
THE OXFORD HISTORY
OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Edited by
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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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The Naqada Period (c.4000–3200 BC)

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The second major phase of the Predynastic Period—the Naqada culture—derives its name from the site of Naqada, in Upper Egypt, where in 1892 Flinders Petrie uncovered a vast cemetery of more than 3,000 graves. Petrie, struck at once by the unusual nature of these burials, compared with those previously known in Egypt, mistakenly ascribed them to a group of foreign invaders. This group was supposed to have continued in existence until the end of the Old Kingdom, and it was even suggested that they might have been responsible for its decline.

Archaeologists in Egypt had grown used to monumental funerary architecture, but the humble Naqada burials consisted of little more than the body of the deceased in foetal position, wrapped in an animal skin, sometimes covered by a mat, and most often deposited in a simple pit hollowed out of the sand. None of the offerings accompanying the deceased corresponded to the usual hallmarks of pharaonic civilization, as it was recognized in Petrie's day. The pottery vessels of black-topped polished red ware, zoomorphic schist palettes, combs and spoons of bone or ivory, and flint knives and other artefacts together constituted a peculiar type of assemblage. Jacques de Morgan was the first to suggest that these might be the remains of a *prehistoric* population. Petrie then set about testing de Morgan's assumption scientifically; eventually, after excavating thousands of other graves from comparable sites, he was able to establish the first chronology of Predynastic Egypt. Petrie must, therefore, undoubtedly be regarded as the father of Egyptian prehistory.

Chronology and Geography

Having established that the graves were Predynastic, the next task was to organize the considerable quantity of material uncovered, and to place the newly defined Predynastic culture within a chronological framework. Using the pottery from 900 graves in the cemeteries of Hiw and Abadiya, Petrie devised a method of seriation that formed the basis for a system of 'sequence dates', in which the new categories of



Map of Egypt showing principal sites of the Naqada I and II phases

pottery were defined according to the form and decoration of the vessels. Petrie reached the intuitive hypothesis that wavy-handled pots evolved gradually from globular vessels with clearly moulded functional handles towards cylindrical forms on which the handles were merely decorative. The 'sequence-dates' chronology was initially organized around this concept of evolution in wavy-handled design.

A table of fifty sequence dates resulted, numbered from 30 onwards, in order to leave space for earlier cultures that had not yet been discovered. This turned out to be a wise precaution, given that Brunton's excavations at Badari would later result in the identification of the Badarian Period, the first stage of the Upper Egyptian Predynastic (see Chapter 2). The lengths of the individual phases represented by each of these sequence dates were uncertain, and the only link with any absolute date was that between SD 79–80 and the accession of King Menes at the beginning of the 1st Dynasty, which was assumed to have taken place in c.3000 BC.

The sequence dates were grouped into three periods. First, there was the Amratian (or Naqada I), from the type site of el-Amra, containing styles SD 30–38; this phase corresponds to the maximum development of the black-topped red ware and of vessels with painted white decorative motifs on a polished red body. Secondly, there was the Gerzean (or Naqada II), from el-Gerza, containing styles SD 39–60 and characterized by the appearance of pottery with wavy handles, coarse utilitarian ware, and decorations comprising brown paint on a cream background. Finally, there was Naqada III, representing the final phase of SD 61–80, which was marked by the appearance of a so-called late style, whose forms were already evoking Dynastic pottery. According to Petrie, it was during the Naqada III phase that an Asiatic 'New Race' arrived in Egypt, bringing with it the seeds of pharaonic civilization.

Scholars have frequently praised Petrie's relative dating system, and, although various analyses have corrected it and improved its precision, the three basic phases of the late Predynastic have never been fundamentally questioned, and today they still constitute the loom upon which Egyptian prehistory is woven.

