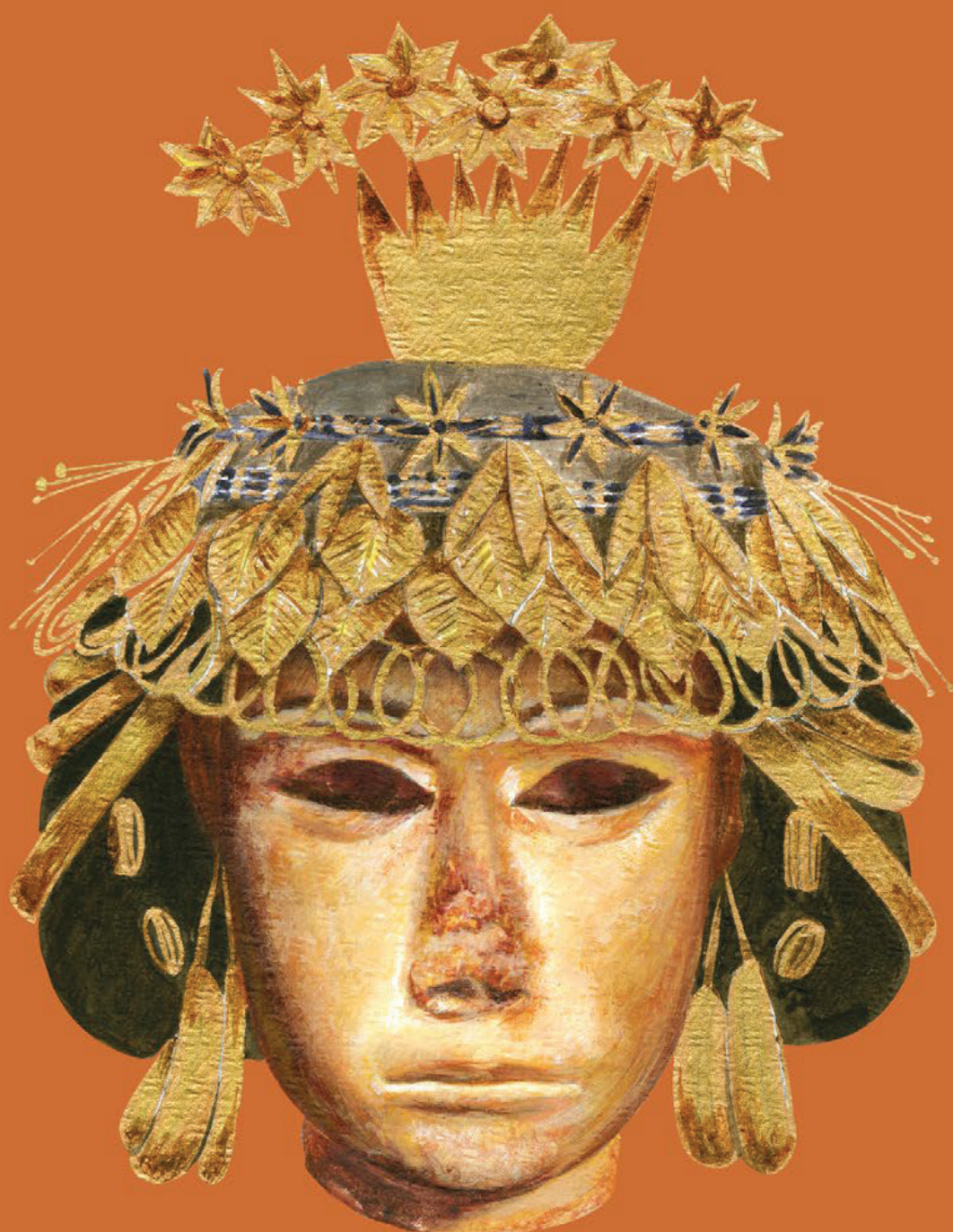


Petr Charvát

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



Karolinum

The Birth of the State

Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and China

Petr Charvát

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THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

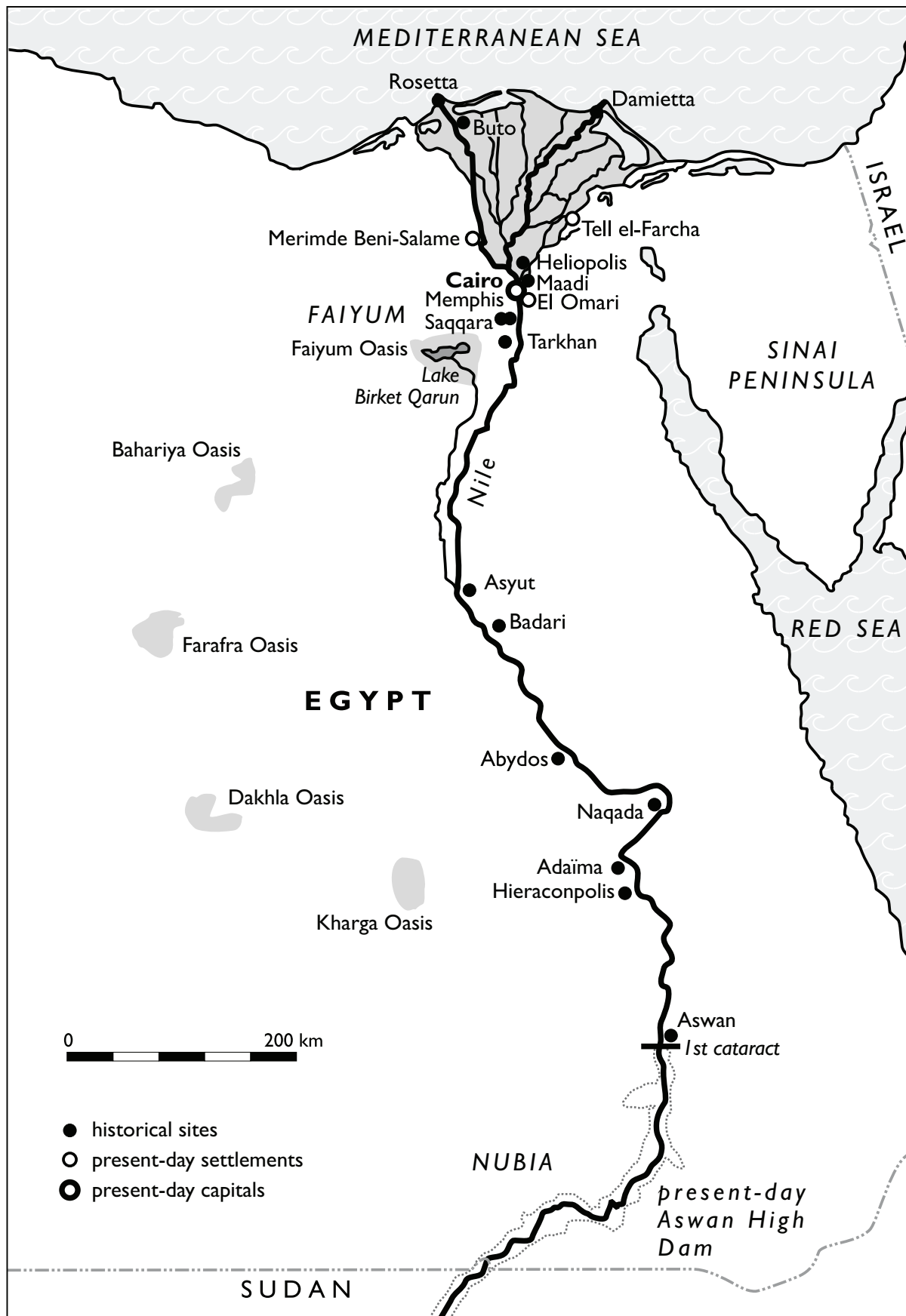


Fig. 1 Primary historical and archeological locations of prehistoric and early ancient Egypt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Economy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The embryos of cities

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Social differentiation: the elite and the others

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

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

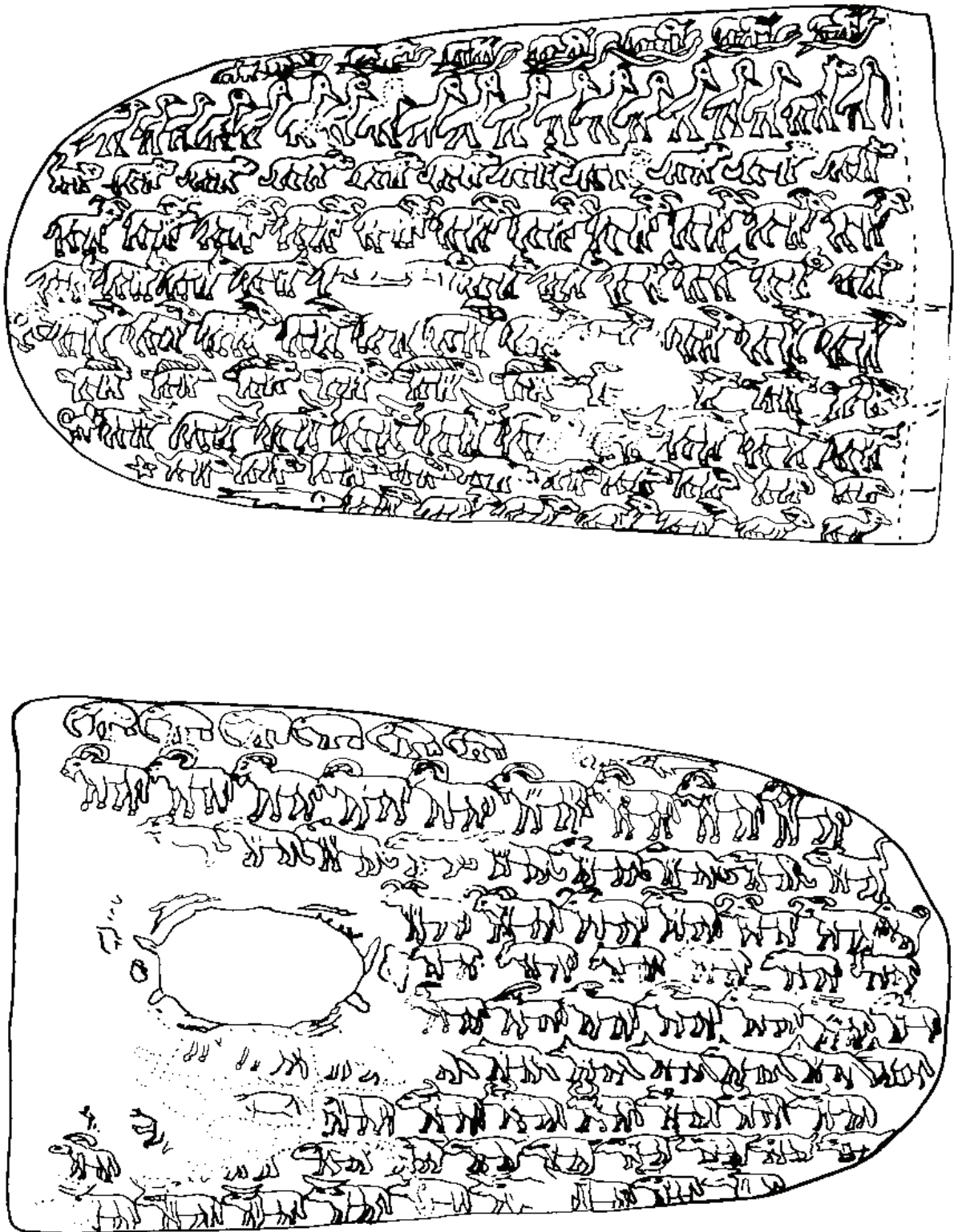


Fig. 3 The Brooklyn Museum knife handle, ivory, early Naqada III period, ca. 3400 BC.

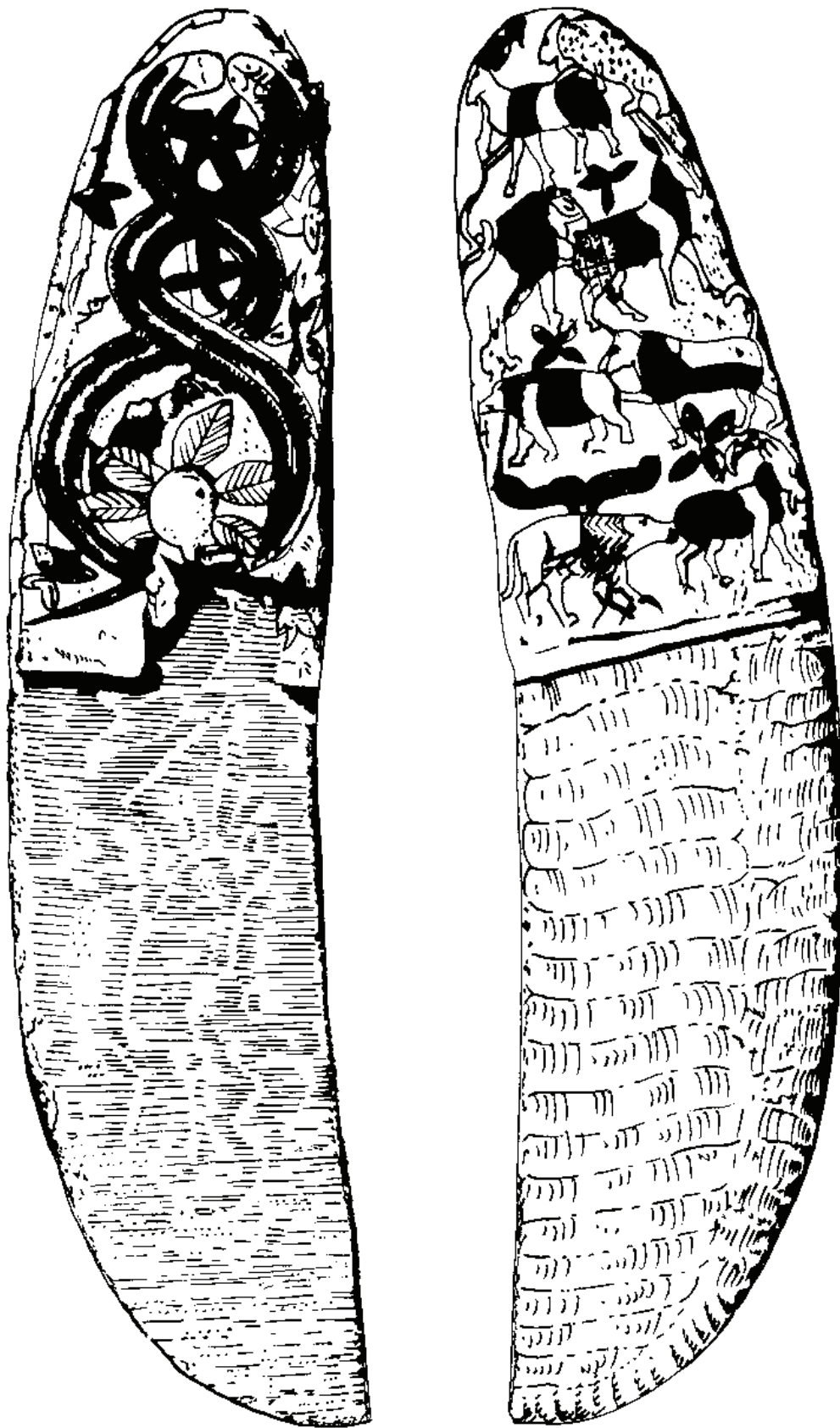


Fig. 4 Knife from Gebel el-Tarif with gold-leaf handle. End of Naqada II period 3600–3500 BC.

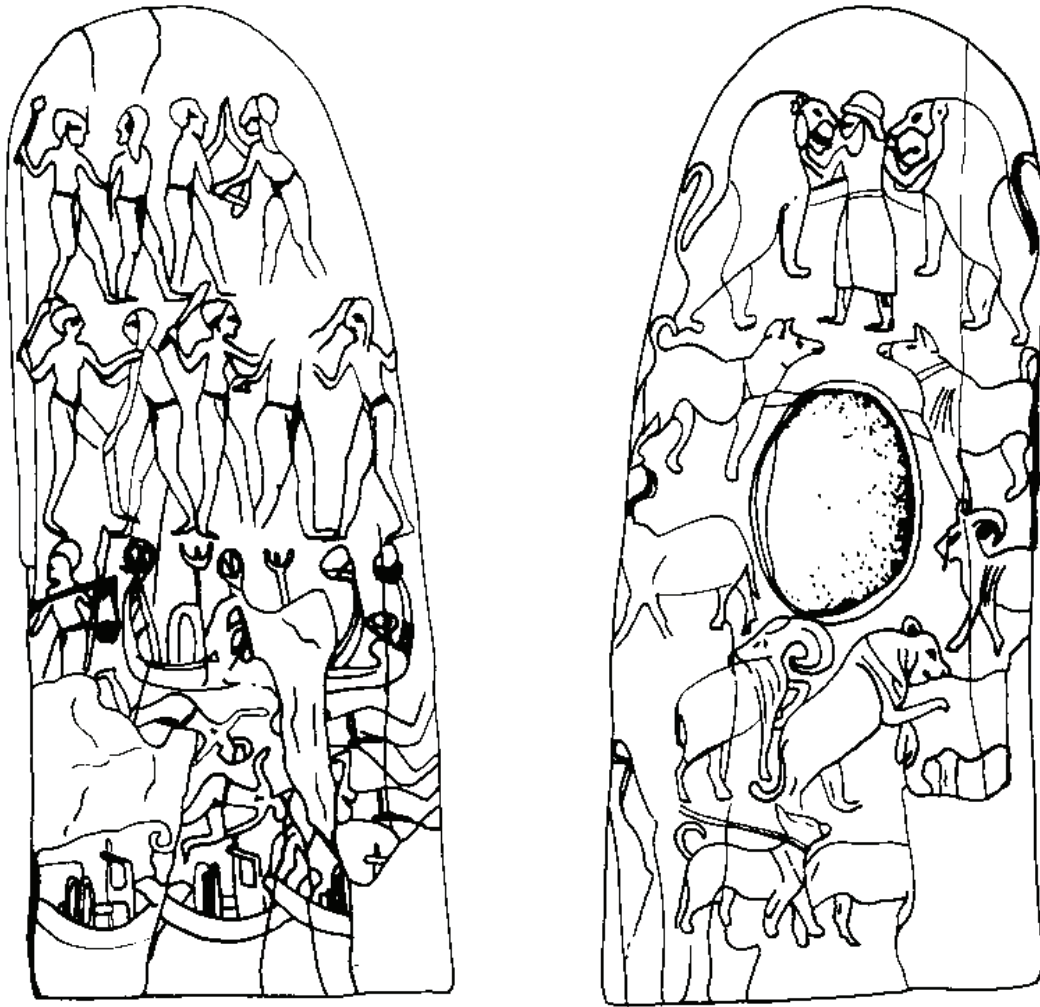


Fig. 5 Ivory knife handle from Gebel el-Arak. End of Naqada II period 3600–3500 BC.

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

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

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

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

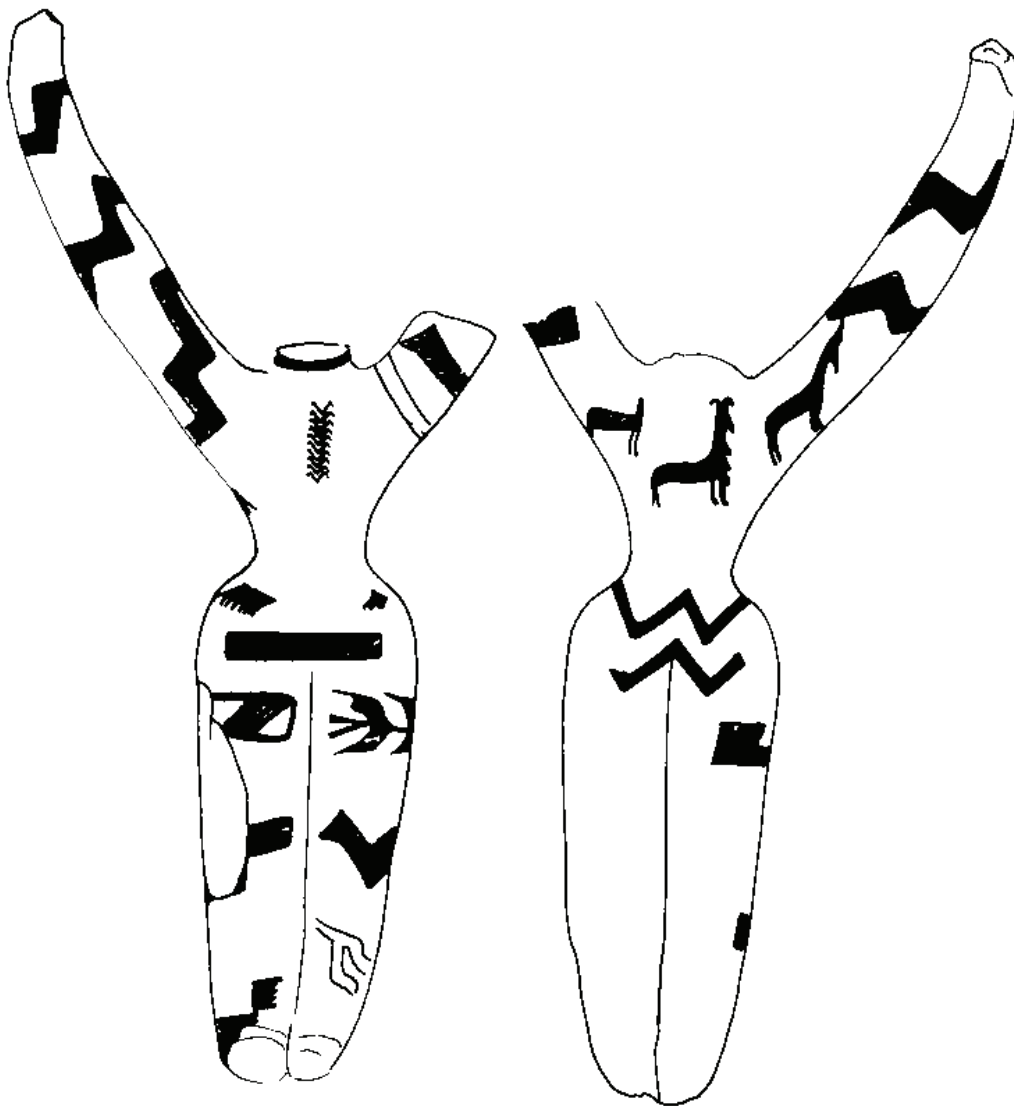


Fig. 6 Clay figure of dancer with tattoo or paint. Naqada II period.

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

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

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

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

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

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



Fig. 7 A fragment of a cosmetic palette in the form of a turtle from the Adaïma settlement.

Egyptian society of the pre-state period in burial rituals

The Adaïma site in Upper Egypt provides us with an example of the early stratification of ancient Egyptian society. Of the two burial grounds at this site, the western one dates back to prehistoric times (ca. 3700–3300 BC). The eastern burial ground is linked to the slightly more recent period of 3200–2800 BC. The earliest grave of the western burial site is that of six deceased at the top of a sandy mound near a settlement from the same period. A group of double graves are positioned around this burial, possibly “marking” the burial ground at a set distance from the earliest grave. Other graves of those possessing a high social stature are located between the zone of the double-graves and the earliest mass grave on top of the mound. Yet the entire burial ground ends with an “external lining” of non-elite graves surrounding the central burial area. We do not know where the elite from the 34th and 33rd century BC disappeared to.

It is quite remarkable that the oldest, southern part of the eastern burial ground, established ca. 3300 BC, holds exclusively the remains of children. Except for its northern sector, which dates back to the dawn of Egyptian history, this burial site reveals a normal breakdown of ages of the deceased buried there. Separated burial of the deceased by age and sex indicates, from today’s archeological perspective, the society’s relatively low degree of social stratification. Signs of differences in the social position of the buried children are, nevertheless, betrayed by found cosmetic palettes, an abundance of funerary objects and the use of exotic imported materials in some graves.

The method of laying the deceased to rest in a crouched position on their left side with their heads pointing south and facing west, regardless of age and sex, still prevailed at this point at the Adaïma burial site. The corpse was sometimes buried in a grave lined with reed matting or animal skins. Sometimes in the western burial site a wooden “coffin” served this purpose; in the northern part of the eastern burial site we come across “coffins” made from baked clay. Some excavations have revealed the deceased laid to rest in boxes made from wattle held together by clay.

Another noteworthy trait of the western cemetery is the removal of the heads of the deceased long after their death. This was documented in two cases and could have something to do with a belief in the immortality of one of the human being's parts and with the desire to preserve the deceased's presence among the living. A fitting analogy, although remote in time and space, is provided by information from a Pyrenean village in what is now the Provence region of southern France from around the turn of the 14th century AD. When a venerable patriarch from a family of one of the leading homes of the town of Montailou died, a family member would cut a lock of hair from his head the morning before the funeral and immure it in the home so that his "lucky star would not leave." We also have proof at the same burial site of a secondary burial of already deteriorated, yet intentionally dismembered human remnants in a clay "coffin." A severed right hand placed in the grave in a non-anatomical position, however, evokes the idea of posthumous punishment carried out on the deceased for a misdeed either he or one of his relatives did. The question lingers to what extent we can interpret traces of cut necks, observed in three cases in the western burial ground and in one in the eastern burial ground (while alive or post-mortem?), as the sacrificing of the individuals in question.

