

Petr Charvát

The Birth of the State: Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China



Karolinum

The Birth of the State

Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China

Petr Charvát

Reviewed by: Prof. PhDr. Jan Bouzek, DrSc.

Prof. PhDr. Jaroslav Malina, DrSc.

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CONTENTS

Preface	11
Acknowledgements.....	14

ANCIENT EGYPT

The Natural Environment	17
The Roots and Origin of All Things: The Productive Economy In Egypt (Neolithic Age, ca. 5500–4500 BC)	19
The Chalcolithic Age or Building Inequality: The Badari Culture (4500–3800 BC)	25
Embryonic Signs of the State: Naqada I, II and III (4 th millenium BC).....	27
Economy	27
The embryos of cities	29
Social differentiation: the elite and the others.....	31
Egyptian society of the pre-state period in burial rituals.	38
Lower Egypt: Between the Pharaoh and the Red Sea.....	41
Economy	41
Settlements.....	43
Burials	44
Beyond everyday borders: contact with Asia.....	46
Confronting the Enemy: Nubia	49
The Burial of the Famous and Powerful in the Northern Part of Upper Egypt: Abydos	50
Burial Grounds Of The Southern Kingdom of Upper Egypt: An Elite Burial Site In Hieraconpolis	53
“Simple” Egyptians.....	56
The Dawn Of The Egyptian Writing System	59

The Birth of the Egyptian State.....	63
Stabilization of the Early Egyptian State.....	68
Characteristics of the Early Egyptian State.....	69

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

The Natural Environment	73
The Dawn of a More Advanced Social Structure (the Halaf culture, 6000–5000 BC)	77
Early Historiography: Susa at the Close of the 5th Millenium BC	85
Mausoleum of Susa	85
Painted pottery of Susa: the people and their communities	87
Painted pottery of Susa: the people and their work	90
Painted pottery of Susa: deities	93
Painted pottery of Susa: Why?.....	95
Susa at the Dawn of the Uruk Period:First Reports from the Creation of the State (early 4 th millenium BC)	97
The sacral face of the age: activating fertility powers	100
The secular face of the age: building, protection, tradition....	102
Sumer, the Southern Part of Mesopotamia:	
While This Was Happening	106
Activating the potential of fertility powers	106
Writing! Writing?.....	107
The enchantment of cylinder seals.....	109
“You will not be like gods”	110
Behold, Civilization: the Greater Community of the Late Periodof Uruk Culture (3500–3200 Bc) -	
En, Nin, Nameshda.....	112
Economy: redistribution prevails.....	116
Spiritual and political leaders: EN, NIN, NAMESHDA.....	118
Innovations at the dawn of the 3 rd millenium BC:	
LUGAL, NIN, NAMESHDA.....	122
The wise Owl of Minerva flies at dusk: the crisis of the 27 th century BC and what came of it -	
LUGAL, ENSI ₂ , EN.....	125

“The End of the Beginning”: The Sumerian State at the Close Of The Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2500–2334 BC)	130
The king and his court	130
The powerful and revered	134
Careful and resourceful	138
“He who shackles slaves...”	141
Conclusion	143

ANCIENT INDIA

The Natural Environment	147
Prehistoric Beginnings	150
The Preparatory Period	160
The Proto-Indian Culture (2500–1900 BC)	163
Economy	163
City life	167
Mohenjo-daro	169
Harappa	175
Towns and cities	178
Rural life	180
A state organism?	181
The spiritual culture	186
The Demise of Proto-Indian Culture	198

ANCIENT CHINA

The Natural Environment	203
Prehistoric Beginnings: “Mesolithic-Neolithic” – Hunters, Gatherers And Farmers	206
The Neolithic Period in southern China	213
The Chalcolithic Period (We Are No Longer All Equal)	217
China’s Northern Regions during the Chalcolithic Period	224
The Beginnings of the State	227
The Traditional Interpretation of Chinese History	227
The Erlitou Culture	228

In the cities and peripheral areas of the first state	230
Zhengzhou	233
Anyang	234
Western Zhou	237
The Economy of the First Chinese State	243
Society	244
Characteristics of the Oldest Chinese State	244
A state arises from kinship	247
What followed?	249
What the elite took with them on their journey to the next world	252
The spiritual world	253

HOW THEN IS A STATE BORN?

First, a Brief Review	267
Subsistence	270
Agriculture	270
Craft	274
Trading	276
Settlements	278
Burials	281
Society	288
Organizational centers of the Chalcolithic societies and their facilities	290
Courtiers of the first rulers: clever, resolute and foresighted . . .	291
Courtiers of the first rulers: those who speak with the gods . .	295
<i>Egypt</i>	295
<i>Sumer and Akkad</i>	296
<i>What was the deification of the Mesopotamian rulers like?</i>	297
<i>India and China</i>	300
Three social estates and the birth of the state	301
Metaphysics	305
The human world, space, time and their nature	305
The non-human world	308
Is the world around us composed of the elements?	310

Powers of the overworld.	311
Art	313
Conclusion	315
Appendix: the State in Trouble	317
Egypt	317
Mesopotamia	322
India.	327
China	332
Bibliography	341
Index	347

PREFACE

This book features much of my research on the state and on statehood in the ancient Near East. Although I focused mainly on prehistoric and ancient Near East, I always made sure that my findings and observations also took into consideration the development of all other early state centers.

I gradually amassed considerable findings on the creation and development of early statehood in Egypt – for which I still feel an affection, as it was in this area that I had commenced my career as a researcher – in the Near East, in India and in China. This body of knowledge helped me in preparing introductory university courses on the history and culture of civilizations predating antiquity that I have taught since 1993 at universities in Prague and Plzeň.

