

Renée F. FRIEDMAN & Peter N. FISKE (Eds.), *Egypt at its Origins 3. Proceedings of the Third International Conference “Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt”*, London, 27th July - 1st August 2008. Leuven - Paris - Walpole, MA, Peeters, 2011. 1 vol. in-4°, xxiv-1292 pp., ill. (ORIENTALIA LOVANIENSIA ANALECTA. 205). Prix: €125.

The growing interest in the earlier periods of ancient Egyptian history is not a recent phenomenon. Every year several hundreds of references are being added to the Bibliography of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Period in Egypt and Northern Sudan (for the latest update see S. HENDRICKX & W. CLAES in *Archéo-Nil* 22 [2012], pp. 95-111). ‘Excellent years’ for this bibliography are the ones in which the proceedings of the tri-annual conference “Egypt at its origins” are being published.

The book under review contains the proceedings of the third Origins conference, held at the British Museum, London in 2008. This impressive collection of papers, meticulously edited by R.F. Friedman and P.N. Fiske and containing numerous cross-references, presents the results of the latest research and is, like the two previous volumes, a must have for everyone with an interest in the origins of ancient Egyptian civilization.

The 54 contributions are organized under ten different sections or themes.

The first section deals with settlement archaeology. Seven contributions illustrate our growing understanding of settlements and give interesting new insights in everyday life, settlement dynamics, its social and economic organisation and ritual or ceremonial activities that took place in these settlements.

Mortuary archaeology is the theme of the second set of articles and focuses mainly on the Memphite region (C.M. Lacher, A.S. La Loggia, I. Regulski and Y. Tristant & J. Smythe) and Hierakonpolis (R.F. Friedman et al. and S.R. Zakrzewski & J. Powell). The major discoveries from the elite cemetery at HK6, where a complex and elaborate mortuary landscape is being excavated, consisting of a series of well organised tombs of human and animal burials and large pillared halls, illustrate the unique and special place that holds this site in the Predynastic period.

The third section is by far the most extensive and comprises articles that deal with an array of different types of objects. The iconographic theme of the hippopotamus is the subject of two interesting contributions. X. Droux describes a series of stone hippopotami figurines that clearly seem to be manufactured as identical pairs while S. Hendrickx & M. Eyckerman discuss the tusks and tags which are mainly made from the animal's teeth. Both contributions illustrate the ritual importance of the hippopotamus in the Predynastic iconography. Of particular interest is also G.J. Tassie's contribution on how different canonised hairstyles reflect social stratification, thus showing how hairstyles are linked to the formation of the state.

Pottery and lithic production are the central theme in the fourth section. M. Baba discusses a series of pit-kilns that have been excavated at HK11C. Based on the structural evidence of the kilns and the analysis of ceramics that were retrieved during the excavation, the author proposes a reconstruction of the firing technique. K. Nelson & E. Khalifa describe the technological innovations in pottery production at Nabta Playa, including the emergence of the first Black-topped pottery that occurred between the Middle and Late Neolithic. Caused by increasing aridity in the desert, new ways of social and cultural interaction developed, leading to technological change and innovation. H. Riemer presents the results of the lithic analysis of another important site in the Western Desert. The study of almost 70.000 lithic artefacts excavated at El Kharafish reveals new insights in the subsistence strategies of the pastoralists of the Sheikh Muftah cultural unit.

Three contributions deal with the topic of early temples. R. Bussmann discusses the degree of local variation in early temples. In contrast to later periods where temples are a key institution of the Egyptian king, he suggests that the 3rd millennium temples function on a provincial level with only loose contact with the royal court. K. M. Ciałowicz presents a series of votive deposits which were discovered in the Early Dynastic administrative-cultic centre at Tell el-Farkha. They consist of high quality ivory figurines that depict human, animal and divine subjects for which, in most of the cases, no parallels exist. N. Kawai relates the newly discovered stone structure with an associated subterranean chamber at north-west Saqqara in which numerous votive objects were found.

The Naqada transition is dealt with in two contributions. N. Buchez & B. Midant-Reynes tackle this highly debated issue from the point of view of Kom el-Khilgan and, based on the analysis of the 239 excavated tombs, forward a slightly different picture which can be explained in terms of *acculturation* instead of population movements or inter-relationships. Based on the analysis of the pottery production at Tell el-Farkha, A. Maczynska however, forwards the term *integration* (combining or integrating elements of both cultures without either of them being in the dominant position) to explain the unification of the 'Two Lands' during the Naqada IIC-IID period.

The section on chronology is of particular interest with two highly important articles. After a short introductory article in which S. Hendrickx describes the strong and weak points of our current knowledge of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic chronology, R. Hartmann presents the results of the completed excavation of Cemetery U at Umm el-Qa'ab, allowing us to reconsider in particular, the chronological framework of the Naqada I and early Naqada II period. Based on the introduction of new pottery types and at the same time, a reduction of the presence of older types, she proposes new sub-phases to the existing chronology. Of similar importance is the work of N. Buchez for the site of Adaïma. The analysis of the pottery yielded some important new chronological insights of which the most important one is the fact that sub-phase IID1 can no longer be supported.

Potmarks are the topic of the next section. E.C.M. Van den Brink gives an overview of what has been achieved since the foundation of the International Potmark Workshop at the second Origins conference in 2005. The next three contributions present the potmark corpora from different sites: Adaïma (G. Bréand), Tarkhan (L. Mawdsley) and Buto & Giza (A. Wodzińska), all yielding different results regarding the enigmatic function of these marks.

A. Anselin deals with potmarks in the context of the development of hieroglyphic writing. Other contributions in this section on early writing are the ones from J. Cervelló-Autuori on the emergence of the solar cult in Early Dynastic Egypt and E. V. MacArthur on the relationship between early writing and the rise of the central political state. Particularly interesting is J.C. Darnell's contribution on the rock art and rock inscriptions of the Wadi of the Horus Qa-a in the Theban Desert, illustrating how 'iconographic interaction' at rock art sites develops into a form of iconographic syntax which ultimately provides a background for the origin of writing.

The final section presents some theoretic approaches regarding different aspects of early Egyptian history. B. Andelković examines the driving factors behind the emergence of the Egyptian state. P. Perry describes the way in which the elite at Hierakonpolis used ideological power as the principal means of political centralisation, as is illustrated by the discoveries at HK29A.

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