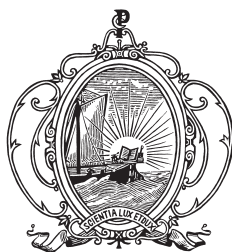# REMOVE THAT PYRAMID!

Studies on the Archaeology and History of Predynastic and Pharaonic Egypt in Honour of Stan Hendrickx

edited by

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EMERGENCE OF THE STATE AND LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN THE NILE VALLEY (4ᵀᴴ–3ᴿᴰ MILLENNIA BC)

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Studies on the emergence of the state tend to begin by focusing on communal dynamics, particularly their forms of leadership. They subsequently expand the scope of their research as the timeline continues on towards kingship and the political-administrative state apparatus. In this analytical strategy, communal spaces and their leaders are practically ignored once the analysis focuses on the state sphere and the figure of the king. Contrary to this approach, I will consider funerary, iconographic, and textual evidence of local leadership before and after the advent of the state in the Nile Valley between roughly the 4ᵗʰ and 3ʳᵈ millennia BC. My objective is to understand how the nature of local leadership transforms as the state emerges and is consolidated on a global scale.
Stan Hendrickx is indisputably a pillar in the field of studies on Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt, both for his own research and for that patient and enormous task of compiling all the existing bibliography on these issues. I am proud to have the opportunity to contribute to this book in his honour, with some reflections that begin with a topic that has been central to Stan's work: Predynastic leadership.

In the field of Egyptian Predynastic research, there are very good studies on local leadership, based both on archaeological and iconographic sources (see for instance Baines 1995: 95–124; Midant-Reynes 2003: 326–375; Friedman 2008a; Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2012). However, this situation contrasts with the practically total absence of this topic in the studies on the immediately subsequent periods. What happens to those local rulers once the state emerges? Do they simply disappear under the weight of the state apparatus? Admittedly, the evidence of local leaders after state consolidation is very scarce, but such circumstances are not very different with respect to pre-state leadership. In my opinion, it is the question itself about local leadership in dynastic times which is rarely posed. I think this is so because of the notorious evolutionist bias from which the timeline is considered: the expectation is that things grow, so the focus moves from the community to the state; from chiefs to kings. Once the latter appear, the former vanish from the perspective. Contrary to this approach, I will consider funerary, iconographic, and textual evidence of local leadership both before and after the advent of the state in the Nile Valley between roughly the 4ᵗʰ and 3ʳᵈ millennia BC. My objective is to understand how the nature of local leadership transforms as the state emerges and is consolidated on a global scale.

Let us begin by considering the available evidence of leadership in the Nile Valley prior to the emergence of the state. In terms of funerary evidence, during Naqada I a new type of rectangular tomb is used, which coexists with an older, oval-shaped grave typical of the Badarian period. Slightly larger in size, these new tombs tend to contain a greater quantity and diversity of grave goods. These new graves are a minority, though, while most of the tombs continue to be similar to those of the former period (see Wilkinson 1996: 75–85; Friedman 2008b; Campagno 2002: 151–153).

Within this context, certain grave goods are significant as they may have functioned as leadership insignia. In tomb A35 of el-Omari, for instance, an individual holds a 35 cm long cane as if it were a kind of sceptre (Debono & Mortensen 1990: pl. 28.1). In several tombs there are maces that likely were not used as weapons, given the impractical materials in which they were made (porphyry, diorite, breccia). It is much more likely that they were included in the tomb to emphasise the warlike role of its owner (Hoffman 1982: 145; Midant-Reynes 1992: 172, 183; Campagno 2002: 154–155). It is possible to trace a relationship between this kind of objects and the tomb's occupant, as if they symbolise the outstanding position of their owners, as would also happen after the emergence of the state with the objects that symbolised the power of the king.