I was also given the chance by the LIBRI publishing house to write on earlier periods of the ancient development of the centers of civilization in an encyclopedia-type series. All those readers understanding Czech are therefore welcome to delve into these books as well.¹

The creation of the book that lies before you was not, however, that easy. Following the publication of my previous book² by the Karolinum publishing house, its director, Jaroslav Jirsa, invited me to present the results of my more broadly focused research to the public and kindly showed interest in publishing this work. I am sincerely grateful to him for this. In time, I realized that it really would be beneficial for my students and other readers to be presented with this kind of treatise, so I decided to begin writing it.

¹ Petr Charvát, Václav Marek, Pavel Oliva: *Encyklopedie dijin staroviku* (Encyclopaedia of ancient history, in Czech), Prague: LIBRI 2008.

² Petr Charvát, *The Iconography of Pristine Statehood – Painted Pottery and Seal Impressions from Susa, Southwestern Iran*, Prague: Karolinum Press 2005.

Those leafing through this book might feel that the writing is dry and tedious, full of archaeological information, descriptions of objects and excavations. I am afraid that this is how it works with modern historical sciences and archaeology in particular. Yet my interpretation has two objectives: Above all, I hope to present a summarized account of present-day knowledge and understanding of the oldest statehood of the Old World, but also of that which preceded it. Achieving this requires nothing less than a laborious analysis of the pages and “strange volumes of this age-old and precious science,” of the folios of archeological reports. On the other hand, there is clearly a need for a comprehensive assessment of the finds presented and for a review of the social process that led to the creation of the state in all its complexities. I attempt this in the fifth chapter, where I include passages from ancient texts, whose authors attested to everything that afflicted them and their nations in times of trouble.

I cannot conceal the fact that, especially in those areas that are not found within my own expertise as a cuneiformist and archaeologist, I relied on the advice and assistance of treasured friends, who provided me with significant help at various points in my research. I am extremely indebted to them for this.

Until now, most of my professional work has been conducted in two institutions of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which later became the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic: the Institute of Archaeology and the Oriental Institute. The Institute of Archaeology provided me with a position at the very beginning of my research career, and I am grateful for the many suggestions and role models in the creative and friendly atmosphere that prevailed there. I also benefited from advice, information, assistance and support from many people at the Oriental Institute.

I should also mention my *alma mater*, which prepared me for my research work – Charles University in Prague. My research career began in the university’s Institute of Egyptology and the memories from these years will never fade.

I would often travel to Brno University for guidance, assistance and friendly advice. I am indebted to its staff, especially to my colleague Inna Mateciucová.

A great deal of gratitude is owed to my colleagues and friends from various foreign institutions. Worthy of special recognition are Jean-Louis Huot and his dear wife, Serge Cleuziou, Jean-Marie Durand, Béatrice André-Salvini and Françoise Demange, Jean-Daniel Forest, Régis Vallet, Jean-Jacques Glassner and his kind wife, my long-time friend Erle Leichty, Barry Eichler, Steve Tinney and Philip Jones, Holly Pittman, Gregory Possehl, Mitchell Rothman, Shannon White, Richard Zettler, Charles Maisels, Dieter Schlingloff and especially Walther Sallaberger.

I acknowledge my debt of gratitude to my learned colleagues Svetoslav Kostič, Jiří Prosecký and Břetislav Vachala for help with English-language editions of the ancient texts.

This book would certainly never have been written without the full support and help of my family. My wife, Kateřina Charvátová, deserves my utmost gratitude for her understanding and support, and a special thanks goes to Jan, Lenka, Ondřej and Eva. Little Toniček Charvát has brought great joy into my life. If it were not for all of you, my dear family, this book would not have been written.

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Prague, 20th of July 2013

Petr Charvát

ANCIENT EGYPT

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

A key geographic factor contributing to the historical complexion of Egypt is the Nile River, which over the millions of years of its existence has carved out its riverbed in the North African bedrock. Totalling 6,695 km in length, its upper part consists of two tributaries – the Blue Nile and White Nile. While the Blue Nile's source is Lake Tana in Ethiopia, the White Nile originates with Lake Victoria and Lake Albert in Uganda. The Nile Valley cuts south to north through Egypt, stretching 1,360 km from the first cataract (cascades, rapids) near the city of Aswan. There are six cataracts in the Nile riverbed: the first near Aswan and, moving southward, the last near the Sudanese city of Khartoum. From Aswan to the mouth at the sea, the Nile Valley's gradient is 85 meters. The river runs to the Mediterranean Sea through a vast delta now demarcated by two main distributaries, the Rosetta (west) and Damietta (east). In ancient times, the Nile Delta had one more main distributary, meaning that there were three distributaries at the time.

The Nile Valley possesses a surprisingly diverse topography. Ten kilometers wide on average, it spans a maximum width of 17 kilometers at the segment south of the Faiyum Oasis. Including its delta, the Nile Valley covers a total area of 37,540 km². The river's bottom is composed of sand and rock sediment covered by layers of clay deposits.

The rock terraces over the Nile Valley previously provided quality types of building stone, lime, sandstone, granite and basalt. To both the west and the east of the river, these terraces gradually turn into a plain now covered by desert. In ancient times, the edges of the valley consisted of a grassy steppe that contained metal deposits (including copper and gold) as well as gemstones – agate, amethyst, carnelian, chalcedony, almandine, jasper, onyx, crystal and the legendary turquoise from the Sinai Peninsula.

Yet there is more to Egypt than just the Nile. Vast oases, of which the Faiyum basin is the largest, extend west of the river. This low ground covers a total area of 12,000 km² with an altitude of -44 m with Lake Birket Qarun (in ancient times it was called Moeris) forming its center. We also find the Siwa, Bahariya, Farafra, Dakhla and Kharga oases in the western desert. Furthest west by the Libyan border lies the Kufra Oasis. With its annual flooding, the Nile ensured the fertility of Egyptian fields up until the first Aswan Dam was built in 1907. The floods usually began in early June and culminated in mid August. The optimum rise in the Nile's water level was considered 16 cubits (8.36 m). With the water level beginning to drop in September, field work could be commenced in October.

