< previous page   page_60   next page >

Page 60

2

The intellectual foundations of the early state

With the imagined community—the nation—people feel that they share bonds of common interest and inherited values with others, most of whom they will never see. It is a vision of people. By contrast, the state is a vision of power, a mixture of myth and procedure that twines itself amidst the sense of community, giving it political structure. In the modern world the state has become the universal unit of supreme organization. No part of the land of planet Earth does not belong to one. Like it or not most people are born members of a state, even if they live in remote and isolated communities. The stateless are the disadvantaged of the world, anachronistic. Its powers have grown so inescapable that, at least in the English language, the word 'state' has taken on a sinister overtone.

What are the roots of this condition, this vast surrender by the many and presumption by the few? People have recognized the state as an abstract entity only since the time of the Classical Greeks. But the real history of the state is much longer. If we move further back in time to the early civilizations—of which Egypt was one—we can observe the basic elements of modern states already present and functioning vigorously, yet doing so in the absence of objective awareness of what was involved. The existence of the state was either simply taken for granted or presented in terms which do not belong to the vocabulary of reason and philosophy which is part of our inheritance from the Classical world. We must accordingly make allowances if we are not to miss important truths. Essentially we must not confuse substance with language. The growth in the mechanisms of the state, as with other products of the mind, has been a process of addition. The ideas and practices that we associate with more modern times have been grafted on to a core which has remained fixed and basic since the appearance of the first states in the ancient world. The study of ancient history exposes this core and thus the bedrock of modern life.

Fundamental to the state is an idealized image of itself, an ideology, a unique identity It sets itself goals and pursues them by projecting irresistible images of power. These aid the mobilization of the resources and energies of the people, characteristically achieved by bureaucracy We can speak of it as an organism because although made by people it takes on a life of its own. Ideology, images of earthly power, the enabling force of bureaucracy, these are some of the fundamental elements of states both ancient and modern. They contain and reinforce the roles of the state's leaders as effectively as they do those of its

< previous page   page_60   next page >

Page 61

people, and bear it onwards in times of weak leadership. They are themes that will recur throughout this book.

Ideology has become one of the shaping processes of modern times. It is the distinctive filter through which a society sees itself and the rest of the world, a body of thought and symbol which explains the nature of society, defines its ideal form, and justifies action to achieve that ideal. We might consider using the word with strictest regard to its origin only to refer to the political philosophies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries AD, of which Marxism supplies the paradigmatic example. Because of their immediate earthly concerns ideologies might also appear to contrast with religions, with their appeal primarily to the spiritual condition of individuals and their redemption. But this convenient contrast between ideology and religion reflects the viewpoint of modern western culture. Islam and Judaism, for example, are concerned equally with personal righteousness and with the form that human society should take on earth. Both prescribe a complete way of life, including a code of law. With ancient speculative thought we move to a state of mind that could envisage the forces behind the visible world in terms only of divine beings and their complex interactions. For the Egyptians the ideal society on earth, although not formulated in the manner of a modern treatise, was a fundamental reflection of a divine order. It was, however, liable to disturbance by incautious kings and so required constant care and attention through ritual and pageant, as well as through occasional more forceful reminders. It seems entirely appropriate to use the term ideology to cover their vision of the state, embedded within theology yet politically valid and constantly stated in powerful symbolic terms. It was a consciously created framework within which the Pharaonic state functioned.

Yet it was not the sole source of order. Egyptian bureaucracy came to express an implicit ideology of social ordering that was never raised to the level of a fully formulated conscious scheme. This implicit ideology of social order (as distinct from the explicit ideology discussed in this chapter) will be explored in Chapters 4 and 5.

Egyptian ideology stressed three themes: continuity with the past, a mystic territorial claim of unity over geographical and political subdivisions, and stability and prosperity through the wise and pious government of kings. It also took for granted, as did the ancient Egyptians as a whole, the notion that those who lived in the Nile valley under the rule of Pharaoh formed the imagined community of 'Egyptians'.

The Egyptians' view of the past

Ideology requires a past, a history. For a dynamic ideology of change, such as Marxism, the past has to be unsatisfactory, an imperfect time whose shortcomings are the spur for action, for revolution. The past exists in order to be rejected. More commonly, however, societies embrace the past, or some parts of it, with respect. History makes the detailed tracery of a myth of the past that provides a model for the present. Ancient Egypt belongs firmly in this category. It knew its own past, and fitted the images so derived within the myth-world of ideology.

The past for the ancient Egyptians had a straightforward and rather prosaic course. No epic narrative of events spanned past generations, no great theme or tale of destiny urged a moral on the living. The Egyptians and their neighbours had always, so it seemed, lived

É possível usar o termo ideologia para as sociedades do passado pois a confusão entre ideologia e religião é um ponto de vista moderno.

< previous page   page_62   next page >

Page 62

in their respective homelands. The past was a model of order, a continuous and almost exclusively peaceful succession of reigns of previous kings, each one handing the throne on to his successor in a single direct linear sequence. This mirrored how things really were during the 'great' periods of peace and stability. It also reflects, incidentally, an elementary view of what history is about—namely the succession of rulers—that still has wide popular currency in the modern world.

Continuity emerges most explicitly from the lists of dead kings that the Egyptians themselves compiled. The majority derive from the New Kingdom, by which period the Egyptians had accumulated a millennium and a half of history.1 The best known is to be found carved in fine low relief on one of the inner walls of the temple of King Seti I at Abydos (*c.* 1290 BC; Figure 18). At the left end of the scene stands Seti I himself, accompanied by his eldest son Rameses (later Rameses II), in the act of making offerings. The beneficiaries of the offerings, as the accompanying text makes clear, are seventy-five royal ancestors, each represented by a single cartouche, together with King Seti I himself, owner of the seventy-sixth cartouche, and whose own twin cartouches are then repeated nineteen times to fill the bottom row completely. The order of the cartouches appears to be more or less correct historically, but numerous kings are omitted, primarily those from periods of internal weakness and division. As Figure 18 shows, the largest group (thirty-nine of them) covers the earliest kings, whilst the next seventeen cartouches belong to the immediately ensuing kings who were weak in power but legitimate in status and were perhaps represented by a mini-list or set of statues in the old Osiris temple at Abydos which lay not far away. The whole scene represents a particularly generous version of a common temple cult of royal ancestors. Normally the cult focused on individual statues placed in a temple by individual kings. At Abydos a list of names achieved the same end, more comprehensively but also more economically. Correct chronological order was not essential, however (or was not always achieved). Another king list, in the temple of Amun-Ra at Karnak, and of the reign of Tuthmosis III (*c.* 1479–1425 BC), represents each of a list of sixty-one kings by a picture of a statue rather than by a simple cartouche.2 But with this list the kings appear not to be in correct chronological order.

An interesting extension to the scope of this royal ancestor cult occurs in the tomb of a high official at Sakkara of the reign of Rameses II, an overseer of works named Tenroy.3 At the centre of the scene is a list of fifty-seven cartouches of earlier kings, in correct order. Tenroy asks them in a prayer to grant him a share of the daily offerings that were made to them in the temple of Ptah at Memphis. A similar mixture of expectation and reverence
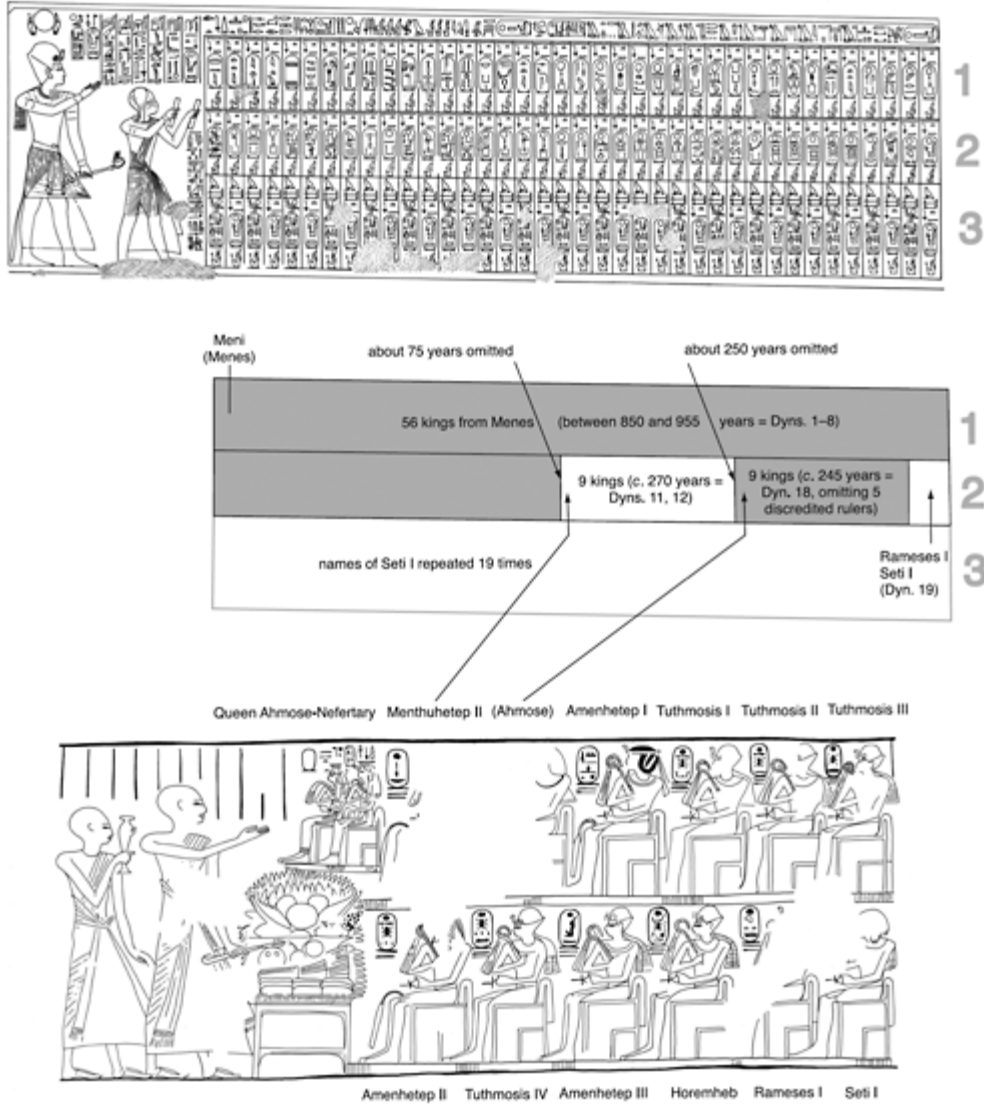
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< previous page   page_63   next page >

Page 63

Figure 18 *Above*. Legitimizing the present by revering an edited version of the past: King Seti I (and Prince Rameses) present offerings to the names of kings made up into a single continuous sequence which connected Seti I to Meni (Menes), the earliest king of whom the Egyptians had a firm record. In the accompanying diagram the names have been divided into blocks representing periods of legitimate rule as interpreted by the priests of Abydos. The gaps in 'real' time and history, visible to ourselves,were periods to which a stigma was attached. The weighting of the list towards kings of earlier periods is striking, presumably because this gave a more intense feeling of antiquity. The weighting has been partly achieved by including the kings of the 8th Dynasty, whose ephemeral reigns continued the rule of the great Memphite kings of the Old Kingdom, but in reduced circumstances. Temple of Seti I at Abydos (*c.* 1280 BC). *Below*. Private reverence of the ruling house and its ancestors, by Amenmes, the chief priest of an image of the cult of the long-dead king Amenhetep I called 'Amenhetep of the Forecourt'. Amenmes lived in the time of Rameses I, Seti I's father. From his tomb at Western Thebes, after G.Foucart, *Le Tombeau d'Amonmos,* Cairo, 1935, Pl. XIIB, itself a copy made in the nineteenth century by Thomas Hay.

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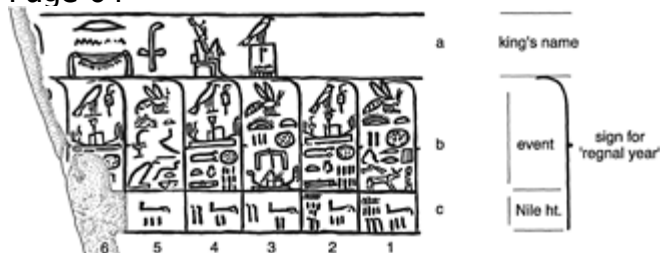
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Page 64

Figure 19 An extract from the Palermo Stone recording events in six years of King Nynetjer of the 2nd Dynasty (the extract begins with his fifteenth year). His name is written in line 'a'. The compartments in lines 'b' and 'c' are divided by vertical lines, curved at the top and with a small projection to the right placed half-way down. Each of these lines is in fact the hieroglyph used to write the word for 'year? (see also Figure 37F, p. 106). Row 'b' summarizes in hieroglyphs the main events of the years: (1) Appearance of the king, second running of the Apis-bull. (2) Processional tour of Horus (i.e. the king), eighth time of the enumeration. (3) Appearance of the king, third time of the Festival of Seker. (4) Processional tour of Horus, ninth time of the enumeration. (5) Appearance of the king, offering to (?) the goddess Nekhbet; the Djet-festival. (6) Processional tour of Horus, tenth time [of the enumeration]. The biennial rhythm of the king's official life, built around an enumeration of the country's wealth every second year (probably an early kind of Domesday record), is striking. The lowest row of compartments (c) contains an exact measurement of the height of the Nile flood above a fixed point: (1) 3 cubits, 4 hands, 3 fingers (1.92 in); (2) 3 cubits, 5 hands, 2 fingers (1.98 in); (3) 2 cubits, 2 fingers (1.20 in); (4) 2 cubits, 2 fingers (1.20 in); (5) 3 cubits (1.57 in); (6) destroyed. The variation in height, in this five-year span amounting to 0.78 in, would affect crop yields in higher-lying fields. See T.A.H.Wilkinson, *Royal annals of ancient Egypt: the Palermo Stone and its associated fragments,* London and New York, 2000, 126–8.

doubtless underlies other New Kingdom tomb scenes where offerings and prayers are made to deceased kings. The tomb at Thebes of the priest Amenmes (Figure 18, *below*), for example, shows him worshipping the statues of twelve New Kingdom Pharaohs regarded as legitimate, plus the founder of the Middle Kingdom, Nebhepetra Menthuhetep II. Again the chronological ordering is correct. Although these lists are relatively late, the practice of honouring named royal ancestors was an old one. The pious regard shown by kings of the 12th Dynasty towards members of the preceding 11th Dynasty, whose power they had usurped, also reveals that the search for continuity in kingship could transcend the political details of dynastic succession.4 The fact that most lists put their selection of kings into correct chronological order reflects a natural Egyptian inclination towards the keeping and archiving of administrative records. The archival element is very evident in the lists of the Palermo Stone (Figure 19). This name is given to a group of fragments of a black basalt slab, evidently carved during the latter part of the 5th Dynasty (*c.* 2350 BC). Most of the design consists of horizontal rows of compartments, each one separated by a vertical line with curving top, which is, in fact, the hieroglyphic sign for 'year'. Each of the compartments contains a summary of the principal events in a single year of kings whose names run across the top of the appropriate block of compartments. The events tell us what things the Egyptians of the time thought were important. They are a mixture of religious festivals, creation of statues of the gods,

< previous page   page_64   next page >

Page 65

occasional warfare, regular taxation, and, in a separate subdivision, the precise height of that year's Nile flood. The Palermo Stone portrays an interest in the deeds of the past, adding an intellectual cladding to the bare lists of names, yet one which still remained in harmony with the ideal. We can assume that this kind of chronicle provided the basis for the later summary lists of kings. It must itself have been compiled from several different sources, since there is only limited consistency in the kind of things recorded line by line, and in the length of the entries.5

Administration and piety towards royal ancestors do not provide a complete explanation for this interest, however. The records at their disposal enabled the Egyptians to measure past time, and offered them the prospect of an intellectual journey to the point where time met the cosmos. The most vivid expression of this is found in another king list, again from the New Kingdom, but this time written on papyrus and now in the Turin Museum.6 Originally it listed around 300 names of kings, and the aim of its compiler was completeness. No king seems to have been too minor or short-reigned for inclusion. The Palestinian kings who formed the Hyksos Dynasty were included, even though they did not merit having their names written in cartouches. This, in fact, was a remarkable concession to reality: tacitly admitting a break in the succession of legitimate kings just for the purpose of attaining completeness. Against each king in the Turin list was written the precise length of his reign, sometimes to the exact day. At certain points a summary of numbers of kings and total length of reigns was inserted. Thus at the end of what we now call the 8th Dynasty, a summary of 958 years from the reign of King Menes, the first name of the lists, was provided.

If this was all the Turin king list did, it could be classed as an elaborate administrative device. The compiler of the list attempted, however, to continue back in time beyond the reign of Menes. It is here that the modern and the ancient mind part company. Beyond history we place prehistory: the record of human society in a world without writing, an anonymous place where names and deeds are unknown. Such a state of affairs was inconceivable to the ancients. But this did not prevent curiosity about what had gone before the first recorded king. The Turin list devoted more than one column of its text to this. Immediately before Menes came several lines which summarize the collective reigns of 'spirits', not given individual names, and before these, and heading the whole compilation, a list of deities. The name of each is written in a cartouche, as if a king, and followed by a precise length of reign. In the case of the god Thoth, for example, this is 7,726 years.7

From the whole Turin list one could trace in direct line the royal succession from a period when the gods had ruled as kings, and from the completeness of the data gain the added satisfaction of calculating exactly the entire period involved. On consulting it, the ancient scribe could have known the age of the world since the time of the first creator god and he would have seen how the kings of the past and their great monuments fitted within this majestic scheme. The rigid linearity of this view of time is brought out in detail from the way that overlaps of whole dynasties at times of internal division are ignored, and the reigns simply placed end to end, and all figures added together for grand totals.

Sources of this kind tell us what the Egyptians themselves found interesting about their own past and how they preferred to organize it. If it was chronologically incorrect and pervaded with invention it did not matter, because they had no knowledge of the past independently derived with which it could conflict, and this was, anyway, the past they wanted to have. We have largely though not wholly lost that innocence. We know how

Page 66

to 'deconstruct' texts that purport to record the past objectively. We know that they are bound to be complex products of far-from-mechanical minds, reflecting the ideas and biases of their time, and malleable by later editing even if they are dryly administrative. Knowledge of the past is never 'true', it represents a set of interpretations in a constant state of change and is bound to be, to some extent, what we choose it to be. Through archaeology and social history, moreover, we have developed an altogether broader view of what the past is about, and a multiplicity of tools for studying it. Yet ancient annals still exert their power. There remains within Egyptology a strong literalist tradition that cannot bear to let go of the thought that king lists and other similar documents are fundamentally true. By this view the onus rests upon scholars to find ingenious and sometimes tortuous ways of explaining discrepancies. When learning about ancient Egypt for the first time it is helpful to work with clear schemes of history and chronology, but it is also important not to put them beyond the reach of scepticism.