The reliability of the ceramics corpus is fundamental to the validity of the system. In 1942 Walter Federn, a Viennese exile to the USA, exposed certain flaws in Petrie's corpus. In order to classify the vessels from de Morgan's collection in the Brooklyn Museum, he was obliged to revise Petrie's groups, removing two of them from the sequence. It was Federn who introduced a factor that had been ignored by Petrie:

the *fabric* of the vessels. It also became apparent that a system based on material from Upper Egyptian cemeteries was not necessarily transferable either to the necropolises of the north or to those of Nubia.

In spite of its recognized shortcomings, Petrie's work nevertheless formed the sole means of organizing the Predynastic into cultural phases until the system devised by Werner Kaiser in the 1960s, which even then could not actually replace it. Kaiser seriated the pottery of 170 tombs from cemeteries 1400–1500 of Armant using the publication of the site made by Robert Mond and Oliver Myers in the 1930s. His work showed that there was also a 'horizontal' chronology in the cemetery. The black-topped red ware abounded in the southern part of the cemetery, while the 'late' forms were concentrated towards the northern end. A very detailed analysis of the classification, still based on Petrie's corpus, allowed him to correct and fine-tune the sequence-dating system. Petrie's three major periods were thus confirmed, but refined by the addition of eleven subdivisions (or *Stufen*) from Ia to IIIb. In 1989 Stan Hendrickx's doctoral thesis allowed Kaiser's system to be applied to all of the Naqadan sites in Egypt. This resulted in slight modifications, particularly to the transitional phases between Naqada I and II.

The other important progress in Predynastic chronology has involved advances in absolute dating. Both Petrie's sequence dates and Kaiser's *Stufen* constitute relative dating systems; they have a *terminus ante quem* of c. 3000 BC (the presumed date for the unification of Egypt), but they cannot in themselves provide any absolute date for the beginnings and ends of each of the Naqada phases and subdivisions. The necessary links to an absolute chronology were made possible in the second half of the twentieth century by the development of methods of dating based on the analysis of physical and chemical phenomena. As far as the Egyptian Predynastic is concerned, thermoluminescence (TL) and radiocarbon (C-14) dating are the most important of these scientific methods.

Libby tested the accuracy of the radiocarbon dating system on material from the Faiyum region, and since then the testing of samples for dating has been sufficiently systematic to enable the construction of a fairly precise chronological framework, in which Petrie's three great phases have come to take their place. The first Naqada phase (Amratian) lies between 4000 and 3500 BC, followed by the second phase (Gerzean), from 3500 to 3200 BC, and the final Predynastic phase runs from 3200 to 3000 BC.

The geographical locations of Naqada I sites all lie within Upper Egypt, from Matmar in the north to Kubaniya and Khor Bahan in the

south. This situation changes, however, in the Naqada II culture, which is particularly characterized by a process of expansion: emerging from its southern nucleus, it diffuses northwards as far as the eastern edge of the Delta, and also southwards, where it comes into direct contact with the Nubian 'A Group'.

Naqada I (Amratian)

Petrie and Quibell uncovered several thousand Predynastic graves between them (15,000 for the whole Predynastic Period). As a result, our knowledge of the period was—for over a century—based almost entirely on funerary remains.

In broad terms, the Amratian is not different from the earlier Badarian culture. The burial rituals and the types of funerary offerings are so similar that one wonders if the latter does not constitute an older, regional version of the former.

In general, the Amratian dead were buried in simple oval pits in a contracted position, lying on the left side with the head pointing south, looking towards the west. A mat was placed on the ground below the deceased, and sometimes the head rested on a pillow of straw or leather. Another mat or the skin of an animal, usually goat or gazelle, covered or enclosed the deceased and most of the time covered the offerings as well. The surviving remains of clothing suggest that the usual apparel worn by the dead was a sort of fabric loincloth or a hide loincloth trimmed with fabric. Although simple burials of single individuals were in the majority, multiple burials were also fairly frequent, most notably involving a woman (possibly the mother) and a newborn infant. Compared with the previous period, larger burial places appeared, provided with coffins of wood or earth, and more lavishly equipped. Although plundered, the Amratian tombs of Hierakonpolis are remarkable for their rectangular form and unusual size (the largest being 2.50 m. × 1.80 m.). In two instances, the inclusion of magnificent disc-shaped porphyry maceheads probably indicates the burials of powerful individuals. The Amratian culture particularly differs from the Badarian in terms of the diversity of types of grave goods and consequent signs of hierarchy, and Hierakonpolis was clearly already an important site from the point of view of such diversification.