We hope further research will clarify the extent to which similar customs are derived from some of the earliest known forms of the Egyptian myth of the murdered, dismembered and magically reassembled god Usiris (Osiris).

Adaïma's deceased were often buried with household objects, usually consisting of personal ornaments, cosmetic necessities, dishes, tools and weapons. The pair of sandals made from painted stucco that accompanied one of the deceased in the western cemetery is undoubtedly emblematic of a higher social status. The placement of ornaments in the graves of very small children, who were unable to wear them for long, reveals an attempt to use legitimate means to incorporate the children into one of the groups of the adult population. These groups were represented by jewelry that was worn on the body for an extended period so that the personality of the wearer penetrated these decorations. The jewelry thus became part of the wearer's "narrower social persona," indicating his social rank. The presence of cosmetic pallets,

which we have already mentioned and will talk more about later, represents an especially noteworthy feature. Judging the social position of the deceased based on a lack of funerary objects should certainly not be taken as an exact science, and this is emphasized by the fact that traces of green malachite have been found preserved on the eye brows of skulls of some of the dead, who were laid to rest without accompanying objects. Such an attribute would indicate that they were among the Egyptians of higher status.

An interesting side note is provided by an archeological find in an adjacent settlement from the pre-state period, within a context that can be dated to roughly 3500 BC: the remnants of matting containing the facial part of a human skull together with three cattle tailbones. This is evidently an expression of white magic in which the force and energy of the deceased in question, indicated by a bull tail, was to remain in the home even after the individual's death and be passed on to its occupant. The immuring of skulls into clay benches in dwellings of the Euphratean site of Mureybit in Syria in phase II of this Neolithic settlement presents a clear analogy here.¹⁸ It is still not known the extent to which the image on the vessel from grave U-239 at the burial ground in Abydos, depicting a figure with a hairy (?) tail, hair adorned with feathers and armed with a club, tyrannizing smaller human figures – perhaps captives – is related to this.

At this point, a fact of a more general nature should be noted: Beginning in the Naqada II period, the deceased would take with them to the next world not only opulent table pottery, but also simple kitchen utensils – in increasingly larger quantities. We are left here with the impression that in this period the Egyptian dead began to depart for the next world fully equipped: with both a simple bowl for cooking and magnificent table serving sets.¹⁹

¹⁸ Information on Asian sites and life and institutions can be found in the publication of Eric M. Meyers (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Archeology in the Near East I-IV*, Oxford etc., Oxford University Press 1996.

¹⁹ David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 94.

LOWER EGYPT: BETWEEN THE PHARAOH AND THE RED SEA

Remarkable testimony on the contact maintained between Upper and Lower Egypt, indicating a fairly high level of social organization, should be mentioned with regard to the relations between the two regions. Central Egypt, the Nile foreshore running about 250 km between Fayum and Asyut, has yet to provide any evidence of settlement during the pre-state period of ancient Egypt. This leads us to believe that the people of both of these lands considered this to be a kind of “no man’s land,” separating the two parts of the Egyptian ecumene and assigning specific spheres of authority to them. This then indicates a high level of centralized management of social activities in both pre-state formations of ancient Egypt.

Economy

Archeological finds in Lower Egypt (the area of the Nile’s lower part and delta) dating back to the 4th millenium BC depict a well-formed culture that originated here, while demonstrating clear contact with continental Asia. These people’s livelihood consisted mainly of the cultivation of cereals and other crops – wheat, barley, flax and legumes. Livestock included sheep, goats, cattle and pigs, while domesticated dogs helped them tend to these animals. The people of Lower Egypt did supplement their diet by hunting and gathering in the wilderness. Evidence of this is provided by finds of hippopotamus, bird (even peacock) and fish bone, turtle shells and shells from the Nile.

Lower Egyptian master craftsmen worked their pottery on a slowly turning potter’s wheel, actually a potter’s bench, on which the potter would create a vessel in the traditional way from pieces or strips of clay, turning the base on which the vessel was created so that they

did not have to run around the object being worked on. In the final phase of the work, they could perfectly center the vessel by rapidly spinning the slow wheel, or by slowly turning the wheel they could decorate the still soft surface of the vessel with imprints or engravings of straight or wavy lines. The Lower Egyptians made all kinds of tools and weapons from stone, particularly fissile varieties such as silex (flint) or hornstone. An especially distinctive material worked with by Lower Egyptian craftsmen was copper, creating decoration as well as tools from it: sticks, spatulas, hatchets and fishing hooks. Copper appeared relatively suddenly and in large quantities; this can be viewed as a deliberately driven technological progress. Although copper artifacts from Lower Egypt and Asia have much in common with regard to shape and form, this probably was not a direct import from the continent. Asian hatchets, for instance, are different in appearance. Chemical analysis tells us that Lower Egyptian craftsmen worked with copper that was originally from the Sinai Peninsula, where miners and metallurgists most likely processed extracted ore in the ingot of raw metal of a surprisingly constant weight (ca. 825 g) which was then exported to consumers.

One surprising find was the remains of a domesticated donkey from a Maadi site; this clearly attests to the focus of the Lower Egyptian culture on remote contact, since this pack animal does not belong to the spectrum of farm animals expected to be found with settled farmers. Nile fish bones found in Palestine indicated that there was even long-distance trade with the food products of Lower Egypt. We can also assume that pottery and stone vessels were exported, as well as cutting instruments, shells from the Nile and even pork. In return, Lower Egyptians received from their continental trading partners goods imported in containers of Levantine origin or raw materials for manufacturing cutting utensils out of rock. They also received vessels made from basalt, copper ingot from the Sinai Peninsula, shells from the Red Sea, dyes, resin, oil, cedar wood and tar.

Starting around the late 4th millenium BC, the Upper Egyptian culture began to penetrate the distinctive milieu of the Lower Egyptian regions. To date, the finds attesting to this are extremely rare: pieces of cosmetic palettes, ivory combs, cone-shaped club heads and even

some stone vessels. Some of the first finds come from the site of a storage center in Tell el-Farkha. The delta site of Buto sheds light on the further development of these relations after 3300 BC. Here artifacts of a southern origin begin to be accompanied by architecture inspired by Upper Egyptian models. We still do not know if this expansion occurred by way of a peaceful entry into the population or if it is proof of forced occupation.

Settlements

The people of the Maadi settlement, spread out over an area of a little more than one hectare, lived in three types of dwellings. The huts were of an oval shape built from posts covered with mat or other organic wattle, perhaps like an Indian tee-pee. These abodes were entered from the North, the direction from which the Mediterranean Sea's refreshing breeze blew. Another type of post dwelling possessed either an oval or rectangular shape and its walls were sunk into a shallow foundation trough. This may have served as a modest enclosure for livestock as well. Four homes of the third and least common type were found in the western part of the site. These consisted of oval dwellings with lengths of three and five meters, sunk into up to 3 meters of bedrock. They were entered by a descending corridor similar to the entrances of medieval sunken-floored dwellings equipped with stairs cut into the rock. The builders made their walls out of stone or, in one case, out of adobe. A structure lodged into post holes in the floor evidently supported the roof. The presence of fire pits, storage containers and a communal waste dump – of tools or animal bones and the remnants of vegetable aliment – convincingly attest to the residential nature of such structures. Living in these abodes probably was not overly healthy. Linguists have pointed out to experts on such structures from medieval Europe the shared origin of the words “dung” and “dungeon.”

Women cooked here over fire pits that were either sheltered or in the open air. The massive furnaces up to two meters long were most likely used for firing pottery. The settlements were also equipped with wells and large storage containers dug into the ground. Other sites have

revealed dug-out hollows used for storing pottery and pits up to two meters deep serving as storage areas or even as workshops.

The Tell el-Farkha site opened a whole new world to us. In ca. 3300 BC there appeared large rectangular buildings positioned with their corners at the cardinal points – a novelty in the Lower Egyptian milieu. As in prehistoric Mesopotamia, this positioning should probably be linked with the prevalence of a premeditated and clearly formulated world view that held the practical necessity of incorporating human habitations into the universe's order and adapting to it their external parameters exactly aligned with the cardinal points. The novelty and unusualness of these buildings is probably illustrated by the fact that they were repeatedly destroyed by the Nile's flooding and were, contrary to all logic, rebuilt on the same place. Archeologists found the remnants of several stages of an ancient brewery in the middle of one of these buildings. These finds have provided us with proof that a crucial form of the socially managed movement of material goods, i.e. redistribution, was at this time introduced. This concerned the central distribution of foodstuffs, though redistribution also meant taxes, allowances and payments of all kinds – a decisive step toward building the first state. We will ascertain to what extent the centralized supply of beer was also accompanied by the mass distribution of cone-shaped loaves of bread baked in special ceramic "tube pans" (cf. p. 28) once we are able to fully confirm that these "tube pans" were really used to bake bread.²⁰

This milieu also provided us with significant proof of social differentiation: A sunken-featured dwelling with massive stone walls was found at Maadi site in the Nile Delta.

Burials

The people of the pre-state Lower Egyptian culture buried their dead in special burial grounds. Constant social stratification is demonstrated

²⁰ David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 94–97, picture of bread pans; *ibid*, p. 88, Fig. 4.4.

by the finding that some children had been up to this point buried under the floors of people's dwellings in coffin-like enclosures. Archaeologists interpret the burial of children, women and men separately as the mark of an egalitarian society. The bodies of the deceased were first arranged in a position with heads pointing north. A change in position gradually came about so that the heads of the interred pointed south and they faced east, not west – the direction in which ancient Egyptians believed the empire of the dead to exist and which those laid to rest in Upper Egyptian burial grounds faced. A crouched position on the right side (and sometimes on the left) also slowly became the norm. This left/right positioning depended on regional specifics, not on differences in the sexes as was the case in Mesopotamia at this time (men were laid to rest on their right sides, women on their left). With their heads resting on charred stones from fire pits, the dead were wrapped in a blanket or a pelt to protect them on their final journey. In contrast to the Upper Egyptian culture from the same period, the Lower Egyptian deceased were only minimally equipped for the next world, receiving a pottery vessel or two, some shells from the Nile (perhaps used as spoons), but hardly any personal ornaments and only rarely was an ivory comb or stone pottery found. It is only from this point that we gradually begin to find cosmetic palettes, simple tools from chipped rock and even quartered animals, which were most likely provided as food for the final journey. In some cases, simple shelters made of wood, perhaps of tree branches, shaded the grave sites.

The burial of animals – including dogs, goats and sheep – alongside people attests to a solid integration into nature's order and the notion of the basic equality of all creatures. A remarkable find was that at one burial ground (Heliopolis near Cairo) the goats were laid to rest in exactly the same position as their owners – crouched on their right side with their heads pointing south and snouts to the east, wrapped in a blanket or pelt and accompanied by pottery. These discoveries were made among the most affluent graves of the burial ground. Dogs, accompanying people on the eternal hunt, were found buried next to their masters throughout the cemetery.

Beyond everyday borders: contact with Asia

From the beginning of the 4th century we find pottery of Asian origin at the Buto site in the Nile Delta. This was pottery typical of the Palestinian culture of Ghassul and made on potter's wheels in Egypt. However, Egyptian potters gradually adopted it as their own pottery style and even stopped using a potter's wheel for it.²¹

The unique ornamentation on painted bowls from an undetermined Egyptian location also confirms that there was contact in this early period, maybe even earlier. These are among the white cross-lined ware (also called c-ware) and feature the decoration of vertical combs facing each other with hunting scenes accompanied by shaded triangles.²² Similarities with the decoration on pottery from Susa in western Iran from level A (the transition period of the Ubaid and Uruk culture, ca. 4000 BC) are so clear that we must assume that contact was established.²³

One other very surprising group of finds comes from Abydos graves of a later period. The imprints of cylinder seals in clay were found in a number of large mausoleums. In inventing the cylinder seal (ca 3700–3600 BC), the Sumerians were able to magically control the time and space around them. This was mostly used to seal the packaging of goods or (later) the doors of storage spaces. The rotating cylinder with the negative of the ornament or scene carved into it was pressed into the damp clay or other soft material, leaving the impression in positive. The people of ancient Egypt buried in Abydos graves used cylinder seals in the same way. Evidence of the arrival of this new administrative tool from Asia is represented by one of the Abydos imprints (from grave U-153), presenting the cuneiform sign NAGAR.²⁴

²¹ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň, Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 33–34.

²² David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 107–108, depiction of bread “tube pans” also on p. 88, Fig. 5.5 on p. 108.

²³ Petr Charvát, *The Iconography of Pristine Statehood – Painted Pottery and Seal Impressions from Susa, southwestern Iran*, Prague, Karolinum Press 2005, e.g. p. 255, No. 1 (Coll. 3223).

²⁴ Petr Charvát, review of Jane A. Hill, *Cylinder Seal Glyptic in Predynastic Egypt and*

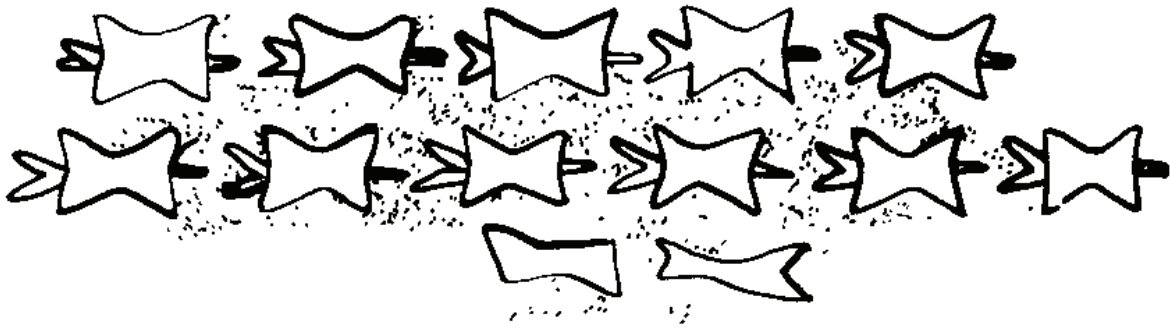


Fig. 8 A seal from grave U-153 in Abydos with the repeating cuneiform sign NAGAR. Late Naqada II period, 36th–35th century BC.

This cuneiform sign gives the name of a Sumerian city in northern Syria whose ruins are today covered by the hillock of Tell Brak [8]. Other Abydos seals also bear traces of the influence of Sumerian art, specimens of which must have arrived in Egypt even before 3500 BC. In Egypt, however, technology coming from abroad was very quickly adopted, and Egyptian artists had soon adorned their cylinder seals with exclusively domestic ornamentation and scenes. Cylinder seals spread to such an extent throughout the lands of the Nile that we even find imprints in the Nubian region of Egypt.

The impressions of cylinder seals found at the En Besor site in Sinai represent a unique case in which this originally Sumerian discovery was re-imported from Egypt back to Asia. It was here, next to a building full of brewing equipment for beer production, that a total of 99 cylinder seal imprints of Egyptian origin (the seals bear hieroglyphic writing), but from local clay, were found. The cylinders are clearly carved in an Egyptian style. The place obviously served as a wayside and supply station on the road from Egypt to the part of Palestine they had conquered, but also as a toll for tributes from subjugated lands.

The fact that Egyptian cylinders were used to stamp seals on goods of local origin can only mean that this was the place that the Palestinians' taxes and allowances were delivered to. These payments were affixed with the seals of the individuals entitled to a portion of the taxes levied by pharaonic rule of the northern provinces. En Besor apparently served as a meeting and exchange point where officials from the

northern provinces of Egypt delivered tributes marked with the seals of those they were designated for and where procurators took possession of the relevant goods from these Egyptian agents. These procurators evidently broke the seals here, disposed of the original seals and took possession of the goods individually on behalf of their masters, who had sent them here for this purpose.

Egyptians were extremely interested in Palestine at this time and began to invade the land after 3400 BC. Finds of Asian pottery from the U-j grave in Abydos, which we will further examine, provided significant information on the extent of mutual contact. Originally, there were some 700 Levantine bottles with wine containing terebinth resin and chopped spiced figs. The total amount of intoxicating drink accompanying the deceased elite to the next world was about 4,500 liters.²⁵ We know that, in addition to staging posts like En Besor, temporary Egyptian posts also operated near larger settlements in Palestine. “Dual” sites where both Egyptians and Palestinians lived together were also discovered here, as were larger centers where people of Egyptian and native origin evidently resided together. The Egyptians’ main imports from Palestine were wine, oil, resin and honey.²⁶ Other imports included beans, asphalt from the Dead Sea, wood and goods manufactured from it, turquoise and cupriferous ore. Obsidian from Anatolia was imported as goods in transit.²⁷ These trade relations carried on even after the establishment of the ancient Egyptian state.²⁸

²⁵ David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 202.

²⁶ An analysis of residue in pottery attributed to the pharaoh Djer of the 1st dynasty of ancient Egypt provided concrete evidence: David Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC*, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, p. 148, note 17.

²⁷ Marc Lebeau, Thierry de Puter: Un fragment de vase en pierre égyptien vraisemblablement d’époque protodynastique découvert à Tell Beydar, Syrie, in: *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 37, 2006, pp. 279–294, on p. 285.

²⁸ Marc Lebeau, Thierry de Puter: Un fragment de vase en pierre égyptien vraisemblablement d’époque protodynastique découvert à Tell Beydar, Syrie, in: *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 37, 2006, pp. 279–294, on the discovery of pottery probably dating from the I/II Egyptian dynasty made of metagabbro from the Eastern Desert in Egypt in secondary storage at Tell Beydar IIIb (ca. 2450–2400 BC).

CONFRONTING THE ENEMY: NUBIA

Nubian culture closely resembled Egyptian culture at this time. Nubians farmed the land, utilizing the Nile's flooding, and raised livestock. Burial grounds located in the vicinity of the Nile have provided us with information on their culture. Those buried here took with them on their final journey ornaments made of stone, ivory and nacre, as well as cosmetic necessities, including palettes similar to those previously described. These, however, were made of quartzite and not of greywacke as in Egypt. Pottery and tools were also found here. Metal appeared rarely and, if so, it was imported.

An increasing number of objects imported from Egypt appeared in Nubia. Even symbols and emblems suggesting the close proximity of the emergence of the first Egyptian and Nubian states were found in some of the elite burial grounds. At a certain point it was not clear who had borrowed from whom with regards to these symbols and emblems. The Nubians were intensive trading partners with the Egyptians. It appears that they mainly supplied the Black Land with foodstuffs and raw materials, livestock, fruit, tropical woods such as the renowned ebony, pelts and, in particular, gold, which was extremely abundant in Nubia.²⁹

Nevertheless, the Egyptians soon began to send military expeditions from their bases in the southern part of Upper Egypt. If the Nubian chiefs did not voluntarily submit and did not promise to pay tributes to Egypt, the Egyptian soldiers would attack the Nubians, enslave them and take their crops, livestock and valuables. Sometime around 2700 BC, Lower Nubia became part of the Egyptian state as its frontier zone.

²⁹ Cyril Aldred, *Egypt to the End of the Old Kingdom*, London, Thames and Hudson 1965, p. 61, fig. 50, fragment of an ebony seat from a grave in Saqqara dating to 3000 BC.

THE BURIAL OF THE FAMOUS AND POWERFUL IN THE NORTHERN PART OF UPPER EGYPT: ABYDOS

The burial ground excavated at the Abydos site in Upper Egypt provided exceptional information on early Egyptian statehood. This was the sister site of Hierakonpolis, though it is not known whether the city also claimed a sovereign position in politics or whether their citizens were satisfied with its spiritual status.

The Abydos burial ground dates back to roughly the first two phases of Naqada culture, i.e. to 4000–3300 BC. In addition to the common pits dug in sand or clay that held the bodies of the deceased, the famous and powerful were also memorialized here with burial edifices made of brick – actual mausoleums. The famous U-j tomb was, for instance, 9.1 × 7.3 m in size and 1.55 m deep. They were usually rectangular and normally contained a large burial tomb in the ground where the deceased would lie with their most valuable funerary objects. The tomb was usually located in the central part of the entire rectangular structure that was composed of a series of rooms for storing the most numerous part of the funerary objects – food in pottery, wooden and other materials and textile supplies. The entire surface of the tomb was usually made of brick, though builders often used wood, too. Although originally the bodies of the deceased were wrapped in reed blankets, this custom slowly disappeared from large and prominent graves starting around 3400 BC.

A substantial finding here is that a number of these graves are situated with their corners aligned with the cardinal points. We must therefore assume that the deceased were laid to rest in posthumous dwellings that were built in accordance with the universe's order and with the principles of the visible and invisible world.

The Abydos tombs were not spared the destructive march of time or the prying hands of thieves. In excavating them, therefore, archeologists generally only found mere remnants of the original, grandiose

and opulent funerary objects. Yet even these lamentable bits have provided us with ideas of the wealth of the ancient deceased, of the social practices of their age and of what they brought with them to the next world. The opulent objects attesting to the high social position of the Abydos people included frequent finds of an abundance of jewels, weapons, textiles and pottery. The most commonly found jewels were necklace beads made from imported minerals, e.g. from the famed lapis lazuli that regularly appeared at this time in Egypt in great quantities.³⁰ Weapons most frequently found consisted of daggers chipped from flint (silex) and equipped with handles made from precious materials (usually ivory). Not much fabric was preserved, but archeologists interpret the small chips of bone, ivory or wood with hieroglyphic symbols that appeared in the above-ground structures of the Abydos tombs as lists of the rolls of material stored in the tomb. Along with the luxurious vessels made of precious metals or choice stone, the Abydos dead took with them dozens and sometimes hundreds of pottery vessels. It is generally believed that the survivors of the deceased filled these vessels with supplies for the journey to the next world and for life in it. These vessels, probably originally containing oil, beer, milk, fats and similar edibles, were usually made in Egypt. However, merchants brought a substantial number of these vessels, filled with an extremely rare and valued drink – grape wine, from the Palestinians lands. For instance, the aforementioned U-j tomb contained in its three rooms 700 supply vessels with a total of 4,500 liters of wine.³¹ We do not know if ancient Egyptians also knew how to make palm wine as the Sumerians did.

Board games, remnants of which were also found in Abydos tombs, assumedly accompanied the dead for leisure purposes.

Emblems of power, such as an ivory scepter, were also among the secular objects found here. Also found in Abydos tombs were ivory carvings depicting the transport of various goods by throngs of people

³⁰ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň – Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 46.

³¹ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň – Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 42.

and animals and the viewing of prisoners. The deceased in Abydos also took with them emblems of sacral power such as sacred objects and sometimes even entire shrines carved out of wood. These are clearly the objects of individuals whose authority overlapped into both lay administration and religious areas. This is especially apparent in some of the objects that survivors buried with the deceased: Clay imitations of agricultural products, such as garlic, onion and poppy head were found in the Abydos tombs. Obviously, the intention was to supply the deceased for the next world with everything they could have possibly needed for their earthly life. It therefore seems that ancient Egyptian religion described to its people an afterlife that was more or less a picture of their life on earth.

BURIAL GROUNDS OF THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF UPPER EGYPT: AN ELITE BURIAL SITE IN HIERACONPOLIS

As early as ca. 3800–3600 BC the remains of leading figures were buried in a special cemetery that was separated from the final resting place of the population's non-elite classes. For their final journey they generally received ivory and stone objects, a large supply of pottery, jewels, cosmetic palettes and weapons made of silex. In some cases, we already find here the deceased wrapped in long strips of linen and their faces covered with funerary masks made from baked clay.

One of the largest tombs here (no. 23) has a burial tomb 5.5×3.1 m in size with a depth originally exceeding 1.2 m. The burial tomb is bordered on each side by eight post holes that originally supported the top part of the tomb made from wood and reeds. On the eastern part of the tomb the double row of post holes attest to an additional top structure, probably a shrine venerating the dead or a funeral chapel. The entire complex was surrounded by a post fence that was 16×9 m in size with a northwest entrance. According to the pottery discovered, this mausoleum dates back to roughly 3500 BC.

Another very surprising discovery was made in close proximity to this tomb. An oval burial pit, perhaps also with an above-ground wooden structure, held the remains of a young elephant, roughly ten years old, wrapped in linen strips and accompanied by funerary objects.

Similar discoveries were made in other places of the burial ground for the elite of Hieraconpolis. Aurochs (*Bos primigenius*), related to today's bison, another elephant and a large ram were buried here. Other graves revealed baboons, wildcats, hippos, a domesticated bull and a lamb. Discoveries of silex figures of animals from the funeral chapel of tomb no. 23 raises the question of whether this was an attempt to magically secure for themselves in the next world access to the powers of nature represented by these animals, whose depiction was intended to forever provide this privilege to the deceased in tomb no. 23 [9].

Although tomb no. 23 had been repeatedly dug up, archeologists have made a significant number of discoveries there in both the 20th and 21st centuries.