Pre-state iconography includes a series of images worth considering in this regard. An object very similar to the later Red Crown of Lower Egypt is depicted on a Naqada I potsherd (Wainright 1923; Baines 1995: 95–96, 98–99; Payne 2000: 94, no. 774, fig. 34.774). The sherd belongs to a period that largely predates the process of political unification when this crown was associated to the White Crown of Upper Egypt. During the Naqada I period, the object could represent a headdress or a crown symbolising the leadership of some local character. Moreover, the decorations on some Naqada I vessels depict certain individuals that stand out from the many other characters in the scene. This is due to their larger size, their central position with their arms raised, and their attire, which includes feather headdresses and animal tails that hang from their waist, similar to those the Egyptian king wore in later times. These figures also hold a mace similar to those previously discussed with respect to grave goods. Furthermore, they seem to be subduing a group of smaller individuals, whom they take by the neck or tie up with ropes, in a scene that resembles the sacrifice of prisoners by the king during the Dynastic period (Dreyer et al. 1998: 84, 111–115; Hendrickx 1998: 204–207; see Fig. 1). In a slightly later period, at the beginning of Naqada II (c. 3600 BC), vessel decorations also depict figures with penis sheaths, holding objects that look like sceptres or boomerangs, and usually interacting with figures with prominent feminine features (Vandier 1952: 286–288, 352–353; Midant-Reynes 1992: 165–167, 180–182). Furthermore, a number of statuettes recovered from these
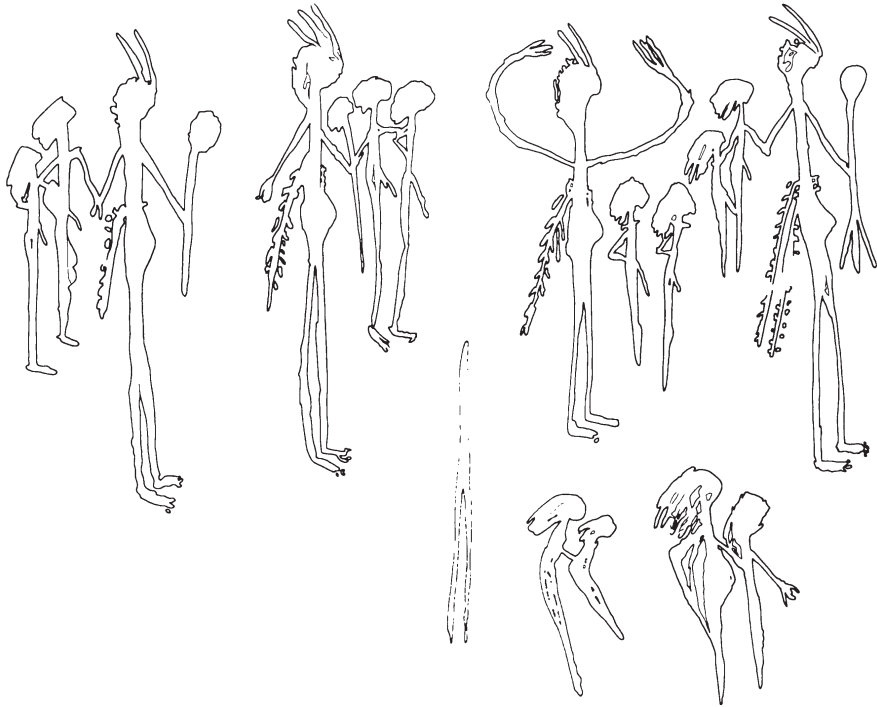
Fig. 1. Abydos U-239/1 (after Dreyer *et al*. 1998: 114).

epochs depict bearded individuals who also may be interpreted as emphasising certain attributes that were common in later characterisations of the Egyptian monarch (Vandier 1952: 419–428; Midant-Reynes 1992: 169).

Beyond the funerary context, the rock art of the Eastern and Western Deserts includes a large number of scenes that resemble the aforementioned iconography. In the Eastern Desert, a specific type of boat is frequently represented, in which one or more large characters appear, often with arms raised, holding maces, bows, and sceptres, and wearing feather headdresses. These navigation scenes may have had ritualistic significance, similar to scenes associated with hunting wild animals (particularly the hippopotamus) and others depicting war-like scenarios that include weapons and hand-to-hand combat (Winkler 1938; Redford & Redford 1989; Wilkinson 2000a: 158–165). The more distant Western Desert rock art also includes hunting scenes and interactions with wild animals, as well as other images that share some "air de famille" (Muzzolini 2001: 213; see also Le Quellec 2019: 85) with the imaginary that emerges from the Nile Valley and Eastern Desert iconography (Leclant & Huard 1980). Within this context, it is worthwhile to consider some recently documented images in the Gilf Kebir region. In a scene from the so-called 'Cave of the

Beasts' (Wadi Sura II; Kuper 2013) a large individual wields a type of axe or mace. Below this character, on the left, a human figure appears upside down in a position that resembles the later Egyptian iconography depicting defeated opponents. To the right, two rows of individuals, the lower composed of smaller, upside down characters, might either depict two groups in face to face combat, or the victory of the upper party over the lower (Bárta & Frouz 2010: 35–37; see Fig. 2). The exact meaning is unknown, but the relationship between the large characters holding weapons and the opposing group seems to illustrate a warlike context.