The differences between the Badarian and Amratian cultures can be seen above all in changes in material culture. The black-topped red ware gradually became less common, and this trend would eventually lead to its total disappearance at the end of the Predynastic. The

rippling effect on the surface of the pottery became rarer, as did black-polished pottery. At the same time, however, red-polished pottery continued to flourish in a variety of forms, often incorporating different styles of surface decoration. The best-decorated examples feature sculpture in the round and white painted designs comprising geometrical, animal, and vegetal motifs. These constitute the beginnings of an iconography that would eventually lie at the core of pharaonic civilization.

The fauna represented on the vessels are essentially riverine, such as hippopotami, crocodiles, lizards, and flamingos, but there were also scorpions, gazelles, giraffes, ichneumons, and bovids. The bovids are rendered schematically, thus making their precise identification difficult. Sometimes a boat might also be depicted, prefiguring the leitmotif of the Naqada II phase. Human figures, although at this date unobtrusive, were nevertheless present in the Amratian version of the universe. Such figures, however, were represented schematically, each with a small round head on a triangular torso terminating in thin hips and standing on stick legs, often without feet. The arms were represented only when the figure was engaged in some activity.

The depictions involving human figures can be divided into two types: the first—and most frequent—is the hunt, and the second is the victorious warrior. A good example of the hunt is shown on a Naqada I vessel in the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow. This scene comprises a person holding a bow in his left hand, while in his right he controls four greyhounds on a leash. This is the very image of the hunter, with the king wearing the tail of an animal at his belt, that can still be seen several centuries later on the so-called Hunter's Palette or on the Gebel el-Arak knife handle (the former now in the British Museum and the latter in the Louvre), and indeed continued to be a powerful image until the end of the pharaonic period.

The theme of the victorious warrior occurs on the elongated body of a Naqada I vessel in the collection of the Petrie Museum, University College London. The depiction comprises two human figures among plant motifs; the larger figure, with stalks or plumes fastened in his hair, lifts his arms above his head, while his virility is unequivocally marked by a penis or penis sheath. Interlaced ribbons descending from between his legs may represent decorated cloth. A white line emerges from the larger figure's chest and wraps around the neck of the second figure, a much smaller person with long hair. A swelling on the back of the smaller figure could represent bound arms. Despite a clear pelvic protuberance, the sexuality of the smaller figure remains

ambiguous; if it were feminine, this would justify the small size. A similar scene decorates an identical vessel in the Brussels Museum, as well as one of the same material excavated in the 1990s by German archaeologists at Abydos. The prevalence of the bound figure, and the absence or obstruction of the arms of small persons, strongly suggest the imagery of the conqueror and the vanquished. This early theme of domination appears to be the prototype of traditional scenes of victory in the pharaonic phase. It is interesting to note that, as early as the Naqada I phase, the dual theme of hunting and war—always understood to be victorious—is established, implying the existence of a group of hunter-warriors already invested with an aura of power.

The graves and the funerary offerings indicate not so much increasing hierarchization as a tendency towards social diversity in the Naqada I culture. The offerings in this period appeared initially to be intended simply to mark the identity of the deceased. It is not until the Naqada II phase (and even more so Naqada III) that larger accumulations of funerary artefacts are clearly in evidence.