According to the funerary masks, there were at least two people buried here, although the burial tomb also contained the remains of four human bodies positioned without uniform orientation, without blankets of reeds or animal pelts and without funerary objects. Over 600 fragments of a life-size human sculpture from limestone were found in the vicinity of the above-ground entrance structure, which was probably a kind of funeral chapel. Several animal sculptures painstakingly

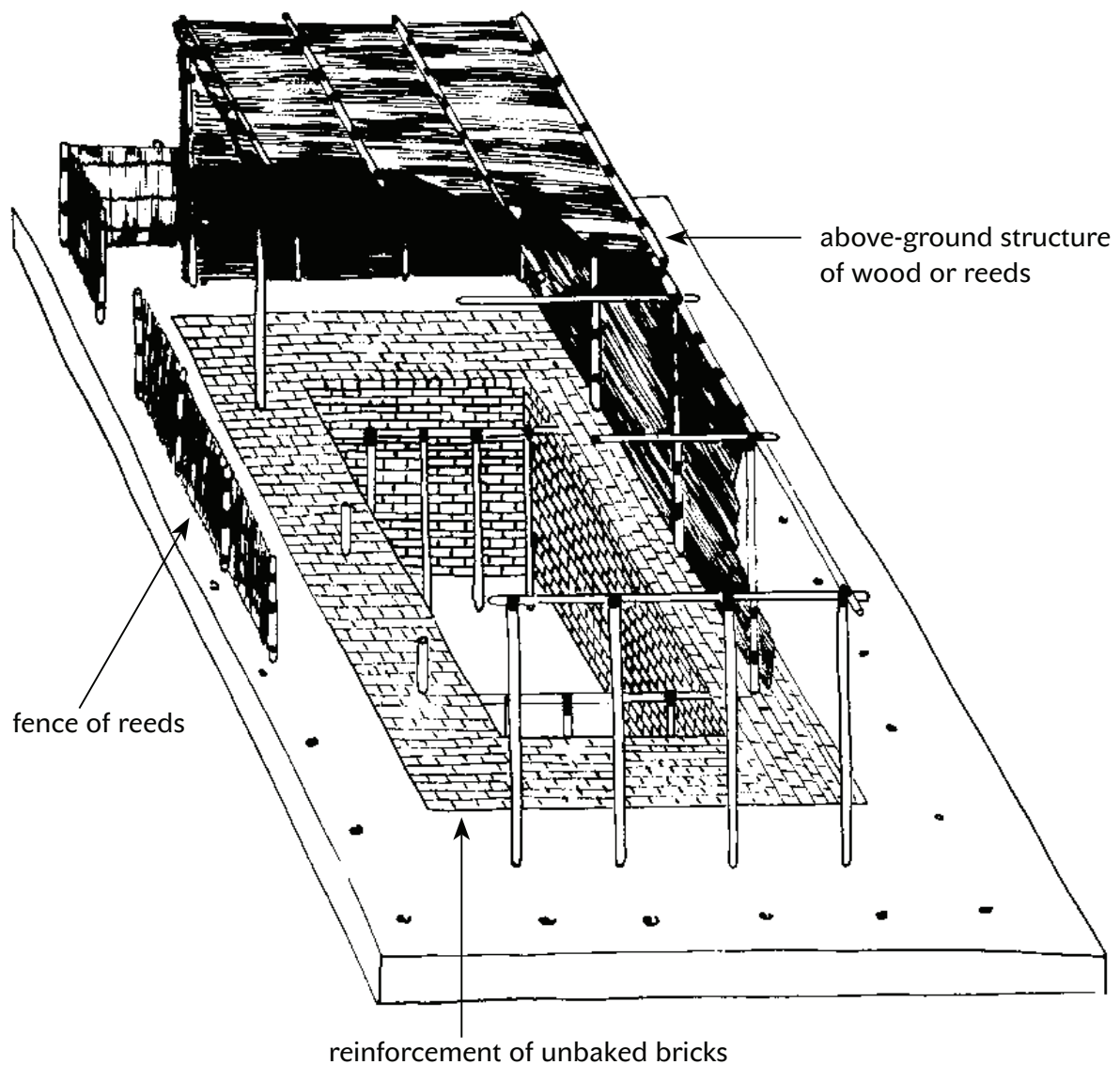


Fig. 9 A reconstruction of a prehistoric Egyptian tomb resembling tomb 23 from Hierakonpolis.

cut from silex were found in the charred layer in this structure. We might legitimately ask if this is proof of a form of ritual “made timeless,” familiar to us from other sites and from buried animals in other elite parts of burial sites (Heliopolis in Lower Egypt). Other finds here included the top of an ivory club, arrowheads and a human neck bone with a deep cut.

It seems that this primary burial site of the Hieraconpolis elite was not left in peace. The wooden above-ground structure of tomb no. 23 caught on fire and the sculpture, possibly belonging to the deceased laid to rest in it, was intentionally broken into tiny pieces.

Later, sometime after 3300 BC, the Egyptian elite began using vast brick tombs in the southern part of the site. Dozens of vessels holding supplies for the deceased’s afterlife were found in these tombs. Here we find renowned tomb no. 100 ($5.85 \times 2.85 \times 1.50$ meters) decorated with murals depicting ships, hunting scenes, a battle scene and victory in it – all of which were subjects that the pharaonic administration later adopted for its symbolism. Weapons, jewelry, objects made from precious metals and imported lithic raw materials were also found in the tomb. At that time, the facades of the brick structures served to divide in regular spatial intervals the niches that would later become a permanent feature of Egyptian architecture. This development ended with the advent of large funeral structures, hundreds of meters in size, consisting of the tomb’s own space and a rectangular courtyard where commemorative ceremonies were held. It is entirely possible that animals and even people were sacrificed here, though these events were becoming scarcer at the end of the rule of the First Dynasty of Ancient Egypt.

Sometime during this period similar funerary architecture returned to the original elite burial grounds. This was most likely done intentionally to establish a bond with the momentous funerary structures of their predecessors. It seems that Hieraconpolis was not the only place where this occurred. The intentional link to the customs of ancient predecessors went so far that they began to make red pottery with black borders and ancient animal themes reappeared in art. The pre-dynastic Hieraconpolis temple, already standing in the desert at that time, was reconstructed. The Hieraconpolis of the Egyptian pharaohs was moved under the Nile’s steep rocky cliffs, to the fluvial plain.

“SIMPLE” EGYPTIANS

In addition to these burial grounds of the Egyptian elite, excavations have revealed a large number of buried Egyptians clearly not belonging to the ruling class [10]. Prehistoric Hieraconpolis has provided us with several such burial sites. The remains of the deceased are buried here in a crouched position with their heads pointing to the south and facing west. Their bodies were often wrapped in linen, a reed blanket or a goat or gazelle pelt. They were also protected by slabs made of hard materials such as baked clay. The deceased here were buried with ornaments, tools, weapons and vessels – sometimes they were even laid to rest in large containers used as coffins. The vessels often contained food provisions for the final journey – bread, beer, gruel or fruit. Impressive red pottery with a black border was found here along with weapons made of flint or metal, metal tools (e.g. needles or fishing tackle), cosmetics, such as the aforementioned make-up palettes, and ivory objects. The deceased received sea shells and steatite beads as ornaments, as well as ground malachite green used as make-up. Flint knives and daggers were also found, sometimes attached to wooden handles and kept in leather sheathes. Excavations also revealed objects made of bone, horn, ivory or of hard or rare types of stone. It is worth pointing out that women of advanced age usually received the most valuable funerary objects. In Hieraconpolis, one of these matrons was buried with four vessels, bird-shaped greywacke cosmetic palettes, a “toilet bag” of sorts, a basket with stone amulets, a comb and needles made of bone, make-up and scented fabrics. Wrapping the body in linen filled with resin may have come from the need to preserve the human body as long as possible and probably represented the first step toward mummification. We also find here the aforementioned evidence of a cut neck or decapitation. The remains of some twenty bodies of men and women ranging in age

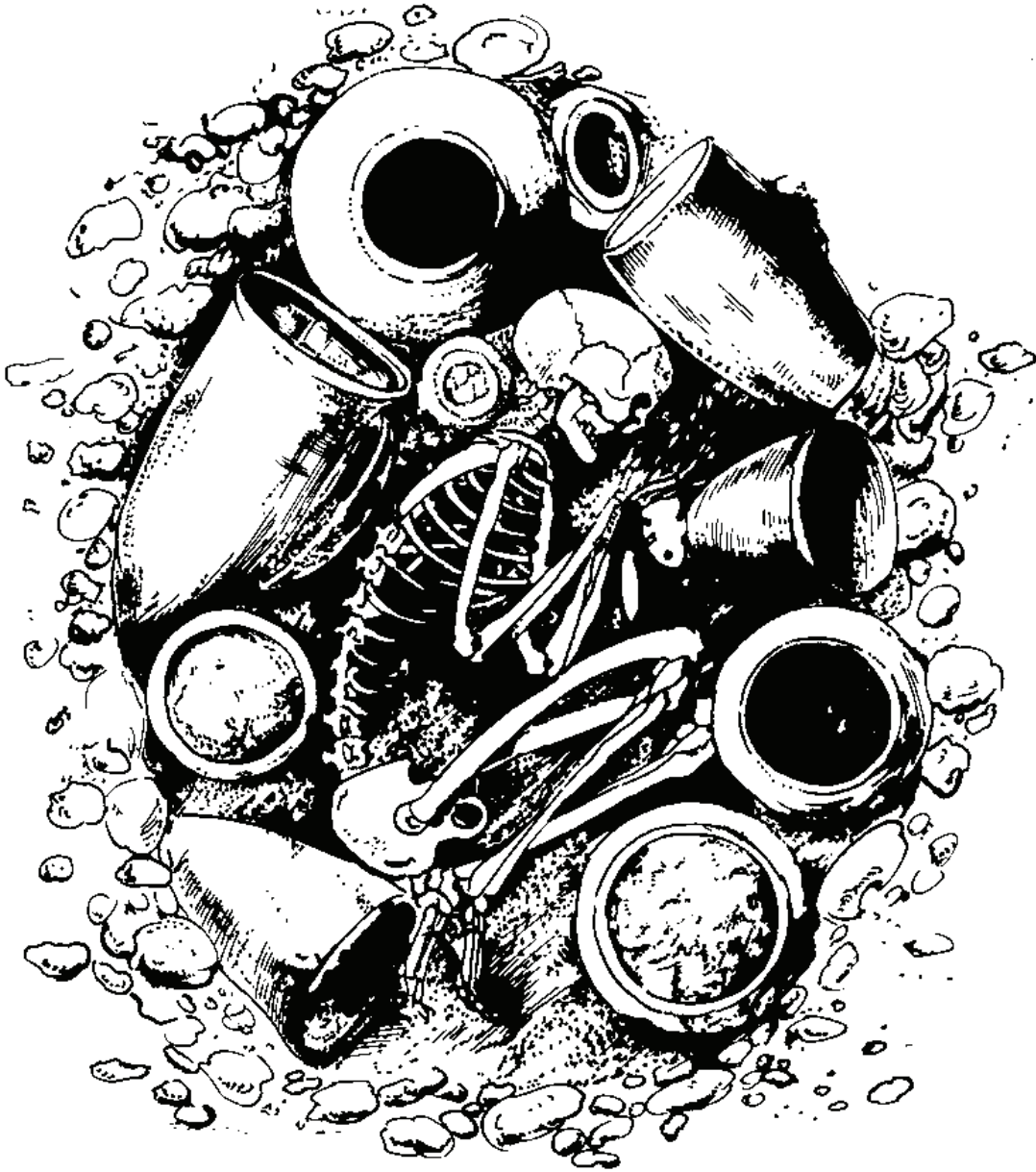


Fig. 10 This is what Egyptian graves looked like during the period immediately preceding the creation of the state: a grave from the El-Amra, Naqada II period (latter third of the 4th millenium BC).

from 16 to 65 years were found at the Hieraconpolis burial site with 470 graves.

Among them were the bodies of five young men whose skulls bear subtle cuts as if from scalping. As mentioned above, we will decide here between the testimonies of some of the earliest forms of the Osiris myth or the desire to preserve the place of the human being's immortal component among the living. The find of a row of bones and skulls in

tomb T5 at the Naqada burial site points to the considerable significance ascribed to the human collective.³² This clearly evokes the idea of human solidarity enduring in a mythical, enlightened “afterlife” just as it did during the individual’s earthly life. Community members using the burial ground here were, therefore, as in Neolithic Asia, a collective both of living people and of those who had already departed for the afterlife.

³² Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň – Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 16.

THE DAWN OF THE EGYPTIAN WRITING SYSTEM³³

Ancient Egyptians created a writing system composed of figural symbols written in rows or columns. The writing generally reads from right to left, but monumental inscriptions might read from left to right. The direction of the writing is always given by the fact that the figurative symbols look in the direction of the text's starting point. The writing could essentially run in any direction, just not up and down. The system is based on an association of graphic symbols and of sounds of the spoken language joined on the principle of rebus and charades. The image of a goose, pronounced *sa* in Egyptian, sounds the same as the expression for son, *sa*. This is why the term "son" is written in hieroglyphics as a symbol depicting a goose.

The oldest Egyptian writing possesses a relatively transparent nature of image-coded information, yielding relevant information through a mix of icons, indexes and symbols, providing in unclear cases sound (or image) references on the principle of rebus and charades. For example, a square with the name of a pharaoh designated AB has human hands and holds a club in one of them. The pharaoh clubs a bound captive, who is designated XY [11]. Interpretation: pharaoh AB is victorious over the land XY.

Hieroglyphs are divided into two categories: those carrying meaning and those carrying sound. Originally, the individual symbols most likely stood for whole words and were read as such. Later, however, most of the signs represented sounds with a single consonant (and

³³ See Christopher Eyre and John Baines, Interactions between Orality and Literacy in Ancient Egypt, in: K. Schousboe and M. T. Larsen (ed.), Literacy and Society, Center for Research in the Humanities, Copenhagen University, København, Akademisk Forlag 1989, p. 91–119. Also see David Wengrow, The Archaeology of Early Egypt – Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC, Cambridge – New York – Melbourne – Madrid – Cape Town – Singapore – Sao Paulo, Cambridge University Press 2006, pp. 198–207.

probably also a vowel, but those were not written). In some cases, signs stood for sounds with two or even three vowels.

This writing system is sometimes supplemented by phonetic complements that can provide, for clarity's sake, a sound that contains a read word and thereby determines which word is meant.

Hieroglyphs also feature ideograms, pictographic symbols determining the conceptual sphere that the word belongs to. A picture of a person indicates that the concept relates to a human being; a picture of a circular enclosure inscribed with a cruciform signifies that a city is being spoken of; a picture of a pyramid on a plinth tell us that the writ-

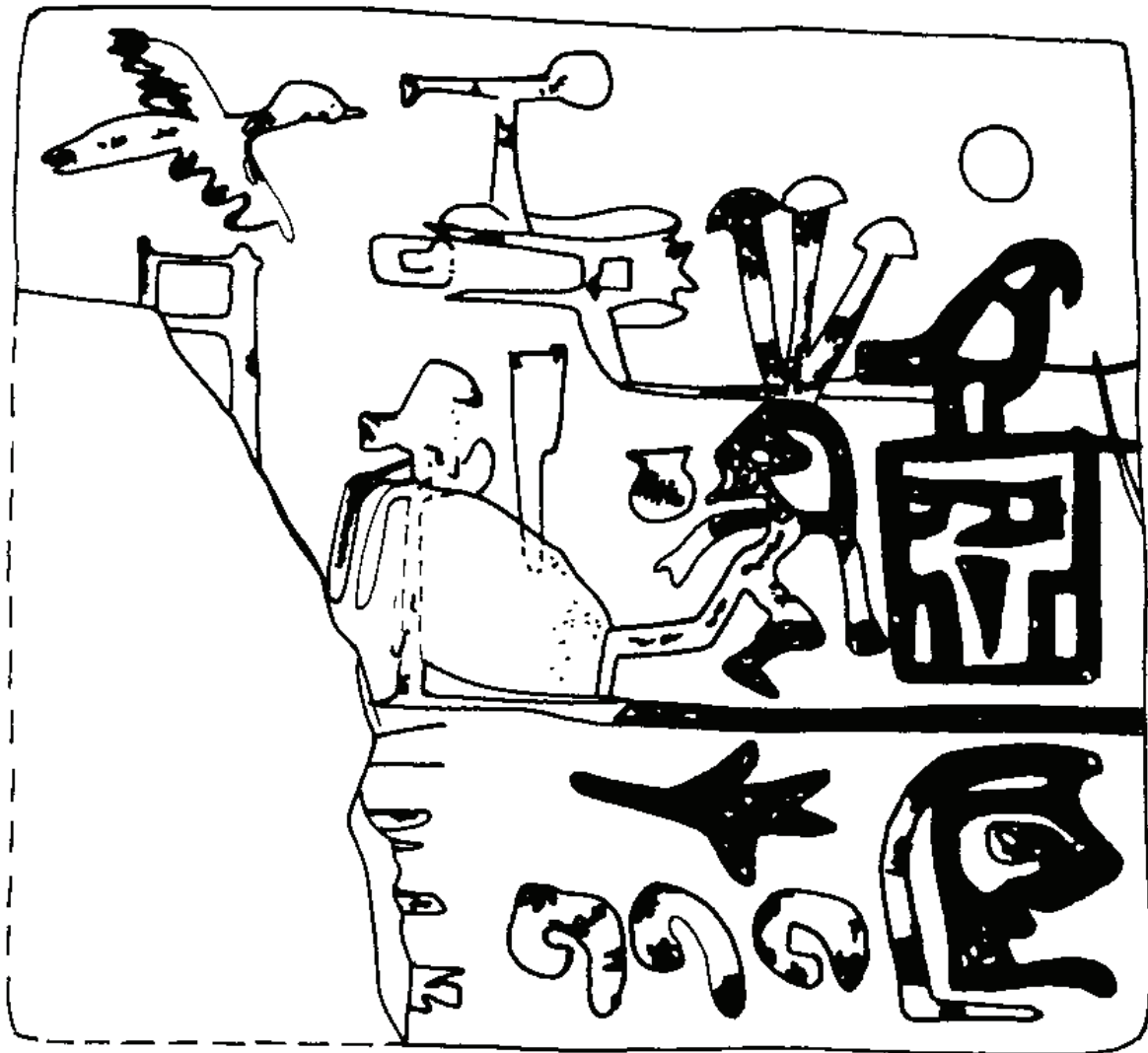


Fig. 11 Ivory tag with depiction of the Pharaoh Narmer's victory over his enemies. One of the signs with which the pharaoh's name is written wields a club and clutches the hair of a kneeling captive. On the right part of the upper row of the tag we see the pharaoh's name in a small frame representing the front of the royal palace (serekh). 3200–3100 BC.

ing has to do with a pyramid complex. A single sound (homophone) can be written with different symbols, while a single symbol can be used to capture different sounds (polyphones). Hieroglyphic script as such is extremely heterogeneous. One and the same symbol can either represent an entire word or, instead, can act as a phonetic component in writing by using symbols capturing speech sounds. This writing system apparently emerged over the course of the 4th millennium BC, as indicated by symbols cut into pottery of the first and second Naqada periods (ca. 3800–3200 BC). Further examination is needed to determine the extent to which this was inspired by the primitive cuneiform script noticed on the stamp from tomb U-153 in Abydos (NAGAR site, Tell Brak in Syria).

One of the oldest samples of Egyptian script comes from Abydos tombs, dating back to ca. 3300 BC. Vessels from the U-j tomb there bear ink writing most likely indicating names of the estates from which supplies of goods stored in the vessels originated.³⁴ These are probably different locations within the Abydos surroundings.

Writing on papyrus has not been preserved from the most ancient times; it has only been found on pottery and on pieces of wood, bone, ivory, stone and clay. Palettes, club heads and weights have also been found to have writing on them. Writing from this period has been discovered on stone vessels and cylinder seals, while the oldest writing was found inscribed on rock faces exposed to the elements.

Egyptian script evolved into the first meaningful messages created at around the establishment of a united state shortly before 3000 BC. A combination of direct depictions of an act or event, its symbolic expression (e.g. clubbing an opponent as a symbol of victory) and actual written messages points here to the mixed nature of a system of graphic symbols that still cannot fully rely on a system of fixed characters with set phonetic values. The entire writing system did, however, stabilize at the very beginning of the Old Kingdom, ca. 2700–2600 BC. The Egyptians themselves called their script the “words of the gods” and its symbols “pictures.” The same word was used to refer to a scribe and artist.

³⁴ See Jane A. Hill, *Cylinder Seal Glyptic in Predynastic Egypt and Neighboring Regions*, Oxford, Archaeopress 2004, p. 15.

During the New Kingdom some 800 hieroglyphic symbols were used, while 24 phonetic-like symbols were available. The multivalence of this script, suiting its esoteric nature and utilized by the tight circle of rulers, was maintained until the very end of the script's existence in Late Antiquity. Egyptian scribes then developed at the dawn of the 3rd millennium a simplified, cursive script called hieratic (priestly) for the common needs of everyday registration records.

The even freer Demotic ("popular") script emerged in the 7th century BC. In the Hellenistic period, the Egyptian language began to use Greek upper-case characters supplemented by seven symbols adopted from Demotic script. This resulted in the creation of the Coptic script, which is still used today.

Most of Egypt's ancient documents are official notices written by pharaohs who used them to record facts relevant to their rule. More often than not, they were of a religious nature. In many cases, not only have sacred writings to honor the gods been preserved, records on royal military campaigns and sometimes even a form of "ethnographic report" on newly discovered lands have survived. Given the binding nature of the royal titulature's wording and of the phraseology of inscriptions, the writing on Egypt's monuments possesses a high level of consistency and repetition. Ninety percent of all Egyptian texts allegedly adhere to a standard formula. The widespread Egyptian custom to remove the names of individuals who had committed some offence, or whose remembrance had simply become undesirable, attests to the active use of such monuments for cult purposes. Such cases of *damnatio memoriae* most frequently appear in connection with the "Heretic Pharaoh" Akhenaten, worshipper of the sun god Aten (1353–1335 BC). Yet this appeared in many cases, both before and after.

The Egyptian historian and priest Manethon (or Manetho, lived under the Hellenistic rulers during the Ptolemaic dynasty, 321–246 BC) can also be mentioned within Egyptian culture. He promoted the cult of the syncretic divinity of the Dionysian and healing nature of Serapis, but is remembered mostly as the author of a work on the history of Egypt written in Greek. This work drew heavily on original Egyptian records and he divided the rulers of Egypt into thirty dynasties – a classification still used today.

THE BIRTH OF THE EGYPTIAN STATE

In contrast to the other centers of early statehood, Egypt offers us a unique monument of art that practically captures the very instance of this key moment in history. This is the famous Narmer Palette found in the late 19th century in the Main Deposit of the Temple of Horus in Hieraconpolis and probably stored there sometime in 1400 BC [12].

This monument dates back to the times of the Egyptian state's establishment by the pharaoh Narmer, also called Menes or even Hor-Aha, around 3000 BC. Narmer, standing victorious over rows of decapitated corpses, is presented here as the one responsible for the ritual massacre of his enemies. Assuming the form of a bull, he blasts through the fortification of the enemy's city, while his servants tame two mythical animals with the bodies and heads of lions and the necks of snakes – perhaps symbols of hostile chaos.

The god Horus personally takes part in the scene of the massacre and, on the other side, the goddess Hathor observes another scene of the enemy's destruction. Here an unknown ancient Egyptian writer presents the pharaoh's basic duties with regards to honoring the gods, ritual and war.

The Main Deposit from the Temple of Horus at Hieraconpolis also revealed a more peaceful role of the royal office, perhaps linked to the king's responsibility for the fecundity and fertility of the land and its people. In addition to the Narmer Palette and the club head of King Narmer's club, the deposit also held the club head of King Scorpion (derived from the symbol used to write his name). This club head features a picture of the king performing what is probably an agricultural ritual.³⁵

³⁵ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň, Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 19.