The Egyptian climate is characterized by four seasons: winter (December–February), spring (March–May), summer (June–August) and autumn (September–November). It usually rains in Egypt from November to April with most of the precipitation coming in December and January. Plowing and cereal sowing usually began in October after the Nile stopped flooding. We do not know for sure to what extent, if at all, Egyptian farmers cultivated spring cereals.

The original flora and fauna were much more abundant than they are today. Various species of palm, sycamore, fig and willow trees, as well as acacia and tamarisk grew in the river valley, whose banks were covered with reeds. The Nile's banks were once frequented by elephants, rhinoceros, giraffes, lions, leopards, hippos and crocodiles. Herds of antelopes and gazelles grazed in the steppe above the river valley. The waters of the Nile were brimming with fish and various species of birds nested there.

THE ROOTS AND ORIGIN OF ALL THINGS:
THE PRODUCTIVE ECONOMY IN EGYPT
(Neolithic Age, ca. 5500–4500 BC)³

The people of prehistoric Egypt farmed arable soil whose total area is estimated at 34,440 km² [1].⁴

The onset of a productive economy and the people's own food production came about in quite specific terms in prehistoric Egypt. Archeologists have always admired two unique traits of Egypt during the Neolithic Age: First and foremost, the Neolithic Age in the land above the Nile is relatively recent, probably not dating back earlier than 5500 BC. This differs significantly from the Near East, whose Neolithic dawn is thought to have occurred around 10,000 BC. Secondly, the "Black Land" has produced a surprisingly low number of sites yielding Neolithic findings. These essentially consist of Faiyum, Merimda Beni Salama, El Omari and Maadi in the northern part of the country, predominantly in the Nile Delta region.

What is the reason for this? We probably need to seek the cause in Egypt's distinctive natural conditions. Over the last ten thousand years of human history, the Sahara Desert was far more hospitable than it is today. It was teeming with springs, enjoyed a favorable precipitation cycle and featured abundant flora and, consequently, bountiful fauna. It therefore can be assumed that its human inhabitants, who left behind monuments of ancient art (recently brought to the general

³ Unless otherwise mentioned, my main source of information in further interpretation is the publication *Dossiers d'Archéologie* No. 307, octobre 2005: *L'Égypte prédynastique*, Dijon, Editions Fatou S. A. S. 2005, with contributions by Béatrix Midant-Reynes, Yann Tristant, Krzysztof Ciałowicz, Sylvie Duchesne, Luc Staniaszek, Eric Crubézy, Nathalie Baduel, Dominique Farout, Renée Friedman, Marcell Campagn and Stan Hendricks. Another source is David Wengrow's *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006. I am grateful to my colleagues Petra Maříková and Jana Mynářová for the helpful passages from this book.

⁴ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 186.

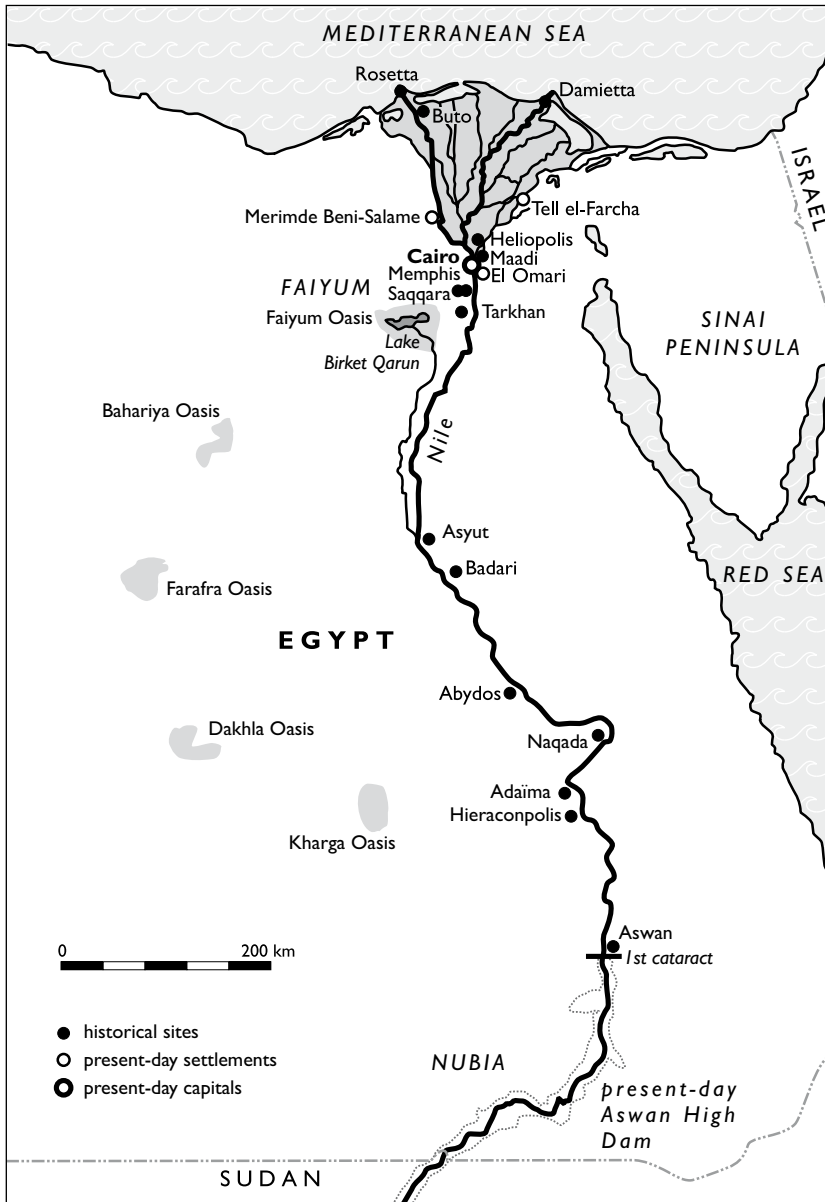


Fig. 1 Primary historical and archeological locations of prehistoric and early ancient Egypt.

public's attention by the film *The English Patient*), led the kind of life that could be called "clustered and scattered". At the more perilous times of the year – most likely during the hot and exhaustive summer – they probably moved in smaller groups to protected and shaded position next to running water, where they could better survive the summer heat.

