

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

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- 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
 - most 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 impracticably 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
 - while this is an interesting idea, it is pretty hypothetical
 - it certainly does not prove anything conclusively
- 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 almost 50 m across, of sandstone blocks, 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

- 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 Hüyüks)
 - continued Lower Egyptian traditions

- 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 jar contained stone vases and carnelian beads
 - others had ceramic vessels, grain, 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 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 date this period (and the start of the next) 100 or maybe even 200 years earlier
 - Some 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
 - implications
 - these burials imply increasingly rich and powerful elites
 - emerging at just one or a few places in all of Upper Egypt

- which probably implies the consolidation of regional Upper Egyptian chiefdoms into fewer, larger polities
 - since creating the more expensive burials would have required access to more surplus and laborers
 - this was probably at least in part based on military domination
 - which probably culminated with a single Upper Egyptian chiefdom, 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 a shaped like a bowling pin, which in later times clearly symbolized rule of Upper Egypt
 - called the white crown of Upper Egypt
 - Scorpion 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 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
 - 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 suggest that the palette of Narmer refers to battles against foreigners
 - because the losers look central African, like the traditional Nubian enemies of Egypt
 - implying that Upper and Lower Egypt had already been unified by one of his predecessors
 - 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