The funerary statuettes are particularly significant. Both men and women are represented standing, more rarely seated, with emphasis on the primary sexual characteristics. Only a few of the thousands of excavated tombs contained such statuettes, and usually they occurred only singly, groups of two or three in one tomb being comparatively rare. The maximum number found in a single burial was a set of sixteen figurines. Based on an analysis of the other offerings, the tombs that contained multiple statuettes were not particularly rich in other respects, and such small sculpted figures were sometimes the sole funerary offering. Could these be the tombs of sculptors? Whatever their significance, the presence of these objects indicates greater exclusivity than wealth as determined by sheer quantity of grave goods. The use of copper and flint knives as funerary offerings raises the same kind of question during the Naqada II phase.

The more or less schematically rendered heads of bearded men seem to constitute another new category of human representation in Naqada I, which was to be further developed in Naqada II. Found on small throwsticks of carved ivory or on the tips of hippopotamus or elephant tusks, the one repeated feature of these representations is the presence of a triangular beard, often balanced by a sort of 'phrygian' cap pierced by a suspension hole. Unlike women, men were no longer being solely identified by their primary sexual characteristics, but by a secondary sexual characteristic and the social status that this conferred

on them. The beard was evidently a symbol of power, and, in the form of the ceremonial 'false beard', it later became strictly reserved for the chins of kings and gods.

Another symbol of power that characterizes the Naqada I phase is the disc-shaped macehead, usually carved from a hard stone, but sometimes also occurring in softer materials such as limestone, terracotta, or even unfired pottery, and occasionally provided with a haft. It was during this period that techniques of working both hard and soft stones (including greywacke, granite, porphyry, diorite, breccia, limestone, and Egyptian alabaster) began to be developed, and this craftsmanship would eventually ensure that the Egyptian culture became the 'civilization of stone' *par excellence*. Greywacke cosmetic palettes constituted the item of choice for funerary equipment during the Amratian. These palettes exploded into a diversity of forms, from a simple oval shape, sometimes incised with figures of animals, to complete zoomorphs, including fish, tortoises, hippopotami, gazelles, elephants, and birds (although the range of beasts depicted on the painted vessels was nevertheless much greater).

The production of bone and ivory objects, including punches, needles, awls, combs, and spoons, extended—and improved upon—the repertoire of the preceding Badarian culture. Not many worked stone tools have been found in Naqada I graves, but the rarity of such finds was equalled by their quality. These delicate and long bifacially flaked blades, some as much as 40 cm. long, were regularly serrated. Their most unusual feature was that they had all been polished *before* retouching. This process was also used on beautiful daggers with bifurcated blades, which look ahead to the Old Kingdom forked instruments known as *pesesh-kef* used in the Opening of the Mouth funerary ceremony.

Glazed steatite, already known in the Badarian period, continued in use. The first attempts at crafting Egyptian faience appear to date from the Naqada I phase, whereby a nucleus of crushed quartz was shaped into the desired form and coated with a natron-based glaze coloured by metallic oxides.

Metalwork shows few differences from the Badarian period, apart from an extension of the repertoire, including such artefacts as pins, harpoons, beads, looped pins for attachment and bracelets, often executed in hammer-worked native copper. The tips of bifurcated spears from a tomb in el-Mahasna, which imitate worked-stone specimens, evoke comparison with the techniques of metal production employed by their northern neighbours at Maadi (see below).

The picture derived from the analysis of the tombs and their contents is of a structured and diversified society, with a tendency towards hierarchical organization, in which the major traits of pharaonic civilization can already be seen in embryonic form.

Compared with the significant remains of the world of the dead, the surviving traces of Naqada I settlement are poor, not only because too few sites of this type have been preserved but also because of the nature of Predynastic land-use practices. Since the buildings making up the settlements were essentially constructed from a mixture of mud and organic materials (such as wood, reed, and palm), they have not survived well, and the work invested by the archaeologist would have to be considerable to yield even a minimum of data. Among the vestiges of subdivided huts made from beaten earth (which are not even definitely known to be dwellings) are hearths and post-holes. The zones of habitation are indicated by deposits of organic material dozens of centimetres thick. The sole surviving built structure has been excavated at Hierakonpolis, where the American team uncovered a burnt man-made structure consisting of an oven and a rectangular house partially enclosed by a wall, measuring 4.00 × 3.50 m. Although it is possible that such houses may have been present at all Nile Valley settlements of this date, it should be borne in mind that Hierakonpolis may well have been unusual—it had been an important site from an early date, and from this time onwards it was the centre of an élite group, judging from its large-scale graves.