When the climate was more hospitable – probably mainly in winter – they concentrated on the open steppe in camps numbering dozens and often even hundreds. There, on the migration paths of animals moving from summer to winter grazing lands, they hunted the weaker stragglers from the passing herds. In Egypt, we could examine the traces around the settlement of smallish sub-groups that wandered here, weighed down with the kill from winter hunts, so that in tolerable climate conditions they could harvest occasional crops from lands watered predominantly by the regularly flooding Nile.

As far as agriculture is concerned, Neolithic Egypt in no way differed from the Neolithic farming of other cultures and continents. Crop farming mainly consisted here of the cultivation of cereals, mainly barley and wheat, but also flax. Knowledge of garden and orchard farming still had not been developed; this was primarily due to the regular migration of groups subsisting on shifting cultivation. Egyptian livestock farmers, just as those from other lands, raised herds of sheep, goats and cattle, as well as lithe and nimble pigs. Domesticated dogs apparently helped them in their work, and donkeys may have also been used as beasts of burden. The hunting of game remained a constant subsistence custom for the people of the Neolithic Age in Egypt. Such game included large animals such as elephants, hippos, crocodiles, antelope and cervids. The sea, the Nile and some lakes were fished, and gathering techniques were used for other game (e.g. turtles).

Prehistoric Egyptians mastered working with natural materials without much difficulty. In addition to everyday domestic necessities, they used clay to create handmade pottery, painting the surfaces shades of red, brown or black. Pottery adorned with engraved patterns has been found at other sites. Stones were used for smaller cutting tasks and served as common household tools – blades, sickle blades, knives, peelers, chisels, arrowheads and the likes – as well as for making heavier

and cruder grinding tools such as plant and vegetable grinders, sharp-edged axes and even hoes. Owing to its abundance and fissility, bone was often used in tools such as spikes, bodkins, needles and harpoons. Larger bones could also be used as trowels, forming tools or spatulas. Seashells or ostrich eggshells were used in a similar manner to make spoons and other utensils. Galenite finds indicated that they may have already at that time attempted to use metals. Organic materials were used to make a broad spectrum of objects during the Neolithic Age in Egypt. Wood was used to make dwellings and functional parts of tools (e.g. scythe handles were made out of tamarisk), as well as flails for threshing grains. Tanned hides were used to make clothes (shoes) accessories and for coverings and carrying aids (bags, sacks, pouches, packs). Delicate linen was woven from harvested flax, while sheep wool was used to make coarser cloth. Plant tissue of all kinds – from reeds or twigs – served a wide range of purposes: It could be used for light structures or shelters, but was also undoubtedly used for bed matting, for packaging goods and for making all kinds of baskets. Prehistoric Egyptians clearly used organic materials to build canoe-like vessels with upright bows and sterns used to navigate the Nile.

Only faint traces were left of the settlements of Egypt's Neolithic people. They probably lived in light, above-ground dwellings made from woven sticks, packed clay and timber poles that were easily built and could be freely abandoned without much loss. We know nothing of their furniture, of which there was probably very little. The settlements featured fireplaces and open-air furnaces offering better visibility for work. There were also a number of pits or large containers and baskets set into holes dug out of the ground that probably served as storage, depositories or caches. It is interesting that these pits were generally concentrated in a single place or within one confined area in the settlement. This leads us to believe that every family did not have its own pantry; instead, the entire community kept its reserves together in one place. This attests to the rather strong group solidarity of these early Egyptians, who most likely arrived here already organized into communities bound by blood or quasi-blood relations. Some finds provide testimony of dwellings on elevated places, among which the aforementioned supply pits were concentrated at less elevated sites.

In most cases, these were seasonal settlements occupied at the end of spring and early summer.

The negligible number of burial sites is a striking feature of Egyptian Neolithic cultures. This may, however, be given by the fact that the deceased were sometimes simply laid to rest in the ruins of abandoned settlements. Though it is evident that the communality of the Neolithic Age in this area was not overly strong, obligatory burial rituals already begin to appear at some sites: The dead generally lie crouched on their right side with their heads pointing south; they are wrapped in a blanket or pelt and accompanied by pottery vessels or shells, cosmetic palettes, or even small trinkets such as beads made from ostrich eggshells, and any funerary objects they may have received for their final voyage. However, Neolithic Egyptians probably had yet to lay claim to the “Black Land” in the form of large and permanent burial grounds – an act characteristic of communality in its defined and deliberate spatial action (“this land is ours because our ancestors are buried here”).

It is extremely difficult to attempt a description of the spiritual profile of Egyptian society in the Neolithic Age. The clay figurines of

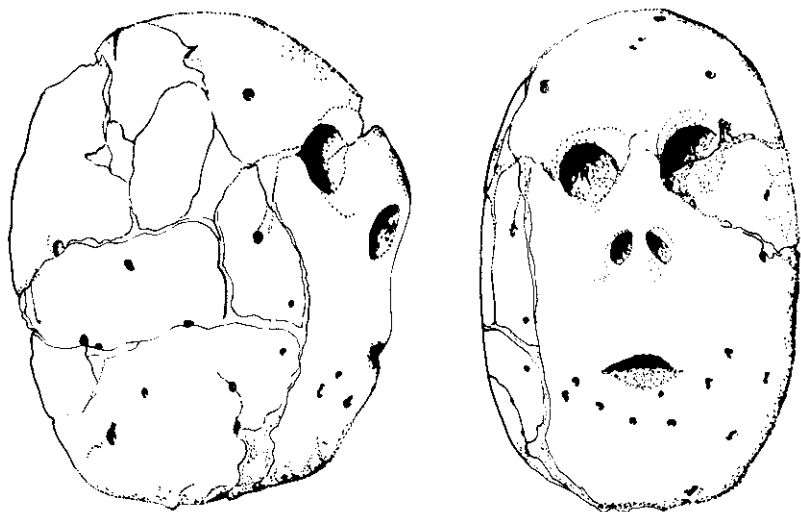


Fig. 2 Clay rendering of a human head. Merimda Beni Salama, Neolithic Age.

horned cattle bring to mind the customs of Neolithic cultures in Asia from a settlement context. The form of a human head, found at the Merimda Beni Salama settlement site [2] and most likely originally featuring hair and a beard made from organic material, evokes the idea of cults not exceeding the traditional standards of an egalitarian society, whose main criteria consist of age, sex and acquired status. Yet we lack more detailed information on this.

