Lecture 9: Pre-Dynastic Egypt

Natural Advantages

- Transportation (both ways)
- Rich soil (450/sq. mi.)
  - Annual flooding (silt)
  - Simple irrigation systems
- Relatively unified culture
  - Upper and Lower Egypt
  - Nomarchs
- Protected by:
  - Sea to N. and E.
  - Deserts W.
  - Cataracts (waterfalls) S.
  - Only NE passageway allows for land invasion
**Pre-Dynastic Period 5000-3000 BCE**

- Difference between Nile “Delta” and “Valley”
  - physiognomy
  - economic traditions
  - burial customs
  - pottery designs
  - lack of a writing system
  - contact with Mesopotamian culture
  - Farming villages coalesce into provinces or principalities

- Gebel al-Arak knife

**Egyptian Chronology**

- Pre-dynastic Period (5500 - 3100 BC)
  - farming villages coalesce
- Early Dynastic Period (1st – 2nd Dynasties)
  - Narmer forms the state (c. 3000 BCE)
- Old Kingdom (3rd–6th Dynasties)
  - Age of the Pyramids
- First Intermediate Period (9th – 11.5 Dynasties)
  - Civil War
- Middle Kingdom (11.5th – 13th Dynasties)
  - Classic Era
  - Tale of Sinuhe
- Second Intermediate Period 14th–17th Dynasties
  - Hyksos Occupation
  - chariot, compound bow, stone defenses
- New Kingdom (18th – 20th Dynasties)
  - New Imperialism
  - Ramses II
  - Battle of Kadesh (1274 BCE)
- 3rd Intermediate Period (21st – 25th)
- Late Period (26th – 31st Dynasties)
  - Assyrian/Persian Control
- Ptolemaic Dynasty (331 BCE - 31 BCE)
  - Macedonian Control
- Roman Period (31 BCE - 642 CE)
  - Caesar Conquers Cleopatra
  - Byzantine Period

**Neolithic Egyptian Timeline**

- Around 9000 BCE
  - hunter-gatherers of Nile Valley enjoyed the milder post-glacial conditions
  - domestication of animals
- By 5000 BCE
  - farming villages appeared
  - rock art in some of the region’s caves
  - gradual formation of small states
Badari culture (4400-4000 BCE)

First culture to practice agriculture in Upper Egypt

- 600 graves
  - small, shallow pit dug in the desert sand
  - body placed on a mat
  - contracted position on its left side
  - the head pointing south facing to the west
  - bodies of young not found

Badari grave goods

- handmade pottery with rippled surface
- personal items:
  - hairpins, combs, bracelets and beads in bone and ivory
- grave goods tell us there was an unequal distribution of wealth
- wealthier graves found in a separate part of the cemetery.

Egyptian Timeline

After 4000 BCE
- sudden desiccation of the grass plains of the Sahara
  - migration of people towards the Nile
  - population, and villages sizes increased

3500 to 3000 BCE
- sudden advances in craftsmanship and technology, which culminated in the working of copper, stone mace heads and ceramics

The north and south developed independently.
- Upper Egypt displays very distinctive cultural elements
  - new artistic activities
  - highly specialized craftsmanship
  - highly specialized religious beliefs and practices.
Urbanization in Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper Egypt (South)</th>
<th>Lower Egypt (North)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Naqada culture (4200-3050) by 3300 BCE</td>
<td>Maadi culture (3600-3000) by 3600 BCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The first walled towns appeared at Naqada and Heirakonpolis</td>
<td>• settlement covered about 45 acres of land on historical route to the copper mines of the Sinai Peninsula</td>
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<tr>
<td>- rich tombs, probably the resting places of the rulers of Upper Egypt (to the south)</td>
<td>- very simple burials</td>
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Naqada culture (4200-3050 BCE)

- Early Naqada culture (I) correspond to Badari culture
- Naqada II-IV demonstrate clear advances towards urbanization
- mud bricks found by Petrie suggests that Naqada was the precursor to the burial monuments constructed by later Egyptian civilizations
  - “the centres of powerful territories, each ruled by a hereditary elite exercising authority on a regional basis,”
- The heads of these states are generally accepted as being early kings of Upper Egypt

Tombs at Naqada

- In 1894 Flinders Petrie unearthed three cemeteries at Naqada that contained 2200 graves, the largest mortuary in pre-dynastic Egypt.
- grave items included copper, ivory, bone and shell jewelry, and small model figurines of humans, oxen and boats, together with model weapons and food.
- These item were believed to have magical purposes and helped with ensure that the dead would have a content afterlife.
Religious Practice in Naqada

- The people who lived in Naqada were followers of the god Seth, the god who killed Osiris, the god of the dead.
- Naqada is considered to be the center for the followers of Seth.

Hierakonpolis

- The complex is thought to belong to a ruler of the ancient city of Hierakonpolis in around 3600 BCE.
- It was the largest urban center on the River Nile.

The Painted Tomb at Hierakonpolis

Built in about 3300 BCE depicts a floating funerary cortège and scenes of power and dominion, among them one of the earliest scenes of smiting. Probably the burial place of a ruler of Predynastic Upper Egypt. The figure holding up what appears to be two lions is a motif that has links to early Mesopotamia. The tomb was well furnished and elaborately decorated.
Predynastic Hierakonpolis cemetery (HK 43)

- 260 burials so far uncovered
- some which revealed evidence for what may be the very beginnings of artificial mummification.
- wrapping the head and hands with pads of linen
- Pottery found in association with these burials indicates a date not later than Naqada IIb
  - (ca. 3600 BCE)
  - a good 500 years before the next evidence of mummification will be found in a tomb of a king

Maadi culture (3600-3000 BCE)

- a unique predynastic site
- evidence of foreign house styles and pottery, domesticated donkeys, intricate storage facilities and an advanced copper industry.
- In 3600 BCE foreign trade goods started to reach Egypt having a great effect on the communities in Lower Egypt.
  - prosperity of the trade networks later lead to vast settlements in Egypt such as Memphis and the settlement at Cairo.

Settlement at Maadi

- covered about 45 acres
  - Almost all of the houses were oval in shape and constructed with post walls and mud-daub wicker frame.
  - These homes had entrances through a slanting passage with steps that were faced in stone.
- very simple burials
  - These types of burials have distinguished the Lower societies from the Upper societies in Egypt.
Egyptian Unification

- One of these rulers was the first to unite the whole valley, from the first cataract near the Nubian Desert to the Mediterranean, as a single kingdom in about 3400 or 3100 BC.

Hedjet - White Crown

Deshret - Red Crown

Pschent - Double Crown

Early Dynastic Period 3000-2647 BCE

- Narmer unifies Egypt 3000 BCE
- Palette of King Narmer
  - little over 2 feet tall
  - found at Hierakanpolis (Nehken)
  - originally a tablet used for grinding eye paint
  - shield shaped
  - depicts the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
  - dual crowns of Upper and Lower
  - wearing a false beard
  - hair = power
Literacy in Egypt

- Writing was not brought into Egypt from Sumer
- Developed independently and may have begun on Naqada II pottery.
  - Pottery apparently charts the gradual stylization of the plants, animals and religious dances
  - May have resulted in a set of divine symbols that are virtually hieroglyphic signs
Oldest Mummy Discovered

• in 2003 a coffin thought to date from 3100 to 2890 BCE under Egypt’s First Dynasty had been discovered at Saqqara.

2nd Dynasty Pottery

• The vase on the left is of sedimentary stone and dates from the Second Dynasty,
• the other two are stone vases with gold-covered handles, First or Second Dynasty