Continuity of orderly kingship was the principal image that the Egyptians wanted the past to project. It was something satisfactory to contemplate by itself, and failed to provoke an interest in the writing of narrative history that explained people and events in terms appropriate to their times and that posterity would understand. Occasionally one encounters a more varied reaction. A few reigns had a certain 'flavour'. Sneferu of the 4th Dynasty, for example, was later regarded as the archetypal good king from the distant past.8 Rameses II was likewise a model for his successors. 'You shall double for me the long duration, the great kingship of King Rameses II, the great god' prayed Rameses IV some sixty years later (the prayer failed: he died in his seventh regnal year).9 Khufu (Cheops), builder of the Great Pyramid, on the other hand, acquired a reputation for cruelty and arrogance, which appears in a collection of stories (Papyrus Westcar) apparently written in the late Middle Kingdom.10 It reappears in Manetho's *History* and in the narrative of Herodotus.11 Whether this was a true reflection of Khufu's character, or an imagined consequence of having been the builder of the largest of all the pyramids, is something we can no longer tell. Papyrus Westcar tells the story as a prelude to introducing the ultrapious kings of the succeeding 5th Dynasty, the point evidently being that by arrogant and offensive behaviour Khufu brought doom to his house. The reigns of other kings from the distant past who were thought not to have maintained the standards of kingship that the Egyptians regarded as proper were likewise made the settings for didactic discourses. King Pepi II, last king of the 6th Dynasty was one: he is apparently credited with homosexuality in a later tale.12 A king with an unsavoury reputation probably provided the setting, now lost, for the lengthy set of lamentations on disorder composed by a Middle Kingdom scribe named Ipuwer.13

At this point we must draw a distinction in our sources. Texts of this nature, recorded only on papyrus, were the speculative literary products of the scribal elite, part didactic, part entertaining, not meant as statements of theology. It was from the same educated elite that the 'theologians' were drawn. But we should not imagine two sets of people, one with a less respectful view of the past. An attitude that looks disrespectful to us can be found in papyri narrating events in the lives of the gods. In one such story the goddess Isis ('a clever woman. Her heart was craftier than a million men') schemes to discover the secret name of the sun-god Ra, depicted as an old man who succumbs to the pain of a snake bite and reveals his hidden name to her.14 The text is complete and its purpose is clear. It provides 'historical' authority for using the story itself as a cure for scorpion sting. Another

Page 67

story, beautifully written out and part of a private library that also contained conventional ritual and theological material, narrates the quarrel between the gods Horus and Seth. Their confrontation was one of the cornerstones of the myth of the state. It took the optimistic view that the forces of good and evil, of order and chaos, of truth and falsehood, as symbolized by these two beings who were embodied in kingship, were not in the end symmetrically balanced. Horus, and what he stood for, would ultimately triumph. But this version presents it as a burlesque, in which the gods—amongst them Isis and Osiris— are quarrelsome, vulgar and open to ridicule.15 What was permissible in literary scribblings and what was proper to formal theological texts would have been a matter of clearly understood taste. Systems of authoritatively stated belief need channels for release and are not necessarily damaged thereby. Instinct for survival tells most people how far to go and when to stop. The reputations of Khufu and Pepi II did not exclude them from the formal king lists, nor were the images of the gods Horus and Osiris made any less majestic by their prototypes being made the subject of mirth. Moreover, this limited 'licence' or intellectual freedom created settings in which the lessons of bad kingship could be expounded. The acknowledgement of periods of disorder and injustice served as a warning and gave credence to the role of the king as maintainer of order and justice.

There was, however, a limit, perhaps self-imposed through deference to decorum, or perhaps derived from a blindness to perceiving that the affairs of the state can be presented as a narrative on a larger scale than that of simple story-telling built around a few characters. We know, from modern researches, of a period of internal unrest culminating in civil war between two contemporaneous ruling families, the 9th and 11th Dynasties, of Herakleopolis and Thebes respectively. This was the First Intermediate Period. Later Egyptians treated it circumspectly. The founder of the principal breakaway group, King Khety of the 9th Dynasty, later became, like Khufu, the object of unfavourable anecdote, preserved in the copies of Manetho. The entry for this king, in fact, summarizes neatly the anecdotal, moralistic view of history: 'King Achthoes [the Greek form of Khety], behaving more cruelly than his predecessors, wrought woes for the people of all Egypt, but afterwards he was smitten with madness, and was killed by a crocodile.'16 There is no hint here of the political opportunism which must have given Khety and his family temporary control of the Egyptian throne, soon disputed by a rival dynasty based at Thebes (the 11th). No later text that we know of used the setting of provincial breakaway or warring dynasties directly. In the immediately ensuing period (the Middle Kingdom) thoughtful men composed literary texts which dwelt on the nature of a disorderly society, but within them they kept recent historical reality at a distance. The First Intermediate Period was not used directly to point to a moral. One device put the description of disorder into a prophecy uttered by a priest (named Neferty) at the court of the long-dead but highly regarded king Sneferu, of the early 4th Dynasty.17

All happiness has vanished;
The land is ruined, its fate decreed,
Deprived of produce, lacking in crops.
What was made has been unmade.

The disorders of this unspecified future time are terminated by the saviour-like arrival of a King Ameny, whose historical model was probably Amenemhat I, first king of the 12th

Page 68

Dynasty. The lamentations of the scribe Ipuwer were another product of the same mood, but their dramatic pictures of social upheaval likewise lack historical names and events.

By the time of the New Kingdom a second period of internal disorder had occurred, again culminating in a civil war: the Hyksos Period (see the previous chapter, pp. 41). But here the circumstances were very different.18 The Hyksos were Palestinian kings who had taken over the delta. Since this was a period of rule by foreign kings eventually ejected by military force from Egypt it was legitimate to see it as an unfortunate aberration from the ideal picture of the past. Even the Turin list accepted this. The Hyksos kings appear, but shorn of royal titulary and cartouches, and labelled instead with a hieroglyphic sign which categorized them as foreigners. In one remarkable temple text, Queen Hatshepsut, herself a successful usurper of the early 18th Dynasty, used the Hyksos Period as the scenario of disorder from which she had saved Egypt, ignoring the half-century of peaceful and prosperous rule of her 18th Dynasty predecessors. Here the theme of royal responsibility for deliverance from chaos was used with a vengeance. It was permissible in a formal text because the Hyksos Period could be explained away, unlike the First Intermediate Period.

Departures from the picture of the ideal past were few, and (the Hyksos Period excepted) confined to individuals. More typically the past was the fount of authority and authenticity. A characteristic image is provided by King Neferhetep of the 13th Dynasty (*c.* 1740 BC), piously visiting 'the house of writings', examining the 'ancient writings of (the creator-god) Atum' in order to discover the correct form for a new statue of Osiris, laid down by the gods themselves at the beginning of time.19 With a similar reverence for ancient forms Egyptian artists retained the original shapes of hieroglyphs with scarcely any modification for 3,000 years. The general continuity of style in art and architecture owes itself to the careful reproduction of codified styles created in the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom. But there was an element of self-deception in this. Changes of ideals and forms did occur, and these must reflect intellectual development, something directly apparent from written sources also. The whole modern scholarly apparatus of art history in Egyptology is based upon the premise that style did change from period to period. Thus the brooding, careworn images of kings in Middle Kingdom statuary conveyed a very different message from their idealized youthful counterparts of the Old Kingdom.20 King Neferhetep's new statue of Osiris would have been recognizably a product of the craftsmanship of its time. Indeed, the 'writings' that the king examined can have specified the nature of the ancient image in only general terms, such as the precious materials of which it was composed. The Egyptians could not have put into the words of their language a description of the style of a statue in the way that we can do now. The same was true of architecture. The New Kingdom saw a major reappraisal of temple architecture in which, at least as it relates to the royal mortuary cult, we must recognize significant shifts in meaning. Change did occur, but on the whole tastefully and reverently through retention of the basic vocabulary of traditional forms, sometimes reinforced by appeals to the past. More will be said on this in later chapters.

On occasions the exploitation of the past could be quite elaborate. In the next section of this chapter an extract from an important mythological text will be quoted, known as the Shabaka Stone.21 In its preamble King Shabaka of the 25th Dynasty (716–702 BC) claims to have copied the text from an ancient worm-eaten document, and it is, indeed, written in a very archaic style. For a long time scholars accepted Shabaka's claim at its face-value, and set the original composition of the text as far back as the 3rd Dynasty. It has now

< previous page page_69 next page >

Page 69
become generally accepted that, although the themes of the myth belong to the mainstream of Egyptian thought, this particular composition is relatively late, perhaps even of Shabaka's time. As for its archaic style, there is good evidence to show that in the Late Period scribes had a working knowledge of an archaic form of the language, and could compose in it (pp. 372–3). An appeal to antiquity, and sometimes a cloaking in antique forms, made new ideas or new interpretations of old ideas, more acceptable. The past was a cultural womb.

The myth of the state

The kings of the lists shared one title in common: all were Kings of Upper and Lower Egypt, the two archetypal geopolitical divisions of valley and delta. In this title lay a powerful expression of unity. Again, however, we find the Egyptians shying away from the unpleasant realities of politics. Order versus chaos is a theme that occurs in various guises in Egyptian thought. It was a theme of kingship. Several of the reflective texts of the Middle Kingdom mentioned above (including the lamentations of the scribe Ipuwer) dwell on the nature of a disordered world, making the king responsible for its cure, but these, as noted above, belong to a tradition of limited free speculation at court. At the level of formal ideology division and disunity were seen not in terms of potential fragmentation into multiple territories, or into the topsy-turvy chaos of the lamentations of Ipuwer. That would have given too much weight to a disturbing possibility. Instead a symbolic dualistic division was proposed. This appealed to the Egyptian love of symmetry, as reflected throughout their art and architecture. Moreover, the idea of two originally separate kingdoms provided a basis for the king's unique unifying role that was safer and more respectable than a greater number of lesser units, or a wider condition of anarchy. It also matched the general geographical division of the country into two halves, although real political history shows up internal divisions along different lines.

The elaboration of this aspect of kingship was as much pictorial as written. The Egyptians excelled in strong and direct visual symbolism. In this they were helped by the nature of hieroglyphic writing. Most hieroglyphic signs stood for groups of consonants, so that pictures of things could be used to write other words that had the same sequence of consonants even if pronounced differently. It is as if, in modern English, we chose the picture of a leaf to write all words with the sequence of consonants l and f: thus, leaf, life, loaf, *laugh,* and *aloof.* (Context and additional signs when necessary prevented ambiguity.) This dissociation between sign and meaning was boldly exploited by artists. And it remained a characteristic of the writing system that, although at an early date a cursive form of writing (hieratic) was developed, for use with pen, ink and papyrus, in formal contexts artists lovingly retained all the detail and natural form of the originals so that the roots were never lost. Artists could thus take hieroglyphic signs standing for abstract concepts and work them as tangible objects into artistic compositions whilst retaining congruity of style. This emblematic use of hieroglyphs contributed a visual element to a theological language-game. It is an important characteristic of the Egyptian art style, as is the restraint with which it was exploited. In any one composition only a very few signs would be treated in this way, giving a clear and immediate message

A good set of examples which summarizes the basic ideology of the Egyptian state is
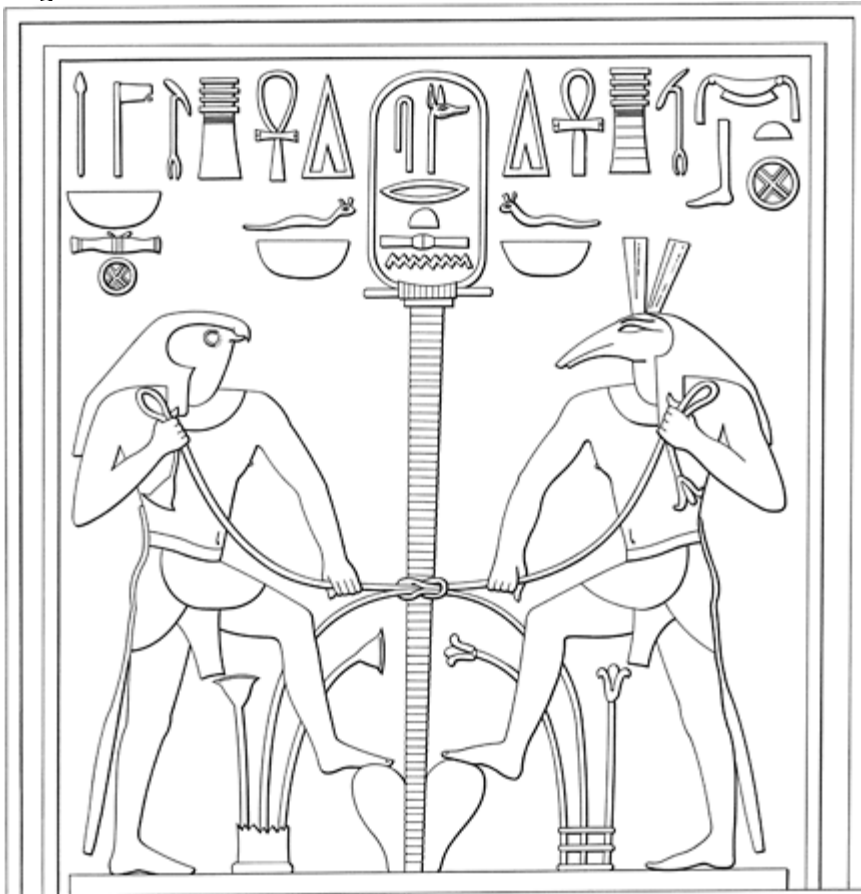
< previous page page_69 next page >

< previous page   page_70   next page >

Page 70

Figure 20 The source of political order and stability: the reconciliation of conflicting powers epitomized by the gods Horus (left) and Seth (right), in whose reconciliation is subsumed the political divisions of Egypt (see Figure 34, p. 97). The reconciliation is symbolized by the tying together of the heraldic plants of Upper and Lower Egypt around the hieroglyphic sign for 'unification'. Throne base of Senusret I (1956–1911 BC) from his pyramid temple at El-Lisht. J.-E.Gautier and G.Jéquier, *Mémoire sur les fouilles de Licht,* Cairo, 1902, 36, Fig. 35; K.Lange and M.Hirmer, *Egypt: architecture, sculpture, painting in three thousand years,* third edition, London, 1961, 86 (prepared by B.Garfi).

carved in low relief on the sides of ten limestone statues of King Senusret I of the early 12th Dynasty (*c.* 1956–1911 BC) from his mortuary temple at El-Lisht (Figure 20).22 Down the centre runs a segmented vertical sign that is actually a stylized picture of a windpipe and lungs, but which was used to write not only the word for 'lungs' but also the verb 'to unite', which possessed the same sequence of consonants: *s, m,* and a strongly aspirated *a.* The word and its hieroglyph were the key components whenever the theme of the unification of the kingdom was presented. On top of this emblematic sign for 'unity' rests the

< previous page   page_70   next page >

< previous page   page_71   next page >

Page 71

oval cartouche containing one of the names of the king. Around the sign two plants are being tied in a reef-knot: on the left a clump of papyrus stalks, the heraldic plant of Lower Egypt; on the right a clump of reeds similarly characteristic of Upper Egypt. The act of tying is being performed by two gods: on the left the hawk-headed Horus, and on the right Seth, whose animal was a mythological creature.23 The hieroglyphs above each god refer to two localities. Seth is 'The Ombite', that is, from the city of Ombos (Nubt, near the modern village of Nagada) in Upper Egypt. Horus is 'Lord of Mesen', a town name used for places in both Upper and Lower Egypt (for reasons explained shortly), but here meaning one in Lower Egypt. On some of the throne bases Seth is called 'Lord of Su', a place lying just within the northern border of Upper Egypt, whilst Horus is several times called 'The Behdetite', that is, the one from Behdet, another toponym used for more than one place, but here clearly referring to somewhere in the north.

The artists who carved these statue bases were masters of elegant variation. Other dualistic themes were also woven into the same basic design. On five of the bases Horus and Seth were replaced by figures of plump Nile gods identified by symbols as Upper and Lower Egypt, whilst the hieroglyphic captions at the top refer to the 'Greater' and 'Lesser Ennead' (Company of Nine Gods), 'offerings' and ideas of fertility using paired synonyms in both cases. There is also another variation of the Horus—Seth theme. In this case the pairing is between, on the one side, 'The united portion of the two lords', with a little picture of Horus and Seth to identify who the two lords were, and on the other, 'The thrones of Geb', an earth-god who, in longer texts on the theme, presided over the reconciliation of Horus and Seth. The dualism could thus be extended beyond the pairing of two contrasting entities to the pairing of synonyms, each one of which contained a reference to some aspect of the balanced pairs.

Within this rearrangement of entities to illustrate the concept of harmony through the balancing of pairs we can glimpse a simple example of one form of the Egyptians' thought processes: the manipulation of words, especially names, as if they were discrete units of knowledge (which in a way they were). Ancient knowledge, when not of a practical nature (of the kind: how to build a pyramid and how to behave at table), was essentially the accumulation of names of things, beings and places, together with their associations. 'Research' lay in extending the range of associations in areas which we would now term 'theology'. Meaning or significance was left in the mind and remained largely unformulated. Mythological scenes such as this one provided a kind of cross-tabulation of concepts.

The esteem in which names of things were held is nicely brought out by a class of text that scholars call by a Greek term 'onomastica' (singular, 'onomasticon').24 The best known, compiled in the late New Kingdom (*c.* 1100 BC) by a 'scribe of sacred books' named Amenemope, and much copied in ancient schools, has the promising heading: 'Beginning of the teaching for clearing the mind, for the instruction of the ignorant, and for learning all things that exist.' But without a single word of commentary or explanation it runs on as a list of names of things: the elements of the universe, types of human beings, the towns and villages of Egypt in great detail, parts of an ox, and so on. To the modern mind this form of learning appears like the most stifling kind of pedagogy. But to the ancients knowing the name of a thing made it familiar, gave it a place in one's mind, reduced it to something that was manageable and could be fitted into one's mental universe. We can, in fact, still recognize some validity in this: the study of the natural world, whether bird-watching or classifying plants, begins with knowing names, and with arranging the names in groups

< previous page   page_71   next page >

< previous page   page_72   next page >

Page 72

(the science of taxonomy), just as was done intuitively in the onomastica, which served as memory aids for the range of knowledge which was absorbed simply as a result of being a reasonably well educated Egyptian.

This view of names led to a prominent characteristic of Egyptian religion. The names of gods became the building-blocks for expanded definitions of divinity which at the same time directed the attention towards an underlying unity. Thus in one version of the Book of the Dead, Osiris is defined as: 'Lord of eternity, Wenen-nefer, Horus of the Horizon, with many forms and manifestations, Ptah-Sokar, Atum in Heliopolis, Lord of the Mysterious Region'. The names of no fewer than five 'gods' are used here to enrich the imagery by which Osiris is to be understood.25 A very explicit revelation of this phenomenon is contained in a short speech by the sun-god: 'I am Khepri in the morning, Ra at mid-day, Atum in the evening.'26 Fascination with the 'names of god' produced Chapter 142 of the Book of the Dead, which carries the heading 'Knowing the Names of Osiris in his every seat where he wishes to be', and which is an extensive list of geographically local versions of Osiris, as well as of versions of several other divinities finally summarized as 'the gods and goddesses in the sky in all their names'.27

An appreciation of the Egyptian mode of thinking is essential to the correct evaluation of texts which may seem to have a more direct bearing on the real, material world; texts which can become sources for history. Place names were just as open to manipulation, giving rise to a form of symbolic geography. It was a kind of word game which sought an idealized and symmetrical layout of places which were handled primarily as place names given mythological associations. Often, perhaps always, there was something there on the ground, a huddled mud-brick town or a nondescript little locality. But although symbolic geography articulated a myth of territorial supremacy on the part of the state, it is a mistake to take the geographical references in religious sources as guides to ancient real geography. To do that is to miss the abstracting powers of the Egyptian mind which created an ordered and harmonious myth-world from common and often probably rather humble experience. The result was full of familiar names yet belonged to a higher plane. It hovered tantalizingly between reality and abstraction.

It also, however, sets a trap for the unwary. Modern scholarship inclines towards the approach of lawyers: documented facts are assembled, they are discussed point by point, and a verdict is reached which satisfies modern logic and the 'weight of the evidence'. But ancient texts and scenes reflect their own intellectual aesthetic. They were composed from within the minds of their creators, and reflected an inner world which was not a straightforward projection of the material world, the world which, for example, archaeology uncovers. Symbolic geography was a product of an imaginative people. We should not think of using it as a straightforward basis for historical reconstruction.

We are now in a slightly better position to pursue the imagery on the throne bases of Senusret I. A written version of the myth occurs as part of the Memphite Theology, or Shabaka Stone, mentioned earlier.28 Outwardly it has narrative form:

[Geb, lord of the gods, commanded] that the Ennead gather to him. He judged between Horus and Seth; he ended their quarrel. He made Seth king of Upper Egypt in the land of Upper Egypt, up to the place where he was born, which is Su. And Geb made Horus king of Lower Egypt in the land of Lower Egypt, up to the place where his father [Osiris] was drowned, which is 'Division of the Two

< previous page   page_72   next page >

< previous page   page_73   next page >

Page 73

Lands' [a mythical place name although an Egyptian would probably instinctively think of Memphis]. Thus Horus stood over one region, and Seth stood over one region. They made peace over the Two Lands at Ayan. That was the division of the Two Lands…Then it seemed wrong to Geb that the portion of Horus was like the portion of Seth. So Geb gave to Horus his inheritance, for he is the son of his firstborn son. Geb's words to the Ennead: 'I have appointed Horus, the firstborn'…He is Horus who arose as King of Upper and Lower Egypt, who united the Two Lands in the Nome of the Wall [i.e. Memphis], the place in which the Two Lands were united. Reed and papyrus were placed on the double door of the House of Ptah [the temple of Ptah at Memphis]. That means Horus and Seth, pacified and united. They fraternized so as to cease quarrelling in whatever place they might be, being united in the House of Ptah, the 'Balance of the Two Lands' in which Upper and Lower Egypt had been weighed.