Fig. 2. Cave of the Beasts / Wadi Sura II (after Bárta 2010: 40).

To summarise the available evidence regarding pre-state leadership, we have, on the one hand, the funerary context characterised by tombs of larger size and grave goods of greater variety and quality. This suggests the existence of communal leadership figures, to whom the grave goods, such as sceptres and maces, would belong. On the other hand, contemporary iconography suggests that these leaders are characterised by two primary attributes. First, there seems to be an association between leadership and the ritual sphere: scenes such as those related to boats or those presided by large characters raising their arms may depict a ritualistic performance. Second, there is a possible link between these leaders and violence, not only because the rituals seemingly involve human sacrifice, but also because these characters frequently hold maces or axes and appear associated with hunting and combat scenes, which may suggest a close link between leadership and war.

It can be argued that other possibilities for the exercise of leadership should remain open. Some authors, including Michael Hoffman (1989), who took into account evidence of work specialisation in Hierakonpolis from the beginning of the 4th millennium BC, have suggested a more economically-oriented leadership profile, which could have been linked to the administration of production surplus for exchange or accumulation. While this possibility cannot be totally excluded, the iconography of the time does not support this hypothesis. Just as iconography highlights hunting practices over agriculture and husbandry, despite the increasingly decisive role of the latter in production, depictions of prominent figures always emphasise attributes linked to ritual and violence. While other leadership characteristics may have been present, they do not exist in the preserved iconography.

But what if we consider these same issues once the state emerges? If we turn our attention once more to funerary evidence, the Egyptological tradition compels us to consider a very well-known series of tombs of increasing complexity, from tomb U-j at Abydos at the beginning of Naqada III (c. 3200 BC), to the mastabas of the kings and the elite of the 1st Dynasty at the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, and the monumental tombs of the Old Kingdom (see e.g. Reisner 1936; Snape 2011: 7–85). Instead, I would like to consider another type of tombs that are much less frequently investigated, although information is equally available. These graves are contemporary to the Old Kingdom royal tombs but much smaller in size and less spectacular. Take, for example, the tombs explored by Guy Brunton (1927) in the area of Qau-Badari. The grave goods are quite modest, usually limited to some vessels. Certain tombs contain necklaces and amulets; less frequently, objects associated with the state sphere may appear, such as a vase with hieroglyphic inscriptions, which may indicate that these individuals had access to the elites, perhaps through patronage relationships. In general, however, the overall image of these tombs is not very different from that of pre-state epochs, although during the Old Kingdom, non-elite tombs are more diverse in terms of tomb size and type of grave goods. During this time, cemeteries for the general population (for example, in Giza, Gurob, and Naga ed-Der) contain a variety of tombs, including small oval tombs very similar to the ones known almost 2000 years before, shaft tombs, and small mastabas connected to each other, possibly reflecting kinship ties (Grajetzki 2003: 24–26). But in any case, the contrast between these types of tombs and those of the state elite is great.

Common graves are quite different from the large royal, elite tombs, and are comparable to those of pre-state times. Even if the small mastabas or modest grave goods mentioned above (cf. the vase with inscriptions), allow us to suspect the existence of village elites, this type of tomb alone does not explain much about forms of leadership. However, textual evidence fills this gap in information. The Old Kingdom texts frequently mention the significant position

of *ḥqꜣ niwt*, the village chief or headman (Moreno García 1999: 232). The first known reference of a *ḥqꜣ* is from the 3rd Dynasty: a fragment of a jar from Elephantine on which the chief of the village Itiutau is mentioned (Kahl *et al.* 1995: 170–171; Moreno García 2004: 89). This *ḥqꜣ* appears in relation to an amount of goods that, according to existing interpretations, he likely paid as a tribute to the state. Slightly later, the Gebelein papyri (4th Dynasty) refer to *ḥqꜣw niwwt*, village chiefs in charge of providing clothes to the state administration, also suggesting a tributary sequence mediated by these headmen (Posener-Kriéger 1975: 219; Moreno García 2004: 89).

In later texts, especially the Coptos Decrees (6th Dynasty), we find more references to local leaders such as the *ḥqꜣw niwwt*. In Decree G, the king commands to an official: "You shall make this division of land of this *per-shena* together with the chiefs, the rulers of the towns, and the tribunals of the fields" (*Urk.* I: 294, 15–16; Strudwick 2005: 114–115). Decree M also states that "the mayors, the seal-bearers of the king of Lower Egypt, the sole companions, the overseers of priests, the chiefs and the rulers of the towns and their associates will operate under his command" (*Urk.* I: 301, 1–2; Strudwick 2005: 121). The mention of these village rulers in the context of a division of fields commanded by the king, or at the end of a hierarchical sequence of officials linked to the state administration, is interesting as both contexts simultaneously imply the participation and strong subordination of the *ḥqꜣw niwwt* in tasks performed by the state.