THE CHALCOLITHIC AGE OR BUILDING INEQUALITY: THE BADARI CULTURE (4500–3800 BC)

At first glance, the Egyptian prehistoric culture referred to as the Badari in the northern part of Upper Egypt does not overly differ from its Neolithic predecessors. This is, however, merely an illusion.

Generally speaking, the culture's *habitus* did not change all that much. Curiously, in addition to wheat, barleys, millet and legumes, the seeds of wild growing (and most likely gathered) plants reappear. The raising of sheep, goats, cattle, pigs and geese⁵ was supplemented by fishing, sometimes conducted seasonally during the fish passages⁶ and gazelle hunting.⁷ The presence of metals, especially that of copper, used for ornament, weapons and tools in the Badari culture is worth noting. Relatively inconspicuous, though extremely meaningful changes indicating social development were occurring.

Highly significant among the finds are stone palettes used to hold coloring agents applied to the face and body. These were not merely cosmetic aids. Given that cosmetic palettes would later become an extremely important indicator of a prominent social position (and thus a badge of the Egyptian elite) and conveyors of a message of considerable spiritual content, they signify the first distinction of individuals still performing perhaps more of a specific cult role, i.e. that of a prehistoric shaman of sorts.

Another striking aspect is that these first cosmetic palettes were made from a single type of mineral: greywacke (metapelite). This attests to a sufficiently detailed knowledge of the geology of Egyptian

⁵ Cyril Aldred, *Egypt to the End of the Old Kingdom*, London, Thames and Hudson 1965, p. 25.

⁶ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact Between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň, Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 12.

⁷ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, pp. 45–46.

minerals and also to the domestic nature of the Badari culture; it seems that its people no longer roamed great distances to the future Sahara Desert, but probably moved within the “Black Land.”

They also lived here in circular abodes made of clay or poles and wattle. Fireplaces and storage pits supplemented these dwellings.

The Badari were already at this point burying their dead in large burial grounds with a greater abundance of funerary objects than before. In addition to elegant red vessels with black edges, the deceased received for their final voyage numerous jewels, shells, objects made from bone, ivory or ostrich eggshells, spoons, combs, cups, stone vessels, weapons and tools. We also find here cosmetic palettes and shells from the Red Sea, and even copper trinkets. Exactly what was used to carve the female figurines of bone and ivory for the Badari’s deceased is still a mystery.

Yet a major change in the burial ritual is evident. For the first time ever, the Egyptian dead are positioned according to uniform rules: in a curled position on a north-south axis with their heads to the south and generally facing west. Although it is remarkable that even in Egypt’s historic culture the burial grounds are located in the west, of even greater importance is the finding that the burial of the dead is, for the first time ever, subject to strictly set rules. We therefore need to scrutinize the creation of the first world view imposed upon the survivors to provide the deceased with an eternal repose in accordance with already spatially fixed notions regarding the arrangement of the visible and invisible world. Early social distinction evidently assumed a symbolic nature and manifested itself in the spiritual sphere through a clearer idea about the arrangement of the worlds accessible and inaccessible to our senses. At the same time, those individuals entrusted with communicating with the supernatural also began to use their external appearance to distinguish themselves from others in their community.

EMBRYONIC SIGNS OF THE STATE: NAQADA I, II AND III (4000 BC)

Economy

Excavation of the settlements revealed that the culture's overall *habitus* remained the same – hunting, fishing and gathering. Wheat, barleys and legumes continued to be grown, while livestock consisted of sheep, goats and pigs. The gathering of wild crops, fishing and the gathering of bivalves in the waters of the Nile were other forms of subsistence.⁸ The first artificial materials, faience vessels, appeared in the manufacturing sphere.⁹

It is not until 4000 BC that we see the series of changes that led to the birth and establishment of statehood in the society of prehistoric and ancient Egypt.

First of all, there occurred here a fundamental change in farming and the notorious “disappearance of settlements.” It has been alleged that a large number of settlements simply disappeared from the horizon of Egyptian archeology and that around 4000 BC their population dropped to 40% of its number prior to that.¹⁰

This is obviously an optical illusion: the settlements in Egypt did not disappear; their archeological traces have simply not been preserved. The reason for this can probably be found in the location of these settle-

⁸ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 49.

⁹ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň, Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 10.

¹⁰ Lech Krzyżaniak, *Trends in the Socio-Economic Development of Egyptian Predynastic Societies*, in: *Acts of the First International Congress of Egyptology*, Cairo, October 2–10, 1976, Berlin, Akademie-Verlag 1979, pp. 407–412, on pp. 409–410; further literature given by David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 82, note 13.

ments: While in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic ages they were located, among other places, on rock plateaus above the Nile Valley, in 4000 BC they were more prone to being built directly in the river valley and to occupy advantageous positions within the Nile's flood plain. Their disappearance from the archeological picture can be accounted for by the fact that the Nile's fluvial plain was repeatedly flooded each year by many meters of sludge. In this light, any archeological discovery of remnants of these settlements is much more a case of incredible luck than anything else.