On the El-Lisht thrones Horus and Seth are representatives of Upper and Lower Egypt of equal status. On the Shabaka Stone Seth's place is diminished. From an initial equality with Horus he is subsequently disinherited, though acquiescing in his new role. An archetypal tension has been created which each king must resolve by ensuring the triumph of the sense of legitimacy and orderly rule that Horus stood for. This text, and a mass of further ancient allusions on the same theme which can be found spread over a good part of Pharaonic history, pose a fundamental question. Does the myth reflect a formative historical phase in the history of the Egyptian state? Or was it devised as a piece of intellectual aesthetic to provide a philosophical basis for the Egyptian state which had, in fact, developed along a different historical path?

Past generations of scholars were frequently attracted to the first of these hypotheses, that the myth somehow reflected a formative historical phase. Before the 1st Dynasty they saw two kingdoms, each with a 'national god': Lower Egypt under Horus, Upper Egypt under Seth. A turning point had come when Lower Egypt defeated the south and established a unified kingship, even though this might have been short-lived in view of other evidence which suggested that the 1st Dynasty began with unification imposed from the south. That there is an alternative explanation owes much to archaeology. Indeed, the synthesis of sources, of archaeology with ancient myth, provides a case history of how ideology is created.29

The formation of the state: a model for early Egypt

Ideology emerges with the state: a body of thought to complement a political entity. How states arose in the first place has been the object of much study by archaeologists and anthropologists. Individual cases vary a great deal in their particular circumstances, and we should not look for a checklist of universally valid causes or a single cause which outweighed all others. Egypt is particularly interesting because, apart from being one of the earliest examples, state formation seems to have taken place in the absence of some of the more obvious factors.30 It is hard to imagine, for example, that in a land where population was relatively small and natural resources so abundant, competition for resources from sheer necessity was a major factor in the emergence of political domination.31 It

< previous page   page_73   next page >

Page 74

also strains the evidence needlessly to promote trade into a major force. Nor was there an external military threat, and the conflicts that developed within the Nile valley in the period leading up to the 1st Dynasty seem to have been amongst communities already well advanced along the path to statehood. Some evidence points to long-distance external connections in the Nagada II Period, reaching as far as southern Mesopotamia and Elam.32 But these connections are far more likely to be signs of local success than to be pointers to a determining influence in local affairs.

The dynamic for the growth of the state seems in many instances to lie inherent within the very fact of settled agriculture and the population increase which this allows. To this extent it is as justifiable to look for 'causes' that slowed down the process in some parts of the world as it is to search for those which allowed it a rapid passage in others, such as Egypt. The essential factor is psychological. Permanent occupation and working of the same tract of land give rise to a powerful sense of territorial rights which come to be expressed in mystic, symbolic terms which in turn create a peculiar sense of self-confidence within the community concerned. The legacy of this in the modern world is the magic word 'sovereignty'. It awakens in some a competitive urge, and they see the possibility of obtaining an agricultural surplus for a more satisfactory life not through extra agricultural work on their own part, but by purchasing it or coercing it from others. It need not be perceived or presented as crudely as this. Placating the gods through the development of shrines and the donation of produce under the supervision of a priestly elite achieves the same end. Into modern times it remains particularly difficult to separate piety from worldly ambition. Whatever the rationale, the combination of ambition and mystic sense of identity puts individuals and communities into potential competition with one another. It wrought a once-and-for-all-times change in the nature of society. From essentially leaderless aggregations of farmers, communities arose in which a few were leaders, and the majority were led.

The course which this competition took in a landscape of almost unlimited agricultural potential, of the kind supplied by ancient Egypt, we can envisage through the analogy of game playing (see Figures 21, 22, 23). We can begin simply by imagining a board game of the 'Monopoly' kind. At the start we have a number of players of roughly equal potential. They compete (to some extent unconsciously) by exchanges of different commodities, and later more openly by conflict. The game proceeds by means of a combination of chances (e.g. environmental or locational factors) and personal decisions. The game unfolds slowly at first, in an egalitarian atmosphere and with the element of competition only latent, the advantage swinging first to one player and then to another. This can last for so long that the players can abandon the game from boredom or fatigue (perhaps the fate of many incipient states). But one outcome is that the initial equality amongst the players does not last indefinitely. An advantage that at the time may escape notice upsets the equilibrium enough to distort the whole subsequent progress of the game. It has a 'knock-on' effect out of all proportion to its original importance. A person on a winning streak finds that his advantageous position continues to reinforce itself. And so the game inexorably follows a trajectory towards a critical point where one player has accumulated sufficient assets to outweigh the threats posed by the other players and so that player becomes unstoppable. It becomes only a matter of time before he wins by monopolizing the assets of all, although the inevitability of his win belongs only to a late stage in the game.

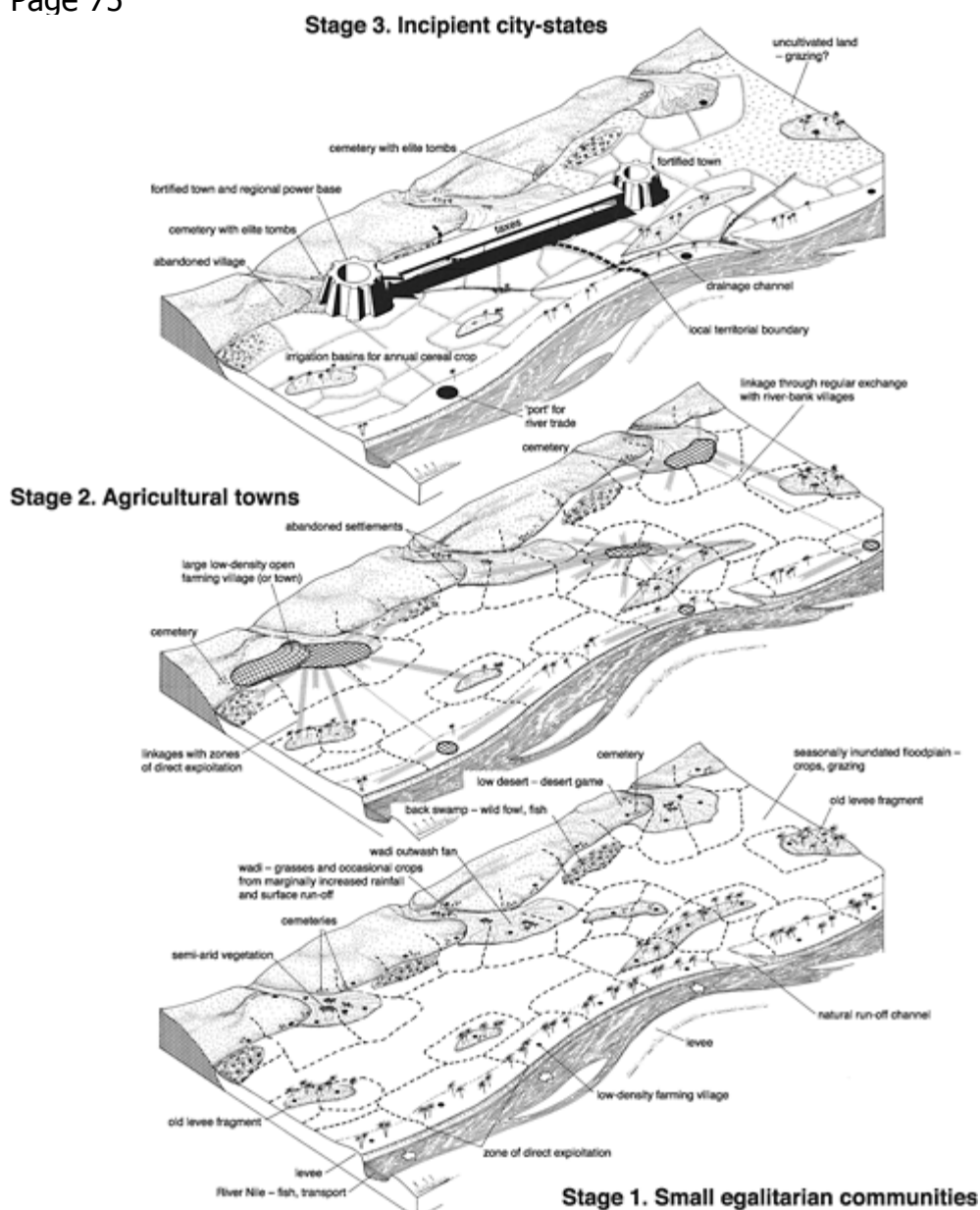We can move closer to historical reality by imagining thousands of games proceeding

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Page 75

Stage 3. Incipient city-states

uncultivated land – grazing?

cemetery with elite tombs

fortified town

fortified town and regional power base

cemetery with elite tombs

abandoned village

taxes

drainage channel

local territorial boundary

irrigation basins for annual cereal crop

linkage through regular exchange with river-bank villages

'port' for river trade

cemetery

Stage 2. Agricultural towns

abandoned settlements

large low-density open farming village (or town)

cemetery

linkages with zones of direct exploitation

cemetery

seasonally inundated floodplain – crops, grazing

old levee fragment

low desert – desert game

back swamp – wild fowl, fish

wadi outwash fan

wadi – grasses and occasional crops from marginally increased rainfall and surface run-off

cemeteries

semi-arid vegetation

natural run-off channel

levee

old levee fragment

low-density farming village

levee

zone of direct exploitation

River Nile – fish, transport

Stage 1. Small egalitarian communities

Figure 21 Model landscape of Upper Egypt in the late Predynastic Period showing the likely environmental factors and local pattern of territorial and political expansion during the crucial phase of state formation.

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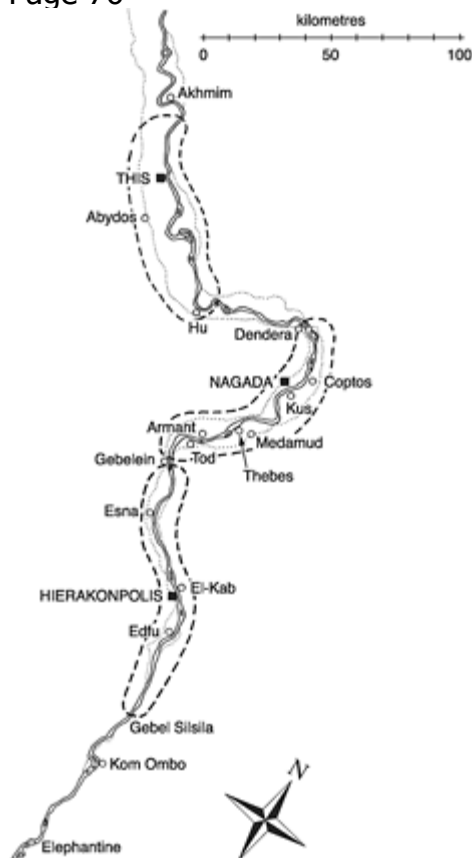
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Page 76

Figure 22 State formation: hypothetical map of the most important proto-states of Upper Egypt as they developed in the late Predynastic Period (see Figure 23, p. 77).

simultaneously, with winners promoted to join a progression of increasingly select games, where they dress in strange costumes and perform the acts of play with exaggerated formal gestures, the successful amongst them playing for ever higher stakes. We need also to correct the timescale, our view of who the 'players' really are. For the most part, so few significant changes of circumstance occur in any one real lifetime that each player is actually many generations treated as a unity. And in real life the games continue beyond the point of winning. Processes of decay and fission set in and the games go on with different outcomes likely. This point will be developed further in Chapter 8.

The attraction of this analogy is that it sets up in our imaginations a simple system with feedback loops.33 It concentrates attention on the essence of a basic process at work in history and draws one away from the temptation to explain events through single causes. Human societies large and small are made up of individuals whose behaviour is not com-

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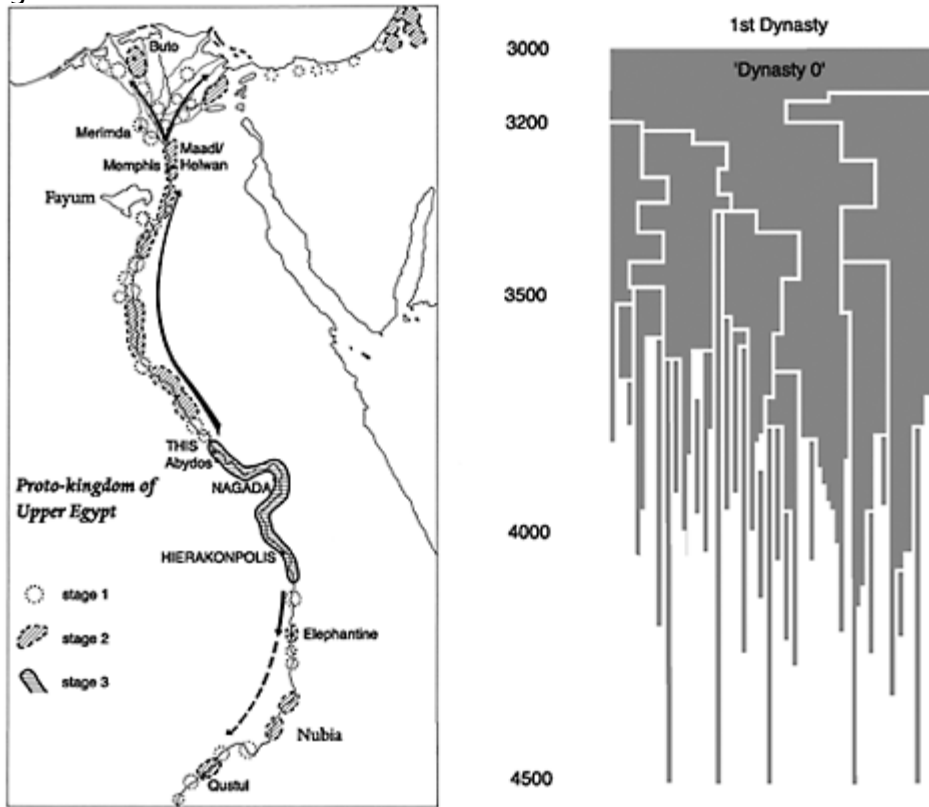
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Page 77

Figure 23 State formation. *Left.* A simple linear view. The processes of centralization are at work throughout the area but at different rates, so that different stages of development (arbitrarily reduced to three) had been reached by the time that the politically most developed centre, a proto-kingdom of Upper Egypt based at Hierakonpolis (Figure 22, p. 76), embarked on a military expansion (marked by arrows) which engulfed the whole of Egypt. Early in the 1st Dynasty the expansion continued into Nubia. *Right.* A more likely process, of complicated but now unrecoverable micro-history involving an ebb and flow of success for individual places, not necessarily based upon violence. In the diagram the boundaries are those of local autonomy

pletely predictable. The result is not wholly randomized 'background noise'. As with any complex adaptive system that allows a degree of free association and interaction of its constituent parts—the molecules of air in weather formations, for example—tiny variations can set up self-reinforcing consequences that grow in power out of all proportion to the starting conditions. Hurricanes suddenly appear. The process can also lead away from a level of integration already achieved. The rapid collapse of communist states in eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s and the equally rapid collapse of the market economy of the west in 1929 are striking modern examples of human social and economic systems

< previous page page_77 next page >

< previous page   page_78   next page >

Page 78

running temporarily in reverse, towards dispersal of the energy that has gathered into centres of power, where the prime factor has been the accumulation of innumerable personal acts, borne of disillusion, frustration or greed.

Analogies have drawbacks. A misleading aspect of my imagined board game concerns the notion of rules. They stand for the limits which most people place on their behaviour and for the various restraints which systems impose. The study of history, however, including cases of recorded state formation, reveals that striking transformations often happen through the agency of unusually dominant individuals who flout the rules, kill their rivals and seize everything. Charismatic leadership is, in a way, another 'chance' factor, but to make good progress it has to come at the right point in the game. The interaction between system and individual lies at the heart of much modern historical (and archaeological) study.34 We can draw the implication that all parts of Egypt where settled farming communities were early established should have advanced some way along the trajectory of play before its final and more theatrical stages, simply as a result of local internal processes. There was thus a receptive background to the last phase of political unification. The final expansion of the winning kingdom was into a social and economic landscape in which the processes of state formation were already under way, although at different rates.

Foundations of ideology (1): local tradition

It is very difficult to penetrate in a specific way the minds and the dealings of people during the Predynastic Period, before writing had appeared. But archaeology gives us two signals to inform us when the process of state formation was in progress. One is the physical drawing together of communities into larger settlements that become towns. This is the process of urbanization, which increases the scope for interaction amongst individuals in whom the great change in outlook is taking place, involving an expanding sense of imagined community and mystic association with a defined tract of land. The other is the appearance of the rewards of successful competitive interaction in the form of evidence for conspicuous consumption and display. The familiar picture of social stratification, of a society of haves, have-nots and many in between, has arrived. In Egypt this reveals itself in more richly equipped tombs for a minority, and signs of an emerging ideology of power. Two sites in Upper Egypt, Nagada and Hierakonpolis, exemplify both aspects.