From today's research perspective, however, the Narmer Palette is not a preface, but an epilogue to the construction of the ancient Egyptian state. Inscriptions with Narmer's name are found all over Egypt and in Palestine. It seems that the ideas for statehood came from Upper Egypt, and that Lower Egypt, a typical "buffer zone" wedged between the ambitions of Upper Egypt and continental rulers, had no choice but to join in. Abydos, Hieraconpolis and perhaps even Naqada were most likely the earliest centers of Upper Egypt that the pharaohs' dominion arose from. We will probably never know what their mutual relations were like and whether they indeed divvied up "spheres of influence" and expansion directions – Abydos to the north and Hieraconpolis to the south. The extent to which the painted decoration of tomb No. 100 from Abydos dated to this period – a flotilla of ships, people with emblems of power (a staff and whip), battle, hunting and ritual scenes – truly depicts the ideology of the conquering forces of Lower Egypt's rulers is still unclear. Monuments from some of the Abydos tombs indeed depict throngs of captives, the transport

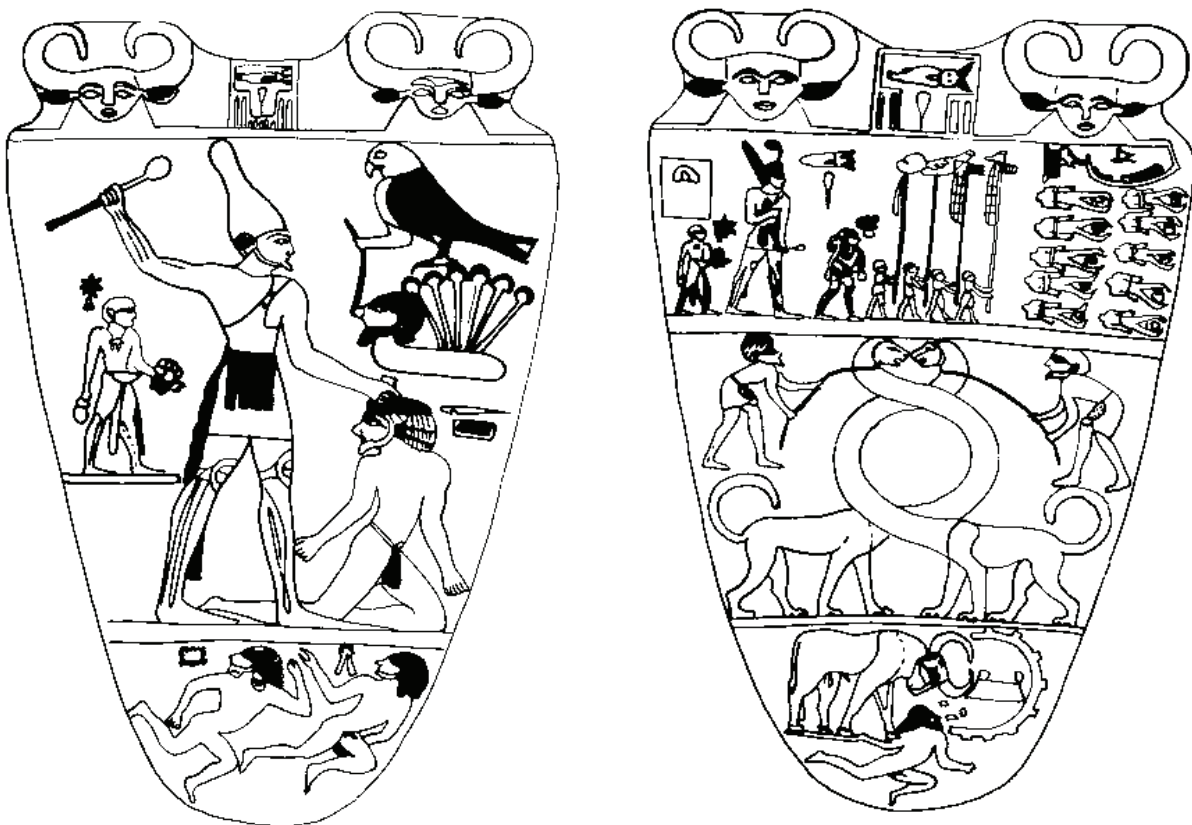


Fig. 12 The Narmer Palette.

of goods and herding of livestock. The “seepage” of Upper Egyptian-Naqada culture northward, to Lower Egypt, starting in the latter third of the 4th millennium BC, also remains a question: Was this a matter of colonization or occupation? Or did it have something to do with cultural assimilation and the ensuing absorption? Many questions arise and few have been answered. It seems that, to a certain extent, Lower Egypt followed the pace of Upper Egypt’s social development: Even before King Narmer’s times, rulers with animal names appeared in the delta lands. Inscriptions of a king named Crocodile found in Tarkhan offer an example of this.

In any case, the important thing is that at the dawn of the united Egyptian state’s history a new capital city also arose in Lower Egypt. At the time it was called *Inebou Hedjou* (translated as “the white walls”), later acquiring the name Memphis. It was situated at present-day Sakkara, south of Cairo.³⁶

The pharaoh did not own land at the dawn of Egyptian history. He and his court lived off the taxes paid by the population and, in particular, off the livestock tax levied every two years.³⁷

The Egyptian pharaoh was, above all, a spiritual and religious official. In performing rituals, he essentially connected with the gods and became a god himself. In doing so, he was able to summon the essential moments of creation and of the universe’s configuration, and over time became one with the sun god.³⁸

Egypt’s ruler took over from his predecessor and father, the creator god (most often the falcon-god Horus), the obligation to take care of the world and maintain its life and order [13]. Given his origin, he shared the “divine spirit,” the power to revitalize all beings in the name of *ka*, and was thus “consubstantial” with divine beings, but also with the generations of previous rulers. He was then worthy of divine reverence, since he performed his duty in bringing together individual

³⁶ Kateřina Postupová, *Počátky kontaktu Egypta a Předního Východu* (Early contact between Egypt and the Near East), B.A. thesis, Plzeň, West Bohemian University in Plzeň, Faculty of Arts 2007, p. 21.

³⁷ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 72.

³⁸ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 59.

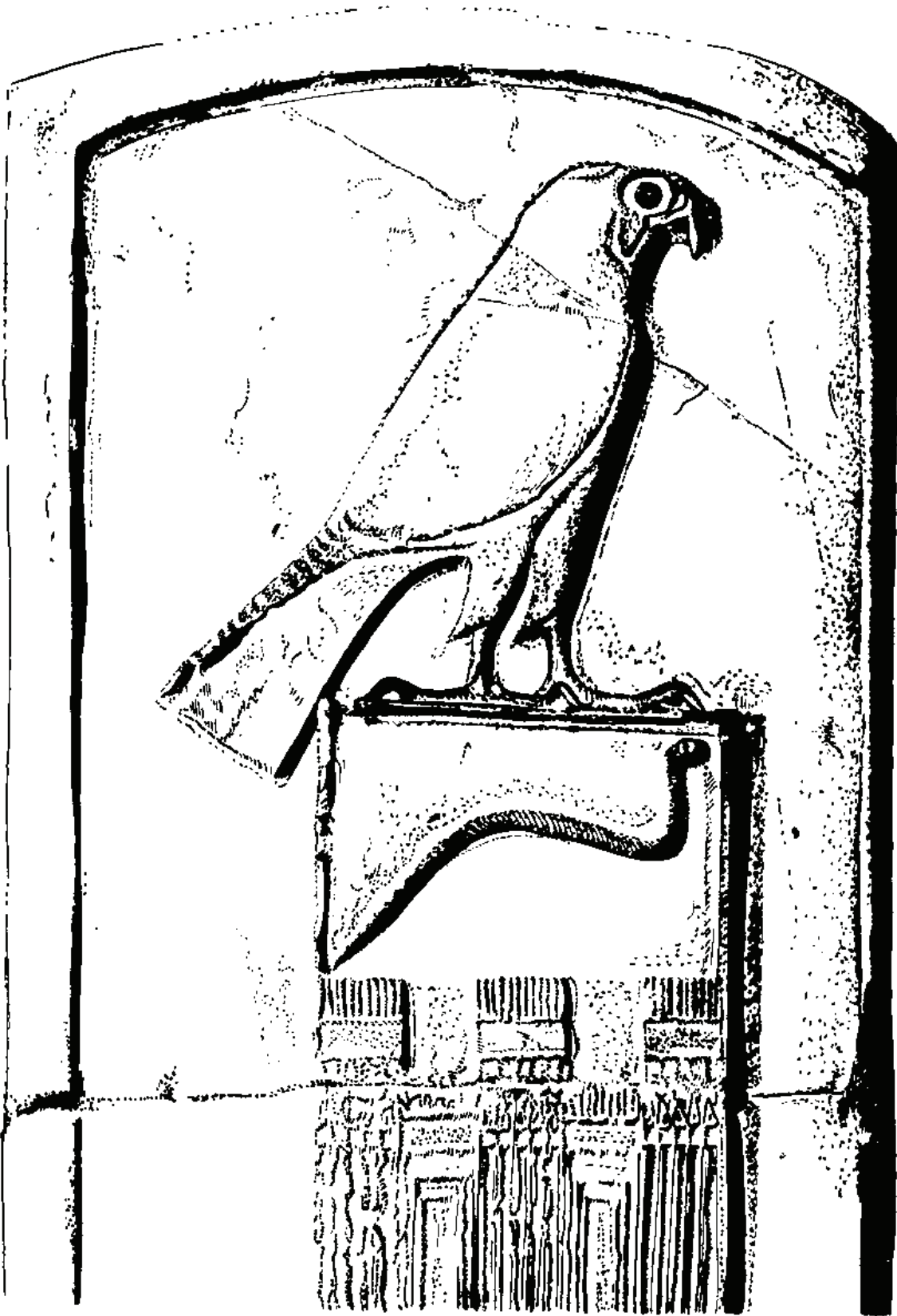


Fig. 13 Stela of the pharaoh of the 1st dynasty of Djet (2900–2800 BC). Above: a representation of the royal palace, over which a serpent indicated the ruler's name. The sculptor depicted the god Horus in his falcon form.

human beings and creating a community of them. He was responsible for their lives and was nothing less than the *ka* of his people.³⁹ The royal *ka* carried enormous significance in Egypt. He was responsible for the fertility of the soil, animals and people, for the people's lives and for the way the world was.⁴⁰

The sense and meaning of the myth of Egyptian society, i.e. the story of righteous Osiris, loyal Isis, the treacherous Set and the brave Horus are evidently based on this idea. Osiris, the ruler of Egypt, was murdered by his evil brother Set, who cut up the latter's body into pieces so that Osiris could never return to this world. Set thus unjustly stripped his brother of and took over his royal *ka*.

Yet Osiris' wife, the loyal Isis, gathered up all the pieces of her husband and magically brought him back to life, and they then conceived their son Horus. The mother was able to raise her son, who grew into a brave man and revenged his father by killing Set in a fight. In doing so, he assumed possession of the royal *ka* that had originally belonged to Osiris and had subsequently been stolen by Set. He thus gave his father the gift of life and became the rightful ruler and, consequently, the source of life, fertility and bliss for Egyptians.⁴¹

These myths evidently formed the ideological basis of the pharaoh's power and social position in the public life of ancient Egypt.

³⁹ Jiří Janák, Chapter 105 of *Kniha mrtvých v období Nové říše – Staroegyptské pojetí vzkříšení* (The book of the dead during the New Empire – the Ancient Egyptian concept of resurrection), doctoral dissertation, Prague, Charles University in Prague, the Hussite Theological Faculty, Religious Studies Department 2002, p. 33., p. 36.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 37.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 38 and p. 178.

STABILIZATION OF THE EARLY EGYPTIAN STATE

Altogether fundamental – and irrevocable – changes for the history of the land occurred quickly after that, during the so-called archaic or early dynastic period (ca. 2920–2575 BC). It was then that the rulers of a united Egypt, the pharaohs, achieved economic independence, lording over numerous “state estates,” agricultural operations scattered throughout the land that delivered their crop to the ruler.

In the political sphere, the pharaohs rid themselves of “significant” competitors, individuals of higher social status whom we know little about and with whom they still had to share public support in the period around 3000 BC.⁴² It is probably at this time that we find proof of the division of Egypt into administrative territories – nomes – with 20 and 22 in Lower and Upper Egypt, respectively.

Finally, it is in the spiritual sphere that creators of that period attributed to the pharaohs a fundamental importance in this world. The gods were believed to have created a sacred order in creating the world (*maat* in ancient Egyptian), preconceiving the proper and just arrangement of things of the visible world. The pharaoh, who according to Egyptian doctrine was in the individual parts of his being “consubstantial” both with the gods and his people, came to this world to carry out this divine order and to stifle the forces of evil and chaos. Nobody was to oppose him since he had been invested with authority from the highest places. All of these changes probably came to an end the moment the architect Imhotep built the first known step pyramid for his master, the pharaoh Djoser (2630–2611 BC), in present-day Saqqara.

⁴² Peter Kaplony, “Rollsiegel”, in: *Lexikon der Egyptologie*, vol. V, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz 1983, pp. 294–300, mainly pp. 294–295.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY EGYPTIAN STATE

Let us now briefly take a look at the information available on how early Egyptian state administration was run at this time.⁴³

Egypt's ruling structure consisted of three basic pillars – the pharaoh and his court, the state's economic administration and governance of the nomes.

It was around this time that the private property of the pharaoh and of his family was separated from the strictly state property that formed an economic requisite for the pharaoh's office. Among the pharaoh's personal property were craft shops (stonecutters) and sources of mineral resources (stone quarries for the manufacturing of vessels). The royal court, the first public institution in the land, was from the mid-2nd Dynasty managed by an official, often translated as a "vizier," on orders of the ruler. The vizier organized the work of experts in precisely defined areas and that of individuals with more generally defined authorities. They were primarily "courtiers" in the broader sense of the word, or valets. We know that one of them took part in supplying a certain temple and, therefore, had administrative duties involving redistribution. Also belonging to this group were "those in the court (palace)," masters of ceremonies tending to the sacred royal insignia, crowns, robes and the king's personal jewelry. Records were found from this period on the existence of a "solar barge," a boat for the deceased pharaoh to use on his journey to the heavens.

⁴³ I am drawing here from Petra Vlíčková's study *Kamenné nádoby s nápisy – Prameny k poznání správního systému Raně Dynastického Egypta* (Stone vessels with inscriptions – Sources for understanding the administrative system of Early Dynastic Egypt), in: Lubica Obuchová, Petr Charvát (edd.), *Stát a státnost ve starém orientu* (The state and statehood in the ancient Orient), a set of studies by the group "Man and the Landscape in History," Prague, The Czech Oriental Society 2006, pp. 8–25.

The main source of income from the pharaoh's court consisted of revenue from the royal domains (larger farming complexes) and the individual estates. Along with their production functions, they also served as fiscal bodies since the taxes and contributions levied by the ruler on the subjects were concentrated in them. All the royal authority's income was delivered by the payers to the pharaoh's treasury, a kind of "ministry of finance."

The central treasury could also have had regional branches. Part of the treasury consisted of a supply division, perhaps an executive agency in charge of redistributing certain contributions.

Egypt's ruling administration was also subject to judicial proceedings carried out by tribunals and specially designated officials.

Much of the executive power was in the hands of the governors of Upper and Lower Egypt and of the administrators of the various regions (nomes). Lands beyond Egypt's borders that were subject to the pharaoh's rule were governed by "foreign-land protectors."

We find the situation regarding religious cult institutions and their relations to pharaonic rule to be somewhat chaotic. Besides state-wide cults, there were local (or regional) cults, which, however, we have less information on. It was apparently the royal workshops that supplied the liturgical furnishings or at least some of its components to the temples. The pharaoh's warehouses also supplied sanctuaries, their personnel and even their stockrooms with foodstuffs. We also know of the "domains" of the various deities, without having to answer the question whether this was property obtained independently by the temple or assigned to it for use by the ruling administration. Cult personnel included, above all, priests carrying out funeral ceremonies and dealing with the pharaoh's mortuary cult. There were other clergy members whom we know only by title. Important temples were led by high priests.

ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT¹⁰⁵

Northern China is characterized by mountainous land in the west, with flat alluvial plains spreading out in the east from the foothills to the Shandong Peninsula and northeast Manchuria. Right about in the middle of this area we find the Ordos Plateau, north of which, beyond China's borders, lies Mongolia and the Gobi Desert. Southern China is hidden in the shadows of the giant Himalayan Mountains, whose foothills extend all the way to Chinese territory. The precipitation that this massif attracts provides most of the waters to the main Chinese rivers. The Yangtze's basin, extremely mountainous in the western part, is distinguished by numerous natural lakes [40].

The Tropic of Cancer traverses Taiwan and China's coast to the north of Hong Kong.

China's axis consists of two large rivers flowing from west to east and emptying into the Sea of China: the Huang He (Yellow River) in the north and Yangtze River in the south. The Huang He is 4,840 km long and flows through the plains in the northern flatlands, emptying into the Yellow Sea to the north of the Shandong Peninsula. The Yangtze first meanders through the massifs of southwest China then travels 6,380 km before emptying into the East China Sea.

¹⁰⁵ This following books provided the information base for this chapter: Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001; David N. Keightley (ed.), *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press 1983; Jakub Maršálek, *Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 BC) na území provincie Shandong* (Social analysis of late Neolithic burial remains (ca. 3000–2000 BC) of the Shandong Province), doctoral distertation, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institution of the Far East (department: The History and Culture of Asian and African Countries, adviser: Prof. PhDr. Oldřich Král), June 2003; Yang Yang et Zhao Guayan, *Culture de la Chine – L'archéologie*, Beijing: Editions en Langues étrangères 2003, as well as Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005.

The geological foundation of northern China's plains consists of immense, wind-blown layers of loess. River and stream beds are often recessed in this loess, frequently bearing layers of fertile black soil. These beds are very susceptible to the erosion process, especially following ancient deforestation, to the effects of wind and to the summer monsoon rains.

There is an abundance of loess matter in the river water that often settles in the riverbeds, causing them to clog up and resulting in catastrophic floods and the unexpected redirection of river currents. In southern China, on the contrary, most of the soil comes from diluvium.

Northern China is characterized by an oceanic climate that mainly prevails in areas in close proximity to the Yellow Sea. The winters are mild here, while summers are not overly sweltering and rain falls frequently throughout the year. An inland climate prevails in the western part with a hot and damp summer (30–35 °C) and cold winter (around 0 °C). The rains here are not overly profuse, but it is enough for farmers to grow crops without artificial irrigation.

China features a uniquely remarkable biotope of vegetation from north to south, representing nearly all species of plants from a subarctic to a temperate and even subtropical zone. Its northern-most region consists of subarctic taiga, composed mainly of pine, hemlock, birch and poplar. Manchuria in northeast China represents a region of mixed and deciduous forests, while Mongolia to the northwest has steppe features, and we even find desert land toward the western border of China. The land's complexion south of the Huang He River is made up of deciduous trees, lakes, wetlands and low hill country. Steppe-forest land stretches out south of there. South China then surprises with damp subtropical evergreen forests. The zone of dense monsoon rainforests originally spread along the coast of the Sea of China and extended west to Myanmar (Burma), and even to northeast India. Yet China's geography also offers steppe, cold deserts and high mountain vegetation.

PREHISTORIC BEGINNINGS: “MESOLITHIC-NEOLITHIC” – HUNTERS, GATHERERS AND FARMERS

Chinese archeologists discovered the first cultures of this type, dating back to the 6th millenium BC, at the lower part of the Yellow River (Huang He); the Cishan site in the Hebei province is the most renowned of these. In contrast to present-day climatic conditions, an examination of found animal bones tells us that a subtropical climate prevailed here in the 6th millenium BC. This undoubtedly facilitated the search for food by people that lived here at that time. They most likely moved in an environment of deciduous forests and swampy river valleys.

The people living here at that time were mainly hunters and gatherers (hares, moles, monkeys, badger, civet, leopards, sika deer, various other types of deer, muntjac, wild cattle, wild pigs, wild geese, carp, turtles and shellfish). The hunters here would frequently stalk deer in the shady forests.

We know that chestnuts, hazelnuts and hackberries were among the foods gathered. Farmers apparently focused on cultivating one kind of millet.

It appears that the people had tamed dogs and even domesticated pigs. They may have even begun the domestication of fowl – roosters, hens and chickens.

The clay here was used to make pottery baked at low temperatures and decorated with ornaments that were either impressed with a comb or string, or were painted. Handmade stone tools included sickle blades, grinders for plant food and long and thin diggers.

The remnants of settlement activities is represented here by a total of 80 pits of various shape, round and square, some of which are over 5-m deep. They were found to contain an abundant residue of cereals, consisting of one kind of millet. Apparently, this was already grown as a cultivated crop (*Setaria italica*) at this time.

Clay figurines of pigs also appeared in this period.

It was only after 5000 BC that Chinese history produced its first Neolithic culture complex, now called Yangshao (ca. 5000–3000 BC) with the bearers of this culture mainly occupying the area of the central part of the Yellow River.

Yangshao agriculture, namely the cultivation of the millet species *Setaria italica* and *Panicum miliaceum*, provided these people with basic subsistence.

Digging sticks, hoes and spades were used to cultivate the soil. The harvested cereal was kept in storage vessels made of pottery, and food was prepared using stone grinders.

Herdsmen raised dogs and pigs, and less frequently cattle, sheep and goats.

The Yangshao people also supplemented their diet with chestnuts, hazelnuts and hackberries. They carried on the older hunting traditions

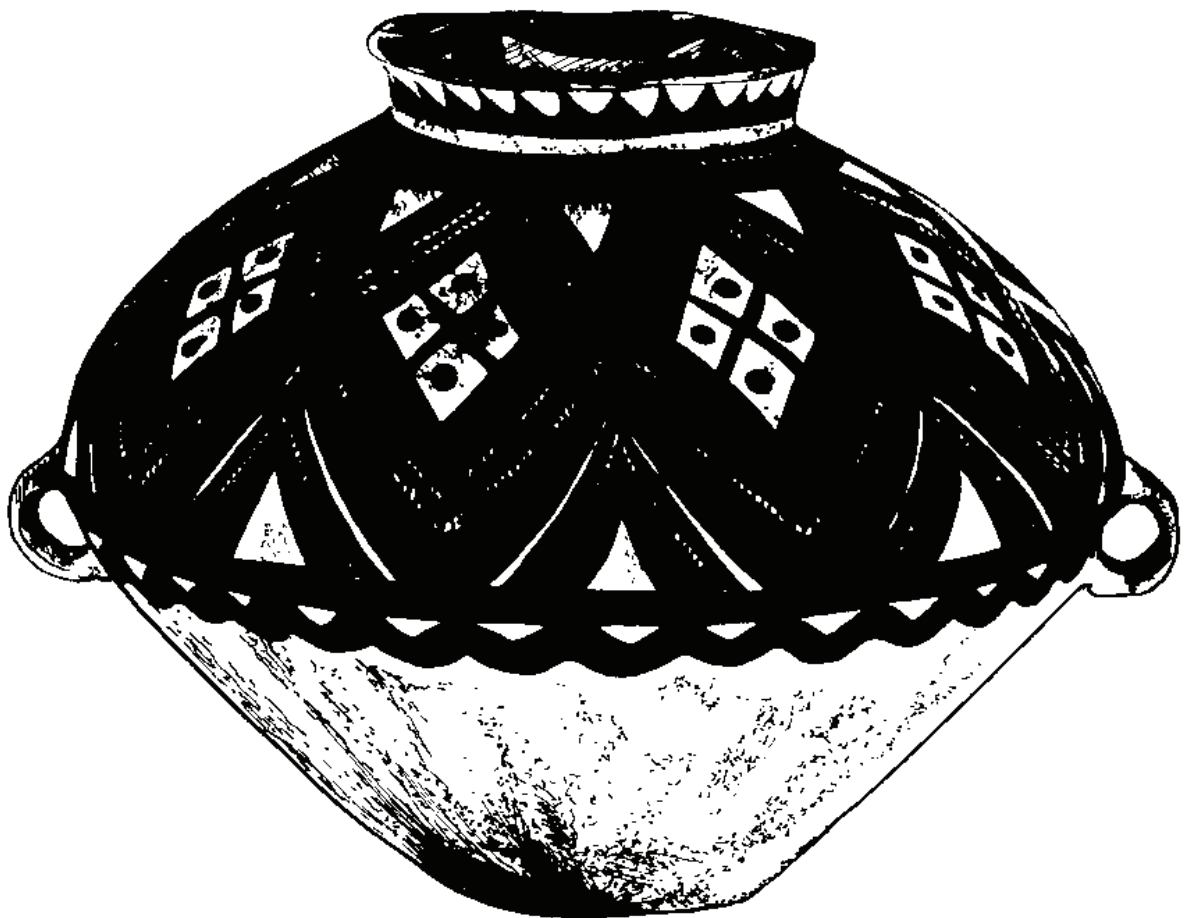


Fig. 42 Painted pottery of the Neolithic culture of Yangshao.

and dragged or carried home bandicoots, marmots, monkeys, badgers, raccoons, foxes, bears, wild pigs, ovibovines, deer, turtles, fish, clams and snails, leopards, wild horses, rhinoceroses and antelopes.

The culture produced handmade pottery that was painted before it dried and fired in temperatures around 1000 °C and higher. Finished products included bowls, dishes, pots and bottles. Geometric elements, animal figures and human faces were among the repertoire used as painted ornament [41].

Farmers here primarily used stone to create the working parts of hoes for cultivating fields.