Yet if during the 4th millenium BC the regular settlement descended into the Nile's flood plain, this would represent proof of an extremely important social process, i.e. a mass transition to settled agriculture (in contrast to the migratory agriculture of the preceding period) carried out directly in the most advantageous locations: in the arable land of the Nile Valley regularly revitalized by the river's repeated flooding. A settled agricultural population offers state agencies other advantages as well: it is very productive and, therefore, taxes can be imposed in higher amounts. Settlements in fixed places are also controllable and governable.

A model of a hut, previously discovered at one of the burial grounds from around the same period, offers us an idea of what settlements looked like at that time. The small structure is oblong with walls of wattle, most likely plastered with clay and protruding in the upper part into a round roof. The jamb casing was most likely made from wooden beams.¹¹

Yet the transition to settled agriculture did not mean that other subsistence activities came to a halt. Graves from that period reveal harpoons, fishing tackle, knives and quivers, clearly demonstrating the importance of hunting, fishing and gathering activities on the unfarmed land.

¹¹ Cyril Aldred, *Egypt to the End of the Old Kingdom*, London, Thames and Hudson 1965, p. 34, fig. 22 Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, pp. 48–49.

The embryos of cities

Another social process reflected in archeological finds was occurring at this point in time in Upper Egypt and possibly elsewhere: the creation and development of extraordinary settlements – the first cities of sorts. Hieraconpolis, (Nekhen in Ancient Egyptian) the original capital of Upper Egypt with the temple of the hawk deity Horus of Nekhen, was one such settlement. A reverence for “the Spirits (*bau*) of Nekhen” attests to the sacredness of the place at this time. These spirits were deities with jackal heads, considered to be companions of the reigning pharaoh and representatives of the deceased kings of Upper Egypt.¹² Even though Hieraconpolis had already been settled in the Badari period (ca. 4500 BC), its rise to unrivalled importance occurred in 3800–3500 BC.

By roughly the mid 4th millenium BC a rectangular area of 2.5 × 3.5 km had been settled. Excavation of the settlement site also revealed spatial differentiations in the residential quarter, manufacturing quarter and cult and burial areas. Crafts working with fire (and therefore dangerous), such as pottery shops, were located on the city’s perimeter. Numerous finds of various kinds of ovens and furnaces support this. An especially popular location was the valley’s cliffs that cut Hieraconpolis roughly in half from north to south. Not only did the locations of pyrotechnic workplaces keep them at a safe distance from the densely built residential quarters, they were also positioned to better avail themselves of the open air currents that provided a better draft for the furnaces. Excavation of the city’s perimeter revealed a potter’s dwelling with a workshop that burned down during prehistoric times and thus provided us with access to a very interesting sample of original Egyptian architecture with roof beams and walls made of large poles. Another find from Hieraconpolis offers a clear picture of this kind of dwelling. Its recessed part measured 4 × 3.5 m and was 0.45–0.80 m deep in the ground. The dwelling’s internal walls were plastered with

¹² Jiří Janák, Chapter 105 of *Kniha mrtvých v období Nové říše – Staroegyptské pojetí vzkříšení* (The book of the dead during the New Empire – the Ancient Egyptian concept of resurrection), doctorate dissertation, Prague, Charles University in Prague, the Hussite Theological Faculty, Religious Studies Department 2002, p. 25.

clay and there was at least one adobe wall. The roof was held up by eight wooden posts, of which two were positioned at the structure's axis. It was entered from the eastern side and the interior was equipped with an oven, a storage vessel and a ceramic block, perhaps to regulate the heat flow.¹³ Another settlement on the city's periphery, apparently belonging at one time to a cattle farmer, was built as a farmstead surrounded by a palisade with buildings, fireplaces, large storage vessels and kitchen areas. A similar periphery location possesses another type of pyrotechnical workplace, presently linked to the brewing of beer. Experts estimate the capacity of one of these with eight boiling vats to be a respectable hectoliter of beer per person, which was to cover the daily consumption of 300 people. This can be seen as the first signs of the existence of a redistributive economy, quite clearly an indication of the path to statehood in still ancient Egypt. We will ascertain to what extent the centralized supply of beer was also accompanied by the mass distribution of cone-shaped loaves of bread baked in special ceramic "tube pans" once we are able to fully confirm that these "tube pans" were really used to bake bread.¹⁴

Visitors of ancient Hieraconpolis would enter a central temple located in the middle of the city. Worshippers passed through an oval 40 × 13 m courtyard in front of the building itself. This courtyard was first surrounded by a fence of reeds plastered with clay, later by adobe walls. Near the longer, northern side of the complex there stood at least five rectangular structures, some of which served as chipped-stone industry workshops for silex and carnelian beads. The temple's facade on the opposing, southern side of the courtyard featured four massive posts with the largest 1–1.5 m in diameter, perhaps whole trunks of imported Lebanon cedars. A pit to secure a single large pole, perhaps for a flag or symbol of the deity, was located across from the entrance.¹⁵

¹³ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 49.

¹⁴ David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 94–97, depiction of bread "tube pans" also on p. 88, Fig. 4.4 below.

¹⁵ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 69.

The temple stood for about 500 years and was reconstructed several times over the period of its existence. A large number of black oval-shaped vessels and red bottle-shaped vessels come from the waste pits beyond the surrounding wall. These might have been aids for performing fertilization rituals, in which the red vessels represented the parched and barren bottom of the Nile Valley before the flooding, while the black represented the fertile earth brought to the Egyptian field by the floods. Along with vessel fragments, the bones of possible sacrificial animals – crocodiles, hippos, gazelles and wild goats – were also found here. The liturgy of the temple thus referred not only to the people of the Nile's waters and river valley, but also to the creatures freely roaming the steppe and desert on the vast areas of the rock plains, into which the Nile had carved out its riverbed over the course of millions of years. A fragment with an engraved image of the fertility goddess Bat and with a picture of a female captive dominated by a symbol of royal power was found in the temple. A close link is thus already evident in the prehistoric period between the fertility of the "Black Land" and Egypt's highest ruling office.

The burial grounds in ancient Hieraconpolis will be analyzed later in the book.