The modern village of Nagada, 26 kilometres downstream from Luxor, on the west bank, has given its name to a site more properly known as Ombos (Nubt).35 In Pharaonic times this was an important centre for the cult of Seth. Excavation and survey have revealed that a town had stood here from the Nagada II phase of Predynastic culture (from *c.* 3500 BC, thus around 500 years before the beginning of the 1st Dynasty), and that from the 18th Dynasty or earlier it had possessed a small stone temple dedicated to Seth. The extent and importance of the town in historical times seem to have been far less than during the Predynastic Period when it is, in fact, one of the largest known sites in the Nile valley (Figure 24). This applies both to the area covered by a deposit of Predynastic settlement debris, which included part of a walled town (the South Town) built of brick, and to a series of cemeteries. One of them, cemetery T, small and lying on a ridge just behind the town, has the hallmarks of a rulers' cemetery. Some of the graves had been

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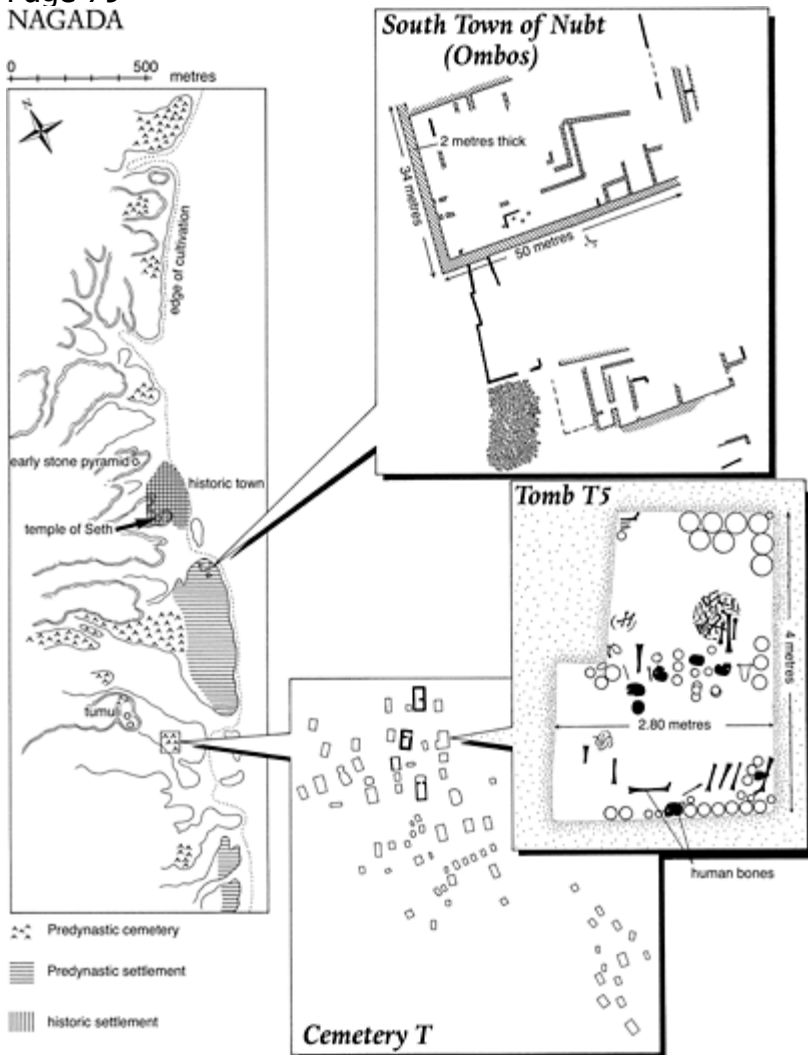
Page 79
NAGADA

Figure 24 Nagada: centre of one of the first proto-states in the Nile valley. Note the extent of the Predynastic town, with its substantial mud-brick enclosure and other buildings at the northern end. The town of the historic period occupied much less space, but probably made up for this in increased density of occupation. The temple of Seth, however, remained a building of modest size throughout ancient times. The huge Predynastic cemetery behind the Predynastic town is the largest to have survived from this period. Cemetery T, although small, contained unusually well-constructed tombs for rich burials, probably those for a ruling house of Nagada. The basic map is after W.Kaiser, *MDAIK* 17 (1961), 16, Abb. 3 (see W.M.F.Petrie and J.E.Quibell, *Naqada and Ballas,* London, 1896, Pl. IA); the inset map of the South Town is after Petrie and Quibell, op. cit., Pl. LXXXV, and that of tomb T5, ibid., Pl. LXXXII; the inset map of cemetery T itself is after B.J.Kemp, *JEA* 59 (1973), 39, Fig. 1, itself after Petrie and Quibell, op. cit, Pl. LXXXVI.
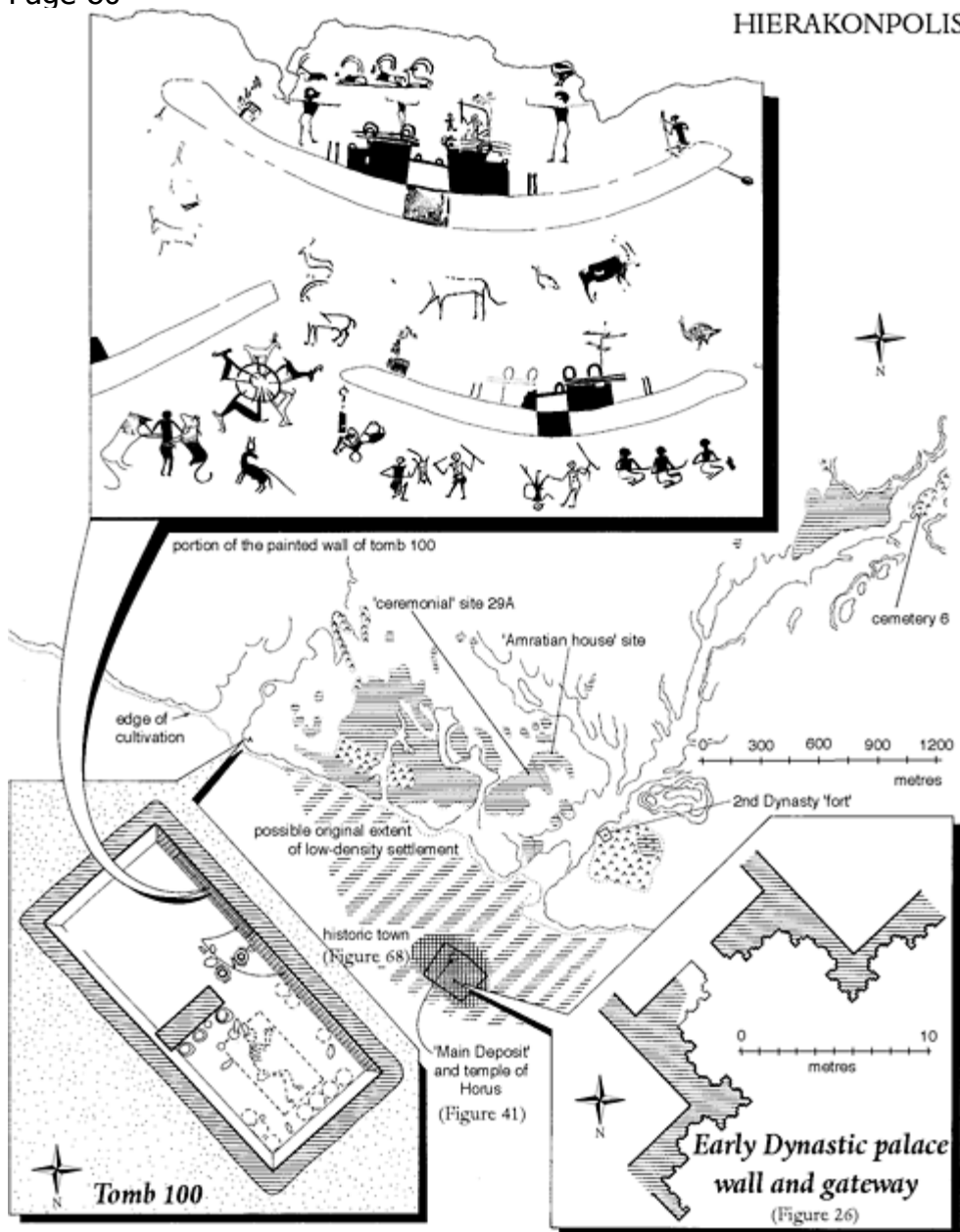
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Page 80

Figure 25 Hierakonpolis: cradle of Egyptian kingship. The base map shows the areas of low-density Predynastic settlement together with the cemeteries on the low desert, and the possible continuation of settlement beneath the present floodplain, on an ancient wadi outwash fan now buried beneath alluvium. In the midst of the latter area stands the walled town of Hierakonpolis of the Dynastic Period (see Figures 41, p. 122, 68, p. 196), which represents, as at Nagada, a smaller but much denser settlement than its Predynastic predecessor. The map is after W.Kaiser, *MDAIK* 17 (1961), 6, Abb. 1 and M.Hoffman, *The Predynastic of Hierakonpolis,* Giza and Macomb, 111., 1982, end map. Towards the beginning of the developmental sequence of kingship is tomb 100 (the 'Decorated Tomb'), probably the tomb of an early king of Hierakonpolis of the Nagada II period (*c.* 3300 BC), and the enigmatic 'ceremonial' site 29A (Figure 53, p. 149); at the other end is the fragment of Early Dynastic palace wall (*c.* 3000/2700 BC) and the huge mud-brick 'fort' of the end of the 2nd Dynasty, both monuments of the aristocratic family which continued to occupy Hierakonpolis for several generations after the beginning of the 1st Dynasty. The Early Dynastic palace gateway and wall are a simplified version of Figure 26, p. 82. The 'Main Deposit' is an anciently buried cache of temple votive equipment of the late Predynastic/Early Dynastic Period and somewhat later, found in the early temple enclosure of Horus. A detailed plan of the temple remains is given in Figure 41, p. 122. Amongst the material in the deposit were the Narmer Palette (Figure 27, p. 84) and Smaller Hierakonpolis (or Two-dog) Palette illustrated in

Figure 31, p. 94.

< previous page   page_80   next page >

Page 81

unusually large and well furnished and, most unusually for the Predynastic Period, had been lined with brick. If we combine the archaeological picture of Nagada with the later position of Seth, we have a reasonably firm basis for claiming that at some time in the later Predynastic Period Nagada had been the capital of a chiefdom or small state.

The association between a major early archaeological site (Nagada) and the cult of one of the gods most closely associated with kingship (Seth) is encouragingly neat. The second site, Hierakonpolis, also contains the essence of a similar association, this time with Horus, but of an altogether more complex kind. The site itself lies in the most southerly region of Upper Egypt (Figure 25).36 Its importance is visible from two aspects of its archaeology. One is the sheer size of the spread of settlement debris of the Predynastic Period (7 hectares on the desert, and more now buried beneath modern fields). It includes an enigmatic set of structures (locality 29A) that might be the remains of a ceremonial area (see below, pp. 147–9). The second aspect comprises a number of unusually rich and well constructed tombs divided between at least two widely separated cemeteries (cemetery 6 and the other unnumbered). One tomb at the latter, no. 100, lined with mud brick and painted with a series of scenes, must have been the tomb of a late Predynastic king.37 Although in style the painting appears alien in comparison with the formalized art of the Dynastic Period, we can recognize at least two motifs which survived into historic times: the victor smiting bound enemies with an upraised mace (Figure 33, lower, p. 96), and the ruler standing beneath a simple awning, reminiscent of later scenes of the king seated during the jubilee or Sed-festival (see below).

In its general aspect Hierakonpolis resembles Nagada. Both sites also exhibit a pronounced shrinkage towards the end of the Predynastic Period. This marks a fundamental change in the nature of settlement, bound up with the appearance of true urbanism in Egypt: the shift from sprawling low-density settlements to walled brick-built towns of far higher population density. The city on the floodplain into which the low-density occupation of Hierakonpolis eventually coalesced has fared much better than Nagada. Destruction has been less intense, and much of the archaeological digging has been reasonably careful. One discovery has been a fragment of a sector of the Early Dynastic town, kept separate
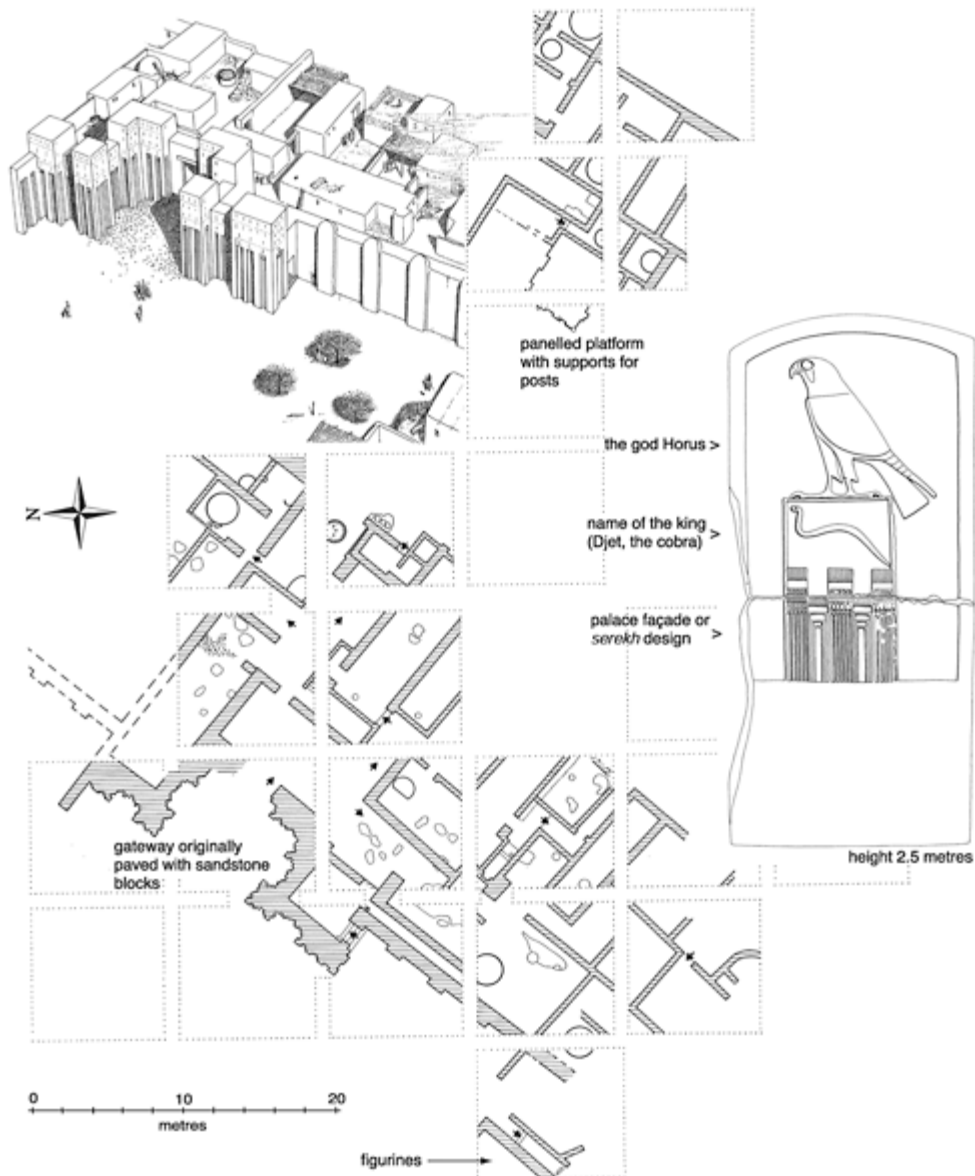
Page 82
HIERAKONPOLIS

Figure 26 Hierakonpolis: a mud-brick ruler's compound (or 'palace') of the Early Dynastic Period. The niched 'palace wall and gateway' appear also in Figures 25, p. 80 and 68, p. 196. From front to back the ground level rose, so that the panelled platform was higher than the entrance. The small arrows mark upward slope. Omitted are various walls, mainly in the central open space, which seem to belong to an Old Kingdom town-phase which followed, although much of the rear was also buried in sand, whether naturally blown in or deliberately dumped is not clear. After W.A.Fairservis, *The Hierakonpolis Project, season January to May 1981. Excavation on the Kom el Gemuwia,* Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 1986, Figures 7A and 7B; also K.Weeks, *JARCE* 9 (1971–2), unnumbered fig.
Inset. The substance of early monarchy: the name of King Djet of the 1st Dynasty (*c.* 2900 BC), written with the hieroglyphic sign of the cobra, appears above a stylized rendering of the distinctive architecture of the royal palace. This the Egyptians called a *serekh,* and a common modern term for the style is 'palace façade'. Standing above is a figure of the falcon-god Horus, of whom each king was an embodiment. Funerary stela of King Djet, from his tomb at Abydos. After A.Vigneau, *Encyclopédie photographique de l'art: Les antiquites égyptiennes du Musée du Louvre,* Paris, 1935, 4.

Page 83

from the rest of the town by a distinctive, whitewashed enclosure wall marked at regular intervals with buttresses (Figure 26). Part of the way along it was broken by a projecting gateway decorated with a more elaborate style of panels and niches that seems to have been a symbol of rule (the heraldic device knows as a *serekh,* meaning something like an 'announcement', which was used as a frame around the king's Horus name, the first of the set of names that each king bore, is derived from it, Figure 26, inset). It is an example of the way that architects sometimes use the scale and design of gateways to summarize the function and interior of the building as a whole. The gateway gave access to a maze-like settlement that seems to have surrounded a central space into which protruded a small brick platform, also with panelled sides provided with supports for wooden poles, perhaps for a canopy. The complex as a whole is our best candidate anywhere in Egypt for an early palace, which turns out to have been a mud-brick compound, seemingly modest in the scale of its individual parts, and providing only limited separation between the huts of the king's followers and the needs of ceremonial. It was in these surroundings that the products of high craftsmanship that we so admire were made and used, and the power of the early state was wielded.38

Another portion of the early town to have survived is the principal temple (described below, pp. 121–4 and Figure 41), within which priests of later centuries had piously buried deposits of votive offerings from the late Predynastic/Early Dynastic periods. Once again the royal associations are plain. The deposits include statues, stone vases and other fragmentary inscribed pieces of one or more kings of the late 2nd Dynasty and, above all, the Narmer Palette (Figure 27). This remarkable object, carved in low relief on both sides of a palette of mudstone (or 'slate'), commemorates a victory over a northern enemy by a King Narmer from the very beginning of the 1st Dynasty. He wears the crowns of Upper and of Lower Egypt, and is faced on one side by a figure of the god Horus. The whole is decorated according to the full artistic canon of Pharaonic Egypt, displays certain of the key distinguishing marks of kings in its depictions of Narmer, and contains small groups of hieroglyphs. The Narmer Palette encapsulates certain of the essential elements of Pharaonic culture, and announces their presence at the very beginning of the dynastic sequence.

In later times Hierakonpolis was the seat of one form of the god Horus, called Horus of Nekhen (Hierakonpolis). Aside from his connection with kingship, Horus (and to a
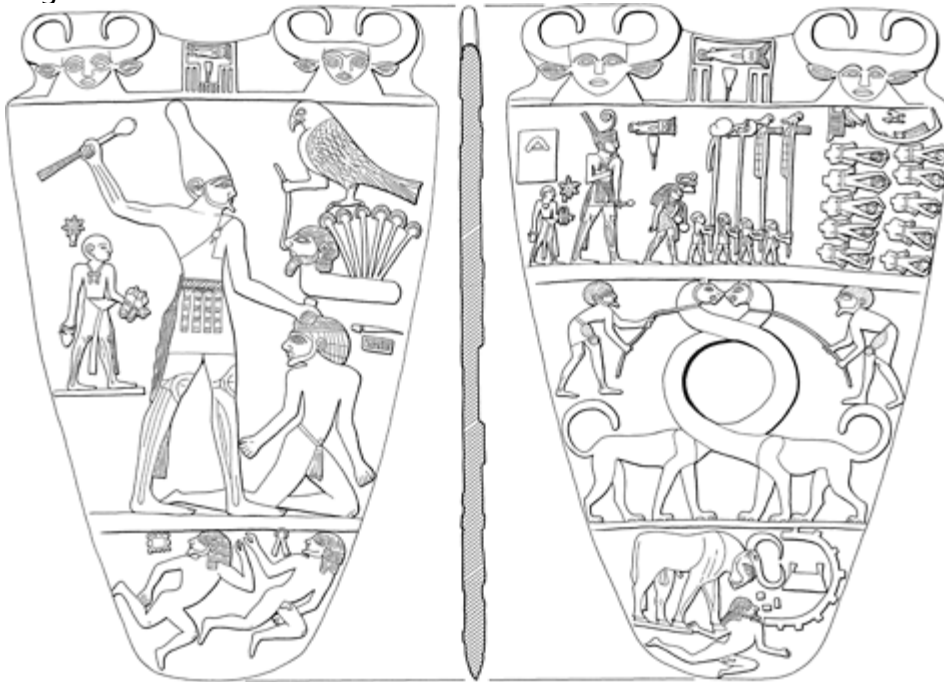
< previous page | page_84 | next page >

Page 84

Figure 27 The Narmer Palette, 63 cm high, is a slab of 'slate' carved on both sides with scenes commemorating the reign of a king with the Horus name of Narmer (written at the top in the 'palace façade' rectangles), who must have lived immediately prior to the beginning of the 1st Dynasty and may well have been the last and greatest of the kings of Dynasty 0 of Hierakonpolis. On the *left side,* Narmer, wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt and other insignia of early monarchy stands with upraised mace about to smite a kneeling captive. Beside the captive's head a group of hieroglyphs gives his name as Wash. The design above probably conveys the supplementary message that the Horus-king (the falcon) has won a victory over an enemy based in the delta, of whom Wash was presumably the ruler. Behind Narmer is a high-ranking figure who carries the king's sandals. On the *right side* the images of conquest in the top and bottom registers are balanced by the central design which expresses harmony, in the form of the intertwined and captive mythical animals. In the top register Narmer, now wearing the red crown of Lower Egypt and accompanied by two men of high rank, walks to inspect two rows of bound and decapitated enemies. The party is preceded by four bearers of standards of distinctive shape. These standards were later called the 'Followers of Horus', or 'The gods who follow Horus'. Whatever their origin, by the time of Narmer they were clearly part of the array of symbols which contributed to the unique aura of kingship. The symbols above the decapitated enemies cannot be interpreted with confidence. In the lowest register the conquering power of the king, symbolized by a bull, is directed against a walled and fortified town. The drawings of the palette are after J.E.Quibell, *ZÄS* 36, 1898, Taf. XII, XIII; J.E.Quibell, *Hierakonpolis* I, London, 1900, Pl. XXIX; W.M.F.Petrie, *Ceremonial slate palettes and corpus of protodynastic pottery,* London, 1953, Pls J, K; V.Davies, *Nekhen News* 10 (1998), 22.