Funerary iconography from the Old Kingdom also offers evidence of these *ḥqꜣw niwwt*. A scene in the mastaba of Ti in Saqqara depicts three characters, clearly identified as *ḥqꜣw niwwt*, appearing before authorities for a tax appraisal, prostrate in front of scribes who take notes (Steindorff 1913: pl. 129; Kanawati 1987: 114; see Fig. 3). Similar scenes are repeated in other elite tombs (for example Mereruka in Saqqara or Queen Meresankh III in Giza), in which the *ḥqꜣw* also appear prostrate or tied up, reporting to officials who force them to bend their backs or who hold sticks to hit them (Duell 1936: pl. 36–38; Dunham & Simpson 1974: 18, fig. 9; see Fig. 4). These images, therefore, describe the *ḥqꜣw* as local leaders who were both responsible before the state, and strongly subdued to it.

Nevertheless, further evidence indicates that while the *ḥqꜣw* were susceptible to violent subjection, they may have had more autonomy than these scenes suggest. On the one hand, there is a type of small statue, like that of Ankhudjes (Fitzwilliam Museum E.35.1907), in which the sculpted character is explicitly identified as *ḥqꜣ* (Moreno García 2001). Looking at these sculptural representations, it can be inferred that the *ḥqꜣw* may have had some privileges as they likely possessed this type of prestige goods and could be important enough to be represented in a statue. So, it is reasonable to conclude that the *ḥqꜣw* did not occupy the lowest stratum of the peasant population. On the other hand, texts

from the beginning of the First Intermediate Period provide information compatible with what these small statues suggest. An inscription on the stela of Hasi (CGC 1649) mentions a character who says of himself: *jnk mrjj n nb.f ḥzjj n ḥqꜣw.f*, "I was a beloved of his master, praised by his chiefs." In this way, Hasi emphasised that he was someone who enjoyed the esteem of both his master and the *ḥqꜣw* over which Hasi himself had preponderance (*Urk*. I: 152, 2–3; Moreno García 2001: 149). Thus, the *ḥqꜣw* appear as subordinate characters with enough significance to be mentioned by the esteem that their superiors received from them. This leads us to a social distinction apparent in the First Intermediate Period, between a 'great one' (*wr* / *ꜥꜣ*) and a 'little one' (*nḏs*). A 'great' one is, according to the terminology of Juan Carlos Moreno García, a rural "magnate". Rather than a peasant, the 'little one' is someone who is simply below the 'great one' in the social hierarchy (Moreno

Fig. 3. Mastaba of Ti (after Kanawati 1987: 114).

Fig. 4. Mastaba of queen Meresankh III (after Dunham & Simpson 1974: fig. 9).

García 2004: 91–95; 2013: 139–140). The text of the stela of Cairo CGC 20503 states: *jr.n(.j) mrrt ʿ3w ḥzzt nḏsw*, "I have done what the great ones loved, what the little ones praised" (*Urk*. I: 151, 11; Moreno García 2004: 92). The structure of this text closely resembles that of the stela of Hasi, using even the same verbs. In this way, the master (*nb*) / chief (*ḥq3*) relationship mirrors the relationship between the great one and the small one. Therefore, it can be inferred that the *ḥq3w* were equivalent to what would later be known as *nḏsw*.

In summary, evidence of local leadership during the 3rd millennium BC on the one hand indicates communal burial practices with noticeable continuity, although, if we extend the timeline, we can see even some impoverishment of the local elite tombs from the 3rd millennium BC when compared to pre-state epochs. On the other hand, in iconography and texts, local leaders appear responsible for larger collectives as representatives of village communities clearly subordinate to state administration. But they also—according to what we saw with respect to the small statues and texts of the stelae—enjoyed some amount of local prestige that allowed access to certain goods or recognition by individuals at a higher socio-political level.