One of the results of the lack of excavated settlements is an imprecise knowledge of the Naqada I economy. The domesticated animal species represented among the grave goods include goats, sheep, bovinds, and pigs, which have survived either in the form of food offerings or as small statuettes modelled in clay. As far as wild fauna were concerned, gazelles and fish appear to have been plentiful. Barley and wheat were cultivated, as were peas and tares, the fruits from the jujube, and a possible ancestor of the watermelon.

Naqada II (Gerzean)

During the second phase of the Naqada culture, fundamental changes took place. These developments, however, took place not at the margins of the culture but in its Amratian heartland; in essence, they can be regarded as an evolution rather than a sudden break. The Naqada II phase was characterized primarily by expansion, as the

Gerzean culture extended from its source at Naqada northwards towards the Delta (Minshat Abu Omar) and southwards as far as Nubia.

There was a distinct acceleration of the funerary trend first seen in the Amratian, whereby a few individuals were buried in larger, more elaborate tombs containing richer and more abundant offerings. Cemetery T at Naqada and Tomb 100 (the so-called Painted Tomb) at Hierakonpolis are good examples of this overall trend.

Gerzean cemeteries comprise a wide range of grave types, ranging from small oval or round pits, poorly provided with offerings, to burials in pottery vessels and the construction of rectangular pits subdivided by mud-brick partitions, with specific compartments for offerings. There were coffins of wood and air-dried pottery, as well as the first indications of the wrapping of the body in strips of linen. Early 'mummification' of this type is attested in a double tomb at Adaïma, an Upper Egyptian site near Hierakonpolis, excavated since 1990 by the French Archaeological Institute at Cairo. The Naqada II burials generally remained simple, but multiple burials, containing up to five individuals, became more common. Funerary rituals appear to have become more complex, sometimes involving dismemberment of the body, a practice that was not attested in the preceding period. In Tomb T5 at Naqada, a series of long bones and five crania were arranged along the tomb walls, and at Adaïma there are some examples of skulls detached from their torsos. The possibility of human sacrifice was noted by Petrie at Naqada, and two cases of throat slitting followed by decapitation have been identified at Adaïma. Although sparse and scattered, this possible evidence for self-sacrifice could be an early prelude to the mass human sacrifices around the Early Dynastic royal tombs at Abydos, which represented a turning point in the emergence of the Egyptian kingship of the Dynastic Period.

Two new types of pottery make their appearance: first, 'rough' pottery, which has been found in tombs dating to this period but was later found in domestic contexts, and, secondly, 'marl ware', which was fashioned partly in a calcareous clay derived from the desert wadis rather than the Nile Valley. The marl pottery, sometimes decorated with ochre-brown paintings on a cream ground, replaces the white-painted red ware of the Naqada I phase. There are two types of motifs: geometrical (consisting of triangles, chevrons, spirals, check patterns, and wavy lines) and representational. The repertoire is limited to about ten elements, combined according to a system of symbolic representation that is still not properly understood.

The predominant motif in the representational art of the period is the boat; its omnipresence reflects the importance of the river, not only as the provider of fish and wild fowl but also as the principal channel of communication that was to be indispensable to the northward and southward expansion of the Naqada culture. It was by boat that raw materials were obtained, such as ivory, gold, ebony, incense, and skins of wild cats from the south, and copper, oils, stone, and seashells from the north and east, mostly destined for an élite whose social position was becoming increasingly distinct from the rest of the population. In these depictions, the boat represents both a mode of travel and a status symbol. It is clear, however, that from this date onwards the Nile, flowing from the north to the south, had also been transformed into a mythical river on which the first gods sailed. The links between the human and cosmic orders were already being established.