< previous page | page_84 | next page >

< previous page   page_85   next page >

Page 85

Figure 28 The dual aspects of Horus: as heavenly power, wielding instruments of destruction, and as earthly ruler. (1), (4) and (5) are figures of Horus wielding a spike or harpoon. On (3) (left) he also wields a mixture of mace, shield and hoe. Towards the right side of (3) the Horus name of the king, Aha ('the fighter'), written with a mace-and-shield hieroglyph, is borne as an emblem by the figure of Horus. In (2) and (3) the ubiquitous nature of Horus as heavenly power is symbolized by a boat which, in (2), is also borne aloft by a pair of wings. The Horus name of the king commemorated on (2), Djet, is the same as that depicted in Figure 26, *inset.* (1) is a reconstructed figure on the side of one of the Coptos colossi (see Figure 45, p. 130). (2) is an ivory comb, length 8 cm, from Abydos. After R.Engelbach, *ZÄS* 65 (1930), 115–16; F.Tiradritti, *The Cairo Museum; masterpieces of Egyptian art,* London, 1999, 44. (3) is the top register of one of a pair of ivory year-labels from Nagada, width 5.6 cm, after V.Vikentiev *ASAE* 33 (1933), Pl. II; F.Tiradritti, op. cit., 42. A companion piece fills in the missing area of water beneath the central boat, J.Garstang, *ZÄS* 42 (1905), 62, Fig. 3.

lesser extent his female counterpart, the goddess Hathor) was, in historic times, a god of widespread immanence in specific local forms. He was thus, at one and the same time, universal and local, although how far his universality was recognized in Predynastic times is difficult to judge. The name Horus means 'The One on High', and as such he appears in a boat astride a pair of wings in the sky, above a second Horus figure surmounting a king's name (Figure 28.2). Later thinking located Horus more particularly at the horizon, and associated him with the sun-god Ra at the time of sunrise, in the combination Ra-Horakhty ('Ra-Horus of the horizon'). Early representations (Figure 28) also stress a violent aspect and show him wielding weapons—a spike, a harpoon, a mace-and-shield or a hoe (for hacking down walls)—an aspect which survived into much later times as 'Horus, avenger of his father' (Osiris) and 'Min-Horus, the victorious', the object of a cult at Abydos.39

In historic times local forms of Horus (and Hathor) appear both within Egypt and in certain foreign territories under Egyptian control. 'Horus Lord of Hebenu' was, for example, the presiding divinity at the town of Hebenu in Middle Egypt; 'Horus Lord of Buhen' and 'Horus Lord of Miam' were cults set up by the Egyptians at two of their fortresses in Nubia, Buhen and Miam (modern Aniba). Two more of these topographically

< previous page   page_85   next page >

< previous page   page_86   next page >

Page 86

defined Horus-gods appear on the El-Lisht throne bases: 'Horus, Lord of Mesen', and 'Horus, the Behdetite', but here, as we have seen, they stand for Lower Egypt. Yet the first time that 'Horus of Behdet' appears, on a carved stone panel beneath the Step Pyramid (*c.* 2650 BC), the symbolic connections are actually with Upper Egypt.40 There has to be the strong suspicion that the Lower Egyptian association of Horus is the product of rationalization, taking place during the Dynastic Period and reflecting the need to create a geographically comprehensive myth. The celestial Horus, who also embodied each king, was perfectly fitted to this mobile role.

Hierakonpolis remained important during the Old Kingdom, becoming a walled town of densely packed buildings. Thereafter it seems to have declined as a centre of settlement, although its temple remained in use and was rebuilt in both the Middle and New Kingdoms though not on a grand scale. Its place as a major focus of urban life on the west bank in this part of Egypt was taken by Edfu, 15 kilometres upstream. The archaeological record here reveals a place of negligible significance in the early periods.41 Only with the Old Kingdom, perhaps the 4th Dynasty, does a walled town seem to have appeared, which then grew, reaching a maximum extent in the First Intermediate Period. The rise of Edfu as a regional centre at the expense of Hierakonpolis led to one of several outbreaks of local internal warfare in the early part of the First Intermediate Period. In the course of this, Edfu was for a time taken over by the governor of the Hierakonpolis region, a man named Ankhtif who, to judge from the location of his tomb at Mo'alla, lived not at Hierakonpolis itself but 50 kilometres downstream, near the northern border of his territory. By the early Middle Kingdom a Horus cult at Edfu had become prominent, remaining so until Ptolemaic and Roman times and attracting the resources for the monumental sandstone temple of that late era that still stands almost wholly intact. The place names Behdet and Mesen, primarily Lower Egyptian names, came to be used as synonyms for Edfu, a recognition of its symbolic status. The changing mythical role of Horus exemplifies how traditions are moulded and reshaped as history moves on.

Parallel to the symbolic geography of Horus and Seth is that for a pair of goddesses who stood for the duality of kingship. They are the vulture-goddess Nekhbet of the ancient city of Nekheb (modern El-Kab; her name means simply 'She of Nekheb') and the cobra-goddess Wadjit of the delta city of Buto. El-Kab lay across the river from Hierakonpolis. Its archaeological record appears to be that of a Predynastic settlement of only modest size, growing to a walled town during the Old Kingdom.42 It is not a counterpart to Nagada and Hierakonpolis. The inclusion of its goddess within the basic symbols of kingship must reflect some local interest, perhaps a family connection, on the part of the late Predynastic kingdom of Hierakonpolis not apparent from the general archaeological picture.

Buto in the north has been the object of a modern archaeological quest, and serves to introduce the early archaeology of the Nile delta. Aside from the association with Wadjit, other sources of the historic period paired it with Hierakonpolis through the mythological entity 'the souls of Pe [Buto] and Nekhen [Hierakonpolis]' (Figure 29, *above*), an interesting abstraction in itself. Is this a way of referring to ancestral founding figures from the most distant past that the Egyptians could imagine? This ancient mythological claim has been sufficient to create the modern expectation that, buried beneath the mud of the delta, there lie the remains of the Predynastic capital of Lower Egypt. Textual sources locate Buto at Tell el-Faraein, very close to the likely ancient shoreline of the Mediterranean. A huge archaeological site exists here, but all that is visible dates to the later
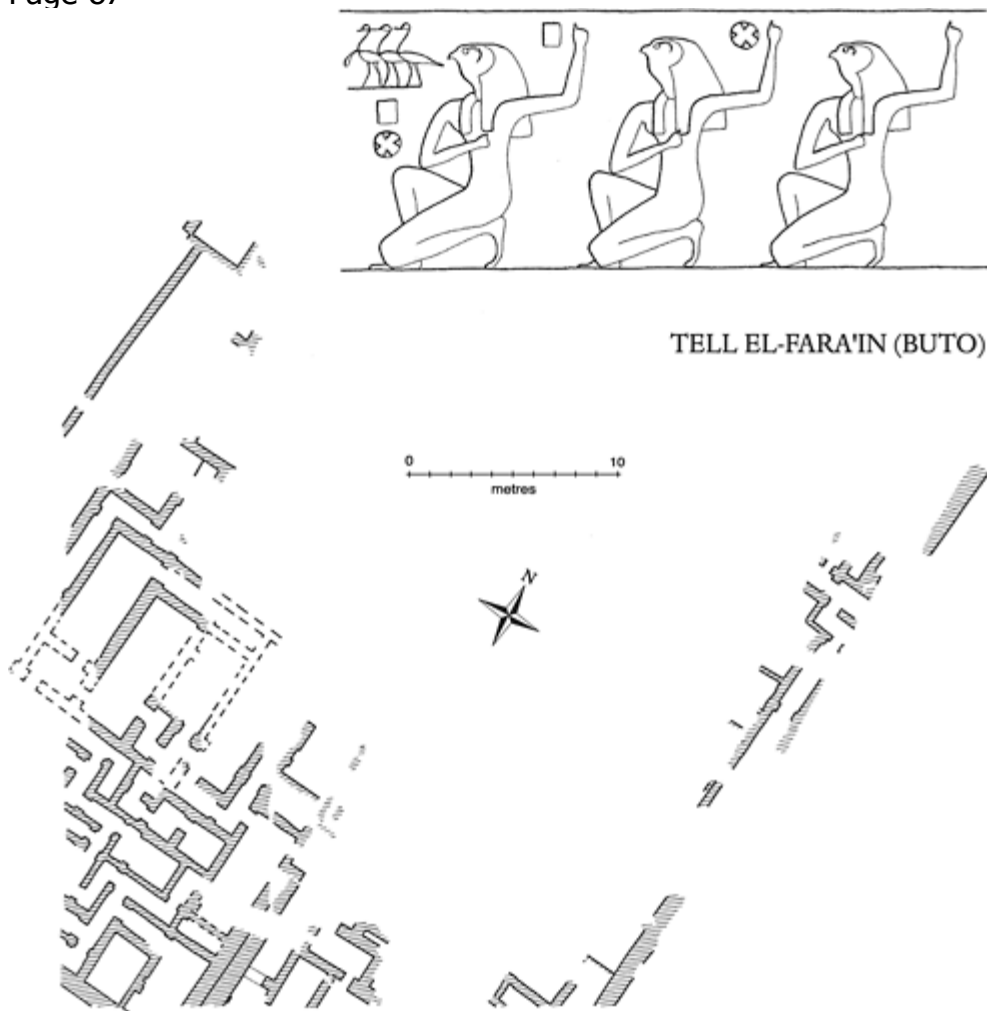
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Page 87

TELL EL-FARA'IN (BUTO)

Figure 29 Plan of Level V at Tell el-Faraein (Buto) in the north-western delta. It dates to the Early Dynastic Period. The interlocking pattern of rooms and corridors might be compared with the small building inside the Shunet ez-Zebib at Abydos (Figure 35A, p. 102) or even the Hierakonpolis palace (Figure 26, p. 82). After M.Ziermann, *MDAIK* 58 (2002), 480, Abb. 8. *Above.* In later centuries Buto (as well as Hierakonpolis) was thought to be the home of 'souls' (spiritual royal ancestors), here shown as hawk-headed beings. After E.Naville, *The Festival-Hall of Osorkon II in the Great Temple of Bubastis (1887–1889),* London, 1892, Pl. IX.6.

periods of Egyptian culture. It took a methodical programme of hand-drilling into the surrounding fields to locate the lost early settlement, which had stood on a now wholly buried sandy mound located to one side of the later city. So far only limited exposures

< previous page   page_88   next page >

Page 88

have been possible but they reveal an oddly unprepossessing beginning for a place of later legend.43
The first settlement (stratum I), 4–5 metres below the present ground level, appeared in the first
quarter of the fourth millennium BC. Its remains display no recognizable architecture and its inhabitants
had made for themselves copies of pottery that was at home in Palestine during the contemporary
Chalcolithic Period. Were they themselves immigrants? In the subsequent phase (stratum II) the pottery
seems to be largely derived from northern Egyptian styles, and the remains of a simple architecture of
wooden posts and wattle-and-daub screens can be recognized. Then, towards the end of the
Predynastic Period (beginning Nagada IId), came a substantial change in the local way of life (stratum
III, continuing into IV). Mud-brick buildings appeared, along with pottery of the Upper Egyptian
(Nagada) tradition and a major change in the types of flint tools. With stratum V and the Early Dynastic
Period the excavated area is filled with a fragment of an extensive mud-brick building of small
interlocking spaces (Figure 29). Is it a palace? A closely similar sequence (but without a 'palace') has
been found at Tell Ibrahim Awad in the north-eastern delta, and is probably represented at other delta
sites.44 At Minshat Abu Omar, also towards the north-east, a Nagada-style cemetery appeared in the
late Nagada II period and served a settlement into the Early Dynastic Period, but as yet insufficient is
known of the settlement to visualize what kind of place it had been previously.45
The culture of the lower, pre-brick building phases at Buto is sufficiently distinctive to merit the use of a
separate term to distinguish it from the Nagada cultures of Upper Egypt. The term that has come to be
accepted derives not from Buto but from the previously excavated site of Maadi, now within a southern
suburb of Cairo of this name.46 This was an extensive settlement (130,000 square metres) that did
contain houses, but made from wooden posts which must have supported screens of reeds. Mud bricks
were used hardly at all. Its material culture is similar to that of Buto stratum II, and neither by
structures nor by artefacts can we detect any significant accumulations of wealth or prestige. Copper
was present, not only as the material for a limited number of objects, but also as a poor-quality ore. Yet
the extent to which a copper industry had been developed remains unclear. The occupation of Maadi
began in mid-Nagada I and came to an end in the latter part of Nagada II, but whether as a
consequence of political and social change or of environmental deterioration (it stood on the desert
edge) is also not clear. Its place as a local centre of population was taken by a community whose
extensive cemetery was long ago excavated at the site of Tura, only one kilometre away, where the
material culture buried with the dead was of the Upper Egyptian Nagada tradition.
Throughout the Dynastic Period, with only isolated exceptions (of which the most conspicuous occur in
the Second Intermediate Period, see above, pp. 39–41), the visible culture of Egypt was more or less
uniform from Elephantine to the Mediterranean. But Maadi culture represents a period of perhaps four
centuries (based on radiocarbon dates) when this had not yet come about, and the way of life at Buto
and elsewhere in the north seems to have been different. From our standpoint it was less advanced in
terms of buildings and artefacts and the technology that the latter required. Uniformity came about
through the northward expansion of the Nagada culture of which the towns of Nagada and Hierakonpolis
were important centres. Nagada culture had roots even earlier in Upper Egypt, some of them visible in
the traces of tiny communities of the fifth millennium BC found in the region of the modern village of El-
Badari (hence the archaeologists' term Badarian). Cultural difference notwithstanding, a settled farming
way of life seems to have

< previous page   page_88   next page >

Page 89

developed in the north at least as early as it did in the south. The same competitive processes must have begun to come into play there as well, losing out only in the later stages of disequilibrium. The significance of this difference is hard to evaluate. So much that makes up culture and identity is not expressed directly through material remains and so leaves the archaeologist with little that is firm to grasp. The ability to organize and to fight is not, for example, wholly to be measured in how well villages are constructed and how ornate are the pots. Thucydides in the fifth century BC made the point tellingly in a contrast between Athens and Sparta, both great powers yet the latter 'simply a collection of villages, in the ancient Hellenic way'. He invites the reader to imagine Sparta reduced to ruins: 'I think that future generations would, as time passed, find it very difficult to believe that the place had really been as powerful as it was represented to be.'47 The archaeological evidence from Buto suggests that palace culture, if such it was, arrived only with the 1st Dynasty, but that does not answer the Thucydides paradox: that power and display are not wholly dependent upon one another.

This brings us back to the topic of identity. In the south, the material culture of Nagada had much more in common with that of northern Nubia, its neighbour, and the peoples of the two areas were closely similar at the skeletal level, as we saw in the last chapter. Yet we know, because the difference persisted into historic times, that the two societies were divided by language and that Egyptians saw Nubians as a different people. To the north the distinction, at the level of archaeology, between the Nagada and Maadi cultures seems to be larger. What other differences might there have been, which are now invisible to us? Those who write about this period tend to take for granted an ethnic and linguistic homogeneity for all Egypt, leaving a greater burden of proof on those who would argue otherwise. Experience over the last few centuries of the expansion of cultures that have become dominant, however, is that language is a ready victim in the reduction of cultural diversity. There is, I would have thought, an equal justification for holding that the north had, until Early Dynastic times, an identity of its own, expressed in its own language. The conspicuous 'Egyptianness' of the historic periods, which was later so easily able to absorb outsiders, might itself have been the result of the northward expansion of an Upper Egyptian identity in which language played a key role. We are unlikely ever to be able to explore this possibility further, but should retain it as an option.

Late in the Predynastic Period a third major player emerged in Upper Egypt, represented in the archaeological record at the site of Abydos (Figure 30).48 Throughout the Pharaonic period Abydos remained a town on the edge of the desert, one of those places that coalesced from several tiny settlements at the end of the Predynastic Period. From the Middle Kingdom onwards it was nationally famous for its cult of the god Osiris, whose tomb was thought to be in the desert behind Abydos and was a place of pilgrimage for any who wished to enhance the prospects of resurrection after death. It seems never to have served, however, as a regional centre. That position, in historic times, was held by the city of This, which seems to have lain close to the river, probably in the vicinity of the modern town of Girga. The local inhabitants of Predynastic times used a number of cemeteries on the desert edge. But further out across the sand, at the very place which was later seen as containing the tomb of Osiris, a separate cemetery developed (in modern times named the Umm el-Qaeab, 'mother of pots', on account of the vessels left by pilgrims of later periods), beginning in the Nagada I period and culminating with the actual tombs of the kings of

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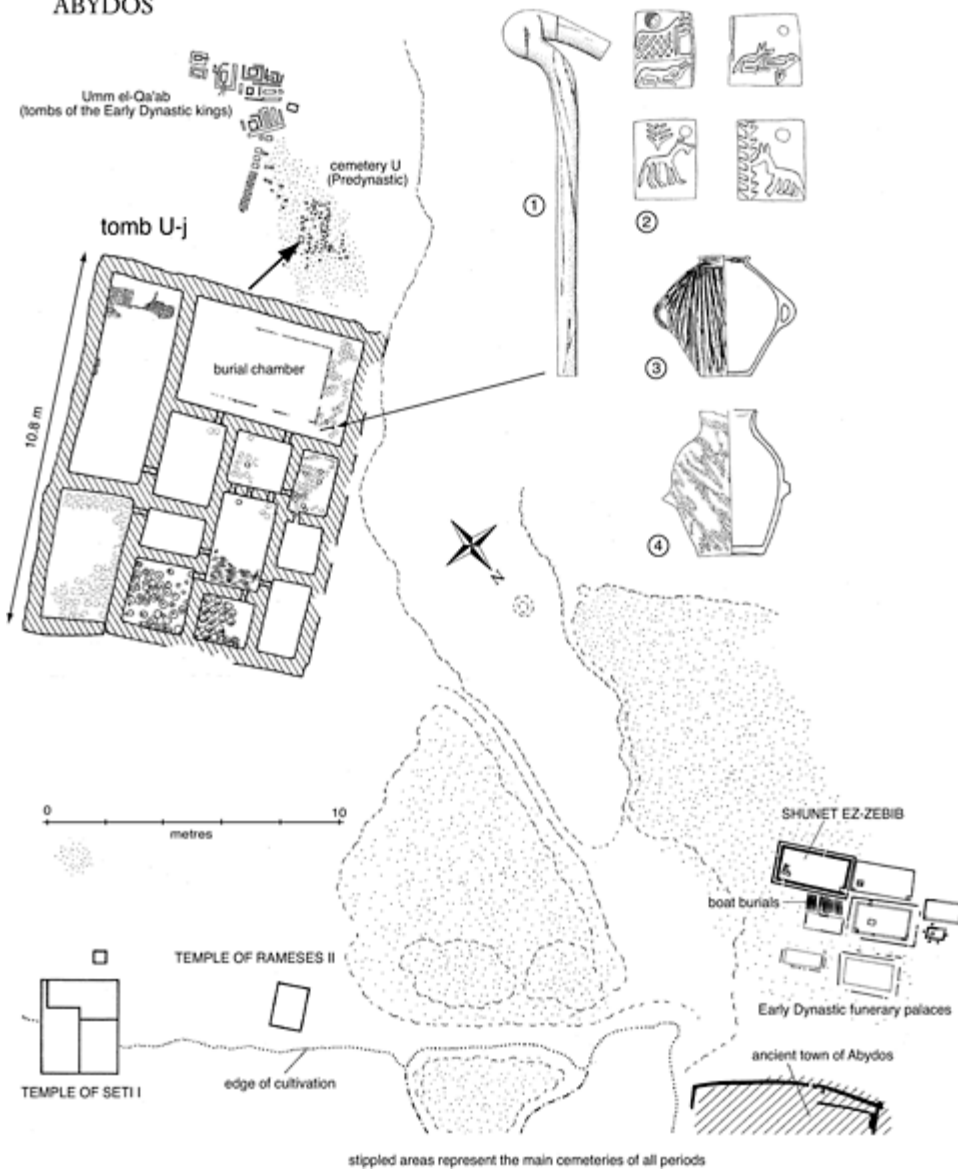
Page 90

Figure 30 Abydos and Egypt's early kings. Superimposed on the sketch map of Abydos is the plan of tomb U-j of Dynasty 0 and of some of its contents. (1) Ivory sceptre of office (originally painted red). Height 33.5 cm. (2) Four ivory labels incised with early hieroglyphic signs. (3) and (4) Two examples of the approximately 200 imported Palestinian pottery storage jars (decorated with red-brown lines) found in position in the tomb. After G.Dreyer, *Umm El-Qaab* I, *Das prädynastische Königsgrab U-j und seine frühen Schriftzeugnisse,* Mainz, 1998, after p. 4, Abb. 2 (plan), 147, Abb. 85 (sceptre); 122, Abb. 77 (labels); and 103, Abb. 66 (pots).

