The emergence of civilization in Egypt: Naqada II and Naqada III

Highly recommended: visit the Rosicrucian Museum in San Jose; there is a link to it on the class web page

Naqada II (also called Gerzean) period 3600-3200 BC (400 years long)
- This is when things really started to change
  - some have suggested that the change was so drastic that it implies the arrival of a new group of people from some foreign place
  - who became the ruling class
  - this is highly debatable, though; the majority of archaeologists now reject this idea
  - there was some outside influence, without a doubt. We’ll look at the evidence later…
- Contemporary with Middle Uruk (3600-3400 BC) and Late Uruk (3400-3100 BC)
  - interesting that this is just when urbanism, technology, the power of the temple, etc. really picked up in Sumer, too
- Naqada II in Upper Egypt (3600-3200 BC)
  - significant changes in material culture
    - in general: the development of elaborate, specialized crafts
    - many changes in pottery style
      - especially the appearance of pots with painted designs, usually showing boats
      - the boats often have features thought to be a “standard” or “emblem” similar to the standards that later identified regions
    - many changes in the styles of other artifacts, often well made and decorated
      - shape of mace heads changed from disk-shaped to pear-shaped
      - cosmetic palettes changed shape and size, often finely made in animal shapes
        - some very small ones must be models
    - the “signature” objects of Naqada II: incredibly well-made flint knives
      - blade first ground to shape
      - then long, parallel flakes chipped off of one face only (“ripple flaking”)
      - small flakes, also chipped off the same side (“retouch” flakes), perfected the shape
      - sometimes with carved ivory handles
      - must be the work of highly skilled specialists
      - clearly for show, not use
    - increasing (but still rare) use of copper, very rare silver and gold
      - copper adzes, axes, daggers; knives, spearheads, harpoons, fishhooks, needles, finger rings, small tools, ornaments
      - copper casting and forging
      - silver and gold for thin wire, tiny beads, sheathing on other materials, jewelry
    - social implications:
      - rise of highly skilled specialists making elaborate display goods
      - implies a high-status clientele able to support this work
      - many of these objects were apparently destined for show and/or burial, not use
maybe competition to make ever more elaborate burials encouraged division and specialization of labor, concentration of wealth, increasing social complexity
or maybe the burials just reflect those changes, which could have been caused by something else
House style changed from round, semisubterranean, with pole and thatch superstructure, to rectangular, aboveground, mudbrick with walled courtyard as in Mesopotamia
Late Naqada II clay house model illustrates this
rectangular, with door at one end and two windows at the other
half roofed, half an open courtyard
similar to houses still used today
does this shift in house shape mean something interesting? Kent Flannery's suggestion:
round houses arranged in a circle around an open space are typical of small farming and herding societies
in which food production and consumption is shared among the whole group
this plan cannot expand to a very large size, or the circle gets impractically large
so if the group gets large, some members tend to bud off into a new group
grids of rectangular houses are typical of larger societies in which productive activities are less shared and communal
made up of many relatively independent productive units, typically families
this plan can easily grow to accommodate more families without budding off
so Flannery argues that rectangular houses suggest a shift from smaller, communal, simply integrated society to larger-scale, more impersonal, fragmented society of economically independent families
they might be interdependent in terms of specialization and exchange, but they no longer form a single functional economic unit
of course, there are many exceptions, and not everyone is convinced by this
a few large towns or small cities developed
possibly just two or three in Upper Egypt
not nearly as generalized a phenomenon as in Mesopotamia
the vast majority of Egyptians were still rural, as they remained throughout Egyptian history - there was never any hyper-urbanism in Egypt
These few large towns were probably the centers of chiefdoms that each controlled a nearby stretch of the Nile farmland and its population
Hierakonpolis (also called Nekhen)
became a major urban center
a “population explosion” at this site around the beginning of Naqada II
at 3800 BC (middle of Naqada I), it was a village of several hundred people
by 3400 BC (middle of Naqada II), it had 5,000 to 10,000 residents
this could reflect population increasing in the area
but it more likely reflects people moving from the countryside into the town
that is, people concentrating into one place, rather than a big increase in numbers of people in the region
this would have put pressure on the food production capacity right near the town
may have encouraged taxation or other control of production from the surrounding hinterland
- densely packed rectangular mudbrick houses, similar to Mesopotamia
  - with a range of sizes, suggesting differences in wealth or status
  - apparently was the residence of important chiefs or kings
  - probably much smaller than Uruk at this time, but at least in the same league
- economy:
  - subsistence based on wheat and barley, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs
  - apparently already a major pottery production center for Upper Egypt
    - because ceramics from Hierakonpolis were widespread in Upper Egypt
    - implies specialization, organization of workshops, concentration of capital,
      probably specialized traders
  - probably some people getting wealthy while others worked for ceramic workshops or merchants
  - Hierakonpolis also produced vases, maceheads, palettes, other stone goods
    - suggests considerable specialization, differentiation, complex division of labor…
  - big constructions were built at Hierakonpolis between 3400 BC and 3200 BC
    - second half of Naqada II
    - an oval retaining wall of sandstone blocks, almost 50 m across, maybe a platform for a monumental building
      - dating is rough, but probably in Naqada II
    - a thick mudbrick wall around part of the town, presumably for defense
  - with an extensive cemetery
    - including some rich burials that suggest wealthy, powerful leaders
- Naqada (a settlement; where Naqada I, II, III pottery styles were identified)
  - similar layout of rectangular mud-brick buildings
  - by the beginning of Naqada II, the town was enclosed by a mudbrick wall
    - presumably for defense
  - very important cemetery
    - containing some large, rich burials comparable to the richest at Hierakonpolis
- This (a site called “This”), near Abydos
  - a poorly known town that was probably the center of another regional chiefdom
- pottery from just a few clay sources was traded up and down the Nile, suggesting specialized mass production
- gold, malachite, other minerals were probably collected or mined from the desert highlands east of Hierakonpolis and Naqada
  - this may have involved organization that could reinforce status differences
    - that is, leaders in these places may have been able to use their access to mines, trading routes, and manpower to exploit them to further build their wealth and power
- burial practices for the highest-status people got increasingly elaborate, suggesting increasing status differences
  - moderate-status burials were still in oval pits, with a modest quantity of goods