But what happens to the ritualistic and warlike bias characteristic of pre-state leadership after the emergence of the state? According to available evidence from the 3rd millennium BC, such a bias disappears completely. That it may be the result of a shortage of evidence is a possibility that should not be ignored. However, there is reason to suspect that this change is not accidental. Since the emergence of the state, the ritual sphere is fundamentally associated with the figure of the king, and hence remains in the realm of the state. Both the iconography—the panels of King Netjerikhet at Saqqara (Firth & Quibell 1935: pls XV–XVI, XXXXII), or the stela of King Qahedjet (Ziegler 1990: 56)—and texts, especially the Pyramid Texts (Sethe 1908–1910; Allen 2005), explicitly assert that the monarch, in his position as god-king, performs the rituals of cosmic safeguard. He is the one who interacts directly with the gods. This does not imply an absence of practices linked to what Barry Kemp (2006:141–142; see also Bussmann 2011) refers to as local traditions, which could have survived or developed outside the sphere of the state. For example, a variety of small votive objects from the 3rd millennium BC were recovered at various sites, including Abydos, Hierakonpolis, and Elephantine. These objects diverge from the state canonical tradition and likely belonged to local cults, where they could serve a variety of functions free from the constrictive intervention of the state. However, these objects, possibly related to propitiatory rituals, do not indicate any association with figures of local leadership. In dynastic times, the relationship *par excellence* between leadership and ritual is exclusively characteristic of the figure of the 'ritualistic king' (Cervelló Autuori 2009).

With respect to violence, something similar occurs: it becomes a prerogative to which the state is exclusively entitled. The Narmer Palette (Quibell 1900: pl. XXIX) clearly reflects that this simultaneously ritualistic and violent bias is concentrated in the figure of the king. The massacre of the enemy is a fundamental ritual of cosmic guarantee. Beginning in the 1st Dynasty, it is carried out against neighbours that the Egyptian state identifies as enemies: the Libyans (in Narmer's cylinder seal; Quibell 1900: pl. XV), the Nubians (on an Aha label; Petrie 1901: pl. III.11) and the Asiatics (on a Den label; Amélineau 1899: pl. 33). In addition to the violence deployed outwards, the state also monopolised violence within its own borders. For example, on a vessel of King Khasekhem (2nd Dynasty) there is an image of the goddess Nekhbet perched on a ring with the word *bš* ('rebel') in front of the king's *serekh* (Quibell 1900: pl. XXXVI). This illustration was perhaps created in celebration of the suppression of internal rebellion. Furthermore, a number of 3rd millennium BC documents refer to *rḫyt*, a type of lapwing that symbolised the subordinate population. They are depicted hanging (top register of Scorpion macehead; Quibell 1900: pl. XXXV), below the king's feet (in a pedestal of king Netjerikhet; Firth & Quibell 1935: pl. LV), or with a knife at the neck suggesting decapitation (Palermo Stone; Wilkinson 2000b: 97–98). All of this seems to confirm the elite perception that the Egyptian population itself was an object of state coercion. Therefore, the state monopolised both inward and outward violence, and in doing so confiscated the attributes of violence that previously characterised local leadership (Campagno 2013).

To conclude this analysis, I would like to return to my initial observation about evolutionism and the obstacles that such a doctrine imposes on thought about local leadership in ancient societies. From the evolutionist perspective, when we look at the scene on the vase of Abydos' tomb U-239, we automatically see the path that leads to the scene of the Narmer's Palette—the path from chiefs to kings. The point here is not to deny the common elements of these scenes, but instead to point out that whereas some paths led to Narmer, most led to the *ḥq3w niwwt* of the Old Kingdom. The idea of a unique path that leads exclusively from the leader of tomb U-239 to Narmer is, precisely, the evolutionist illusion. We can observe this phenomenon once more if a selection of tombs is organised chronologically from the Badarian period to Nagada I, II and III, and then from the 1st to the 4th Dynasties. We see a pattern of progression and growth, but this is an illusion. The whole sequence depends on the initial selection of tombs under consideration.

On the contrary, if we compare the variety and quality of pottery production during the earlier stages of the Predynastic period with the much simpler pots of Naqada III, and with the decidedly rough wares of the Old Kingdom, we can appreciate what Norman Yoffee calls "the evolution of simplicity" (Yoffee

2005: 92) inasmuch as the emergence of the state not only produces expansion—as seen in the size of the elite tombs—but also reduces variability. In a way, the "evolution of simplicity" observable in pottery production, is similar to the process that takes place with respect to local leadership once the state is consolidated. Local leadership was preserved in figures such as the *ḥȝw niwwt*. However, in contrast with pre-state village chiefs, the *ḥȝw niwwt* were stripped of the decisive ritual and warlike aspects of their authority, now captured by the state apparatus. These local chiefs and the deprivation they experienced speaks much about the world to come, perhaps more so than the paraphernalia and iconography representing the powerful and ritualistic god-king.

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