During the Naqada II phase, there was considerable development in techniques of stoneworking: various limestones, alabasters, marbles, serpentine, basalt, breccia, gneiss, diorite, and gabbro were being discovered and exploited all along the Nile Valley as well as in the desert, particularly at Wadi Hammamat. The increasing skills in the carving of stone vessels prepared the way for the great achievements of pharaonic stone architecture. The ripple-flaked knives of this period are among the most accomplished examples of the working of flint anywhere in the world.

Cosmetic palettes became fewer in number, evolving towards simple rectangular and rhomboidal shapes, but at the same time they began to be decorated with reliefs, starting a line of development towards the narrative-style decorated palettes of the Naqada III phase. The disc-shaped macehead of the Amratian period was replaced by the pear-shaped type, two examples of which had already appeared at an earlier date in the Neolithic settlement of Merimda Beni Salama. By the Naqada II phase the macehead had become mysteriously charged as a symbol of power, and in the pharaonic period it was the weapon characteristically held by the victorious king.

Copper working intensified, no longer being limited to small objects but gradually beginning to produce artefacts that were substitutes for stone objects, such as axes, blades, bracelets, and rings. Alongside developments in copper production there was also a growth in the use of gold and silver, and the evidence at sites such as Adaima suggests that the increased attraction of metal might well account for much of the tomb robbery during the Predynastic Period.

The picture of Naqada II society that is thus revealed is a blueprint for the development of a class of artisans who were specialized in the service of the élite. This fact has two implications: first, there had to be an economy that was capable of supporting groups of non-self-sufficient craftsmen, at least during a part of the year, and, secondly, there must have been urban centres that brought together the clients, the workshops, the apprentice craftsmen, and the facilities for commercial exchange.

This process of cultural development was always tied closely to the Nile. As Michael Hoffman showed in his interpretation of the Predynastic remains at Hierakonpolis, settlement clustered near the river, which supported the cultivated land, where simple artificial irrigation techniques could take advantage of the annual flood. The entire Nile Valley was covered by a string of villages, which are often known simply because of their surviving cemeteries. We have evidence for different species of barley and wheat, flax, various fruits (such as watermelon and dates) and vegetables. As in the preceding period, cattle, goats, sheep, and pigs comprise the domestic livestock. Among the domesticates, the dog enjoyed special status, judging from its burials within the settlement of Adaïma. Fish also played an important role in diet, but the hunting of large riverine and desert mammals (such as hippopotami, gazelle, and lions) gradually became more socially restricted until it became the prerogative of the dominant élite groups.

Three large centres arose in Upper Egypt: Naqada, the 'gold town' at the mouth of Wadi Hammamat; Hierakonpolis, further to the south; and Abydos, where the necropolis of the first pharaohs was to be located. Two large residential zones were uncovered at Naqada by Petrie and Quibell in 1895: the 'South Town' (in the central part of the site) and the 'North Town'. The South Town incorporates a large rectangular mud-brick structure measuring 50 × 30 m., which may possibly be the remains of a temple or a royal residence. To the south of this large structure, a group of rectangular houses and an enclosure wall can be made out. These two elements, the rectangular house and the enclosure wall, are typical of the emerging towns of Naqada II. There may be a shortage of primary archaeological evidence of settlements at this date, yet two artefacts from funerary contexts help to compensate for this deficiency. The first is a terracotta model house from a Gerzean grave at el-Amra. An Amratian tomb from Abadiya has provided a second model (Oxford, Ashmolean) representing a crenellated wall, behind which two people are standing; the Amratian

date of the second model suggests the early date at which dwellings of this type began to be used.

Northern Cultures (including the Maadian Complex)

The Maadian cultural complex of about a dozen sites has only recently been brought to light. These sites include the excavated cemetery and settlement complex at Maadi itself, a suburb of modern Cairo. The Maadian culture appeared during the second part of Naqada I and continued until Naqada IIc/d, when it was eclipsed by the spread of the Naqada II culture, exemplified by the cemeteries of el-Gerza, Haraga, Abusir el-Melek, and Minshat Abu Omar.