- another poorly known town
example moderate-status grave lot: a necklace of gold, turquoise, garnet, and malachite beads, some common ceramics, two small decorated pots, and a crude flint knife

highest-status burials began to be placed in rectangular chambers with mudbrick walls
maybe echoed the shift to rectangular houses
highest-status burials started to have “mastabas”, or bench-like rectangular mounds built over them

looting was already a problem in Naqada II
“secondary” burials in some tombs are thought to be attempts to set things right after a grave was robbed.

the “painted tomb” at Hierakonpolis
the largest, most elaborate Naqada II tomb known
presumably the tomb of an Upper Egyptian chief or ruler
unfortunately looted before excavation in 1899, only a few artifacts remained
walls and floor of brick
a light wall divided the tomb into a burial chamber and a space for offerings: a pattern that would be elaborated later
the walls are painted (the only known example from this period) and show:
boats similar to the ones on the pots
men thought to be hunting animals and/or fighting each other
one seems to hold three captives tied by a rope
another seems to hold a figure upside down, ready to hit it with a long stick
but these are ambiguous, since some of the “victims” are clearly animals
also, one seems to hold two animals, much like the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh
suggests two things
first, Mesopotamian influence
second, maybe the painting does not describe real Egyptian events at all…
this is evidence for an emerging elite or ruling class
albeit not nearly as marked as in the following periods
it might be evidence for the elites’ connection to warfare -- or it might not…
it might be evidence for the elites’ having some sort of connection to Mesopotamia, maybe ethnic, trade, religious, or…?