It was therefore more than just a quantitative increase in the area of the settlement that occurred here; a deliberate and calculated determination of the structure of the settled area was also carried out. This can unquestionably be considered early urbanism.

Social differentiation: the elite and the others

Differences within society continued to deepen here [3]. Exceptional movable and immovable assets indicating the prominent position of some individuals began to appear. Although the aforementioned cosmetic palettes continued to be found in burial grounds, sometimes in distinct groups of graves, they were also found in sacred areas, cult centers and temples.

Individuals of authority possessed magnificent objects bearing emblems, frequently weapons such as flint knives with engraved or

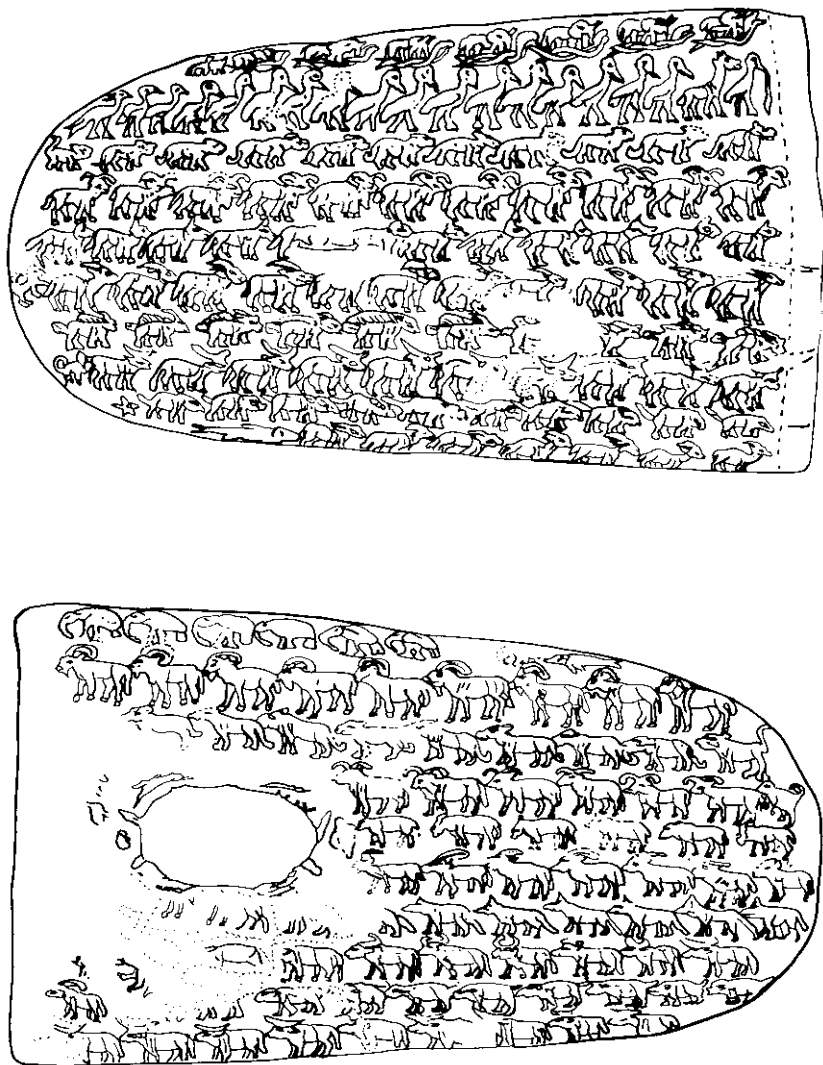


Fig. 3 The Brooklyn Museum knife handle, ivory, early Naqada III period, ca. 3400 BC.

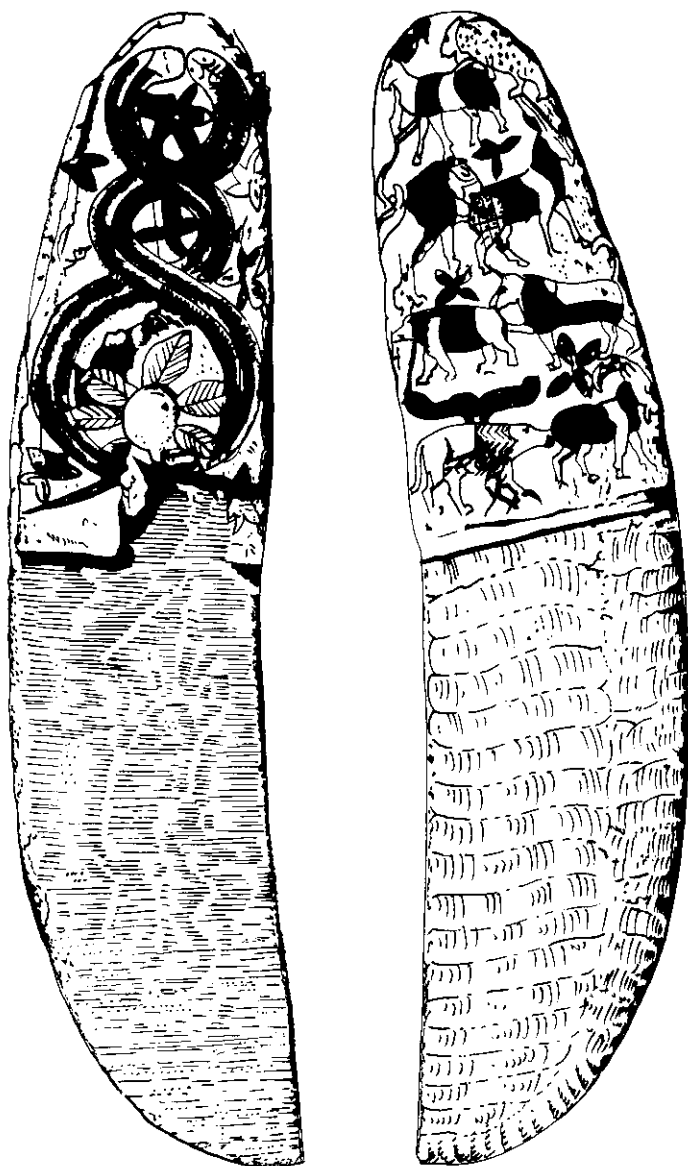


Fig. 4 Knife from Gebel el-Tarif with gold-leaf handle. End of Naqada II period 3600-3500 BC.