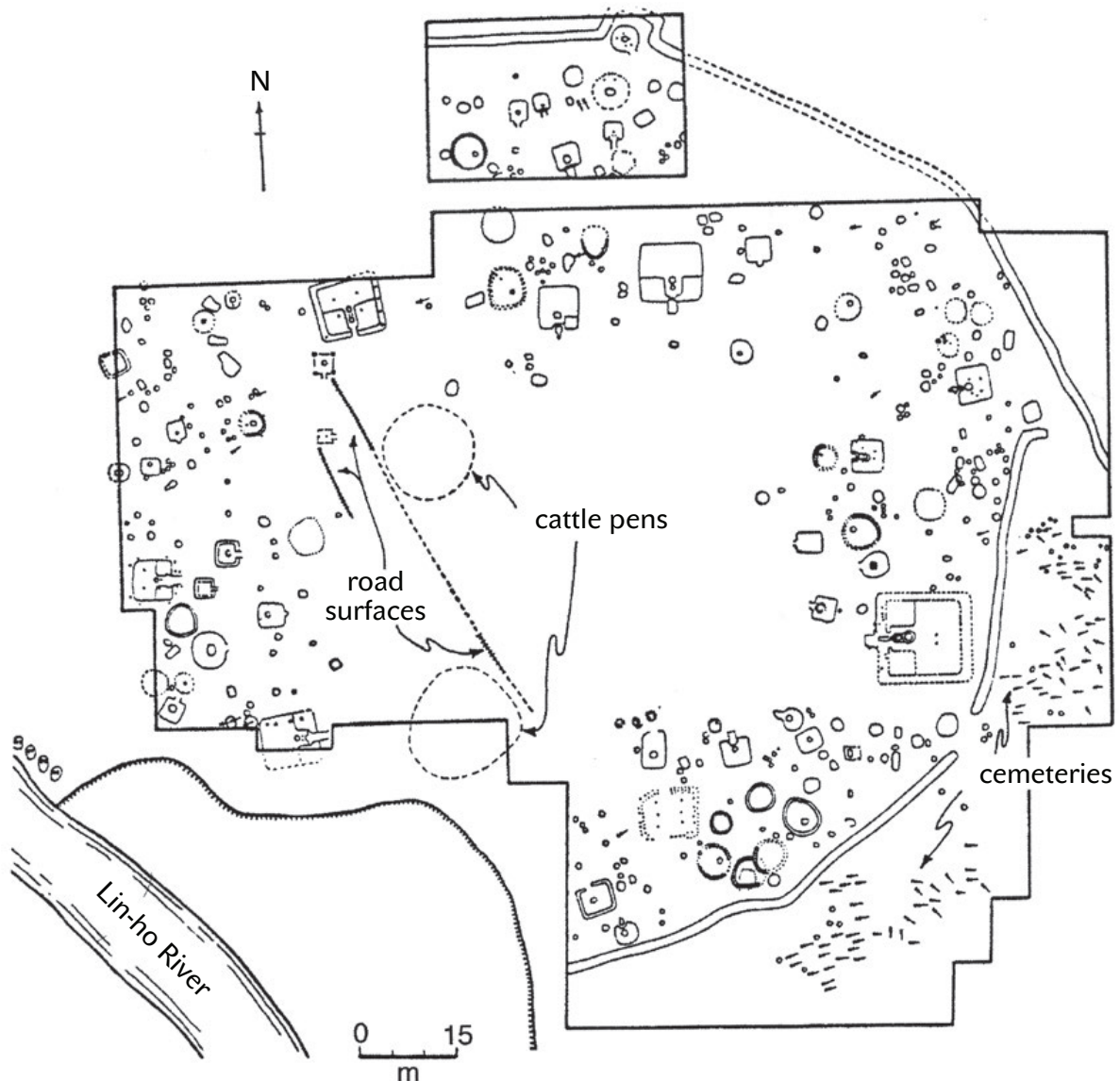


Fig. 43 A map showing the layout of the Neolithic village of Jiangzhai of the Yangshao culture.

Primitive metal tools even appeared in later phases of Yangshao cultures.

The bearers of this culture complex usually chose loess terraces over riverbanks. As it seems that the bearers of the Yangshao culture complex practiced shifting cultivation, villages probably did not remain too long in one place. These villages were usually about 50,000–60,000 m² in size.

The Jiangzhai site in northeast China provides a nice example of a Chinese Neolithic village [42].

This site consists of approximately 100 dwellings accompanied by some 200 storage pits and enclosed by a moat and palisade. A common of about 4000 m² is situated in the middle of the village; cemeteries lie to the east and south beyond the village's barrier. Furnaces were concentrated in a special sector in the southwest. The square or round dwellings had sunken-featured foundations; their walls were made from an organic weave covered with clay, thatch was used for roofs and entrances faced the common. The village of Jiangzhai was composed of five residential groups, each with at least one larger building. This could be proof of five lineages, though the cemeteries had only three separate sectors. Chinese research estimates the size of the Neolithic villages to range from 5 to 100 houses with a size of 20–300 m². With five to six people per house, this would indicate the population of one village to be 200–3000 people, though 300–400 seems more likely.

An analysis of the burial grounds of Neolithic China has produced remarkable results. The Yuanjunmiao site in central China provided a total of 51 graves arranged in six rows oriented on a north-south axis. The entire cemetery was probably originally composed of an east and west half, and, based on the chronology of the material culture, it was deemed that the cemetery was gradually expanded from north to south and from east to west. Approximately two thirds of all graves were mass burials with 92% of the deceased buried in such graves. These graves usually contained a larger number of deceased – from two to twenty-five, though frequently more than four. The fact that the remains of the deceased show considerable manipulation and that, consequently, the cemetery represents an artificially constructed social work and not an objective source for interpreting the society's history is supported by

the fact that these were mainly secondary burials, i.e. bodies that were already decayed were laid to rest here.

Researchers have presented the view that the cemetery's duality could mean that there was a binary social structure – the division into two moieties – and that graves with mass burials could indicate lineage. The cemetery did not provide evidence that could be interpreted in the sense of social stratification, but it did show differences in the prestige of individuals reflected in the number of funerary objects, especially pottery. Burial of women, often with as many or even more funerary objects than their male counterparts – with beads, hairpins and knives – offer extraordinary testimony. The separate burial of two girls, laid to rest in a grave with a specially prepared bottom made of red clay, was also documented. Grave M420 provided a final resting place of a mother and her two daughters and contains the largest quantity of funerary objects of the entire culture.

This could possibly be interpreted in the sense of the matrilineality of the Chinese Neolithic.

The deceased who did not reach adulthood were often buried outside the burial ground in, for instance, containers in graves under residential buildings.

In addition to the Yangshao culture complex, the Dawenkou culture, also Neolithic, existed in the present-day coastal province of Shandong. The bearers of this culture subsisted on agriculture, namely by growing millet. The raising of livestock, mainly pigs, was supplemented by hunting (deer, hares) and fishing.

Both slow- and fast-turning potter's wheels for clay work had already appeared here in isolated cases. Potters made legged bowls, three-legged pots, kettles on three saccate legs, cups and storage vessels. Experts divide the pottery of the late Dawenkou culture into black, grey, red and white. In the culture's later phase, cups on a *bei* leg, "wine glasses," were being used, apparently for ceremonial feasts.

Jade warrants attention as one of the lithic raw materials worked with by the craftsmen of the age. They made small elongated ornaments of a triangle-like cut, perhaps worn on the head, as well as earrings, rings, bracelets, pins, spikes, pendants and beads. Weapons were also made from this material (axes). Turquoise was used as a decorative

material for making beads, for instance, but also for the marquetry of ivory objects. Other types of stone were used to make tools (discs, whorls) or ornaments (bracelets).

The industrious hands of craftsmen worked with another remarkable material, ivory, which they used to make unique cylindrical objects of a conical shape and of unknown function (tubes), knives, sickles and combs, or traded in its unprocessed state. Bones and antlers were also used to make various spikes and throngs or for special implements.

Objects made of organic matter were evidently at one time a quite common component of prehistoric Chinese cultures. Archeological finds in burial grounds include the remnants of drums made of alligator leather, most likely used for ritual purposes.

Dawenkou culture sites are usually located in the hilly and terraced areas beneath mountains in Shandong and along the coast. Smaller square and round sunken-featured dwellings have been found there.

Most of the information on the culture comes from their burial grounds. The deceased were buried in rectangular graves in a supine position on an east-west axis, usually with their heads pointing east, though sometimes to the north. In some cases, the graves are grouped in north-south oriented rows (Jianxin, Sanlihe).

The burial grounds are frequently found in the proximity of settlements and sometimes both locations converge and overlap. In such cases, it seems that the graves sunk into remains of residential buildings are more recent. This would indicate that the Dawenkou people buried their dead in areas of abandoned settlements.

The deceased were well equipped to enter the next world, taking with them pottery, stone tools, weapons (axes and adzes), implements (whorls) and ornaments made from bone, stone and ivory. An abundance of pig mandibles was also found.

The “inner coffins” first appeared in graves in the middle phase of the Dawenkou culture. These were actually burial tombs made of wooden logs with mutually overlapping ends and supporting a flat roof. The entire structure could also be doubled. These structures were probably already at this time linked to the burial of individuals with significant social status. History has shown that this attention paid to a final resting place is emblematic of an elevated social position.

The number of “wine glasses” (*bei*) found in a grave can be considered a barometer of social prestige; sometimes the deceased were buried with only one, elsewhere 35 of these luxurious vessels were found buried with an elite member of society. Another grave of an important figure contained 38 bottles (*ping*) (Dawenkou, grave M10). The occurrence of large storage vessels, whose contents were intended to accompany the deceased elite to the next world, is indicative of social position.

Upper-class male and female graves – though others as well – contained weapons and jade ornaments. Axes accompanied men more frequently than women on their final journey. Ivory objects were also found in graves; these were found in relative abundance at the Dawenkou site, thus clearly emphasizing their exceptional importance. Conical cylinders made of ivory often mark the graves of men.

Cooking, eating and storage vessels were accompanied by pig mandibles (sometimes even whole skulls) in graves of the Dawenkou culture. This is most likely evidence of funerary feasts or the “viaticum,” provisions for the journey to the next world (up to 35 objects – Lingyanghe, grave 79M17). We find by the hands of the deceased unusual “hooked objects” made of handles cut from bone or horns with two deer canines with tips pointing up and away from the handles inserted in them. It is unknown what these were used for. Turtle shells, buried along with some of the deceased, sometimes contained bone needles, small spikes or pebbles and can therefore perhaps be considered musical instruments or ritual props.

The fact that the remains of subadults did not appear in some of the culture’s burial grounds is noteworthy. These burial grounds do not therefore represent a completely objective source for interpreting the society’s history, but show traces of a deliberate selection of the deceased buried here.

The bearers of the Dawenkou culture seem to be the ones who created a system of symbols that would later become the first Chinese script. We still do not know how to interpret the engraved symbols that appear on large storage vessels in particular. The bearers of this culture also devoted considerable attention to ceremonial communal feasts.

The prevalence of tableware sets found in graves attest to the codification of a dining etiquette and the classification of a socially important space for feasts. This consists of a pot for preparing food (*ding*), most likely a legged serving dish (*dou*), storage vessels *hu* and a “wine glass” (*bei*).

In the wealthy M10 grave from Dawenkou, a deceased woman is adorned with a necklace made from 19 turquoise beads, which is wholly unique within this culture. The question lingers whether this ornament made exclusively of a single kind of stone indicates the prestige value of turquoise or whether it points to something else. Could it refer to the connection between a deceased woman’s being and a natural sphere, symbolically expressed and represented by turquoise? Were the color, appearance, “mythical coordinates” of the mineral or its rarity important here?

We thus begin to see the potential of further development toward the society’s division into groups occupying different positions and orientations within society. Up to this point, the society seems to have been distinctly homogenous with the individual elite members vying for a superior position through ostentatious public displays in socially relevant spheres of activities. This should thus be interpreted more as a ranked society than a stratified one.

The Neolithic Period in southern China

Let us now focus on the Neolithic Period of southern China. The Majiabang culture near the mouth of the Yangtze River, mainly to the south of Shanghai, played a significant role in the historical development here. The bearers of this culture grew rice and baked clay pottery at low temperatures. Another distinct southern culture complex, the Liangzhu culture, arose at the tail end of the Majiabang after 3000 BC. It should be pointed out here that the cultures of this group cultivated, apparently with respect to their coastal position, relations with the Dawenkou culture in northern China.

Craftsmen of the Liangzhu culture produced a delicate black pottery as well as the first silk ever known in China.

The bearers of the Liangzhu culture markedly developed the production of ritual objects made of jade. It is here that we become acquainted with the jade objects called *bi* and *cong*, disk-like and cylindrical in shape. History tells us that the *bi* discs were used to worship the heavens, while the *cong*, often square-edged and profusely decorated, channeled the worshipper's veneration toward the earth. Another surprise from this culture consists of the first *taotie* masks in the form of a face that might be that of a person or animal. In one case, a *cong* cylinder even bears the picture of a creature that beats two drums tied around his waste and seems to be wearing a large *taotie* mask.

These people often buried the deceased under mounds accompanied by jade ritual objects and burned sacrifices. In some cases the dead were buried in square ceremonial terraces on the tops of hills.

Portentous and obviously emblematic weapons point to distinct social differentiation in the Liangzhu. The handles of jade axes from the culture's graves, sometimes made of ivory, bore varnished and/or jade decorations and usually had a jade terminal. Artists were able to carve in them impressive decorations that were visible when the axe was carried in an upright position. The rulers of the ancient Chinese states may have adopted the axe's emblematic function from there.

Another remarkable historical phenomenon of south China is the Hemudu site, which is also south of Shanghai and not far from the coast. This site is about 40,000 m², of which 2,630 m² has been excavated. Four archaeological layers have been discovered here, of which the two lower layers belong to the Hemudu culture (the earlier dates to ca. 5000–4600 BC, the more recent to 4300–3400 BC), while both of the upper layers (ca. 3900–3700 and 3400 BC) belong to the Majiabang culture.

The Hemudu culture's subsistence was rice, which was found in great quantities at the saturated site, including rice kernels, hulls, straws and leaves. Farmers used hardwood digging sticks and hoes with blades usually made from cattle shoulder bones. The people supplemented their subsistence by hunting (elephants, rhinoceros and monkeys, among other things) and by gathering edible wild plants. The composition of the vegetation found at the site attests to a warmer climate than today and the presence of dense forests.

The materials that the people of Hemudu made use of included clay for pottery (dishes, trays, pots and kettles), often lavishly artistically rendered and decorated with the imprints of cords and with engraved ornamental, plant and figural motifs. Jade objects were also found here, but bone was the most common raw material for making things of everyday use. Arrowheads, whistles, chisels, spikes and needles were all made from it. Ropes, strings and even thread were made from straw and other vegetable matter, as were woven boxes and containers.

The oldest layer of the Hemudu settlement provided proof of dwellings built on posts. One such structure was 23×7 m in size and featured a 1.3 m deep entrance hall. The wooden structures of the dwellings reveal quality carpentry, including mortise and tenon joints. Reed mats covered the floors here. Some of these larger structures seem to be “community houses” similar to those still used by people of the Indonesian islands.

In contrast to the fourth, deepest layer, the third Hemudu layer underwent definite changes in its inventory. Along with painted pottery, we also find here a wooden loom. Though butterfly-shaped ivory objects were found here, the material culture remained the same, except for a few minor exceptions (lower temperature for firing pottery, the appearance of a portable stove made of fired clay). The same can be said of the second layer.

A more substantial transformation can be seen in the first, highest layer.

In this period, expert potters fired the pottery at a temperature around 1000 °C and, in some cases, may have already been making it on potter’s wheels. Decorative cord imprints again appear. The women here made whorls, flywheels set on the spindle and used in spinning thread from a tow.

Stone tools used in this period included axes, whose middle parts were drilled through, and rectangular adzes, carpenter’s tools with the blade at a right angle to the handle. Objects made from jade included *huang*, square plates with holes in the middle, and semi-annular *jue*.

For the first time there appear only post holes for the insertion of standing structures instead of wooden buildings. Excavators also found 12 burials in supine position here.

Domesticated animals raised by the people included dogs and pigs and perhaps even water buffalo. Finds from Hemudu explicitly testify to the exploitation of a large number of uncultivated biotopes, i.e. the wilderness from the mountain forests to the riverine wetlands (the remains of carp, catfish and turtles) and influent streams (pelicans, herons, ducks). The same applies to pollen grains that prove the presence of different species of oak trees, wild cinnamon, plum trees and walnut trees, as well as aquatic plants and herbs found on land. The people here most likely also ate gourds, acorns and water chestnuts.

THE CHALCOLITHIC PERIOD (WE ARE NO LONGER ALL EQUAL)

The Longshan culture, presently broken down into seven regional variations, gradually developed between 2600 and 1900 BC.

Animals reared during this epoch included pigs and horses.

It is predominantly in the use of clay that we see a difference from the Yangshao period's work with natural materials. Master potters of the Longshan culture, probably already professionals in their craft, often used potter's wheels and fired their clay at high temperatures to shades of grey or black. This pottery sometimes had distinctly thin walls and generally featured engravings, attachments or protrusions. Pottery made here included legged bowls, cups with handles, goblets, typical three-legged kettles, pots and pitchers, as well as storage vessels. This pottery can be classified as black, grey and white. We also find here cups on a *bei* leg, "wine glasses," apparently used for ceremonial feasts. Everyday household objects were made from clay (whorls used for spinning thread).

Jade and turquoise, perhaps of western origin, are among the noteworthy lithic raw materials used by Longshan craftsmen. Jade was used to make ornaments (beads, bracelets, pins with *Taotie* protective masks, burial M202, Xizhufeng), weapons, (axes) and ritual objects. A tablet depicting a human face with protruding fangs was found at an unknown Chinese site, most likely belonging to the Shandong strain of the Longshan culture. Turquoise was used to make ornaments (pendants), but was also placed in graves in its raw form (Xizhufeng graves M202, M203). Stone axes were no longer found among the everyday objects buried with the dead. Less rare types of stone were used to make stones (chisels), some kinds of household implements (e.g. whorls – aids for spinning thread) and weapons (arrowheads). A stone axe with a *Taotie* mask motif made on both sides comes from the Liangchengzhen site.

Bone or shell was used to make everyday tools and implements (e.g. knives, arrowheads, spearheads, whistles?)

In contrast to earlier periods, bronze castings were widely used in the Longshan culture and all kinds of bronze necessities were made. Parts of belts, mirrors and weapons were cast from bronze (later this would also include formidable axes and halberds), as were some types of tools (e.g. knives), parts of harnesses and even of musical instruments. Research has generally focused on ritual bronze vessels that experts divide into the following categories:

1. vessels for preparing and cooking the food offering, especially three-legged vessels and four-legged rectangular *ding* vessels;
2. vessels for storing the food offering (*gui yu*);
3. vessels for warming up a wine-like fermented millet drink (*jia ajue*), both three-legged with pointed legs, also used for libations. Another such vessel is the *he*, an oblate teapot standing on three or four cylindrical legs. This naturally was not a teapot *per se*, but was used for mixing wine with water.
4. vessels for storing wine: *zun* and *guang*, among all bronze artifacts these were most frequently made as sculptures, often in the form of animals;
5. vessels for tasting wine, *gu* or *zhi*, round or square in profile;
6. vessels for ritual washing, all broad and shallow with rounded bottoms and no handles.

It should be noted that the first objects made from gold and silver in China date back to this period.

Remnants of drums made of alligator leather found in the graves of this culture are, among other things, proof of their work with organic materials.

The finding that Chinese farmers and transporters were apparently not familiar with the wheel until the late Shang period is somewhat surprising. Evidence of the wheel's use does not appear until the later stages of the Shang Dynasty.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Jakub Maršálek, Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (ca. 3000–2000 BC), doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and

The primary difference between the Yangshao and Longshan cultures, with regard to civil engineering, is that the Longshan culture complex first used structures that were not sunken into the ground, but, instead, elevated on terraces made from packed clay. The culture's social centers – the early cities – which did not exceed 20 hectares in size, also became foci with a wide range of crafts. They were, however, already surrounded by walls of clay packed into frames, and larger surface buildings were also there.

Based on the size of the residential area, a four-level hierarchy of Longshan settlements can be distinguished: the 1st settlement with an area of 240 hectares, the 2nd with 70–230 hectares, the 3rd with 20–60 hectares and the 4th with 20 hectares. Already in the culture's final phase we find here extensive residential agglomerations surrounded by clusters of smaller sites.¹⁰⁷

The fracturing of society into groups positioned differently on the social ladder is evident in burials.

The culture's burial areas generally appear to be less structurally aligned than burial grounds of the preceding period. The evenly arranged rows of graves prevalent in the Neolithic Age completely disappear. Here we encounter burials directly in residential areas – especially those of youths and children. Although the deceased were still predominantly buried in a supine position on an east-west axis and with their heads pointing east, a relatively large number of deviations were found (head pointing west, south-east orientation with head pointing north – Yaoguanzhuang). Intensive use was made of burial grounds and the superposition of graves (i.e. more recent burials disrupting older ones) was a common occurrence. The relationship between burial grounds and the settlements is more obscure than previously in the Neolithic period. Once again, however, we cannot rule out that the deceased were buried in abandoned settlements, and sometimes settlements were even built on ancient burial grounds.

Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 82, note: 274.

¹⁰⁷ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 50.

Funerary objects consisted mainly of pottery; weapons, tools and ornaments for the most part disappear.

In the case of high-profile burials, the bearers of the Longshan culture adopted from the Dawenkou culture of the Neolithic Period the custom of building “internal and external coffins” (actually timber lined burial tombs). The entire structure can even be repeated several (up to three) times with the tombs inserted into one another.

“Wine glasses” were found here too as funerary objects. Although this type was found in the graves of the deceased that had not been overly wealthy, more technically demanding variations were linked to large and opulent graves. The number of individual glasses found in each grave (up to six) did, however, markedly drop with one “wine glass” per deceased being the most frequent occurrence. Overall, the number of graves with these “wine glasses” also dropped and their imitations in cruder pottery disappeared. A change is apparent in the storage vessels found in graves as well: many of them completely disappear from the Longshan burial grounds and those that remain are of smaller types, including oval vessels with four horizontal handles, a cylindrical neck and cover (*lei*).

The funerary objects also possess fewer jade components at this point and consist mainly of weapons (especially axes) and not of ornaments, as was previously the case.

One of the jades probably bears the depiction of a *Taotie* protective mask (Xizhufeng, grave M202). Perhaps the most important thing to note here is that axes, and especially golden or white axes, were a royal emblem during the Western Zhou period. The king would wield it in his left hand before a battle as he gave a speech to the assembled troops; then, after the battle, he would use it to decapitate the defeated enemy king.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Jakub Maršálek, Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (ca. 3000–2000 BC), doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 67, (*Shujing*, Book of Documents).

Along with other funerary objects, grave M202 in Xizhufeng) contained alligator scales, most likely the remnants of drums made of stretched alligator leather for ritual purposes. They were found along with a whetstone, a bone pipe and a “wine glass” in a 1 × 0.35 m wooden box painted black and red and positioned between the inner and first of the two external timber linings of the grave.

The lower jawbones of pigs, most likely attesting to funeral feasts or supplies provided to the deceased for their journey to the next world in the prior Neolithic Period, were apparently connected to the graves of the elite in the Longshan milieu (up to 32 lower jawbones, Yinjiacheng, grave M138). They appear there repeatedly in multiples of four.

The individual burials at the burial site in Chengzi containing a total of 87 graves could be divided into four different groups according to the number and quality of funerary objects. The fact that the entire burial site is divided into three sectors, of which each contains burials of all four social levels, is of particular importance. This can probably be interpreted as a common burial site of three lineages that had already been internally stratified [43].



Fig. 44 A map showing the layout of the Chengzi burial site of the Longshan culture.

Arrowheads found in the most opulent and largest tombs of the Longshan culture and the fact they were most likely placed there (in larger numbers, in rows and between the internal and external timber-lined tombs) seem to indicate an emblematic role. They could symbolize a high social position: writings of the 1st millenium BC testify to the role of the bow and arrow as a male attribute and symbol of public authority. During the Western Zhou period, the king empowered his representative by handing his bundle of arrows to him. Royal gifts of bows and arrows to aristocrats are recorded by inscriptions in bronze vessels from the same period.

The inscription describes the rewarding of Duke Wen of Jin (636–628 BC), following the victory over the state of Chu in the Battle of Chengpu in 632 BC, with a red bow and a hundred red arrows and a black bow with a hundred black arrows.¹⁰⁹ Since the image of the arrow also forms part of the symbol *hou* = “duke, liege lord” also found in the earlier late Shang period, the conclusion can be drawn that the arrow already symbolized at that time the idea of “commanding authority, of superiority, of *potestatis imperii*.”

The drop in the number of funerary objects, their limitation to pottery vessels and exclusive attributes of elite burials – timber-lined burial tombs, *bei* “wine glasses”, pig jawbones – points to changes in comparison with the Neolithic situation. Given that a certain type of vessel was consistently found in pairs or fours, or that pig jawbones were found in fours or in multiples of four, we can assume that certain customs regarding the numerical ratios of funerary objects were set.

These ratios seem to indicate an abandonment of a ranked society and the rise of a stratified society, in which social classes had been carved out and the vying for status completed. From this moment there is little doubt about who made up the society’s elite: those who had

¹⁰⁹ Jakub Maršálek, Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (ca. 3000–2000 BC)), doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 80, (the Chronicle of Zuo, 28th year of the Duke Xi).

already acquired a position generally acknowledged and clearly and qualitatively expressed by “tags” in funerary objects.

Should we interpret the drop in the number of jade objects found in the graves here (though the preserved samples found are far more impressive in their craftsmanship) in the sense that rare materials no longer ended with the dead at burial sites, but were instead used ostentatiously at public rituals (or were bestowed to the cult) by the elite of that period to demonstrate their prestige, importance and wealth?