Naqada II in Lower Egypt (3600-3200 BC)
again: contemporary with Middle and Late Uruk
Unfortunately, it is more difficult to tell what happened in Lower Egypt, due to sites being located in the Nile delta, where early evidence is mostly deeply buried under silt
As in Upper Egypt, a few large towns developed
extensive trade with the Levant, maybe Mesopotamia
But lower Egyptian culture evolved gradually, without the fairly abrupt changes seen in Upper Egypt at the start of Naqada II
town of Ma’adi (3650 BC - ~2700 [through Early Dynastic])
up to 18 ha (about 1 and 1/2 Çatal Hüyük)
− plain pottery
− oval houses, some semi-subterranean, pole and thatch roofs
− relatively simple burials, both in the town and in cemeteries, with some variation in richness
− but now added extensive trade with Levant and possibly Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr cities of Mesopotamia
− domesticated donkeys (*Equus asinus*: ass) present; used for trading expeditions?
− possible trade with Upper Egypt (debated)
− storage was not only in individual houses in town, but also in segregated areas around the edge of the town
− one of these areas contained underground, roofed “cellars” for storage of goods
− another had rows of large storage jars set into the ground
− one contained stone vases and carnelian beads
− jars, grains, animal and fish bones, lumps of asphalt, flint tools, spindle whorls etc.
− such large quantities of goods must have been for exchange, rather than the use of any one family or group
− this storage was NOT centralized, as at Mesopotamian temples, but dispersed
− maybe controlled by various different families or other institutions?
− considerable evidence of craft production
− copper smelted and worked on site
− ore possibly brought from Sinai
− apparent workshop areas for stone production
− specialized craft producers making goods for exchange?
− Buto
− poorly known due to being deep under water table
− but evidently a large town
− its location suggests that it could have been a port for trade with the Mediterranean and the Levant
− we’ll see more evidence for this in a moment…
− Some evidence suggests contact between Egypt and Mesopotamia during Naqada II and Naqada III
− whether this contact involved a significant number of people, and whether it had any significant effect on Egyptian culture, is highly debated
− while Egypt picked up many ideas from Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia does not seem to have picked up any from Egypt; the influence seems one-way
− Mesopotamian influence in Lower Egypt
− Lower Egypt was clearly part of the Uruk expansion
  − Mesopotamian Uruk period pottery, cylinder seals, and other items are found at Buto and elsewhere in Lower Egypt
  − at Buto, locally made “clay cones” for wall mosaics - a Mesopotamian style
  − implies at least one important building in Mesopotamian style, probably the presence of Sumerian people, some trade…
− clear evidence of goods exchanged from Mesopotamia
  − from Syria, Uruk, even Susa
Mesopotamian influence in Egypt in general
- locally made cylinder seals may be imitations of Mesopotamian models
- paneled “palace-façade” mudbrick architecture appeared in Egypt in Naqada II
  - no known local antecedents in Egypt
  - very similar to buttressed architecture of Mesopotamia
- some artistic motifs (and myths or events that they represent) that appeared during Naqada II seem to have come from Mesopotamia
  - Ivory knife handle of Gebel-el-Arak
    - Mesopotamian Gilgamesh-like (or Enkidu-like) figure holding two lions
    - battle scene with Naqada II style boats and Mesopotamian style boat!
    - suggests that the “influence” may not always have been peaceful
- The motif of a person holding two animals also appears in the Naqada II tomb painting in the Painted tomb at Hierakonpolis
  - you remember that this was a Sumerian motif
  - the figure might be dressed in Sumerian style
  - this motif is not likely to have been invented coincidentally by the Egyptians
- Intertwined serpent-necked animals (“serpo-felines”) appear in Egyptian art by the end of Naqada II
  - slightly later example on the palette of Narmer (Naqada III period)

Generalizations about Naqada II
- Upper and Lower Egypt were still very different
- Upper Egypt
  - large, rich tombs at Hierakonpolis and Naqada suggest big differences in wealth and status
    - apparently a highly stratified, hierarchical society
  - weapons in burials, fighting shown in the Painted Tomb, and walls around towns all suggest that high status had a military component
  - although exploitation of mineral production, craft production, and trade could also have been important
  - Upper Egypt seems to have been organized into regional chiefdoms with a few capital cities and obvious rulers
    - who had to wall their towns for self-defense
    - most people still lived in small rural settlements
  - apparently militaristic chiefdoms controlling increasingly large stretches of the Upper Nile valley
- Lower Egypt
  - little evidence of militarism
  - overall, much more trading activity than in Upper Egypt
    - possibly due to greater agricultural potential of the Delta
    - and opportunities provided by being able to trade with the Levant
  - many centers of concentrated wealth in each town, probably multiple important families or groups per town, rather than a single hierarchy
  - only minor variation between burials found so far
even so, specialized production, trade, and storage of lots of valuable goods at Ma`adi make it likely that people and families developed different degrees of wealth and status
any status differences probably were based on specialized production and trade, that is, economic success
some large towns or cities, maybe the centers of regional chiefdoms or small states, but this is still largely hypothetical
Lower Egypt did not show signs of regional polities, obvious leaders, or militarism
although the absence of evidence in Lower Egypt might be due to poor preservation and little data
Relationship between Upper and Lower Egypt in Naqada II
Upper Egyptian goods and styles began to appear in Lower Egypt late in Naqada II, getting to the Delta town of Buto
suggesting increasing contact, trade, and desire in Lower Egypt for Upper Egyptian goods (and ideas?)
Delta towns like Ma`adi may have been trade centers that moved Upper Egyptian goods to the Levant, and goods from the Levant to both Lower and Upper Egypt
this relationship began to change towards the end of Naqada II, as we will see...