Fig. 5 Ivory knife handle from Gebel el-Arak. End of Naqada II period 3600–3500 BC.

otherwise adorned handles from precious materials such as gold or ivory [4, 5]. They would tend to their appearance with luxurious ivory combs and use their cherished cosmetic palettes. We find here the first monumental graves, in which the deceased were laid to rest with an abundance of funerary objects and whose interiors were sometimes also adorned with artistic decoration (e.g. frescoes).

In some cases we even find evidence of power structures that existed prior to the creation of a united Egyptian state. Symbols of a scorpion, fish, bull's head and bird appear on inscriptions from the Tomb U-j at Abydos. All of these are considered to be names of early leaders of some of the Egyptian lands.¹⁶

¹⁶ Literature cited by Jane A. Hill, *Cylinder Seal Glyptic in Predynastic Egypt and Neighboring Regions*, Oxford, Archaeopress 2004, on p. 15.

Over time we find mounting proof of society's division into the ruling and the ruled. Telling signs of this are the cosmetic palettes, gradually changing from mere beauty aids into relics of art that were most likely kept in the land's prominent temples. These were originally meant as appearance-refinement aids, or to be used in a similar way but for another purpose (e.g. making "masks" for participation in a magical or ritual act). Coloring agents found from this period and used for cosmetic purposes include green malachite (copper ore), black galena (lead ore) and the color red. Some skulls have even revealed traces of complete make-up coverage of eye and nose areas in green and other parts of the face in red. A piece of green malachite, placed in children's graves under the head of the buried child, and sometimes alternating

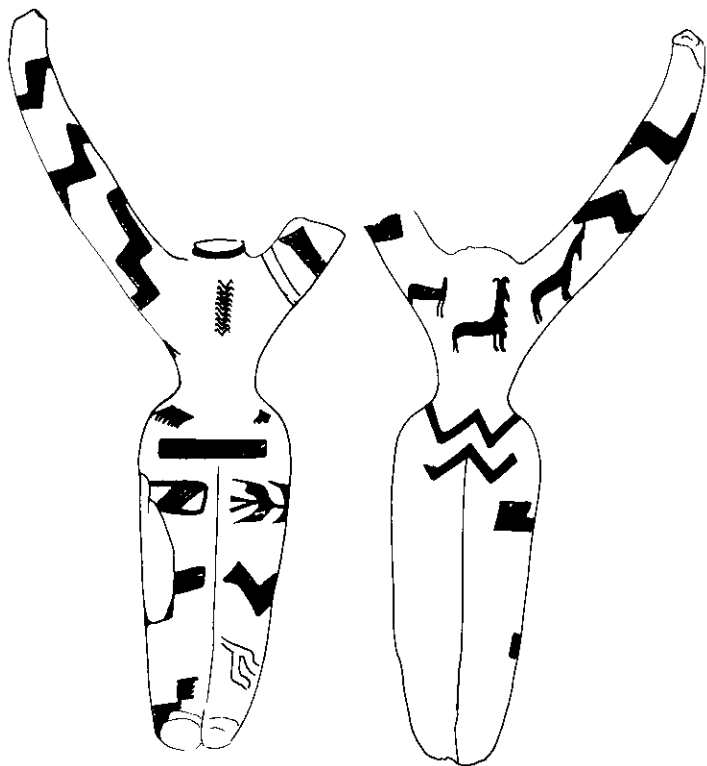


Fig. 6 Clay figure of dancer with tattoo or paint. Naqada II period.

in this position with an amulet in the form of a cow head, encourages us to interpret make-up in terms of the general symbolism of fertility power. The paint on mainly female sculptures (most likely referring to fertility themes) from that time has revealed that paint was applied not only to the face, but to the entire body and that this was done on occasions that called for dancing [6]. Painting on male sculptures instead emphasized aspects of grandeur and authority.¹⁷ In some cases, medicinal effects could be attributed to painting or the application of coloring agents.

In the early Naqada period, cosmetic palettes were still of a simple, diamond shape. Only from the end of the first and during the second Naqada period (ca. 3600–3200 BC) did they take on the form of turtles, birds, fish and various quadrupeds. In contrast to those of simple geometric shapes, these figurative palettes were equipped with a hole for hanging. Although they are found in graves, and mainly at the head of the deceased, they also appear in settlements [7], as demonstrated by the excavation of a residential site from the pre-state period at Adaïma in Upper Egypt. At the end of the pre-dynastic period, only two forms of cosmetic palettes remained – simple rectangular models and those in the form of a shield, often bearing opulent artistic decoration.

Cosmetic palettes disappear from archeological finds after the Egyptian state is established.

Unlike the green coloring agent found quite frequently in graves, the palettes appear to accompany final resting places for a smaller number of deceased – most likely for those who held an elite social position. A black coloring agent appears in closed sectors of burial grounds and may therefore indicate the geographic or biologic origin of the buried.

The relief ornamentation of these palettes often depicts the memorable deeds (victory over an enemy or over a wild animal) of those who gave them. On other finds we see ancient rulers of the Egyptian lands as they perform religious ceremonies. At a certain point in this period, the first forms of crown jewels were also created. These at one time rested on the head of the rulers of a united Egypt – the White Crown of Upper Egypt and the Red Crown of Lower Egypt.

¹⁷ Adeptly described by Tatjana A. Šerkova, "Oko Chora": simbolika glaza v dodinastičeskom Jегipete, "Vestnik drevnej istorii" 1996/4, pp. 96–115.