Archeologists have held the view that, in matters of the social arrangement of this period, society had already created lineages that together formed a patulous, complex and hierarchically structured architecture of “conical clans.” In these clans the individual lineages mutually assumed positions according to their proximity to the lineage of the clan’s founder: the nearer one was to the founder’s descendents, the higher the level of social prestige. The central position in the conical clan was assumed by the founder’s lineage for ritualistic reasons. This lineage was thought to be closest to the spirits of the clan’s ancestors and, therefore, the only ones in the clan to hold a sufficiently strong cult position to activate nature’s fertile powers for the benefit of all other members of this social configuration. Owing to their access to the spiritual world’s powers, it was actually the clan’s ancestors who performed such rituals. The creation of the state then culminated with the representatives of these central lineages, together forming groups linked by political and contractual and even family (e.g. through marriages) bonds. Such groups then acquired public power for the benefit of all members of the original clan, thus becoming a political community. The clan members would then pay for the services of the ruling elite through farm work and military service. One of the explanations of the origin of the symbol *zu*, used for naming the lineage and consisting of the image of an arrowhead under a standard, even assumes that this is a social group constituting the basic unit of armed forces and, therefore, to a certain extent an artificially constructed group.¹¹⁰ This explanation fits well with the

¹¹⁰ Jakub Maršálek, *Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (3000–2000 BC))*, doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague,

aforementioned symbolism of the arrow as a symbol of supremacy, of commanding authority and *potestatis imperii*.

Indeed, the renowned Chinese custom of soothsaying using flat bones, most often cattle shoulder bones or turtle shells, dates back to the Longshan cultural complex. The oracle would heat a copper spike in a fire and apply it to the surface of the bone. Cracks would then form on the bone's surface that the expert would interpret. Other innovations of the age include the introduction of the *Taotie*, an ornamental motif of a human or animal mask. This would later be used as a protective and beneficial symbol.

The Longshan cultural complex evidently influenced surrounding groups of the population. Although the Zhukaigou steppe culture in Chinese south Mongolia (on the northern border of present-day China) mainly raised cattle, their material culture reveals a Longshan influence, including the use of smoothed oracle bones. Today we speak of “interacting spheres of culture,” the mutual permeation of several cultures, when referring to the Longshan sphere.¹¹¹

China's Northern Regions during the Chalcolithic Period

The Hongshan culture thrived during the Chalcolithic Period, perhaps as early as the 4th millenium BC, in northeast China to the north of the Bohai Bay northeast of Beijing and in the Liao River basin in lower Manchuria. Use of a heavy plow was already begun in this period. The craftsmen here were skilled in working with clay, jade and bronze.

A temple of some of the local gods with an altar and several rooms was even found at the Niuheliang site in the middle of burial grounds with graves possessing a varied number of funerary objects. This is a remarkable site that deserves more detailed commentary. The entire

Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 80–81.

¹¹¹ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 230.

group of sixteen cult buildings is located at the summit, on the slopes and at the foot of the Nulu'erhu massif, and is roughly ten kilometers long and five kilometers wide. The sunken-featured temple of the fertility goddess (?) apparently represents the central place of worship. Totalling 75 m² in area, this building was originally constructed from clay and wood in the form of an elongated rectangular space, whose one side was adjoined by a partition, and with a trilobate-structured end. The temple, situated on an extended north-south axis, is over 25 meters long and 2–9 meters wide. The building's ruins revealed fragments of six terracotta sculptures of the goddess, of which one was larger than life-size, while the others were roughly the size of humans. Terracotta figurines of dragon heads and bird claws were also found here. The interior may have even originally featured a fresco.

The temple is situated atop a mountain ridge; a circular “sacrificial altar” built from stone and surrounded by a wall is apparently part of it.

The graves here, situated on the northern and southern mountain slopes under the temple, are mound-like in shape with a large burial containing an abundance of funerary objects surrounded by poorer and even secondary burials. The survivors built for the deceased elite a total of five square-shaped tombs of stone and enclosed them in a wall. The deceased received a number of funerary objects for their journey to the next world, including jade ornaments and weapons and painted pottery vessels. The central tomb no. 1 provided an abundance of rare finds of jade, ornaments and rings, one of which bears the depiction of a mythical creature with a pig's head and dragon's body, while others feature dragon-head images.

The bearers of the Hongshan culture maintained contact with hunter-farmer strains of the Fuhe culture on the northern border.

The Lower Xiajiadian culture, situated along the northern border of China stretching from the sea to the border with Mongolia, became the Hongshan culture's successor in 2500–2000 BC. The population here sustained itself through the cultivation of various species of millet. Master craftsmen were already skilled in working with bronze.

The bearers of the culture lived in villages consisting of sunken-featured adobe houses clustered closely together. Most of the houses were round, though the larger houses could also be rectangular and

the village was protected by stone or clay walls surrounding it. There is evidence that these walls were already made using the process by which clay was packed into frames. Graves of the more affluent can also already be distinguished here at burial sites, and the battle axe, appearing only at large male burials, is clearly emblematic of a warrior.

Oracle bones, usually with holes drilled through, appear here, and the culture's art is represented by discoveries of *taotie* masks.

It seems that the Chalcolithic culture complexes presented at this time a very diverse mosaic of variously organized social bodies that maintained vigorous contact, through which tangible and intangible goods were mutually exchanged. Slowly but surely a unifying base was formed that the first Chinese state would later be built upon.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE STATE

The Traditional Interpretation of Chinese History

Chinese tradition interprets the dawn of the country's history in mythologized form as a succession of three royal dynasties: the Xia, Shang (or Jin) and Zhou. The Shang leader Cheng Tang dealt the Xia state (traditionally dated as 2205–1760 BC) a fatal blow in defeating its last ruler, King Jie. The Shangs then dominated (1760–1122), until they themselves succumbed to the surge of the Zhou dynasty. The Zhou representatives would rule in China until 770 BC, from which point only the eastern part of the country would be under their reign (Eastern Zhou, 770–256 BC). During the ensuing Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BC) the central government disintegrated and a number of conflicts broke out between the individual regional powers (the Warring States period 475–221 BC). It was the First Sovereign emperor (Qin Shi Huangdi) who finally put an end to these endemic civil wars, completely removing the then merely symbolic rule of the Zhou Dynasty and uniting the entire land under his rule (221–210 BC).

The fact that traditional Chinese historiography describes quite accurately the creation of the state body is noteworthy. According to this version, the Great Yu, the first lord of Xia, summoned all other Lords of the nation and got them to agree that, after his death, Yu's first born son would assume the highest office. He managed to do so despite the disagreement of the previously designated successor, and thus the dynastic principle of rule was established. From this moment forth, instead of the former title of lord (*hou*), the highest Chinese political figure was now called king (*wang*).

We must, however, proceed carefully with the information derived from ancient Chinese history. Modern research has reached the conclusion that the oldest Chinese historical records currently known, the

“Bamboo Annals,” were written only later during the Eastern Zhou period, and that for the oldest period they reveal discrepancies with authentic historical records of that period.

The Erlitou Culture

While doubt has never been cast on the historical existence of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, experts have been somewhat perplexed in assessing the credibility of the interpretation of the first Chinese state and its Xia Dynasty rulers. Attention has been repeatedly drawn in this regard to the Erlitou site on the upper part of the Yellow River (Huang He). This site is 3 km² in size and the population is estimated to have been 18,000–30,000.¹¹²

The site itself provides proof of a five-phase settlement. Artificial terraces made from packed clay appeared in the second level, while extensive buildings and tombs were found in the third level. The fourth level yielded evidence of numerous supply pits. Radiocarbon dating tells us that the site was settled at approximately 2100–1800 BC.

The foundations of at least two palace buildings were found in the third layer. The first of these was built on a terrace with an area of 108 × 100 m. The 1–2 m high terrace was filled with layers of clay that were roughly 4.5 cm thick and along whose circumference ran a 45–60 cm thick clay wall. A rectangular 36 × 25 m area was created on the northern end of the terrace and excavators documented on its surface a group of post holes that formed the outline of a large hall measuring 30.4 × 11.4 m. This hall was evidently constructed by pre-historic builders using organic wickerwork suspended from the beam structure and covered with a saddle roof. This district was entered from the south through a pillared gate.

A smaller but better preserved second palace was located approximately 150 m northeast of the first. The foundation terrace measured 73 × 58 m and it also contained a hall in the northern part of its central section. With an area of 33 m² the hall consisted of three main parts

¹¹² Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 43, Table 3.1.

and its outer walls were surrounded by verandas. To the north of the hall was a large in-ground tomb with its upper pit 5 × 4 m in size; the prehistoric gravediggers dug a smaller burial pit in the bottom of this part and, after placing the funerary objects in the grave, carefully filled everything in with packed layers of clay. Other burials here were, however, completely void of funerary objects. This district was entered through a pillared gate from the south.

Residential homes were clustered around both palaces. Some of these houses were sunken-featured, others built on ground level. In the 3rd and 4th layers we find what are probably many ash-filled waste pits, pottery kilns and even crucibles for bronze melting.

As far as basic subsistence activities are concerned, as previously mentioned no important innovations were introduced here in comparison with the prior period.

Skilful potters supplied the population with Erlitou pottery of grey or dark material that was mixed with sand and handmade or wheel spun.

The basic raw materials used still included stone, bone and shell, from which farmers made hoes and sickles. Other tools and weapons – axes, adzes, chisels and arrowheads – were also made from stone. Ritual objects, however, were made from jade.

For the time being, bronze was only used to make a very small number of tools; a bronze knife, a bodkin, chisel and an adze made more from copper than from alloy (98% copper, 1% tin) were found here, as were arrowheads, fishhooks and small discs of an unknown purpose from the new material. Bronze was mainly used to make ritual vessels, weapons and musical instruments. Bronzes from the Erlitou period are still considered the oldest objects of this type found in China.¹¹³

Some of the deceased in the Erlitou period were buried in varnished coffins. They were buried with numerous valuables to accompany them to the next world – both bronze and jade objects. It seems that jade commanded particular respect here, since jade objects were always placed inside the coffin, while other artifacts, even those with the same

¹¹³ For details on bronzes from Erlitou in a cultural context see Sarah Allan, Erlitou and the Formation of Chinese Civilization: Towards a New Paradigm, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 66/2, 2007, pp. 461–496.

functions as the jade ones (such as weapons) were found outside the coffin.

An important find at the site consisted of a large number of oracle bones – especially the shoulder bones of pigs, sheep and cattle – though these still did not have inscriptions. Temples were also found here in which tablets, bearing the names of the ancestors of the ruling lineages, were possibly stored. Sacred districts, enclosed by walls, were also discovered.

In the cities and peripheral areas of the first state

In most cases, Chinese cities played the role of social and military centers, mainly performing tasks posed by state administration. Cities therefore very much resembled each other and possessed an almost obligatory, “model” appearance. The rectangular layout featured a fortification of clay walls pressed into frames (*hangtu*). The walls entered through gates with the main gate usually the southern one. The technique of packing clay into wooden frames was also used for the residences of the Chinese elite built on raised terraces.¹¹⁴ Members of a single lineage or clan generally dwelled within a single city, thus creating an organism bound primarily by factors of kinship.

The results of new research on the Sanxingdui site, 40 km northwest of Chengdu, the capital of China’s Sichuan province, provide a quite explicit example of the urbanism of China’s earliest cities at the dawn of ancient history.

The site covers a total area of 17 km². The city’s development took place over four phases, of which the first (2700–2000 BC) falls under the Longshan culture of the Chalcolithic period. Researchers date the site’s second and third phases roughly to 1700–1500 BC. The city centers were already in place at that time with the city walls enclosing buildings, sunken-featured structures and tombs. The construction of the city walls, delineating a rectangular plot with a total area of 2.6 km² and positioned adjacent to the river bank, began during the

¹¹⁴ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 222.

site's second developmental phase, sometime after 1700 BC. Urban life dissipated at the end of the fourth developmental phase here (ca. 1500–1000 BC) sometime around 1000 BC. In its development, the site thus depicts the fate of China on the path from prehistory to the historical period of rule by the first three Chinese royal dynasties.

We know of no metal-made objects that date back to the site's first two phases; mainly clay pottery decorated with string imprints was found here.

Excavations revealed at the site the foundations of 18 houses, three ash pits, two places of sacrifice (?) and four tombs, in which, unfortunately, neither the remains of the dead nor funerary objects were preserved.

Pottery fragments, objects of jade, gold, stone and bronze, as well as cowry shells, were found in the sunken-featured buildings of Sanxingdui. There were also over 60 elephant tusks and over 3 m³ of burnt and broken animal bones. The conclusion can be drawn from this that these sunken-featured buildings served a still unknown ritual purpose.

One of these pits "with treasures" (pit I – the "place of sacrifice") is 1.64 m (depth) × 3.48 m (width) × 4.64 m (length) in size. They were filled with layers of soil and over 300 handmade artifacts were found here. The middle layer of this fill contained a substantial number of bones that had been burnt and broken before being deposited there, perhaps of animals that were burned in sacrifice. A number of jade ritual objects were found at the bottom of the pit, including a group of "scepters," as well as ritual bronze objects, semblances of human heads and masks made of bronze and a few pottery vessels. Some of the bronze objects feature a gold-leaf overlay. The pit most likely dates back to the very end of the site's development (13th century BC).

The second place of sacrifice (pit II) possesses very similar dimensions: 1.68 m (deep) × 2.3 m (wide) × 5.3 m (long). Over 600 artifacts of bronze, gold, jade, ivory, stone and pottery were unearthed here. The pit's fill had a yellowish soil and finds were made in three layers. The highest level contained over 60 elephant tusks. Excavators found massive bronze objects in the middle layer: the rendering of a standing human figure, depictions of human heads, a mask, three depictions of

a tree and ritual vessels. Finally, at the bottom of this place of sacrifice, jade and stone tools were found, as were jade blades and discs, small animal masks, bronze figures of birds and animals and even seashells.

Renderings of trees made from bronze warrant special attention here. Following their reconstruction they reached heights of 1 m, 2 m and 4.2 m and were thus monumental sculptures. Each tree has nine branches with nine pieces of fruit, leaves and with nine figures of birds sitting on them. The birds were made to resemble toucans with large arched beaks, feeding on the fruit, and wholly unlike the eagle heads that were also found here. Human figures kneel around the trunk of the largest tree. This could very well have something to do with the image of the “tree of life.”

The two pits contained over 40 renderings of human heads, some of which were decorated with gold-wrought plating. They featured different types of hairstyles, including braids and even headdresses. The large-eyed faces were each made to be very unique: sometimes

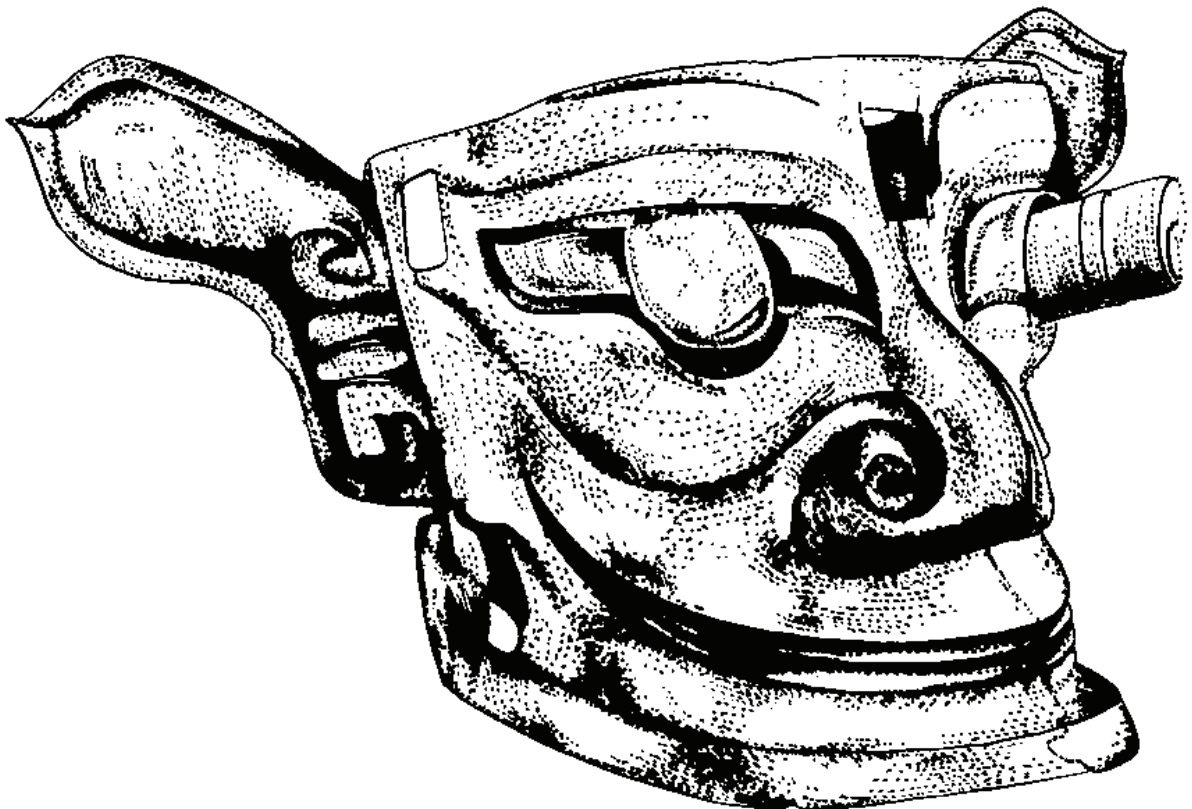


Fig. 45 The bronze mask of a deity or divine ancestor. Place of sacrifice in Sanxingdui, 17th–11th century BC.

with giant ears, sometimes with cylinders instead of eyes or with a trunk-like nose [44].

One exceptionally important find is a bronze human sculpture from Sanxingdui. This figure, standing 172 cm high with his elbows at his chest and hands at the height of his face, raises his arms, perhaps in an act of carrying an elephant tusk (which, however, was not found). The figure, dressed in a long close-fitting robe with tight sleeves, stands on a decorated foot stool with four feet resting on a pedestal – all totally 90 cm in height. The sculpture thus reaches a height of 262 cm and weighs over 180 kg.

Other renderings of bronze bird heads accompany the human sculpture. One of them is 43.3 cm tall and has a socket for mounting as well as openings to attach it to a handle. Another head was made in the form of a bell. These heads, staring wide-eyed, also threaten with their powerful crooked beaks. Even a miniature 12-cm high bronze rendering of an entire bird of prey was preserved.

Given that some of the bronze objects stored here evidently passed through fire, this find could testify to the “burning ceremony” (*liaoji*), known from the oracle bones of the Shang period, by which the hills, rivers and earth were appeased and venerated.

Similar places of sacrifice were also found at other Chinese sites from that period. These sites revealed jade ritual objects (disc- or lozenge-shaped), as well as axes, spear or lance heads, knives or bronze tablets with an animal mask or geometric marquetry made with turquoise (Gaopianxiang, Mayangxiang in Sichuan).

Zhengzhou

This site most likely consists of the older seat of the Shang Dynasty that preceded the more recent Anyang. Zhengzhou is located on the southern bank of the Yellow River, some 150 km south of Anyang. The city’s founders demarcated between two rivers a walled district that was 1.75 km (north-south) × 1.5 km (east-west). The creation of the city was undoubtedly influenced by the location on the Yellow River at the place where it leaves the area at the foot of the western mountains and flows

into the eastern plains. The total expanse of the agglomeration here can be estimated at 25 km²; the inner city alone covers an area of 3.25 km². Up to 100,000 people are thought to have lived here.¹¹⁵

Since the ancient center is located underneath the present-day industrial city, archeological research here is limited. Nevertheless, a number of interesting finds have been made.

The palace district is situated in the northeast quarter of the city and covers an area of roughly 300,000 m². A large number of foundation terraces made from packed clay have been found here ranging in size from roughly 1000 m² to buildings measuring dozens of square meters. Structurally speaking, these buildings again featured beam supports with walls from organic wickerwork and inner pillars 30–40 cm in diameter that were positioned every two meters or so and supported the veranda that extended to the edge of the foundation terrace. The palace district may have been surrounded by a 5–6 m wide moat.

Burials with modest funerary objects were found in the vicinity of these buildings. The deceased received mainly bronze ritual vessels and ornaments (bronze and jade hairpins).

Even in Zhengzhou the central quarter was accompanied by workshop districts (bronze, pottery, bone, etc.) and the residences of service personnel.

The discovery of thirteen bronze objects, mainly vessels, made outside the city's southeast corner is a remarkable find from this site. Four cube-like, four-legged *fang ding* vessels used to prepare food offerings were found here; one of the vessels measures 1 m in height and weighs 86.4 kg, another, round and three-legged, is 87 cm tall and weighs 64.3 kg. The other two were 81 cm in height and weighed 75 and 52 kg.

Anyang

This was an extensive agglomeration of settlements with a total of 17 sites spread over an area of approximately 24 km² (a different cal-

¹¹⁵ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 43, Table 3.1.

culatation gives 19 km²) and inhabited by some 120,000 people.¹¹⁶ The area in the immediate vicinity of one of the more recently established cities of the Shang Dynasty had the form of an elliptical region with a longer axis that did not exceed 200 km.

With a size of approximately 10,000 m², Xiaotun was most likely Anyang's administrative center. Research has revealed what is considered to be three phases of the social center, progressing chronologically from the north to the south (districts A, B and C). District A has the form of fifteen parallel rectangular buildings constructed on foundations of packed clay.

These buildings with beam frames and walls of organic wickerwork possessed pillars standing on stone foundations and probably supporting thatched roofs. District B consists of eleven rectangular or square buildings on these kinds of foundations and arranged in three rows with a north-south orientation. The middle row contains three large buildings and five gates. Burials with horses and battle wagons with wheels and numerous spokes (18–28) were found in their vicinity arranged around a modest-sized terrace with walls of organic mesh. The more recently established district D features 17 buildings on packed-clay foundations with burials nearby. Sunken-featured dwellings about 4 m in diameter and housing service personnel (?) with large rectangular or round storage spaces stood in its vicinity. Shops working with bronze, stone, bone and pottery were located here.

One noteworthy find in Anyang was that of two elephant skeletons.¹¹⁷ The site of Yinxu has also recently been subject to excavations as part of the research done on the agglomeration here. Excavators also encountered here palace architecture, royal tombs and regular residential quarters.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 43, Table 3.1.

¹¹⁷ Jakub Maršálek, *Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (3000–2000 BC))*, doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 68.

¹¹⁸ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 96.

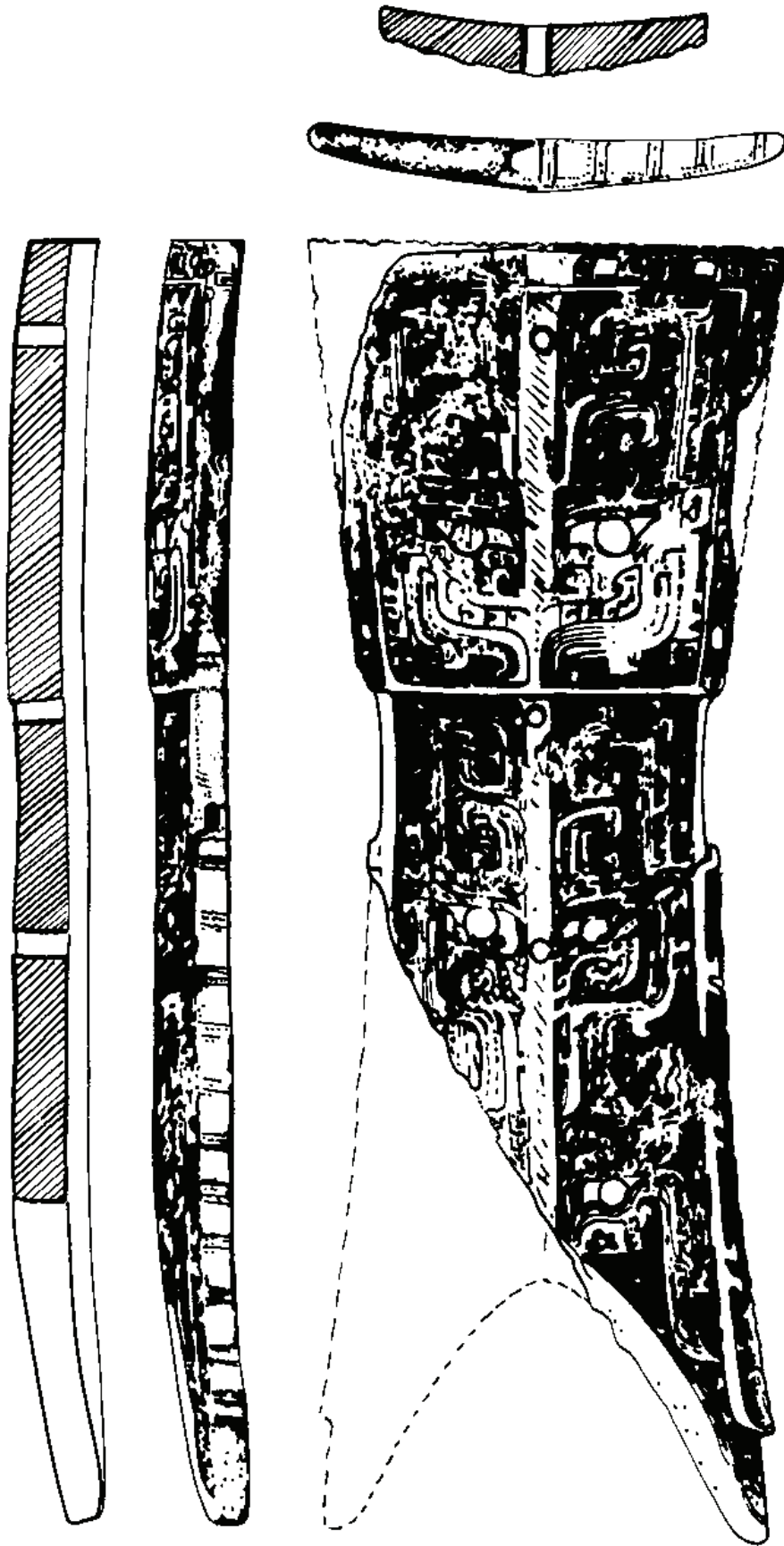


Fig. 46 Bone tablet featuring a carving of a vertical row of three *Taotie* masks from Anyang.

