions, the infrastructure and industries for the manufacture of goods, as well as a variety of domestic quarters where the majority of inhabitants lived. In its direct vicinity, there were probably numerous smaller villages surrounded by agricultural land, and at a greater distance, in the location of the former regional centers, there were secondary and tertiary centers that locally collected, stored, and administered taxes and goods on behalf of the central government. Some of the old centers in the periphery and in the provinces may have laid the foundations for the administrative district or nome capitals of the early Old Kingdom, although the evidence is

inconclusive (Trigger 2003:104). The political and economic integration of the provinces was one of the main challenges of the new centralized government at Memphis. This process would have required significant reform, reorganization, and modification of the administrative system and logistics of the old regional states throughout the Early Dynastic and early Old Kingdom periods. It also required measures to assure loyalty from the descendants and kin of the old regional rulers, as well as means to express the king's overarching dominion over the now highly diverse state of Egypt.

Kingship and state ideology

While the nature and ideology of kingship in Pharaonic Egypt are well-understood concepts, its origins and development in early Egypt are still a matter of ongoing discussion (Baines 1995). As the political organization changed and the polities became larger and socially as well as ethnically more diverse over time, the role of the ruler would have equally changed in response. Especially since the social relations between ruler and subjects became increasingly distant, it was necessary for the monarch to establish a means of justifying and validating his supreme role over a population that no longer only included members of his own kin group.

Over time, an ideology was created that, on the one hand, pictured the king as a benevolent ruler whose responsibility it was to maintain order and prosperity and to protect his territory from outside forces. On the other hand, the king also needed to assure his subjects' loyalty and obedience, especially in the case of those parts of the population and members of the elite whose allegiance was originally within their own kin groups and polities prior to political integration. This ideology has its origins in the iconography of the early Chalcolithic, when a broad but central motif was introduced which conveys the idea of the strong man or leader. This motif, which can be found, for example, on ceramic vessels from late Naqada I, cosmetic palettes, knife handles, as well as part of the wall painting in tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis, is expressed in the form of representations that show a domineering man taming or killing dangerous animals, such as hippopotami or lions (Kemp 2006). It also merges with the so-called subjugation motif, when the strong man subjects one or several human enemies to acts of violence. The subjugation motif is also known from the early Chalcolithic period, and in its early expression appears to oppose the leader to a rather generic form of enemy. Over time, however, the identity of the enemy is gradually transformed into a more specific form and projected onto outsiders whose iconography corresponds to that of a non-Nile Valley inhabitant or the "foreigner," as is aptly expressed on the Narmer Palette (see a summary in Köhler 2002). This transformation of the enemy into a clearly defined non-Egyptian ethnic can only be the result of the gradual political integration of the Nile Valley into one polity and the definition of Egypt's physical and ideological boundaries. The motif thus fulfils the king's need to validate his role as a strong leader and as the protector of his subjects from outside forces.

Another means of ideological legitimation was achieved through the king's association with supernatural powers or deities and his engagement in religious

rituals. This concept is first expressed in different forms during the Protodynastic period, in particular in the ruler's direct association with the falcon god Horus in the early royal titulature, and in the foundation and sponsorship of sanctuaries to deities such as Min at Koptos and Horus at Hierakonpolis.

Quite intriguing is the observation that the origin of the Horus name can currently not be traced to one location or polity as it simultaneously appears in slight variations during early Naqada III in different parts of the Nile Valley. It is employed by a whole range of Protodynastic rulers, a phenomenon which can be explained by peer competition and the exchange of religious beliefs and cultural values between neighboring regional polities (Campagno 2002:52; Trigger 2003:101) and within early Egyptian civilization. During Naqada IIIB–C, the Horus name becomes increasingly standardized, consisting of the *serekh*, which is a representation of the palace with the name of the ruler inscribed, and surmounted by the falcon god Horus. Through his association with the god, the ruler was able to claim divine legitimation and support for his political acts, an ideology that was further elaborated by representations that show the ruler in the act of subjugating his enemies involving the god, as for example on the Narmer Palette. This concept became a powerful tool in Pharaonic state ideology and decorum that remained practically unchanged for the thousands of years to follow.

Conclusion

Owing to intensive research over the past century, including archaeological investigation and theoretical discussion, modern scholarship is now in the position to draw a more precise, though nonetheless complex, picture of the formation of the Pharaonic state of Egypt. Although many of the details are still under investigation and although there is no scholarly consensus on any of the points discussed above, it is possible to summarize the process in very broad terms as follows. There were a number of interdependent factors that contributed to the development of society from an egalitarian family-level group of Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers to the socially more complex tribal or ranked society in the Neolithic and an economically more complex society that can best be termed “chiefdom” during the Chalcolithic period. At the end of the Chalcolithic, during which we see increasing horizontal integration across Egypt as reflected in the material culture and ideologies, we witness the simultaneous formation of several regional states or “proto-states” in different parts of the Nile Valley which basically completes the development towards statehood and complex society. However, a secondary political process of state formation took place when at the beginning of Dynasty 1 the Abydene polity successfully expanded its territory and eventually achieved dominion over southern and northern Egypt, thus integrating several polities into one territorial state with Memphis as the new single Egyptian polity's primary center or capital. This latter process, now, allows us to speak of a politically unified Egyptian civilization that was the result of a long and gradual process of social, economic, and political developments that cannot be reduced to a single historical narrative or theory.

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