< previous page   page_90   next page >

< previous page   page_91   next page >

Page 91

the 1st Dynasty. As revealed by excavations in the late 1980s and 1990s, it is a classic demonstration both of long continuity and of the emergence of social and economic disparity, in this case the emergence of the people who would become the rulers of all Egypt and the founders of the Dynastic state. I will return to the architecture of the funerary monuments of the Early Dynastic kings at Abydos later in the chapter. For the moment we will concentrate on the area where the tombs of their immediate predecessors were located.

Mostly it had been badly disturbed by the time it was investigated by archaeologists, and the contents of the individual tombs were to some extent scattered. But the earliest of the recognizable names of kings come from here, and they form a short sequence which extends a little way—a few generations—before the start of the later king lists and our own sense that Egyptian history had begun. The custom has grown up of referring to these rulers collectively as forming 'Dynasty 0', as a way of marking their kingly status in relation to the unassailable numbered list of dynasties given to us by Manetho. One tomb (its modern designation U-j), better preserved than most, provides a particularly valuable point of reference (Figure 30).49 Its twelve brick-lined chambers were intended to house a richer burial than its predecessors, one of the chambers still containing over four hundred wine jars imported from Palestine. Left over from the debris of robbery were the remains of an ivory ceremonial sceptre and 173 small bone and ivory labels originally attached to other commodities to identify them by means of groups of signs. Though hard to read with confidence they must count as the earliest use of hieroglyphic writing that we can recognize. The owner of the tomb lived at a time when Nagada culture had spread across the delta. Did his own rule spread that far as well?

Further intriguing questions arise. Where did he and his family live at this time and what would he have counted as his home territory? Was he from a long-resident line of local leaders who were in the process of enlarging their territory, or was he one of the rulers of Hierakonpolis who, having extended their territory northwards to include an existing cemetery on already sacred ground, were now taking advantage of the opportunity to locate their own tombs there, too? Related to this is the equally difficult question as to whether there is any real historic connection between the choice of this piece of desert for a cemetery by a royal family, and the selection by later generations of one of the tombs (of King Djer) as supposedly the tomb of Osiris.50 For our present concerns it should simply be noted that yet another fundamental aspect of Egyptian myth, intertwined about kingship and the tension between Horus and Seth, has a strong connection with an archaeological site in Upper Egypt central to the emergence of the Egyptian state.

In the principal king lists (Sakkara excepted) the earliest name is Menes and his should be one of the tombs on the Umm el-Qaeab.51 As first king of the lists Menes has tended to attract more attention in modern times than he did anciently. For there appears to have been no special body of legend attached to him. In the Ramesseum (the mortuary temple of Rameses II) a short list of all the kings of the New Kingdom down to Rameses II is prefaced first by King Menthuhetep II of the 11th Dynasty, victor of the civil war of the First Intermediate Period, and before him by Menes. But we cannot be sure if this reflects any special knowledge of Menes as the first unifier, or is a deduction from the simple fact that his was the first name in other lists. The Sakkara king list actually omits him, starting its enumeration a few reigns further on. This is particularly surprising in view of the fact that Herodotus records a story that Min (as he calls him) founded the city of Memphis, to which Sakkara belonged as the principal cemetery. Manetho has nothing special to say at

< previous page   page_91   next page >

Page 92

all. The entry for Menes reads: 'He made a foreign expedition and won renown, but was carried off by a hippopotamus.'

Menes belongs to the final stage in state formation. One new aspect of the dynastic state was the keeping of written annals: brief hieroglyphic notes on the most significant events in a royal year. The Palermo Stone was compiled from such documents. Specifically these records commenced with the period of Manetho's 1st Dynasty (the earliest belonging to the reign of Narmer himself). This may have been sufficient reason for later generations to start their lists with Menes (Narmer or Aha): he was simply the first of the kings to have a reign properly documented by annals.53 I mentioned earlier that the Turin king list ventured beyond Menes, with groups of unnamed 'spirits' placed between Menes and the gods. The Palermo Stone provides us with a clue as to the origin of this tradition. Along the very top of the stone ran a line of little rectangular boxes which contained not the events of the passing years but simply names plus little pictures of seated kings. On the main fragment they wear the crown that, in historic times, had come to signify the kingship of Lower Egypt. On another, in the Cairo Museum, they wear the double crown. These names must belong to prehistoric kings about whom nothing more was known by the 5th Dynasty. When grouped as 'spirits' by the even later Turin compiler they made a suitable transition between gods and real kings with recorded reigns. For us there is the temptation to take them as the kings of Dynasty 0, in charge of several territories—the incipient city-states—throughout Egypt. The noteworthy fact that on the Cairo fragment some of these little figures wear the double crown means also that the Egyptians themselves did not, at least in the 5th Dynasty, see Menes as the very first unifier. If it is a reliable tradition (and it is a big 'if'), it fits in with a more protracted political history of formation of a unified state, such as the archaeological and artistic record implies.54

Foundations of ideology (2): the containment of unrule

State formation seems often, perhaps normally, to involve violence, although violence against other human beings was not something that only appeared at this stage. As already noted (p. 48), many of the people buried in the late Palaeolithic cemetery at Gebel Sahaba several millennia earlier had suffered weapon injuries.55 Violent conflict is one of the themes of a range of delicately carved low relief scenes in soft stone and ivory which must have originated from the courts or elite households of Predynastic Upper Egypt.56 They contain their own symbolism. Some elements survived into the iconography of historic times, but we cannot be sure if the values and meaning were modified in the course of transmission. More serious for our chances of correct understanding is the absence altogether of many of the most distinctive features of the iconography of historic times. Thus almost the whole of the later iconography of kingship is missing, at least until the very end of the sequence of the objects in question. The end is represented by the Narmer Palette and a few comparable carvings (most notably the Scorpion mace head, also from Hierakonpolis). As objects—commemorative palettes and mace heads—they belong to the world of the late Predynastic. But in their content and style the last pieces are the products of a great codifying of traditions that took place immediately prior to the beginning of the 1st Dynasty. At this time, and building on the work of the creators of earlier commemorative pieces, creative individuals thought out a remarkably homogeneous intellectual system. It

Page 93
embraced hieroglyphic writing, formal commemorative art of the kind that became one of the hallmarks of Pharaonic Egypt, and a basic iconography of kingship and rule. It was, in total, not quite the Egyptian culture of later centuries. Particularly in formal architecture and its meaning the Early Dynastic Period acquired a tradition of its own which was subsequently, during the early Old Kingdom, subject to a second major re-codification of form and meaning. But despite later re-workings the meaning of Early Dynastic culture is to some extent accessible to us because of the wealth of later material in the same style. This is far less true of Predynastic material. The process of conscious, academic codification that laid down the initial rules by which we now interpret Egyptian culture also acts as a barrier to our understanding the material that had been produced by previous generations, during the late Predynastic. We are obliged to attempt interpretation but this has to involve no small measure of intuition.

One of the most prominent aspects is the use of animals, both real and imagined, as an allegory of the forces of life (Figure 31). The species are primarily of the deserts, not those from which the Egyptians later developed animal cults. Sometimes they occur alone, sometimes they share a scene with human figures. They engage in violence, the predatory strong attacking the weak, or are at rest. Prominent is a harmonious pairing and balancing of particularly fierce beasts: wild dogs, lions and long-necked mythological creatures. They are always quadrupeds, and in no respect do they show a resemblance to the figures of Horus and Seth. One example occurs on the Narmer Palette, and here the context implies that the paired beasts stand for a political harmony. The theme generally conveys powerfully the intention on the part of the artist to depict an ultimate, attainable, harmonious framework to a turbulent world, the framework in the form of reconciled opposites, portrayed in allegorical form. An alternative depiction of order, again using animals to symbolize raw, natural life-forms, was by peaceful processions of animals, arranged in horizontal rows one above another. Sometimes they are accompanied by a more heterogeneous group of 'shepherding' figures that must symbolize a form of control. Sometimes, too, the orderliness was emphasized by using parallel horizontal base lines on which the animals stand. In these cases we can see the beginnings of the division of artistic space into defined horizontal bands (registers) that was to become such a distinctive feature of Pharaonic art. The use of animals as an allegory of untamed chaotic life-force survived into the religious art of historic times, most notably in scenes of king and gods capturing wild birds (and in the Graeco-Roman Period animals as well) in a huge clap-net, where texts and context make it clear that the symbolism is of the containment of disorder (Figure 32, *below*).57

The wall painting in tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis (Nagada IIC phase, *c.* 3400/3300 BC; Figure 25) is amenable to the same interpretation. It portrays a symbolic universe in which the central element is a line of boats. This is an early example of the prominent use of the boat as symbol that was to have a long history in Egypt. Some societies (including those of Europe from Roman times onwards) have found in the horse a powerful image of authority, which elevates and almost enshrines the rider. The Egyptians used the boat, often decked out in a distinctive way, to achieve the same effect, sometimes turning it quite literally into a shrine (see below, p. 249). In the Hierakonpolis tomb the boats appear as unassailable points of order and authority, conveying also the sense of passage through time. One of them, with its depiction of a ruler seated beneath an awning and protected by female guardian figures, is specifically associated with rule. On all sides are the threats
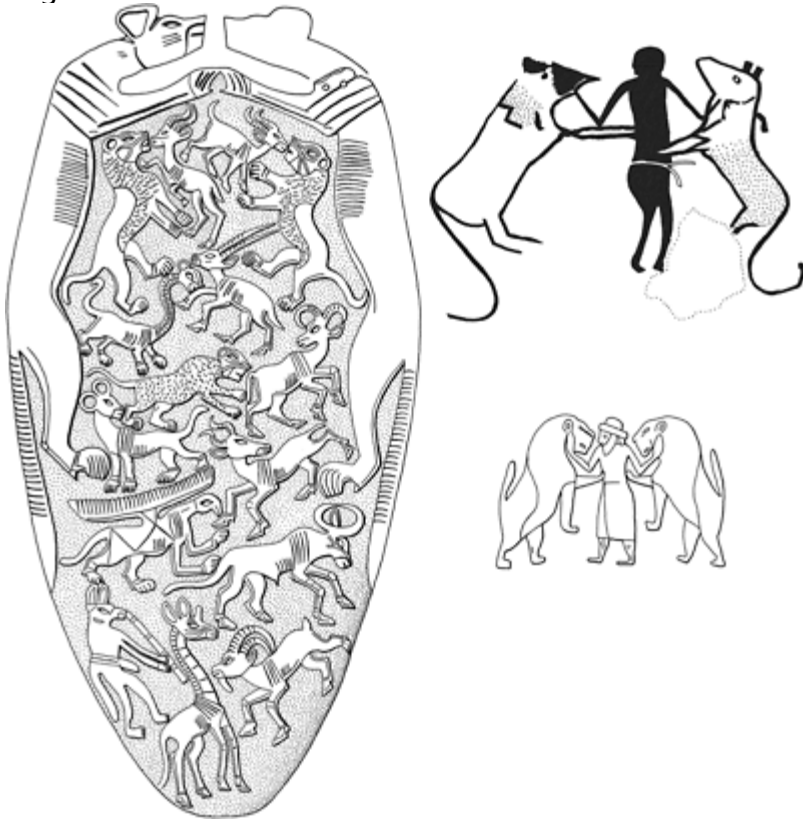
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Page 94

Figure 31 The containment of unrule in the universe. *Left.* The smaller Hierakonpolis (or Two-dog) Palette, reverse side. It portrays life allegorically as an unequal conflict between the strong and the weak, seemingly animated by the flute-playing presence of the Seth-like figure in the bottom left corner. The pre-eminent predators are the facing lions at the top who are, however, not far from a point of equilibrium in which their powers are mutually balancing. This ultimate point of harmony is hinted at by the framing figures of the fierce hunting dogs. *Right.* The actual point of arrested conflict is shown as having been achieved in two other scenes in which the facing lions are now held apart by a male human figure, perhaps a king. The upper example is from tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis (see Figure 25, p. 80); the lower is on the Gebel el-Arak knife handle. Photographs of the palette are in W.M.F.Petrie, *Ceremonial slate palettes and corpus of proto-dynastic pottery,* London, 1953, Pl. F; J.E.Quibell and F.W.Green, *Hierakonpolis* II, London, 1902, Pl. XXVIII; M.J.Mellink and J.Filip, *Frühe Stufen der Kunst* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 13), Berlin, 1974, Taf. 208. For the Gebel el-Arak knife handle, see Mellink and Filip, op. cit., Taf. 210; *Ancient Egypt* 1917, 29, Fig. 4.

from manifestations of raw life-force, some as desert animals and others in human form. The threats are countered by vignettes of capture or defeat. The same elemental struggle waged during a perpetual boat-voyage through time lies behind some of the much later scenes painted in the tombs of New Kingdom Pharaohs at Thebes. But by this time, fifteen
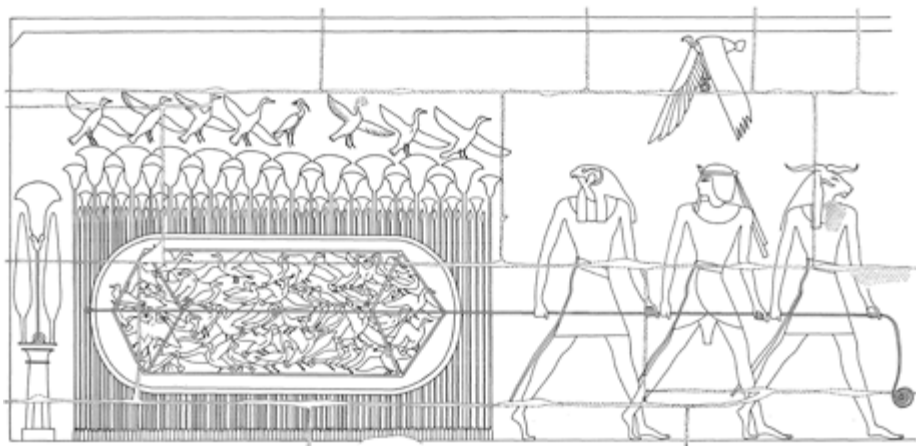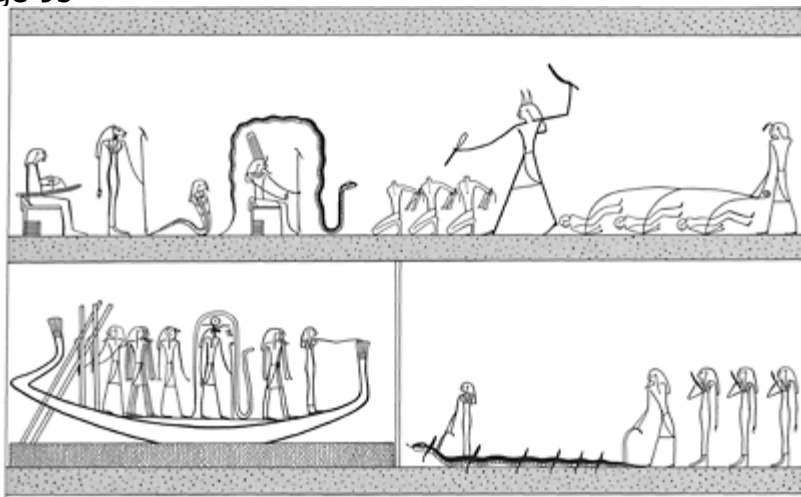
< previous page | page_94 | next page >

Page 95

Figure 32 *Above.* The theme (containment of unrule) transferred to a cosmic plane of cyclic rebirth in which the triumphant voyager is the sun-god, here passing in his barque through one of the hours of the night. In the upper register are three beheaded figures identified as 'the enemies of Osiris', and three prostrate figures labelled 'the rebels'. In the lower register the demon of evil, the giant serpent Apopis, is butchered. Part of the Seventh Division of the 'Book of What is in the Otherworld' as painted on the walls of the tomb of King Tuthmosis III in the Valley of Kings at Thebes (*c.* 1430 B.C). The cursive hieroglyphic text has been omitted. After A.Piankoff, *The tomb of Ramesses VII,* New York, 1954, 277, Fig. 80. Coloured photographs are in J.Romer, *Romer's Egypt,* London, 1982, 170, 173. *Below.* The same theme illustrated by simple allegory from nature. Disorder is symbolized by wild fowl of the papyrus marshes. They are trapped and therefore constrained by a fowler's clap-net operated by King Rameses II and the gods Horus *(left)* and Khnum *(right).* Great Hypostyle Hall at Karnak, inner face of the south wall. See H.Frankfort, *Kingship and the gods,* Chicago, 1948, Fig. 14.
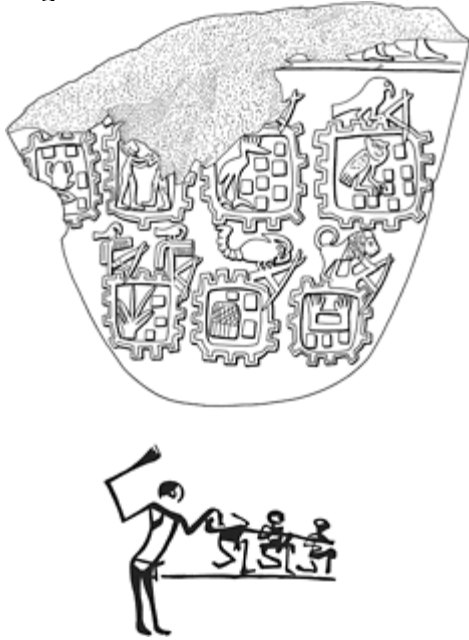
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Page 96

Figure 33 *Above.* One side of the Tjehenu Palette. The main scene, probably of battle, has been lost. The remaining bottom part shows seven fortified towns being attacked by animals symbolizing the monarchy and wielding hoes. The palette presumably celebrated a series of victories in the northward expansion of the kingdom of Hierakonpolis. After W.M.F.Petrie, *Ceremonial slate palettes and corpus of proto-dynastic pottery,* London, 1953, Pl. G; M.J.Mellink and J.Filip, *Frühe Stufen der Kunst* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 13), Berlin, 1974, Taf. 214b. *Below.* The scene of a warrior brandishing a mace over a line of bound captives is taken from tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis (Figure 25, p. 80), and probably depicts a Predynastic king in his role of victor in battle.

centuries or more of intellectual and artistic development had transformed the simple real landscape of chaos into an imagined Otherworld of dangers represented by invented demons (Figure 32, *above*). Real wooden boats also came to be an element of the royal and elite tomb constructions of the Early Dynastic Period (see p. 100, and Figure 30, p. 90, the row of boat burials amongst the funerary palaces at Abydos).58

We are entitled to ask: what was the source of the disorder that made itself felt at this time? It is a common sensation for the people of a settled society to feel surrounded and threatened by a turbulent and hostile outside world. For the small political units of late Predynastic Egypt the settings were parochial: the alien deserts and neighbouring communities not too far away along the Nile. But the more successful of these communities, the incipient city-states, had become engaged in more organized conflicts over territory, the conflicts which were to lead to the birth of the Egyptian state. The urgent reality of conflict involving attacks on walled settlements and the horrors of the battlefield was sometimes translated into pictorial scenes of actual combat (Figure 33), although the essence of conflict, of disequilibrium, was still viewed in generalized allegorical terms. From the

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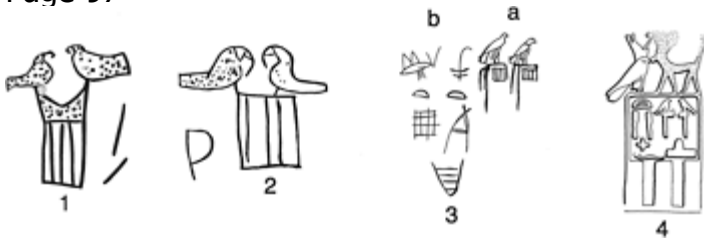< previous page   page_97   next page >

Page 97

Figure 34 The theme of duality in early royal monograms and names. Nos. 1 and 2 (transition to 1st Dynasty) are monograms which represent in a simple way a section of royal palace façade, without adding the king's name (compare Figure 26, *inset,* p. 82), surmounted in each case by two Horus figures. After J.Clédat, *ASAE* 13 (1914), Pl. XIII; H.Junker, *Turah,* Vienna, 1912, 47, Abb. 58.5. In no. 3 the same two Horus figures (a) accompany the name of King (Adjib) Mer-pu-bia (b) of the 1st Dynasty (after W.M.F.Petrie, *Royal Tombs* I, London, 1900, Pl. V.12). No. 4 is a writing of the name of King Khasekhemui of the 2nd Dynasty in which one of the Horus figures has been replaced by a figure of Seth (compare Figure 20, p. 70). After J.Capart, *Memphis a l'ombre des pyramides,* Brussels, 1930, 119, Fig. 116.

experience of disorder and struggle, the shattering of an earlier equilibrium, arose the perception of a world in conflict, real or potential, between chaos and order. This was to remain a theme of intellectual concern for the rest of Egyptian history. So did the notion that containment (though not ultimate defeat) of disorder and unrule was possible through the rule of kings and the benign presence of a supreme divine force manifested in the powers of heaven, of Horus and of the sun. The intellectual view of the nature of the universe coincided with the structure of political power.