An Anyang burial site was discovered on the northern bank of the local river. Eleven royal tombs and over 1,000 ordinary burials were revealed here. Dwellings of service personnel and workshops were also found here. The eleven royal tombs are divided into a western group of seven and an eastern group of four burials. This corresponds in number to the eleven kings that ruled from Anyang. These tombs were kept in deep and spacious pits that were entered by long ramps with a north-south direction and shorter ramps in an east-west direction. Buried with the deceased were objects made of stone, jade, shell, bone, antler, dentin, pottery and bronze. The deceased were accompanied to the next world by several human sacrifices, sometimes with their heads severed from their bodies. A written record on human sacrifices made to ancestors on orders of the King Wen Ding of the Shang Dynasty was found here. Many of these objects are crafted at the highest conceivable artistic level of that period [45].

Western Zhou

Even though we have the least amount of archeological information available to us on this dynasty, which chose to position its power base furthest west of the middle section of the Yellow River, it is relatively well known from inscriptions on bronze artifacts and from later historical sources. Inscriptions on oracle bones from that period were also found.

This appears to have been an originally nomadic group that gradually settled and adopted many of the customs and traditions of the agricultural population.

New objects made of burnt clay – roof tiles, bricks and façade plates – were also produced during this dynasty's rule. Otherwise, however, the changes in the content of the material culture are only in form, not in quantity.

An example of a residence for this dynasty's elite can be seen in a building excavated at the village of Fenchu in the Shaanxi province [46].

This residence also stands on a pounded-earth platform with a height of 1.43 m and 45 m (north-south) × 32 m (east-west) in size.

The focal point of the building positioned along a north-south axis consists of a ceremonial hall with an open courtyard to the south side and two enclosed symmetrical courtyards on the north side. The southern courtyard was entered through a gate to the entire premises with a partition wall blocking a view of the courtyard from the outside. The walls and rooftops were protected by plaster and we even find sewage lines using terracotta pipes.

We also know that the Zhou had central residential agglomerations surrounded by workshops (bronze, pottery, bone) and residences for service personnel, as well as by burial grounds.

Research of one of the “service settlements,” the village of Zhangjiapo (near Feng and Hao, two of the dynasty’s first capitals), yielded remarkable results. Fifteen sunken-featured dwellings, both shallow and deep, were documented here by excavators. The floor space for the shallow dwellings measured 2.2×4.2 with a depth of 1.4 m under the surface. A central pillar and wall built of packed clay supported a round

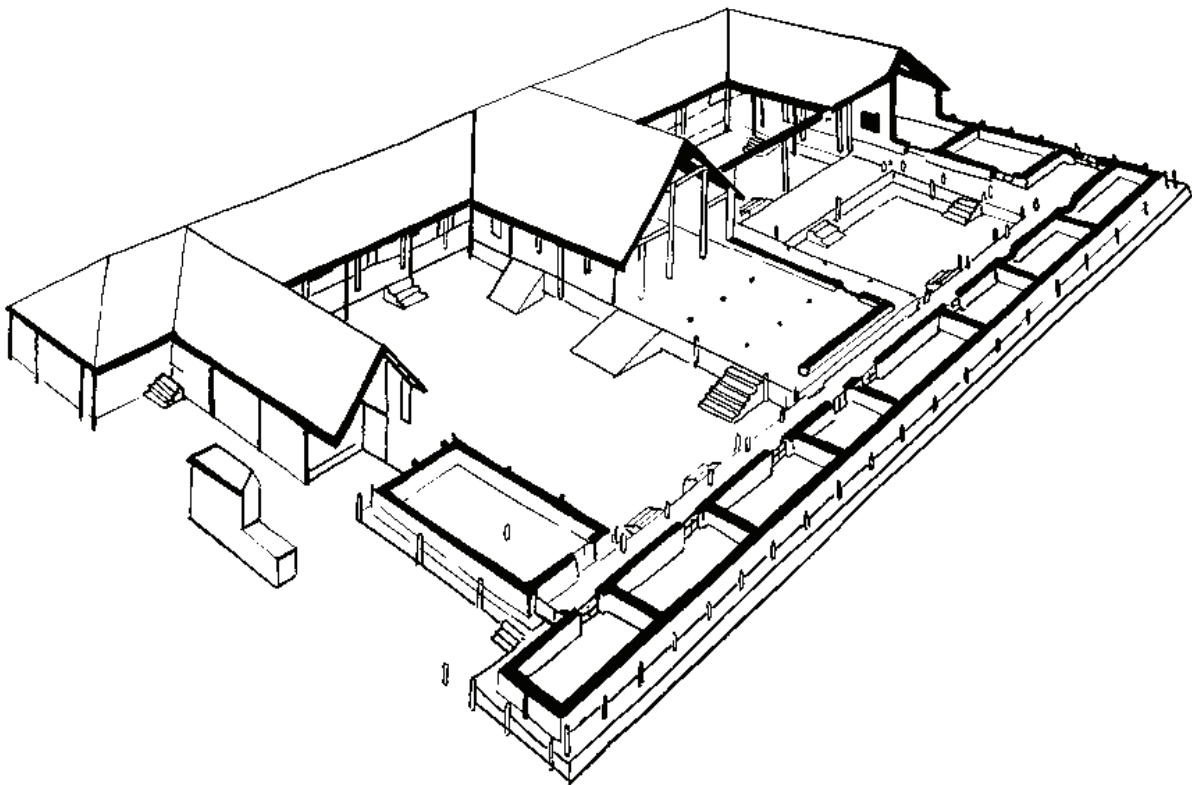


Fig. 47 Reconstruction of elite residences in the village of Fenchu in the Qishan district, Shaanxi, late 2nd millenium BC, Zhou Dynasty.

thatched roof. The structure was entered by a ramp and the interior contained a fireplace, sleeping area and storage niche. Although the walls and floor bore traces of fire burns, it was usually damp inside when it rained. The deeper homes could be up to 3 m deep beneath the surface and were usually oval in shape with a diameter from 7.8 m to 9.5 m. The interior could be divided by a partition wall with doors about 1.2 m in size. Narrower and deeper supply pits and wells accompanied the dwellings.

The villagers made a living by farming or as craftsmen. A total of 65 tools with mainly stone blades were found here, as were 51 axes, of which seven bore traces of honing. Other finds included ten honed stone chisels, a bronze hatchet and 15 bronze knives with handles that had ring-shaped eyelets. The farmers here used spades of bone; 82 pieces of them made from the shoulder bones or lower jawbones of horses or cattle were found here, as well as 23 made of stone and seven from seashells. Harvesting tools found included 246 reapers and 90 sickles, mainly made of seashells. Massive mowing blades were honed from stone into rectangular single or double-cut blades, and sickle blades usually had holes bore through them on the back side so that they could be strapped to a handle as is still the custom in China today.

The people of the village made bodkins and needles from bone; such implements were also found made from bronze or horn. A total of 310 arrowheads found here were made from deer antlers and bone. Clay molds used for casting round objects from bronze and pottery implements for potters and weavers were also discovered here.

These findings show us that the technological profile of the period's main manufacturing sectors did not change all that much from prehistoric times and thus that the political development most likely did not reflect the transformations in the economic base.

Information provided by reports on the legitimization measures taken by the rulers of the Zhou dynasty to justify their move toward empire rule and away from the sovereignty of the previous dynasty is extremely interesting. Their line of reasoning is primarily based on a rebuke of the arrogance, incompetence and inability of the rulers of the preceding Shang dynasty who had neglected to carry out that the very

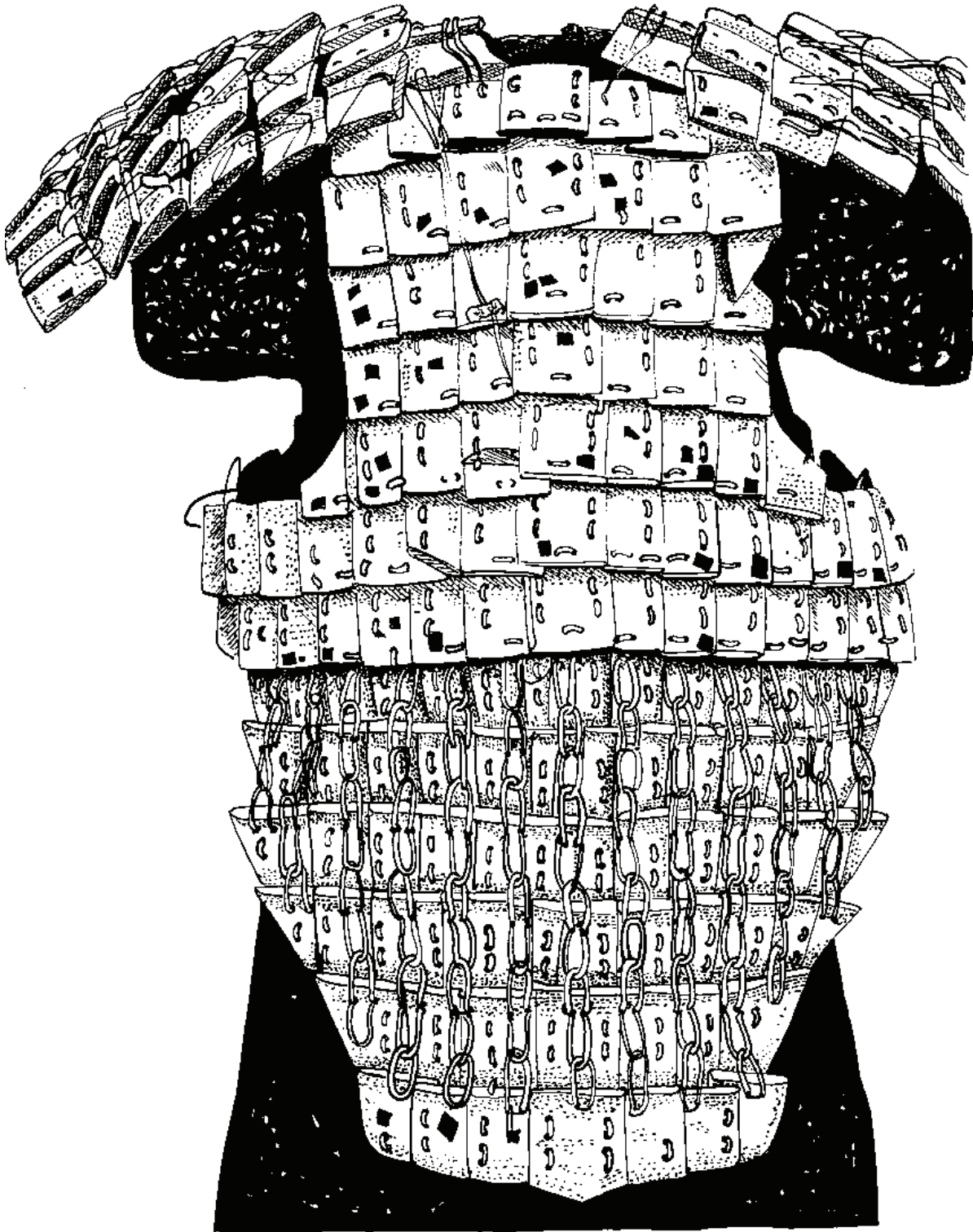


Fig. 48 Lamellar armor, Qin Dynasty period (221-210 BC).

acts they had assured their subjects they would: the flawless execution of cult rituals. It is due to these lapses that the heavens stripped them of the mandate to rule and entrusted the Zhou with it.¹¹⁹

This ideological construct was apparently so convincing that the Zhou even won over some of the experts who had previously served the “old regime.” Some experts of the *shi* class, of no blood relations to the royal family and referred to in Shang writings on oracle bones, even climbed higher on the social ladder.¹²⁰

We will later read of the first “ministries” that were created in the courtyard of the new rulers. Aside from employing experts, the royal court of the Zhou rulers also enlisted archivists (*zuoc*), whose tasks ranged from preparing ceremonial texts to writing historical records.

Not only is a relatively crystallized and even consolidated public authority system perceptible during the Zhou dynasty, we can also detect its symbolic correlations. According to the ceremonial regulations valid towards the end of the dynasty, the king was supposed to possess nine kettles (*ding*) and eight vessels (*gui*), his lieges seven *ding* and six *gui*, higher nobility and court dignitaries five *ding* and four *gui* and the lower nobility three *ding* and two *gui*.¹²¹

The tomb of Lord Guo Ji, the ruler of the Guo estate under the dominion of Western Zhou in the province of Henan, provides us with a good idea of the dynasty’s funeral rituals. A total of nine large graves and four burial places with the remnants of wagons and horses and over 17,000 funerary objects were found here. The ruler Guo Ji departed to the next world with his face covered by a material onto which his survivors stitched the image of his face using jade discs. A number of jade ritual objects, including marquetry in the form of animals, were

¹¹⁹ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 99, in citing the following: “Heaven instructed us, favored us, selected us, and gave us the mandate of Yin (Heaven) to rule over your numerous regions.”

¹²⁰ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 99.

¹²¹ Jakub Maršálek, *Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic (ca. 3000–2000) burial grounds in the Shandong province)*, doctoral dissertation work, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. Oldřich Král, PhD.), June 2003, p. 87, note: 283.

also discovered here. Bronze objects were found in the tomb, as were iron swords with jade handles and golden belts.

In Western Zhou, rituals to honor ancestors took the form of feasts in which the living members of lineages contacted their ancestors in the next world. These feasts not only strengthened the solidarity of elite social units, but also internally divided them and established degrees of subordination and submission in them. Both intoxicating (alcoholic) drinks and the meat of sacrificed animals were consumed at these feasts. This meat represented a rarity of high prestige and significance. In the 1st century BC, the rulers of the feudal states who belonged to the same clan as the emperor received from him gifts of meat as an exceptional honor. The right to consume meat from offerings thus became one of the attributes of the ancient Chinese aristocracy, which reserved for itself the privilege of offering sacrifices.

Following the decline of the central government during the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (771–256 BC), a fight for sovereignty broke out among the seven states: Yan, Zhao, Wei, Qi, Qin, Han and Chu. As previously mentioned, the Qin state emerged as the victor and its ruler, the First Sovereign Emperor (221–210 BC), united all of China under his rule [47].

THE ECONOMY OF THE FIRST CHINESE STATE

One important finding was that the creation of the first Chinese state did not yield any novelties in production and production technology. It therefore came into being as a social and political phenomenon, making use of an economic base that had already been formed. Hence we will not find here any traces of a revolution in production means that official pseudo-Marxist orthodoxy had sought in researching the period prior to the dawn of the state. The intensification of work methods apparently led to the introduction of the mass production of cast iron in the 7th to 6th century BC.

A certain degree of innovation is, however, evident here. These advances include the wheel and axle, which, surprisingly enough, we do not find proof of until the late Shang period, i.e. the 13th to 11th century BC. It appears that this invention made its way here from the Central Asian steppe as a reflection of the contact with the nomadic nations there. The reader is most likely aware that the most famous Chinese export, silk, is known to have come from this period.

Chinese civilization always took care to ensure that the economy was running smoothly and providing the population with all necessities, and the Chinese thus deservedly acquired and maintained a reputation as an industrious and diligent people. The very size of the community of serfs, unimaginable in the West, already had state elites to perform this role. We know from numerous sources that already in the 5th century BC the Chinese tax-paying community consisted of 12,000,000 individuals and that, by the onset of modern times, this number had reached an unbelievable 54,600,000 taxpayers. The need to sustain and supply such a large mass of people naturally placed considerable demands on the productivity of Chinese agriculture, crafts and trade.

SOCIETY

Characteristics of the Oldest Chinese State

The first written sources of Chinese history, inscriptions on oracle bones from the Shang Dynasty, provide us with a view of the activities of the early Chinese state.¹²²

These writings mainly tell us the chain of hierarchical subordination: if the king gave someone an order, he also had to tell that person to carry out the order. The fact that the formulation “he who receives the order accepts the king’s matter as his own” appears in the oracles texts tells us that the hierarchy of power still fell well short of constituting a coherent chain of commitments, obligations and automatic duties. The individual receiving the order then enlisted the relevant managerial and service staff and carried out the king’s order. Such tasks generally consisted of expeditions, hunting (e.g. elephants), capturing game and the likes. The task recipient then notified the king or the king’s subordinate that the order had been successfully carried out.

As for the Shang king’s relation to the land of his subjects, oracle bones describe royal activities undertaken in allied towns (hunts, inspections, etc.) for the purpose of moving the king and his court around his territories. It seems that upon moving to one of the allied towns, the ruler would set up his “camp,” where he would conduct his activities (prophecy). Yet the king could also have dispatched his staff to the allied town for some reason or ordered them to travel there (or declare such an order as a prophecy).

After arriving to the allied town, the king either ordered his subjects or mobilized their collective or collectives to undertake an activity. In

¹²² Superbly covered by David N. Keightley, *The Late Shang State: When, Where, and What?*, in: David N. Keightley (ed.): *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press 1983, pp. 523–564, on pp. 528–529.

doing so, he would sometimes assign a leader for them who could even come from a different allied town. The king may have even assigned official titles to his subjects at his temporary residence. According to some of the writings, the king cared about the health of his subjects and initiated a prophecy ceremony to find out if the sick would recover.

The king received at his seat in the allied town material supplies to run his court, e.g. animal (shoulder) bones, seashells, turtle shells or other necessities.

The king or his dignitaries sometimes set out with an allied town or towns on war campaigns. Naturally, the questions appeared in prophecies of whether the king and the allied town would win in battle and this query was usually answered affirmatively. Sometimes, however, the prophecy also mentioned that losses would be suffered by the allied town's troops. Generally, the prophecy ceremonies were performed to ascertain the course of the military conflict – how far the enemy would go, whether it would attack the allied town and how successful such an attack would be, whether the king's side would receive assistance or reinforcements and whether it would win, etc. In some cases, the allied town and royal "camp" could become the target of an attack by the enemy or individuals not ruled by the king. Prophecies concerned not only military conflicts, but also other political events, such as new alliances bound by marriages.

Royal experts (or the king himself) often prophesized in allied towns and would have the necessary equipment transported there for this purpose. The king would also make sacrifices to the deities and perform ceremonies – sometimes to benefit specific individuals or all their relatives. Pigs were apparently often chosen for sacrifice. These ceremonies were attended either by individuals or entire collectives from allied towns. The king or his masters of ceremony would recite incantations for the good of allied towns. Cult activities included farming rituals, of which, unfortunately, these inscriptions tell us very little. We only know that during the prophecy rituals the king inquired into whether there would be enough rain or a bountiful harvest. In certain allied towns, sacrifices or other rituals could even be organized with other friendly allied towns. It appears that the names of the oracles themselves and the scribes recording their results repeated in various

regions, leading us to believe that these experts accompanied the king from region to region. An analysis of written sources shows, among other things, that the entire sphere of ritualism and prophecy was gradually professionalized and bureaucratized.

It was most likely the veneration of the royal dead in the Shang dynasty that held the entire federation of lineages together. For it was through the ancestors of the royal family that the Shang kings were to reach further and more intensively the spirit world than anyone else. The king's monopoly on communication with ancestors via bronze vessels and manipulation through the wealth of the individual lineages intensified the effect of this factor. It was the rituals that bonded the alliance and solidified relations.¹²³

A still very open, unstable and essentially unfinished form of the oldest Chinese state is apparent from this information. The fact that the territory ruled by its kings was not connected, but formed "islands" separated by countries under other dominion, relates to this. David Keightley's research efforts have even provided us with a map that perfectly shows this disjointed, mosaic-like state complex – the predecessor of the actual territorial state [48].¹²⁴

The ceremonial communal feast retained its importance at this time. Sets of bronze vessels (*gu* drinking vessel and *yue* drinking or pouring vessel) were frequently found in graves of the Erligang culture. Two and even four sets of these vessels were buried with the deceased.¹²⁵

¹²³ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 97–98.

¹²⁴ Superbly covered by David N. Keightley, *The Late Shang State: When, Where, and What?*, in: David N. Keightley (ed.): *The Origins of Chinese Civilization*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press 1983, pp. 523–564, on p. 544. Map 17.3.

¹²⁵ Jakub Maršálek, *Sociální analýza pohřebišť pozdního neolitu (cca 3000–2000 př. n. l.) na území provincie Shandong (A social analysis of late Neolithic burial grounds in the Shandong province (3000–2000 BC))*, doctoral dissertation, Charles University in Prague, Humanities Faculty, Institute of the Far East (specialization: The History and Culture of Asia and Africa, supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Oldřich Král), June 2003, p. 88, note 285.

A state arises from kinship

The basic family units forming the skeleton of the Chinese state were lineages (*shi*) and the clans created from them (*xing*). The king (*wang*) could then award a domain under the individual lineages, or award the income from their corvée or military services, to a member of the elite, to the queen, prince or to a nobleman of high status. The king could even decide to move whole clans to strategically important (though



Fig. 49 The main areas of late Shang state according to inscriptions on oracle bones. The map's shaded areas show the main sites of the Upper Erligang and Anyang phase. The disjointed, "mosaic-like" nature of the early state centers' authority is captured nicely here.

remote) lands to ensure the unhindered possession of these lands. Usually, however, the founder of a new province obtained the right to rule the people who had already settled there. Moreover, lineages of expert craftsmen and masters of ceremonies that traditionally dealt with these professions, and passed them down from father to son, were made available to serve his new court. The symbolic handover of regional rule was expressed by an investiture ceremony in which the candidate received robes, standards, horses and battle wagons.

One Chinese text (*Zuo-zhuan*) even directly describes this way of establishing a provincial government. The Duke of Lu underwent the above-described investiture and received for it a large and ancient bow; to accompany him he received six *zu* (family units) who were originally from Yin. The chieftains of their clans were ordered to “have the leaders of their families gather from near and far their generations of relatives and to lead these multitudes” to accompany the duke to his new province.

What did one holding such a mandate do in his new territory? He first established a fortified settlement, a *guo*, from where he intended to govern the land. He had the right to build temples at his residence to honor the dead and request that they provide protection, assistance, support and their blessing. Then he surrounded his seat with a regional network of service settlements and operations, thereby creating a “city-state”, a formation also called a *guo*. The entire process was therefore essentially carried out as an act of the initiator and of the family groups assigned to him to perform special tasks and duties. Although the local peasantry was obliged to pay taxes and perform corvée, they otherwise were not burdened with requirements and obligations. The new lords let the farmers stay where they were and did not meddle that much in the life of their communities. Thus, this was a social act performed on the basis of general consent basis, respect for socially acknowledged conventions, trust in a promise given and obedience. Force seems to have played an imperceptible role here.

Yet it is clear that, in addition to these “feudal” bonds based on personal honor, ancient China was also familiar with state formations of an utterly bureaucratic nature. The Chu state located in the valley of the Yangtze River was governed by centrally controlled administrative bod-

ies called *xian* (probably meaning “district,” *xiancheng* means district town). These bodies were lead by experienced officials whose jobs entailed moving from place to place. The Chu state long enjoyed independence until the First Sovereign Emperor joined it with the united empire in 223 BC. It seems, however, that the First Emperor used the model of the Chu state in dividing his entire empire into lower administrative units.

During the Zhou Dynasty, rule was passed from eldest son to eldest son, thereby creating a “great lineage” (*da zōng*). Brothers, younger sons and allies were entrusted with inherited positions in the royal court or received “fiefs” (farming estates) in remoter towns. The sons of such favored dignitaries then inherited rule from them in the provinces, thus creating “lesser lineages” (*xiao zōng*), regional “replicas” of royal rule and of the court. Even younger sons obtained important positions in the courts of their fathers, or they were given “lots” in even remoter towns and thus the entire network was constantly expanding.

The average population of such a city district with adjacent farmland ruled by a single member of the elite reached 5,000 people.

However, it was during the Western Zhou Dynasty (1122–770 BC) that the first three governing bodies appeared in charge of specific state departments. These were the “ministries” of agriculture (*situ*), public works (*sikong*) and justice (*sikou*).

What followed?