Naqada III (3200 - 3050 BC): the last century of the Predynastic period
Dating
Some would date this period (and the start of the next) 100 or maybe even 200 years earlier
Some would make it a bit longer
Contemporary with the last century of the Late Uruk period (3400-3100 BC)
Naqada III was a brief, eventful transitional period during which Upper and Lower Egypt became culturally and politically unified
Hence sometimes called the “unification era”
Naqada III in Upper Egypt
accelerating trends continued from Naqada II
the highest-status graves continued to get more elaborate
Cemetery at Abydos
rectangular tombs, mud walled
one to several rooms
roofed with wood and reed matting
example: the most elaborate Predynastic tomb at Abydos
12 rooms
9.10 X 7.30 m (27 x 21 feet)
despite looting, contained hundreds of pots, sorted by type
craft goods continued to get even more elaborate and expensive
such as palettes with elaborate carved decoration, many (but not all) with scenes of war
this evidence of increasingly rich and powerful elites, at just one or a few places in all of Upper Egypt, probably reflects the consolidation of regional Upper Egyptian chiefdoms into fewer, larger polities
since it would take more surplus and laborers to create the more expensive burials
this was probably at least in part based on military domination
probably culminated with a single Upper Egyptian chieftain, centered at Hierakonpolis, with its high status cemetery at Abydos
The macehead of Scorpion hints at the nature of Upper Egyptian kings in Naqada III
first, the object itself is a highly decorated weapon
probably symbolic, not for use, but indicating the military overtones of kingship
Scorpion is identified by a symbol next to him - incipient writing? (more on this later)
he wears the "bowling pin" crown that later was clearly a symbol of Upper Egypt: the white crown of Upper Egypt
the king is using a digging tool to open an irrigation canal
some interpret this as a repeated (annual?) ritual that linked the king to agricultural success - a religious role
others see it as commemorating Scorpion's role in building a canal system - an economic, administrative role
Naqada III in Lower Egypt
large towns continued
Ma'adi
Buto
Tell Farkha
may indicate a more unified, flourishing Lower Egypt than once thought
Historical sources claim there was a single Upper Egyptian realm and a separate, single Lower Egyptian realm, with its capital at Buto
This was long thought to be a mythologized, simplified account to go with a simple story of conquest by Upper Egypt
but increasing evidence suggests it might be at least partially true
the very extensive trading in Lower Egypt might indicate that regional conflicts were controlled, maybe by political unity
large towns might imply complex political organization
wall cones found only at Buto suggest that this place might have been more important than any other Lower Egyptian city: a capitol?
Unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
Cultural unification, accelerating a trend started in Naqada II
Lower Egypt was increasingly influenced by Upper Egypt
excavations at Buto:
bottom levels had only 2% Naqada pottery
by late Naqada II (3300 BC), 40% Upper Egyptian pottery
by Naqada III (3200 BC), 99% Upper Egyptian pottery
by the end of Naqada III, Buto is thought to have been thoroughly “Naqada-ized”
Along with this “Naqada-ization” of material culture came the rise of pronounced social status differences in Lower Egypt
evidence: wide variation in grave goods at Minshat Abu Omar
in sample of 370 terminal Predynastic/Early Dynastic tombs
− but no rich burials of juveniles
− suggests that in the Delta, status was earned during life, NOT largely hereditary, in contrast to the pattern assumed in Upper Egypt