The paired animals are always identical. Even on the Narmer Palette they have no distinguishing marks to suggest a wish to identify each one in a distinctive way with one part of the country or a separate kingdom. Political harmony must be there in the meaning, but only as an urgent aspect of the ideal of general harmony in the world that the Egyptians knew. The paired animals are, none the less, the forerunners of the paired figures of Horus and Seth. The former are the symbols of a general statement; the latter represent a more specific application of the concept and its depiction to the new political circumstances of dynastic Egypt. There is an interesting transitional phase to recognize, too. The earliest depictions of paired figures standing explicitly for the unity of two kingdoms are not figures of Horus and Seth, but two facing figures of Horus, in an archaic form that particularly resembles that of Horus of Hierakonpolis (Figure 34).59 This is a straightforward adaptation of the paired identical figures on the 'slate' palettes. It recurs occasionally in historical periods, when the two kingdoms can both be represented as an inheritance from Horus.60

The cosmic balancing act was not, by itself, enough. Egyptian society of the Dynastic Period was strongly hierarchical. Harmony within the state flowed down from a single source, the king, through loyal officials to the people. The king's role of maintainer of order was paramount. It covered not only responsibility for justice and piety but also the conquest of unrule. The philosophical texts of the Middle Kingdom depict unrule in terms not only of social upheaval, but also of natural and cosmic catastrophe. The final guarantee of harmony in society and in the natural order was not a balancing of opposites. One

< previous page   page_97   next page >

Page 98

force had to be superior. We can glimpse this already in one of the vignettes in Hierakonpolis tomb 100 (Figure 31, *top right*). Here the two paired and facing animals (lions in this case) are held apart and balanced by the central figure of a ruler. The introduction of Seth enabled this to be reflected in the eternal verities of theology, and to understand this we must remember that each king was also a particular embodiment of Horus. And so Seth becomes the loser, and the antagonist to Horus. He becomes the antagonist to order on a grand scale: celestial disturbance in the form of storms, the hostile nature of the surrounding deserts, the exotic character of foreign gods, even red-headed people —these were expressions of Seth. Yet, as the Shabaka Stone tells us, Seth also acquiesces in the divine judgement against him. He retains the power to be a reconciled force in the ideal balance of harmony. The myth of Horus and Seth is not a reflection of how the Egyptian state emerged politically. The details of the period of internal warfare among the incipient city-states of the Nile valley are unlikely ever to be known, but we can safely assume that it was not a simple epic struggle between two protagonists. The myth of the state in historic times was a clever transformation of an earlier, more generalized statement of an ideal world originating in Upper Egypt. It combined the old concept of an ultimate harmony through balanced opposites with the newly perceived need for a single superior force. It was created as part of the great codification of court culture. It drew upon local mythologies, which in the case of Horus and Seth were both centred in Upper Egypt. It became part of the long active interest that the Egyptians maintained in symbolic geography; in effect, a process of internal colonization at an intellectual level.

There is a broader dimension within which to consider this theme. Much later the Middle East became the home to a philosophical tradition of dualism, which imagined a perpetual conflict between a good and an evil force in the universe, between light and darkness. It saw the material world as evil and urged the individual to struggle to overcome its superficial attractiveness, and to seek a path of separation from worldliness. Through Christianity and various rival 'heresies' the idea rooted itself very firmly in Egypt and it has had a profound influence upon European spirituality. In the material discussed in this section we seem to see the ancient Egyptians facing up to the same philosophical challenge—the source of discord and chaos—but giving it a more optimistic and less personally troublesome resolution. Ultimately the struggle was waged externally by divine proxies on behalf of the people, although in the foreground king and people were obligated to heed the ordering concept of *maat* in their lives. A harmonious outcome was held to be within reach.

One further observation needs to be made. The 1st Dynasty began as a state that was territorially as large as most that were to occupy the lower Nile valley until modern times. There was no long process of growth from a spread of city-states, a common early political form that had a thriving history in, for example, Mesopotamia. We have already used the term 'incipient city-state' for territories in southern Upper Egypt centred on Hierakonpolis and Nagada. 'Incipient' seems an appropriate word since they cannot have matched the complexity of contemporary city-states in other parts of the Near East. We can be fairly sure of two, and we can suspect that there were others either already in existence (e.g. one based on This) or still at an even earlier stage of formation (perhaps at Maadi and Buto in the delta, Abadiya in Upper Egypt, and Qustul and Sayala in Lower Nubia).61 The internal warfare pursued most vigorously from the south terminated this polycentric period

Page 99

of political growth, but as states everywhere discover sooner or later, regional assertion remains a powerful force even when its centres are submerged within a larger polity. The game goes on. The Pharaonic state was remarkably successful, through the mechanism of symbolic geography, in creating an ideology with numerous provincial ramifications. We can speak of a national framework of myth. Yet submerged local identities remained. The one we see most clearly in the later historic periods (from the 6th Dynasty onwards) is a submerged city-state of Thebes. More will be said on Thebes in Chapter 7, and on the general theme of local identity and assertion in Chapter 8. It would, all the same, be wrong to try to reconstruct the late Predynastic political landscape from the details of later regionalism, for far too many local changes took place after the beginning of the 1st Dynasty. The rise of Thebes at the expense of Nagada, and of Edfu at the expense of Hierakonpolis, are only particularly striking examples.

Foundations of ideology (3): architecture as political statement

The unification myth was but one aspect of what emerges with the 1st Dynasty as the principal focus of effort, both intellectual and organizational: the projection of kingship as the symbol of power supreme over all others. On the late Predynastic 'slate' palettes conquering figures occur in the form of animals (a lion, a bull, a scorpion, a falcon, see Figure 33) that we can take to be symbols of human power, perhaps of a king. But it is only with the Narmer Palette (and Scorpion mace head) that we find figures of human kings to which detailed treatment has been given in order to convey some of their symbolic attributes. When we turn to architecture we find an equivalent process but on a far grander scale. The royal tomb became the principal public statement on the nature of kingship. Changes in royal tomb architecture are thus our most important single guide to the evolution of ancient perceptions of monarchy.

Nagada and Hierakonpolis have provided us with tombs that, by their size, brick linings and, in the case of Hierakonpolis tomb 100, wall paintings, imply royal ownership. They are, none the less, quite small constructions, and it is unlikely that they ever possessed an elaborate superstructure. The 1st Dynasty brought substantial change. Against a background of increased tomb size throughout the country, reflecting the increased wealth and organization of the Early Dynastic state, we find the builders of the royal tombs taking the first steps towards monumental scale and distinctive architectural symbolism. We must now return to Abydos, and to the tombs of the kings of the 1st Dynasty (and of the last two of the 2nd) who were buried in the part known as the Umm el-Qa'ab.62 The royal tombs consisted of brick chambers constructed in large pits dug into the desert, covered probably by a simple superstructure in the form of a plain square enclosure filled to the top with sand and gravel. This was a straightforward evolution from the brick 'royal' tombs at Nagada and Hierakonpolis. Their royal ownership was proclaimed by pairs of free-standing stone stelae bearing the Horus name of the king in question (an example is Figure 26, *inset,* p. 82). Each tomb also possessed a second element, a separate building located closer to the edge of the flood plain, and just behind the site of the ancient town of Abydos. The best preserved is one from the end of the 2nd Dynasty, the Shunet ez-Zebib, belonging to King Khasekhemui (Plate 2).63 The Shunet ez-Zebib is an enclosure

Page 100

Plate 2 Early royal architecture: the Shunet ez-Zebib at Abydos, mud-brick funerary palace of King Khasekhemui of the 2nd Dynasty (*c.* 2690 BC), looking south-east.

measuring 122 by 65 metres externally, surrounded by a double wall of mud brick, pierced by doorways. The inner wall, still standing in places to a height of 11 metres, is a massive 5.50 metres thick. On its outer surfaces it was decorated with niches to give a panelled effect. The panelled façade on the long side facing the cultivation was emphasized by the insertion at regular intervals of an inner, deeper niche. Along one side a row of twelve wooden boats had been buried, 18 to 21 metres long but only about 50 centimetres high, encased in mud and bricks (Figure 30, p. 90). They have individual counterparts in boats buried alongside the tombs of courtiers of the Early Dynastic Period at Sakkara and

< previous page   page_101   next page >

Page 101

Helwan, and presumably represent a continuation of the theme of the perpetual voyage by the upholder of authority that is so strikingly portrayed in tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis. A small part of the interior of the enclosure was occupied by a free-standing building near the east corner. This contained a suite of rooms in some of which pottery storage jars had been stowed. The outer faces of this building had been decorated in the same panelled style as the great enclosure wall (Figure 35).

Two paths lead us towards the meaning of this building and its companions. One concerns the panelled effect on the outer walls. The most striking examples occur on the façades of large tombs of the Early Dynastic Period (Figure 35.B), mostly in the Memphite area (although one is at Nagada).64 Some examples preserve the lower part of elaborate painted decoration, which reproduces in great detail a way of further decorating the walls: by draping over them long strips of brightly coloured matting lashed to horizontal poles. These panelled surfaces were broken by deep recesses with similarly panelled sides, and at the back of each recess stood a broader niche, painted red, apparently to signify the wooden leaf of a door. The whole design of panels, recesses and applied matting-patterns became a fixed scheme of decoration on later sarcophagi and offering-places in tomb chapels, and these supply us with the details missing from the upper parts of the Early Dynastic tombs.

The design occurs in another context, too. A narrow section of it formed the basis for the heraldic device in which the Horus name of Early Dynastic kings was written (Figure 26, *inset,* p. 82). From this it was long ago deduced that the architectural style belonged specifically to the royal palace. Scholars coined the term 'palace façade' for the architectural style. It was only in 1969, however, that an actual stretch of wall decorated in this style was found which was not part of a tomb. It lay in the centre of the Early Dynastic town of Hierakonpolis, and formed the gatehouse for what is evidently an Early Dynastic palace, the one briefly described in an earlier section (Figures 25, 26, pp. 80, 82). The Hierakonpolis gatehouse, the Shunet ez-Zebib and the frame around the king's Horus name reveal that the Early Dynastic kings adopted the niched and decorated façade as a symbol of power. It denoted by itself the idea of 'palace' as a ruling entity, and for those who were part of the court—the palace elite surrounding the king and administering his power—it was permissible to use a scaled-down version to decorate their own tombs. By its distinctive and imposing style early monumental architecture in Egypt set up a barrier between king and people.

For the second path we must turn to a monument which in time is only a generation later than the Shunet ez-Zebib, but which belongs to another plane of architectural achievement: the Step Pyramid at Sakkara, tomb of Djoser, the first (or second) king of the 3rd Dynasty (*c.* 2650 BC).65 It is the first building of truly monumental scale in Egypt, constructed throughout of stone.66 In its detailing it also contains many of the basic decorative motifs of Pharaonic architecture. It represents, in architecture, a major act of codification of forms such as had occurred in art around the beginning of the 1st Dynasty. The Step Pyramid confronts us with a major problem of interpretation. It has many distinctive parts, each of which must have held a particular meaning. However, very little of it bore any figured or written decoration to declare its meaning explicitly. For much of it we have to rely upon interpretations derived from far later sources, principally the Pyramid Texts (collections of short theological statements carved inside the burial chambers of pyramids from the end of the 5th Dynasty onwards, and the first surviving religious texts
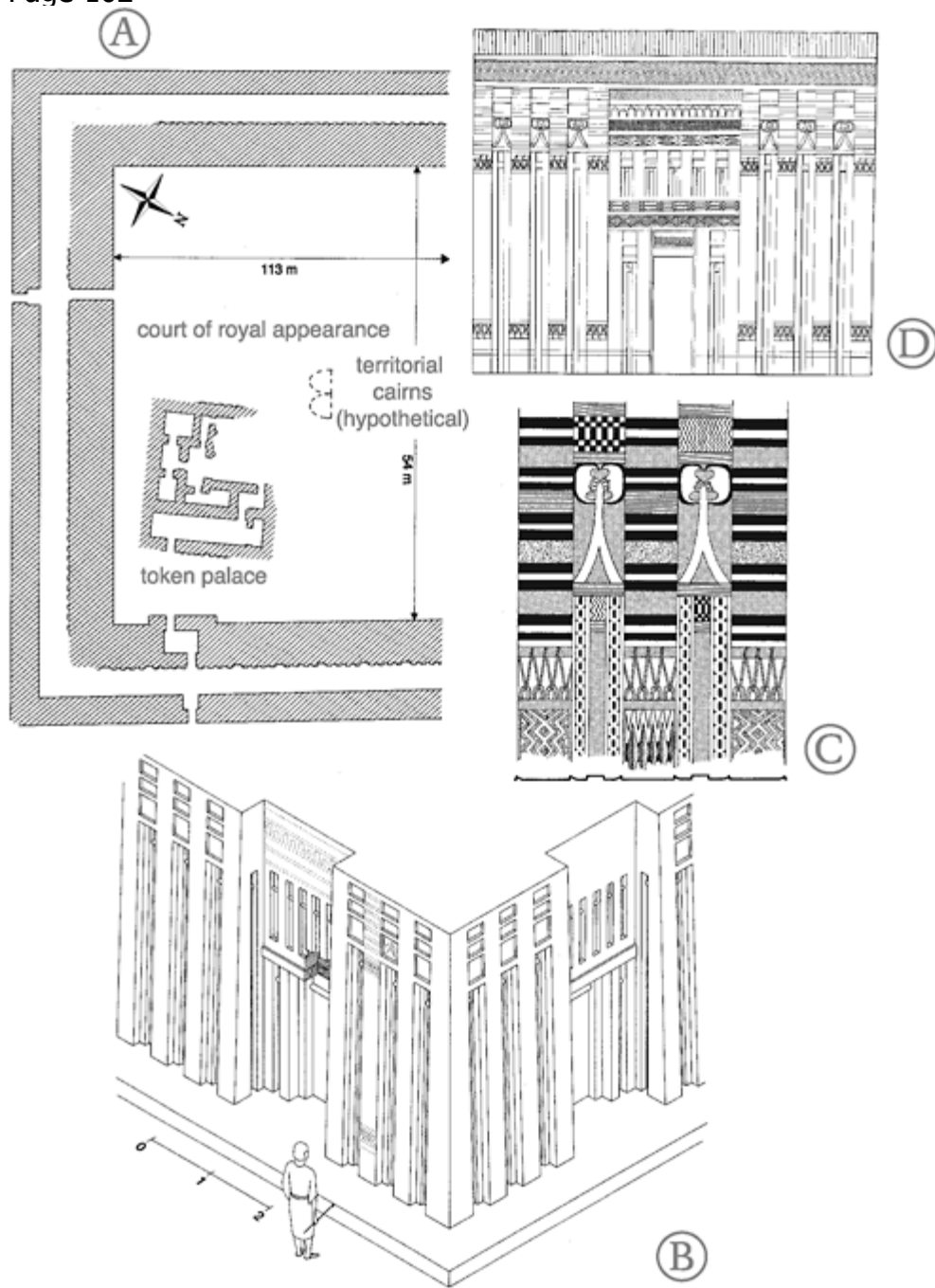
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< previous page   page_102   next page >

Page 102

Figure 35 The royal style of architecture in the Early Dynastic Period. (A) South-east sector of the Shunet ez-Zebib at Abydos (Plate 2, p. 100; reign of Khasekhemui, late 2nd Dynasty, *c.* 2690 BC). The position of the territorial cairns is hypothetical. After E.R.Ayrton, C.T.Currelly and A.E.P.Weigall, *Abydos III*, London, 1904, Pl. VI. Note the simplified 'palace façade' niched style of brickwork on external surfaces. For a section of real (as distinct from funerary) palace wall see Figure 26 (p. 82), from Hierakonpolis. (B) Reconstruction of part of the façade of a 1st Dynasty court tomb, reproducing in miniature the 'palace façade' architecture of court buildings. (C) The reconstruction of the elaborate designs—largely painted—on the upper parts is based on later reproductions on sarcophagi and tomb chapel offering-places. This example derives from the 5th Dynasty tomb of Tepemankh at Abusir, after J.Capart, *L'art égyptien* I: *L'architecture,* Brussels and Paris, 1922, Pl. 46, itself derived from L.Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-ree,* Leipzig, 1907, B1. 24. (D) A further example, a carved 4th Dynasty sarcophagus from Giza, tomb of Fefi, after S.Hassan, *Excavations at Gîza (1929–1930),* Oxford, 1932, Pl. LXV.

< previous page   page_102   next page >

< previous page   page_102   next page >

Page 103

of any significant length). By this time, however, pyramid layouts had changed, and so, too, must have the meanings of the various parts. There is thus, for example, no straightforward answer to the basic question: why a stepped pyramid? By the time of the Pyramid Texts the true pyramid had long replaced it, and so, presumably, had a different symbolism that made a strong link with the cult of the sun centred at Heliopolis. A common modern explanation finds a link between the plain mounds which stood over early tombs and were, in the Early Dynastic Period, turned into plain brick rectangles, and the square plain block of stone masonry which covered Djoser's tomb and over which the Step Pyramid was then erected. Similar mounds are known to have been incorporated invisibly into the palace-façade superstructures of court tombs at Sakkara. For explanation one can turn to a rich tradition of later times that made earth mounds into symbols of creation and rebirth.67 Possible playful ways (modern and ancient) of working with this imagery will be explored further in the next chapter.