The earliest Neolithic sites have been discovered in this part of the Nile Valley, in the Faiyum region and at Merimda Beni Salama and el-Omari (see Chapter 2), and it is these sites that represent the tradition from which the Maadian material culture emerged. Maadian culture differs in all its characteristics from sites of similar date in Upper Egypt. In a reversal of the situation at the sites of the Naqada culture, cemeteries were much less prominent in the archaeological record, and most of our knowledge derives instead from settlements.

At Maadi, the Predynastic remains cover nearly 18 ha., including the cemetery. In the first half of the twentieth century an area of about 40,000 sq.m. was excavated. The depth of archaeological deposits is almost 2 m., including heaps of refuse preserved *in situ*, the stratigraphy of which is complex. The excavated structures show that there were three types of settlement remains, one of which is unique in an Egyptian context, strongly reminiscent of the settlements at Beersheba in southern Palestine. It involves houses excavated from the living rock in the form of large ovals measuring 3 × 5 m. in area and up to 3 m. in depth, each of which was entered via an excavated passageway; the walls of one of these subterranean houses were faced with stone and dried Nile-silt mud bricks, but this is the only known instance of the use of mud brick at Maadi. The presence of hearths, half-buried jars, and domestic debris suggests that these were genuine permanent habitations. The other types of domestic structures at Maadi are already well attested elsewhere in Egypt: first, a form of oval hut accompanied by external hearths and half-buried storage jars, and, secondly, a rectangular style of house in which narrow foundation trenches are all that remain of walls that were presumably made from plant material.

In general, Maadian pottery is globular with a broad, flat base, a more or less narrow neck, and flared rims, partially fashioned from

alluvial clay. They are rarely decorated, except sometimes with incised marks applied after firing. It is interesting to note that the oldest strata at the late Predynastic sites of Buto (Tell el-Fara'in), Tell el-Iswid, and Tell Ibrahim Awad include sherds decorated with impressions that are reminiscent of Saharo-Sudanese pottery. Links with Upper Egypt, dating back to the period before the Maadian culture, are indicated by the presence of sherds from imported vessels of black-topped red ware, which mingle with their pale imitations made locally at Maadi. Conversely, the commercial links with Early Bronze Age Palestine account for the presence of distinctive footed ceramics, with neck, mouth, and handles decorated *en mamelons*, made from a calcareous clay fabric, which contained imported products (oils, wines, resins). Maadian culture was thus a kind of cultural crossroads, subject to the influences of the Western Desert (perhaps an extremely early association), the Near East, and the emerging kinglets of Naqada to the south.

Palestinian influence is also clearly discernible in the worked flint of the Maadian culture. In contrast to the local flint industry essentially employing pressure-flake technology, the Maadian assemblages also include large circular scrapers knapped from large nodules with smooth surfaces, which are well known throughout the Near East. Beautiful edged blades with rectilinear ribbing, known as 'Canaanite blades', also appear at Maadian sites; these were to develop into the pharaonic-period 'razors' (actually double scrapers) that were elements of royal funerary equipment until the end of the Old Kingdom, sometimes polished and sometimes reproduced in copper and even gold. The bifacial pieces, few in number, include projectile points, daggers, and sickle blades. The latter were products of the local tradition (Faiyum bifacial sickles) and were gradually replaced by a Near Eastern style of sickle mounted on a blade.

The comparative rareness of greywacke cosmetic palettes imported from Upper Egypt is presumably an indication of their limited availability and therefore the luxury nature of the object. The more numerous limestone palettes, on the other hand, show signs of wear that indicate their regular daily use. Hard stone maceheads are of the disc-shaped type characteristic of the Amratian and early Gerzean cultures.

Apart from several combs imported from Upper Egypt, objects in polished bone and ivory include the traditional repertoire of needles, harpoons, punches, and awls. Catfish darts, consisting of the first spine of the pectoral and dorsal fins, are found in great number, particularly in jars that were probably stockpiled for export.