− Political unification
− The cultural “Naqada-ization” of Lower Egypt was accompanied by a lot of warfare
− at least, there is a lot of warfare depicted on palettes
− these are basically Upper Egyptian artifacts
− they are decorative, probably not really used (or only used ritually), kept in temples
− Battlefield palette
− Towns palette - animals breaking into walled towns with agricultural digging tools
− other fancy artifacts also suggest warfare
− decorated maceheads
− A recently-reported find of symbols carved on a rock in a wadi in the area of Abydos may record a conquest by the first Scorpion king (there were several who used that name)
− dated around 3250 BC (very end of Naqada II, maybe beginning of Naqada III)
− at Gebel Tjauti
− seems to show a procession including a bound captive, with the row of symbols headed up by a scorpion and a falcon, which later symbolized Upper Egypt
− Maybe King Scorpion of Upper Egypt returning home with prisoners from a military victory
− The Egyptian historian Manetho, writing around 300 BC, said that just before the beginning of the First Dynasty of Egyptian kings, a king of Upper Egypt named Menes conquered Lower Egypt and founded the united kingdom of Egypt
− We don’t know if either region was really that formally organized
− Hierakonpolis was certainly an important center
− Buto was too, although it is still not well known
− Menes supposedly established a new city, Memphis, to be its capital
− archaeological evidence suggests that Memphis did indeed either begin or grow dramatically at about the end of the predynastic period
− Whether or not it happened as a single, dramatic military campaign, the Naqada III period did end with the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under a single king (pharaoh)
− evidently in part through military actions during the preceding decades or century
− archaeological support for the story of political unification by military force is based mostly on a few decorated palettes and maceheads
− these may reflect propaganda as much as literal history
− Palette of Narmer
− found in the temple at Hierakonpolis, an important center, maybe capitol of Upper Egypt
− apparently placed there as an offering cache by a later king shortly after Naqada III
− Narmer's name is given by very early hieroglyphs that can be sounded out
− the word for catfish is pronounced “Nar”
− the word for chisel is pronounced “Mer”
– Narmer could have been thought of as “catfish-chisel” for some reason, but more likely his name just sounded like that, with the hieroglyphs being a kind of rebus trick to represent the sound of the name
– the palette is dated to about the end of Naqada III on stylistic grounds
– one side shows Narmer with the
  – white crown of Upper Egypt (“bowling pin”)
– and the other shows him with the
  – red crown of Lower Egypt (“chair and spiral”)
– the identification of the crowns is based on later, better documented use of them
– Narmer is shown smiting a named victim
– As hawk-headed Horus stands on top of a personified papyrus marsh, maybe representing Lower Egypt, with a rope through its nose
  – Hierakonpolis was the “city of the Hawk”
  – since Hierakonpolis was the probable capital of Upper Egypt, that makes Horus a symbol of Upper Egypt, too
  – so the image seems to depict Upper Egypt dominating Lower Egypt
– on the other side, Narmer is the largest in a row of people carrying standards, probably representing divisions of his territory or army
– Narmer is shown reviewing decapitated victims, named as a group
  – below, a bull breaks into a walled town and tramples a victim – a siege?
  – The bull may be associated with Narmer, given the bull heads flanking his name at the top
– All this seems to suggest a military victory by Narmer of Upper Egypt over part or all of Lower Egypt
– which could correspond to the conquest attributed to king Menes by Manetho
– so Narmer was probably the same person that Manetho called Menes, a military leader who unified Egypt
– if so, though, this would have been just the last step in a process that probably took up to 200 years during Naqada II and Naqada III
– doubts about the palette of Narmer
  – Later kings always began their reigns by commemorating the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, among other events
  – so this might show Narmer commemorating a victory by a predecessor
– some people suggest that the palette of Narmer might refer to battles against foreigners
  – implying that Upper and Lower Egypt had already been unified by one of his predecessors
  – because the losers look central African, like the traditional Nubian enemies of Egypt
  – but if that were so, the Horus-and-marsh image would be hard to interpret
– Macehead of Narmer
  – found in the same offering cache at Hierakonpolis
  – shows Narmer wearing the crown of Lower Egypt
but the serekh surrounding his name is surmounted by Horus, the hawk who symbolized Upper Egypt
again suggesting that Narmer ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt
although not necessarily proving that he was the first to do so
some interpret this macehead as showing a marriage between Narmer (of Upper Egypt) and a woman (presumably royal) of Lower Egypt, legitimizing his dual rule
So Naqada III saw
the culmination of the process of formation of larger and larger political units
maybe reaching the historically claimed situation of two kingdoms, one encompassing all of Upper Egypt, and another encompassing all of Lower Egypt
Naqada III ends with the cultural and political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt into a single polity under a single king