Fortunately not all of this amazing monument is mute. Djoser's stepped pyramid stands at the centre of a rectangular enclosure, 278 by 545 metres (Figure 36). It was surrounded by a thick stone wall with external towers, the façade carved with a simpler and modified version of the palace-façade style, although each tower was treated as if it were a gateway with closed door-leaves imitated in stone. The one true entrance is at the south-east corner, and in the general design of the whole complex we can still recognize the basic shape of the Shunet ez-Zebib at Abydos. Across the centre of the enclosure extends a huge open inner space, a rectangle measuring 108 by 187 metres, faced by panelled walls. At each end stood originally a pair of stone horseshoe-shaped cairns, and immediately in front of the pyramid a stone platform reached by steps faced the alignment of the cairns. This arrangement of cairns and stepped platform is known from Early Dynastic scenes. In one of them, on a mace head of the reign of Narmer (Figure 37), we can see that the setting appears to be in use for reviewing the livestock and prisoners captured in a battle. In another, a label of the reign of the 1st Dynasty king Den, the king appears twice: once on the stepped throne beneath an awning, and once on the arena running or striding between the groups of cairns. This latter element is one of two subjects of scenes actually carved within the Step Pyramid complex itself, in underground corridors beneath the Southern Tomb and the pyramid proper.68 Two groups of three carved panels occur at the backs of imitation doorways. Some of the panels show Djoser performing this very ceremony of striding or running between the cairns, accompanied by other symbols. The shape of the
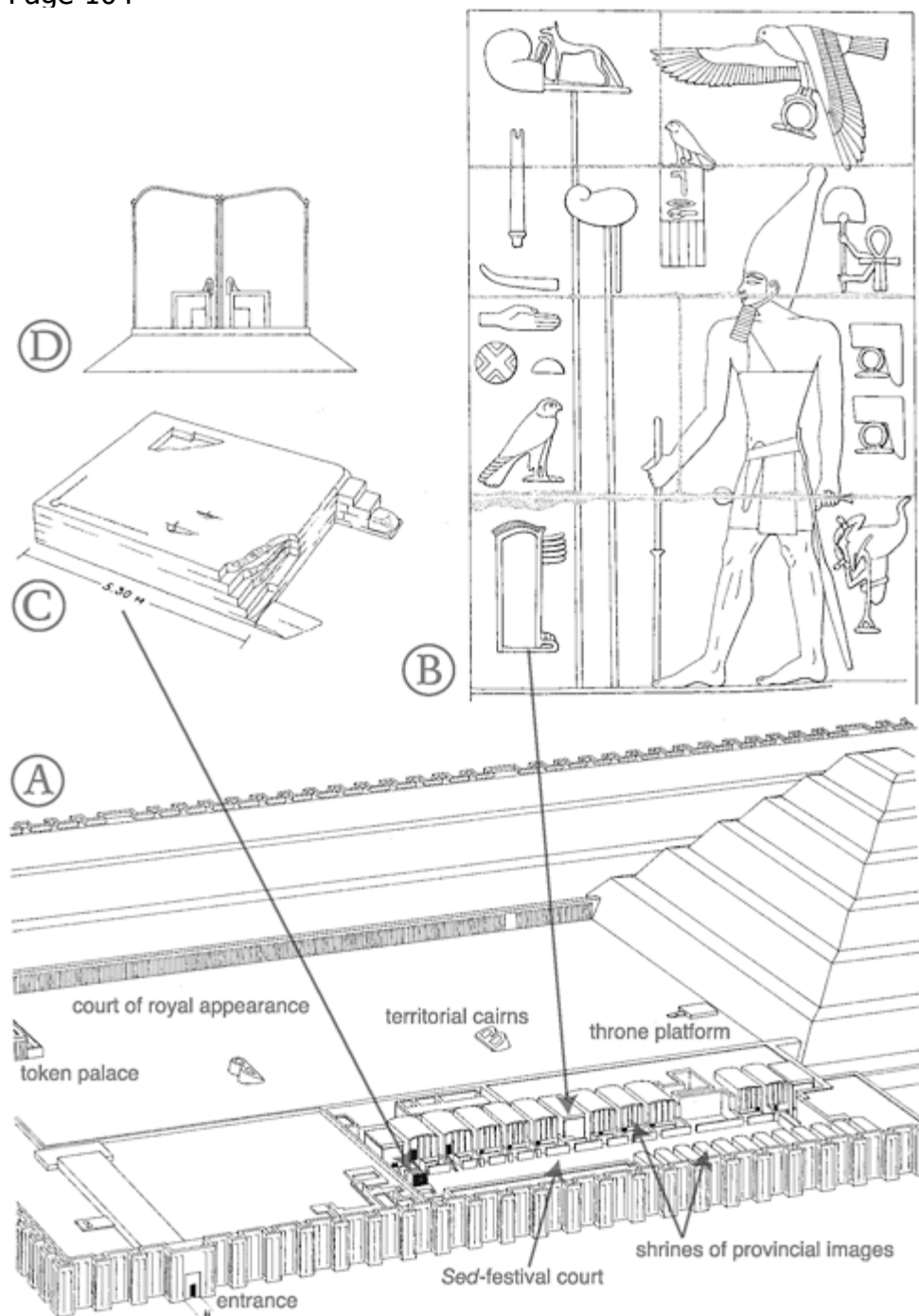
Page 104

Figure 36 Political architecture. (A) Reconstruction of the southern part of the Step Pyramid of King Djoser at Sakkara, eternal plaza of royal display and setting for the *Sed-festival* (see Plate 3, p. 108), after J.-Ph.Lauer, *La Pyramide a degrés,* Cairo, 1936, Pl. IV. (B) Scene of King Djoser proceeding to visit the temporary shrine of Horus of Behdet. The column of hieroglyphs in front of the king reads: 'Halting at the shrine of Horus of Behdet.' The last sign is actually a picture of a temporary shrine of the kind modelled in stone around the *Sed-festival* court at the Step Pyramid. Note that Djoser wears the crown of Upper Egypt. Northern stela beneath the Step Pyramid at Sakkara, after C.Firth and J.E.Quibell, *The Step Pyramid* II, Cairo, 1935, Pl. 17, and A.Gardiner, *JEA* 30 (1944), 26, Pl. III.4. (C) Stone platform with double staircase as found at the southern end of the *Sed-festival* court in the Step Pyramid (see Plate 3, p. 108), after Lauer, op. cit., Pl. LVI.1 and p. 145, Fig. 146. (D) Ancient representation of the double throne dais with canopy as used at the *Sed*festival, based on a carved lintel of King Senusret III (12th Dynasty), as reproduced in K.Lange and M.Hirmer, *Egypt: architecture, sculpture, painting in three thousand years,* third edn, London 1961, 102–4.

< previous page   page_104   next page >

< previous page   page_104   next page >

< previous page   page_105   next page >

Page 105

cairns can be clarified by later references, as can one of the prominent groups of symbols. They are markers of territorial limits.69 Later sources also tell us that the arena itself was called simply 'the field', and that the ceremony was termed either 'encompassing the field', or 'presenting the field', with the emphasis then on the dedication of the arena to a god, although this element is not apparent from the early depictions.

One of the general needs of monarchy (and of other forms of state leadership) is a formal setting for the display of the leader in person, either to the public at large or to the select representatives who compose the court. In later times the Egyptian sources make much of the 'appearance of the king', and we should anticipate that each age sought a dramatic setting for this moment, built around certain basic elements: an open space for assembly, an elevated place where the king could be seen within a formal framing, and a token palace where robing and resting could comfortably and privately take place. In Chapter 6 the elaborate devices adopted by the New Kingdom Pharaohs for displaying themselves will be described and we shall find settings of just this kind. The early sources, both pictorial and architectural, also combine to satisfy this demand exactly. We have to imagine that an important part of an Early Dynastic king's palace was an enclosed arena or plaza, equipped with cairns which symbolized territorial limits and with an elevated throne dais shaded by a canopy of distinctive shape (this latter element present already in one of the boats in Hierakonpolis tomb 100) at one end, and a token palace at the other. It was used as the setting for major royal occasions, such as the reception of tribute, and for a particular ceremony in which the king laid claim to his territory by striding forcefully around its limits. The Shunet ez-Zebib at Abydos and the great plaza in front of the Step Pyramid are replicas at full, if not exaggerated, scale that provided the king with the necessary setting for his own pageantry for the eternity of death.70 One might identify a less developed example (with as yet no trace of the cairns) in the courtyard with panelled dais in the Hierakonpolis palace (Figure 26, p. 82).

This is not, however, the end of the story. There is another element to the essential ritual of early kingship, a periodic celebration that the Egyptians termed the Sed-festival.71 Sources from early times onwards make the Sed-festival a great jubilee celebration of the king's earthly rule over a period that was ideally thirty years, although second and third celebrations could subsequently take place at shorter intervals. The way that the festival was conducted changed over time, and so, probably, did the meaning. It is tempting with Egyptian religion to combine sources from all periods in order to create a comprehensive explanation for a particular ritual or belief because the pictorial forms tended to remain
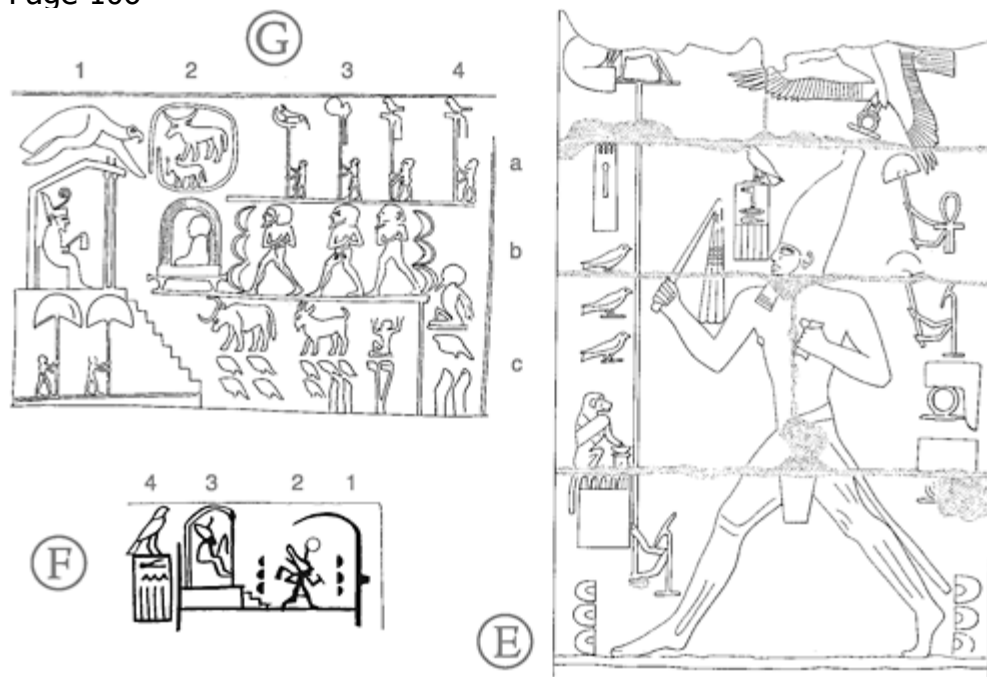
< previous page   page_105   next page >

Page 106

Figure 37 Ritual of territorial claim. (E) Scene of King Djoser running (or striding) across the ceremonial arena between the two sets of territorial marker cairns. In front of the king is the standard of the god Wepwawet, and a vertical column of hieroglyphs, the meaning of which is somewhat obscure. The literal translation is 'The Great White Ones', a plural reference to a baboon-god whose picture forms part of the last hieroglyph. The first element in the name, however, is also a word for a shrine, evidently a 'White Shrine'. It has been suggested that the baboons in question are images of ancestral spirits, though this is only a hypothesis. See *Lexikon* II, 1078–80; H.W.Fairman, *ASAE* 43 (1943), 260–1; A.J.Spencer, *Catalogue of Egyptian antiquities in the British Museum* V, *Early Dynastic objects,* London, 1980, 13; 16, no. 16, Pls 8, 9; G.Dreyer, *Elephantine* VIII. *Der Tempel der Satet. Die Funde der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches,* Mainz, 1986, 69. Behind the king is a pair of symbols used to write a word (*mdnbw*) meaning 'limits'. Central stela beneath the Step Pyramid at Sakkara, after C.Firth and J.E.Quibell, *The Step Pyramid* II, Cairo, 1935, Pl. 16. (F) Part of a wooden label of King Den of the 1st Dynasty from his tomb at Abydos, to be read from right to left: (1) the sign for 'regnal year' (see Figure 19, p. 64); (2) the king running between the territorial cairns; (3) the king appearing seated beneath a canopy upon a stepped throne dais; (4) Horus name of King Den. After W.M.F.Petrie, *Royal Tombs* I, London, 1900, Pls XI.14, XV.16. (G) Part of a scene from a ceremonial mace head of King Narmer, 1st Dynasty, from Hierakonpolis. It depicts a ceremonial appearance of the king on the stepped and canopied throne dais (1), accompanied by bearers of the 'Followers of Horus' standards (3a, 3b, see Figure 27, p. 84). The occasion is evidently the review of prisoners (2b–4b, 4c) and animals (2a, 3c, 4c) captured in battle. The many small signs in line 'c' are numerals. Note the seated figure (divine image?; 2b) in a portable carrying chair with curved canopy (see Figure 51, p. 145). A particularly significant element is the way that the human captives are paraded between the territorial cairns. After J.E.Quibell, *Hierakonpolis* I, London, 1900, Pl. XXVI.B.

Page 107

constant. But continuity of forms masked changes in meaning and practice. Inventing traditions was something that the Egyptians were very good at. For each period the sources should be interpreted within the spirit and for the illumination of that age alone. (In Chapter 6, pp. 276–81, we shall examine one particular set, those of Amenhetep III of the 18th Dynasty.) Two aspects seem more than any other to have characterized the *Sed*-festival. The king, often wearing a distinctive robe, sits on a special dais provided with two thrones for an appearance as King of Upper Egypt and of Lower Egypt. The thrones are normally shown back to back, but this may be an artistic device for rendering a pair which were actually side by side.72 More elaborate scenes, later than the Early Dynastic Period, give as the setting for this ceremony a series of shrines pictured as constructions of wood and matting. The origin and meaning of this style of architecture will be explored in the next chapter. For the moment it is sufficient to know that it originated as a type of temporary building. In these scenes one design stood for Lower Egypt and one for Upper Egypt. Sometimes they were specifically for the cobra-goddess Wadjit of the delta town of Buto, and for the vulture-goddess Nekhbet of El-Kab. But they were for other deities as well. This gathering of provincial images of deities in a series of temporary shrines beside the double throne of the king was a gesture of provincial homage to the person of the king. The other element specifically associated with the festival after the 3rd Dynasty is the ceremony of laying claim to the 'field' by striding around the cairns. At some time, therefore, this separate and presumably more frequent ceremony was absorbed into the pageantry of the Sed-festival.

Again the Step Pyramid clarifies the picture. Beside the great arena with cairns is another but quite separate part of the complex. This runs along the east side of the main enclosure and consists of a series of mostly solid, dummy buildings arranged along both sides of a court (Plate 3). They have a very distinctive appearance: a series of small rectangular structures, with exterior detailing which creates in solid, full-scale, three-dimensional architecture the shapes of the temporary shrines which were envisaged as constructed of timber and matting. They are, in fact, representations of the very kind of buildings which later scenes show gathered for the *Sed*-festival. This seems to be their meaning at the Step Pyramid, too. For at one end of the court is a square throne dais with two flights of steps, originally covered with a little stone building. It is hard to escape the conclusion that this was a rendering in stone for eternity of the double-throne dais covered with special canopy, and that this part of the Step Pyramid complex gave King Djoser the eternal setting for the periodic *Sed*-festival. Scenes of the king visiting the various shrines form the other subject of the carved panels in the underground galleries (Figure 36B, p. 104).

We can now better appreciate the meaning of the architecture of early royal tombs, of which the Step Pyramid is the most complete and elaborate. They provided an arena for the eternal pageantry of kingship as it was experienced on earth: the king as supreme territorial claimant, protected within his distinctive palace enclosure, the focus of rituals centred on his actual person.

With the 4th Dynasty the form of the royal tomb changed dramatically. The stepped pyramid became a true pyramid, and instead of occupying the middle ground of a great complex of other buildings, it towered at the end of a linear architectural sequence which stretched down to the edge of the alluvial plain (Figure 38). The great enclosed arena or plaza of the royal appearance and the special *Sed*-festival architecture all vanish. In their place comes a temple intended primarily for an offering-cult for the king's spirit via an

< previous page   page_108   next page >

Page 108

Plate 3 The Step Pyramid of King Djoser, 3rd Dynasty, at Sakkara, looking north-west. In front of the pyramid are the renderings into stone of the tent-shrines erected on pedestals, forming part of the *Sed*-festival court. Note the probable double-throne platform in the foreground.

offering-place on the east side of the pyramid, and via a group of statues. These elements had been present in Djoser's complex, but now they were dominant. *Sed*-festival scenes occur on walls, but alongside other themes. The true pyramid was a symbol of the sun (another aspect of the great codification discussed in the next chapter), and there is other evidence from the 4th, and especially the 5th Dynasties to show that serious intellectual consideration—theology—was paying more attention to the power of the sun as the supreme force. The prominent title of kings, 'Son of Ra', appears first at this time. The 4th Dynasty and later pyramids convey a new image of kingship. Gone is the raw power of a supreme territorial ruler. The king is now sublimated into a manifestation of the sun-god. Architecture conveyed this fundamental reappraisal to the greatest possible effect.
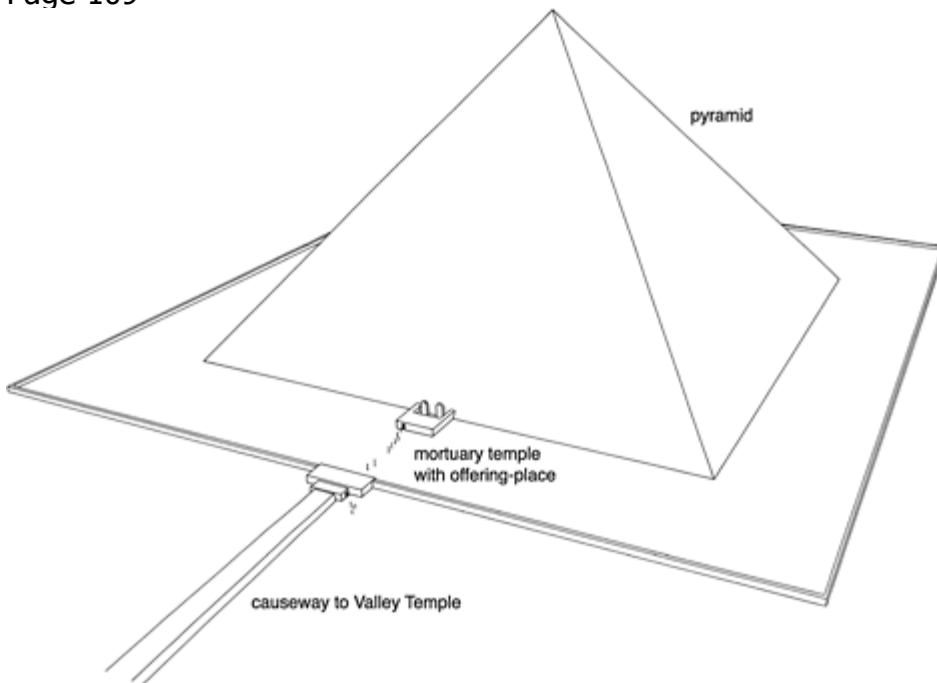
< previous page   page_108   next page >

Page 109

Figure 38 The apotheosis of kingship. The pyramid of Medum (reign of King Huni, end of the 3rd Dynasty, *c.* 2620 BC) was the first of the new generation of pyramid tombs which conveyed a radically different view of the nature of the monarchy In place of a tomb which celebrated the king as supreme territorial claimant and perpetuated his earthly pageantry (Figure 36) the new-style pyramids proclaimed his absorption into the mystic symbol of the sun. The tiny offering-temple was the principal gesture to his human aspect. Later pyramid complexes softened this stark contrast in scale between pyramid and temples.

The social and economic climate in which the early Egyptian state arose still remains sketchily documented. We can recognize as a general background a relatively egalitarian farming society settled in low-density villages and larger settlement areas spread through the Nile valley and delta during the fourth millennium BC. Local identities and community leaders emerged, but at a pace and on a scale which varied from place to place. Inherent in the nature of the process was that local variations that were initially quite small were amplified on an ever-increasing scale. This became an exponential rate of growth for the most successful, which culminated in a single state by the end of the Predynastic Period. Those involved in this final phase of dynamic growth and terminal competition already perceived the consequences of power on a grand scale and codified its expression in distinctive intellectual form. This cleverly fused together a generalized concept—the superiority of a locally derived order over a universal chaos—and the position of a single king whose power as earthly territorial ruler was expressed in monumental architecture, in ritual and in symbolic art. As a set of ideas and ideals for legitimizing the rule of a king over his subjects it was to survive the ups and downs of political history for

Page 110
three thousand years. It also left the Egyptians incapable of visualizing the polycentric pattern of their own early political growth. Whenever political fragmentation reappeared it seemed to be a fall from the original ideal yet (as we can now see) quite mythical state of things. And as the next chapter will show, a parallel erection of a myth-world shut the Egyptians off from their cultural beginnings.