There are many indications of Maadi's involvement in intercultural contacts and commerce. In this regard, the role of copper is particularly significant. Metallic objects seem to have been particularly common at Maadi. Not only are there simple pieces such as needles or harpoons, but also rods, spatulas, and axes. These forms of artefacts were made from stone in the Faiyum and Merimda cultures, but at Maadi they were made from metal. This situation is paralleled in Palestine during the same period, where polished stone axes totally disappear and are replaced with metal versions, albeit using different techniques from those at Maadi. This substitution of metal for stone cannot be mere coincidence, but the result of a process of technological progress that is an indication (and a direct result) of the genuine symbiosis between the two regions. Large quantities of copper ore have also been found at Maadi, which under analysis reveal a probable provenance in the region of Timna or Fenan, both of which are copper-mining sites in Wadi Arabah, at the south-eastern corner of the Sinai peninsula. However, rather than the ore being processed at Maadi itself, it was perhaps imported primarily for processing into cosmetics, and the initial processing must have been undertaken near the mines themselves.

Despite the involvement of the Maadian people in a network of contacts with the Near East, their culture was above all pastoral-agricultural and sedentary. There are few traces of wild fauna to counterbalance the enormous quantity of domesticated animals (pigs, oxen, goats, sheep) that, apart from the dog, comprised the basic meat diet of the community. The donkey doubtless served as transport for the merchandise. Kilos of grain found in jars and in storage pits include wheat and barley (*Triticum monococcum*, *Triticum dicoccum*, *Triticum aestivum*, *Triticum spelta*, *Hordeum vulgare*) as well as pulses such as lentils and peas.

Compared with the good evidence of agricultural activity at Maadi, the interment of the deceased was relatively unobtrusive, indicating a community that had perhaps undergone little social change since the Neolithic and was evidently lacking in stratification or hierarchy. A total of 600 Maadian tombs has been recovered, as opposed to more than 15,000 Predynastic graves in the south. Geographical and geological factors contribute to this imbalance: the northern cemeteries, located in areas prone to heavy flooding, might well have been buried in thick layers of Nile silt. This, however, does not explain everything, because there is also a contrast in the quality and quantity of funerary equipment in the north, compared with the Upper Egyptian situation.

The Lower Egyptian graves are characterized by extreme simplicity, comprising basic oval pits with the deceased placed in a foetal position, shrouded in a mat or in fabric, and accompanied by only one or two pottery vessels or sometimes even nothing at all.

However, as we review the development of the Northern Cultures (consisting of three phases roughly corresponding to the cemeteries of Maadi, Wadi Digla, and Heliopolis), certain tombs appear better equipped than others, without ever displaying conspicuous luxury like that found in Upper Egypt. Nevertheless, a gradual tendency towards social stratification can be discerned, and it is possible that the mixing of the graves of dogs and gazelles with those of humans is part of this process of social change. The final phase of the Maadian culture, represented by the earliest stratigraphic layers at Buto, is equivalent to the middle of the Naqada II phase (levels IIc–d).

At the exceptional site of Buto, there are seven successive archaeological strata in which the transition between the Maadian phases and the overlapping protodynastic can be observed. During this transition, there is a perceptible increase in Naqada pottery styles, while the Maadian pottery progressively disappears. Thus the end of the Maadian culture was not an abrupt phenomenon, as the site of Maadi would suggest, but was instead a process of cultural assimilation. It is probable that, with its fluvial and maritime location, Buto was well placed for important trade, and perhaps also incorporated a palace for local rulers. While the archaeological data from Buto are less startling than the remains at Naqada, there was a comparable process of cultural development here which led, in the same way, to increased social complexity, eventually producing a society characterized by its own beliefs, rites, myths, and ideologies. This was the necessary precondition for the next great step forward in the history of Egypt, which took place in the Naqada III and Early Dynastic periods.