Major social transformations then occurred in China in the Spring and Autumn periods (770–476 BC). Since these do not fall within the timeframe dealt with in this book, we will merely summarize them. Specialists of the *shi* class, originally administrators and warriors of the lower order began to study, along with the art of war, literature and ritual. In becoming officials, they began to offer services to the lords of the Warring States (519–222 BC). A committee of intellectuals was then formed that guarded and guaranteed the survival of Chinese spirituality and culture. Under the First Sovereign Emperor (221–210 BC) this group supported imperial rule in the form of a moralized orthodoxy sanctified by political authority. It was at this time that this kind of

committee, augmented by the principles of meritocracy, took root. Its task was to formulate and introduce a comprehensive and structured view of the world and attitude toward it that was unburdened by group interests. These intellectuals defended the view that the state's primary task was to constantly rectify the reality around us, suffering from imperfection and corruptness, in accordance with the dictates of a higher moral order.¹²⁶ They thus became the collective bearer of dynastic legitimacy and came up with the idea that always only one ruling dynasty legitimately governed. The finishing touches were thus made to the state system in which the spiritual foundations were imposed by the rulers of the Shang Dynasty.

China is a land of hierarchies *par excellence*, and the traditional five or even four subordinations – serfs to kings, sons to fathers, wives to husbands and younger brother to elder brothers (friendships belong here as well, though this is not considered subordination)¹²⁷ – created, at least in theory, a clear and transparent system of decision-making authorities.¹²⁸ In more recent historical times, the figure of the emperor and his plenipotentiaries dominated the area above the blood-relative bonds. Not only was the emperor the highest representative of state power, who named all officials, he was also the highest judge, the supreme commander of the military and also performed other exceptionally important cult and ritual functions. Important acts in space and time fell to him: he determined the design of the capital city, of other important city centers and of settled rural areas according to the cult ideals. He also defined the start of the individual calendar periods.

He determined, in accordance with the religious interpretation of climatic and natural phenomena, the color of courtly attire, which became the official imperial color, and also decided on the form of the court rituals and court music according to the cult ideals.

¹²⁶ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 99–100: the task is “to present a comprehensive view of the world, not merely of any particular group, and argue that the main task is to remake present reality, corrupt and imperfect as it is, in accordance with the dictates of a higher moral order.”

¹²⁷ See the writings of Confucius cited in the appendix.

¹²⁸ Jinhua Jia, Kwok Dang-fei: From Clan Manners to Ethical Obligation and Righteousness: A New Interpretation of the Term *yi*, “Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,” 3rd Series, vol. 17, Part I, 2007, pp. 33–41 (p. 39 on social bonds, namely on the five subordinations).

The situation for the emperor of the Middle Kingdom (as China has been called since ancient history) was made substantially easier by the reflection of the divine light that had shown on his position since time immemorial. Ever since prehistoric times, the ruler of the Chinese state had been an individual invested with extremely potent religious and extensive supernatural powers. More than any other ruler from ancient history, the symbolism of the Chinese emperor also permeated the cult sphere: The Chinese world has four sides – black north, blue-green east, red south and white west – which hold together and lead the yellow center, i.e. the emperor, into harmonic relations (the emperor's exclusive claim to the yellow or gold color is derived from this). The emperor is the lynchpin of celestial order; he combines earthly bliss with celestial harmony and thus guarantees that life on earth progresses as it should. The rituals that the emperor celebrated were essential for initiating the phases of the year, the new seasons and all events occurring in nature. The emperor therefore cannot be anything else but the highest ruler, judge and commander, the source and provider of order, law and justice. If it were not for the emperor, the world would fall into chaos, anarchy and into an everyone-for-himself fight. This very strong ideology of the emperor naturally had an effect on both representatives of regional authorities and on foreign aspirants to the Chinese imperial throne, almost all of whom would accept this ideology. This is also why, despite the fact that throughout its history China was frequently humbled, humiliated and exposed to the cravings of the power-hungry within China and of foreign conquerors, the Chinese culture was never threatened. The shine of the emperor's grandeur overwhelmed all those aspiring to the throne so that, with the transfer of central power, they also accepted the way by which the figure of the emperor infused and helped create the spiritual structure of Chinese society.¹²⁹

A proverb from one of the classical writings well captures the redistributive nature of Chinese society: "Dukes live on tribute, ministers on their estates, *shi* ['gentlemen'] on the land, and peasants on their toil."¹³⁰

¹²⁹ For more on the nature of the highest Chinese office see Joan Ching, *Son of Heaven: Sacral Kingship in Ancient China*, "T'oung pao" 83/1-3, 1997, pp. 3-41.

¹³⁰ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Rout-

What the elite took with them on their journey to the next world

The fourth king of the Shang Dynasty, Wu Ding, also married Fu Hao from the Tzu clan. Lady Hao embraced public life, leading ritual sacrifices and even taking part in battles. Exceptional power was concentrated in the hands of royal couples – a fact tellingly reflected in the funerary objects that accompanied Fu Hao in her grave on her journey to the next world.

A grandiose tomb (M5) was built for her in the city of Anyang after her death. This is the sole burial site from the Shang Dynasty for which we know the name of a historical figure actually buried here. The burial pit is 5.6 × 4 m in size with a depth of 7.5 m. A total of 1,928 objects were placed in the grave by survivors of the deceased. There were 460 bronze objects, 750 made of jade and 74 of precious stones. Sixty-three stone tools were found here, 11 pieces of pottery, 560 objects made of bone, 3 ivory bowls, 15 river shells and 6,800 other shells. The funerary objects included bronze weapons and ritual vessels, over 20 bone arrowheads, more than 490 bone hairpins and 3 clay whistles.

The queen's service set of bronze vessels also featured an opulently decorated wine glass (*xiaozun*) in the form of an owl, a four-legged kettle (*ding*) in the form of a mythical animal (*kui*) and another similar vessel in animal-like forms, a cooker with three steaming pots (*yan*) and a twin wine carafe shaped like a palace (*oufangyi*).

The jade objects accompanying her to the next world included carvings featuring birds, perhaps phoenixes, and in another case an owl, possibly worn as decorations or sewn to clothing. A smallish, though fascinating figure of a kneeling servant with his hands on his knees and a second kneeling human figure with bird's head were also found here.

One of the wine glasses, carved from ivory with real and mythical animal forms, features turquoise marquetry.

It should be mentioned here that non-elite classes continued to be buried at common burial grounds depending on the lineage classifica-

ledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 332. On the duties of the peasants during the Zhou Dynasty see Hao Jitao, Peasant and State in Classical Athens and Zhou China: A Comparative Survey, "Journal of Ancient Civilizations" 8, 1993, pp. 78–104.

tion (*zu*) they belonged to. Customs included the burial of individuals who had not yet reached adulthood, often children, outside the main burial site, e.g. in containers in residential areas.

The spiritual world

Let us first use the sources available to us to inquire into the belief systems of the first Chinese state of the Shang Dynasty.¹³¹

The Chinese had the highest reverence for the god Di, also called “Shangdi” or “Celestial Emperor,” as the supreme deity of the Shang pantheon. We have no idea if this name applied to a single being or to a whole group of deities. Di was the celestial deity, though sometimes his name was added as an honorary title to the name of Shang rulers and a special liturgy was performed in his honor. The cult customs linked to this deity are quite similar to the veneration of the dead, though it seems that the offerings to Di were not made directly from worshippers of the Shang Dynasty, but vicariously through their divine ancestors. A cosmic deity, Di controls natural forces such as the clouds, wind and storms. He sends drought and other calamities and approves (or disapproves) major societal acts such as the founding of cities or the commencing of military campaigns. The four cardinal points fall under his jurisdiction and he may have emerged as an astral deity, perhaps inspired by observation of the North Star.

Other beings worshipped during the Shang Dynasty were most likely natural forces and their personifications – the Sun, Moon, wind and storms, as well as the Earth and even the cardinal points. The appearance here of female guardians (and not male guards) of the East and West is noteworthy and may be an incarnation of the goddess Earth.

It is clear that the veneration of the dead already represented in this ancient period one of the pillars of the Chinese spiritual world. The dynasty’s genealogy gives a total of 35 historical ancestors – both mythical

¹³¹ Aptly described by Wang Tao, Shang ritual animals: color and meaning (Part 1), in: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London 70/2, 2007, pp. 305–372.

and real; their spouses and sometimes their courtly dignitaries were commemorated during ceremonies. The ancestors were called by their “temple names” (*miaohao*) and regular sacrifice rituals were performed in their honor. Mythological figures, the “High Ancestors” (*gaozu*), also appeared in inscriptions on oracle bones. Their names were inscribed using pictorial symbols – e.g. using a picture of a bird – without a set order of symbols, and they were not known by their “temple names.”

Temples and altars were built in honor of all of these beings. Regular ceremonies determined by the liturgical calendar (e.g. a weekly ritual to honor the dead) were performed there, including burnt offerings (*liao*), libations and invocations. Food and wine were most commonly offered at this time, though domesticated animals – bulls, pigs, sheep and dogs – were also sacrificed.

Human sacrifices were also offered, often decapitated.¹³² Shang kings enjoyed hunting as an edification of early statehood’s ideology; they would then offer the hunted game – wild pigs, deer, tigers and wild birds – to their deities. Sometimes jade objects, such as weapons, and gifts of (white) textiles, most likely silk, would be brought to rituals [49].¹³³ Bronze vessels in the form of mythical creatures took on special importance, since only through them could a mystical connection be made with the dead. This is why bronze had an exceptional, cult significance during the Shang Dynasty.¹³⁴

The offerings were chosen according to how they compared with the powers attributed to them. Animals sacrificed to the *yang* force were supposed to be red, while the *yin* force required that animals of dark colors be sacrificed.

Prophecy using oracle bones was among the most renowned customs and traditions of the Chinese spiritual sphere. Bovine or sheep bones, especially cattle shoulder bones, were most often used for

¹³² Wang Tao, Shang Ritual Animals: Colour and Meaning (Part 1), in: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London 70/2, 2007, pp. 305–372, p. 310, note 18 and p. 326, note 87.

¹³³ Wang Tao, Shang Ritual Animals: Colour and Meaning (Part 2), in: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London 70/3, 2007 pp. 539–567 and p. 548, note 23.

¹³⁴ Norman Yoffee, Myths of the Archaic State, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 96.



Fig. 50 Amber pendant in the form of a silkworm's cocoon that silk was made from; 10th century AD, from tombs of the Liao Dynasty.

this. Turtle shells were apparently used later in the eastern coast and Yangtze regions (Dawenkou culture). Before being used for prophetic purposes, the bones first had to be cleaned, dried and shined and had all organic content removed from them, any remaining cartilage cut



Fig. 51 Oracle bone from the Shang/Yin period. The inscription gives three acts of prophecy performed in intervals of three decades. The prophecies concerned the blissful and ominous nature of the upcoming decade. Cracks formed on the left side of the bone at the middle when a red-hot implement was applied.



Fig. 52 A noble lady, a funerary sculpture dating to around the mid-7th century AD.

away. The prophecy was carried out so that the oracle (or king) applied a burning hot implement to the bone's surface, cracking it. The experts then interpreted these cracks as prophetic signs, whereupon the prophecy was inscribed in the surface of the oracle bone [50]. Even cases in which the prophecy was not fulfilled or proved to be wrong were recorded. The services of dream interpreters were also resorted to for these purposes if, for instance, they wanted to explain a king's dreams. Written records of acts of prophecies even seem to indicate different "prophecy schools" and experts entrusted with interpreting prophecies. It was also revealed that, besides the king, the elite of the first Chinese state could also initiate prophecy ceremonies, though these individuals were most likely members of a royal house, the king's relatives or courtiers [51].

Specialists of that age also attempted to influence natural forces, e.g. to magically summon rain. They performed ritual dances and brought burnt offerings for this purpose, sometimes even drowning their sacrificed creatures in the river.

This leads to a debate on the extent to which the first Chinese religion can be considered shamanistic, or whether it was a spiritual system created by a society that had already entered statehood and which, through the veneration of the royal dead, helped to maintain the social hierarchy and forge loyalty toward the ruling dynasty [52].

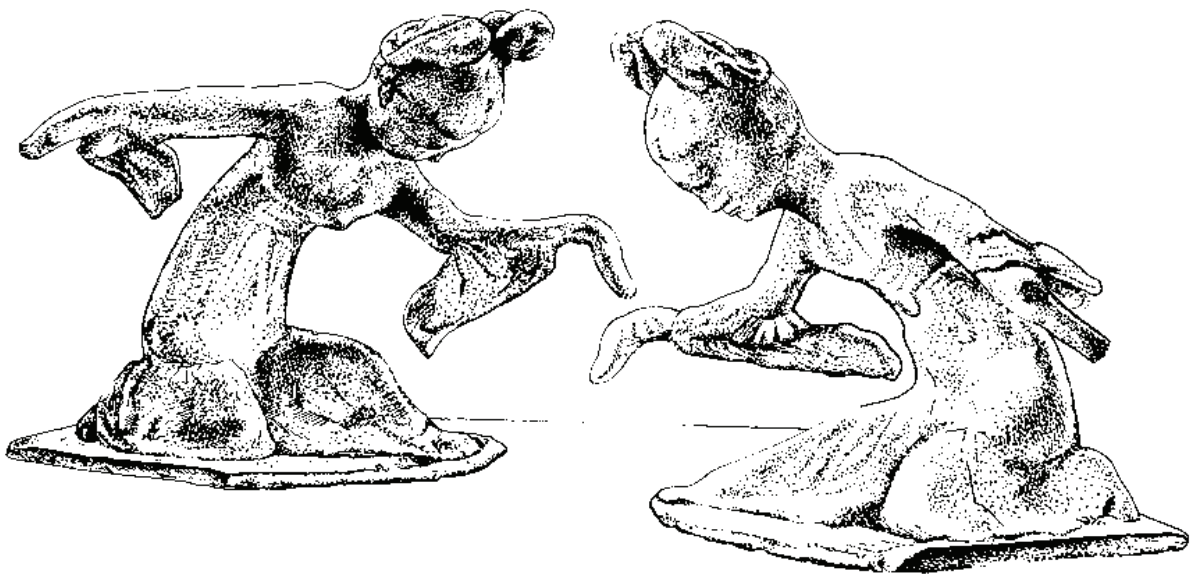


Fig. 53 A pair of dancers, a funerary sculpture dating to around the mid-7th century AD.

Information is just now emerging on how the Chinese perceived the form and nature of this world and the people's place in it. The Earth was square shaped and each of its cardinal points probably already had its own symbolic color as well as its own guardian deity with a special name. The winds blowing from the four cardinal points were sent by the gods, and the borders of the Middle Kingdom were perceived in the direction of the four cardinal points. The extent to which this symbolism of the four cardinal points and of their symbols was already present in Chinese prehistory is debated.¹³⁵

Let us now discuss the Chinese people and how they imagined humanity's idyllic (as well as proper and ideal) state. The following piece of writing from the late Western Zhou period (10th–9th century BC) offers insight:

Anciently, humans and spirits did not intermingle. At that time there were certain persons who were so perspicacious, single-minded, and reverential that their understanding enabled them to make meaningful collation of what lies above and below, and their insight to illumine what is distant and profound. Therefore the spirits would descend into them.

The possessors of such powers were, if men, called xi (shaman), and, if women, wu, (shamanesses).

Those who supervised the position of the spirits at the ceremonies, made the vases (used to) present victims, and appropriate clothes, made the descendants of the past saints glorious, knew the (sacred) names of mountains and rivers, the principal ancestors, (dealt with) all the affairs relative to the ancestral temple, (were in charge of) the difference between father and son (in the ritual), the enforcement of respect, the proper order of ceremonies, the principles of respect and justice, the proper physical behavior, the control of fidelity and trust, offerings and purifications and manifested respect to the luminous deities, were the zhu (invocators).

Those who established family and personal names, who knew what plant should be cultivated for each season, the color (of the hairs of) sacrificial animals, the different kinds of jade and textile, the different colors of (ritual)

¹³⁵ Gabriele Fahr-Becker (ed.), *The Art of East Asia*, p. I.: Tandem Verlag GmbH 2006, p. 16 upper left: grave M45 from Xishuipo, the Yangshao culture, the deceased among forms of the tiger and dragon made from pebbles. However, the date of this grave is debated.

clothes, the (proper) quantity of (ritual) vessels, the rules (concerning) the order of ancestral tablets, the proper positions during sacrifices, mounds and swept soil (for sacrifices), deities of above and below, the origin of the clans and abided by the ancient rules were the zong officers.

Therefore, there were officers for Heaven, Earth, the spirits and the different things, who were called the five officers, who ruled their own domain (of competence) and did not intermingle (with each other's domain).

So the people were trustful, the spirits had a luminous virtue and the people and spirits had their own realm. There was respect and no untoward familiarity. As a consequence, the spirits sent down blessing on the people, and accepted from them their offerings. There were no natural calamities.¹³⁶

We have here an illustrative and detailed description of the relationship between the human world and the spirit world that was considered by ancient Chinese sages to be proper, desirable and just. This text actually seems to show a very ancient attitude toward life. There is no mention here of gods; only people and “spirits” appear. The harmonic relationship between man and everything that transcends him is then considered the criterion of all order of the human and spirit world, just as it was understood in the other early civilizations of the Old World.

This is actually an idealized picture of a “golden age” that is still void of priests and lords and where the classless society is ruled by officers appointed by the “people” and the “spirits” based on their moral, intellectual and ethical qualifications. There is still no distinction made between the spiritual and social sphere, both blend into one. It matters little if this is an authentic text or an interpolation from later periods: for us it represents a reflection upon the original idyllic state of humanity that grew from the roots of Chinese thought. Only later did there appear the central office of ancient China, the king and the emperor, which gradually became the guarantor of heavenly and earthly order.

It is important to point out, however, that changes occurred during the Zhou Dynasty that distinguished it from the situation under

¹³⁶ The *Guoyu*, probably from the Warring States period: G. Boileau, Wu and Shaman, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London 65/2, 2002, pp. 350–3076, on p. 357.

the Shang Dynasty. Research has already shown that, although the basic ritual and ceremonial components of religion did not differ all that much between the Shang and Zhou dynasties, changes can be seen in the periods' dogmatisms (?) as expressed by differences in the customary colors used for cult purposes.¹³⁷ During the Shang Dynasty, a preference was expressed for white and multicolored (animal) offerings, often chosen for sacrifices to the most important ancestors, for fertility rites and for invocations. The spirits of the earth and cardinal points were at that time remembered through animals of yellow color and dark shades; this also applied for the ritual summoning of rain. Offerings of a red-yellow color prevailed toward the end of the Shang Dynasty. The cult profile of the Zhou Dynasty, traditionally linked to the color red (just as the Shang Dynasty was linked to white), was probably in part derived from this. There is also proof that ceremonies began to occur at a set frequency (a weekly cycle) and that certain types of ceremonies were attached to specific worshipped beings.

The extremely influential factor of the ruler's spiritual legitimacy, which has yet to be mentioned here, must also be figured in the social processes. The Chinese king and later the emperor, the Son of Heaven (*Tianzi*), had to possess the power of *de* to undertake the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao*). Only in this way did he secure for himself the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*). As previously mentioned, the rulers of the Zhou Dynasty had already used this line of reasoning to justify their takeover of power through two factors: They declared themselves the lawful successors of the first Xia Dynasty and they insisted that the previous Shang Dynasty had lost its Mandate of Heaven due to the incompetence, ineffectiveness and oppression of its rule.

Though the origin of Chinese writing can be attributed to cult aspects, there soon appear lists of various goods on perishable materials such as silk or pieces of bamboo.¹³⁸ Possible predecessors of the system

¹³⁷ There appear in bronze inscriptions from the Zhou Dynasty toward the end of the 10th century BC some 20 various types of rituals, of which 17 had already been referred to on oracle bones from the Shang Dynasty: Wang Tao, *Shang Ritual Animals: Colour and Meaning* (Part 2), in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London* 70/3, 2007, pp. 539–567, pp. 560–562, note 43.

¹³⁸ Charles K. Maisels, *Early Civilizations of the Old World*, London and New York, Routledge – Taylor and Francis Group 2001, p. 224.

of writing here continued to be discussed by researchers inclined to see them in the symbols and engravings on Neolithic or Chalcolithic pottery. While it still seems that these symbols do not form a continuous and arranged system providing us with the sought testimony, attempts are made to see in them emblems of lineages, families or clans.¹³⁹

Chinese writing has still essentially preserved the traits it acquired in the first centuries of its existence. The famous Chinese endeavor to systematize and describe the entire visible world has even provided us with definitions that the learned doctor and scribe Xu Shen (30–124 AD) gave in the epilogue to his dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi*. He classifies script characters as the results of a process consisting of six basic steps:

1. deictograms – relating to their metaphorically conveyed meaning (i.e. indexes or symbols);
2. pictograms – indicating conveyed meaning through a simple depiction of the relevant thing (i.e. icons);
3. morphophonograms – dual-component characters, in which one component indicates the semantic field that the character belongs to while the second indicates the pronunciation of the entire term (indexes or symbols);
4. syllogigrams – the logical joining of multiple originally independent characters, referring to metaphorically conveyed meanings (i.e. indexes or symbols);
5. iterative characters – created by the graphic modification of an original character accompanying a semantic modifications (icons, indexes, symbols); and, finally,
6. homophonic (“derived”) characters – working with homophony in which a spoken word represents a character depicting existence symbolized by another, similarly sounding word (symbols).¹⁴⁰

The first two categories – deictograms and pictograms (the only character retaining their original graphic form) – only represent 4%

¹³⁹ Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 94.

¹⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer – L’invention du cunéiforme*, p. I.: Editions du Seuil 2000, pp. 166–167, in the English version of the book (Jean-Jacques Glassner: *The Invention of Cuneiform*, tr. Zainab Bahrani, Marc van de Mieroop, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press 2003) on pp. 124–125.

of all the characters. The rest of the writing system is made up of the other four categories of characters.¹⁴¹

This is clearly a system of icons, indexes and symbols that is mainly supplemented by phonetic complements, i.e. symbols that help to disambiguate when a multiple interpretation is possible. We are also familiar with combinations of visual and sound symbols that precisely determine which term is being used. There also appear symbols that, in speaking the given term, refer to another similarly sounding term. Semantic complements, symbols determining the category of terms which the character in question belongs to, are used to specify the meaning of a character in the event of ambiguity.¹⁴² This extremely complicated system of writing (a minimum of 1,500 characters must be known for basic reading) is still used today.

Later, under the rule of the Western Zhou Dynasty (1122–771 BC), bronze vessels frequently bore public inscriptions. Rulers and those in positions of power at that time built temples of immortalized ancestors that were opened with grand ceremonies in their honor. Commemorative inscriptions of these events were recorded on bronze vessels in which offerings were made at these temples.

Since prehistory, the Chinese calendar has been a combination of the moon and sun calendar with a relatively free and flexible system of months that takes into account seasons, temperature, vegetation growth and animal behavior and the possible inclusion of leap months. The calendar conformed to the movement of the stars and also contained information on when agricultural and cultural customs were to be carried out. According to the traditional interpretation, one of the most ancient Chinese emperors entrusted two families with overseeing the calendar and time information. The Chinese state had, since prehistory, set up and maintained calendar offices in charge of determining the period of important holidays and significant dates during the year.

¹⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Glassner, *Écrire à Sumer – L'invention du cunéiforme*, p. I.: Editions du Seuil 2000, p. 186, in the English version of the book (Jean-Jacques Glassner: *The Invention of Cuneiform*, tr. Zainab Bahrani, Marc van de Mieroop, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press 2003) on p. 142.

¹⁴² Norman Yoffee, *Myths of the Archaic State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2005, pp. 94–95.

These offices published almanacs for the people that contained the exact dates of such holidays.

As previously mentioned, the main components of Chinese spirituality always consisted of the cult of personified natural forces and the veneration of the dead; the oldest Chinese religious customs can perhaps be characterized by their affinity to Shamanism.

The deities of the age descended on the shamans of ancient China, resulting in the latter acquiring extraordinary skills, knowledge and power: They were able to invoke rain, purify places of sacrifice or summon the deities to a sacrifice. The Chinese have possibly, since prehistoric times, understood nature and the cosmos around them as an eternal cycle of the universe's primary forces inscribed in the system of the four cardinal points leading out from a common center. This fundamental pair of all cosmic forces, known as yin-yang and depicted by the familiar symbol of a circle divided into two "tadpoles" (black and white), represents the nature of world events in the Chinese understanding. Yin is characterized as cold, wet, dark, diffuse and passive and incorporates femininity. Yang, by contrast, is hot, dry, light, sparse and aggressive, and is associated with masculinity. Both forces are inseparably joined and the one cannot exist without the other. Together they create a dynamic, ever-turning balance in which one side's predominance is counterbalanced by the other. Neither of the sides can, however, dominate forever, and each contains in it traces of the other (the "eyes" in the tadpoles).

Along with architecture and perhaps painting, the works of which unfortunately have not survived, monumental sculpture dating back as far as the Shang Dynasty should also be mentioned. Sculptures from the royal tomb M1001 at Xibeigang in Anyang depict an array of mythical creatures: a tiger-man, pig-man and frog-man were among those found here.

HOW THEN IS A STATE BORN?

