EARLY DYNASTIC EGYPT

Toby A. H. Wilkinson

London and New York

perhaps established to conduct trade with Palestine. Vessels made from marl clay probably represent imports from Upper Egypt.

The spread of Upper Egyptian patterns of ceramic production, distribution and exchange northwards during late Naqada II accompanied other socio-economic developments which fundamentally changed the character of Lower Egyptian society. For the whole of the Predynastic period prior to late Naqada II, Lower Egypt seems to have been characterised by a generally egalitarian social structure. From the period before the advent of Upper Egyptian cultural characteristics, four substantial cemeteries have been excavated in Lower Egypt: at Heliopolis south (Debono and Mortensen 1988), Maadi and Wadi Digla (Rizkana and Seeher 1990), and es-Saff (Habachi and Kaiser 1985). The individual burials vary little in their size or wealth, and in general were furnished with few grave goods. There are certainly none of the prestige artefacts commonly found in contemporary Upper Egyptian graves. From the beginning of Naqada III (*c.* 3200 BC), however, this picture changes. At Minshat Abu Omar, the orientation of burials alters, bodies being laid on their left side rather than their right side (Kroeper 1988: 12–13). A simultaneous change in the pottery repertoire reinforces the division between earlier and later phases, indicating perhaps a change in the nature of funerary beliefs. Settlements excavated in the Delta also show a marked change, lightweight structures of timber and matting giving way to mudbrick architecture (van den Brink 1989). In Upper Egypt, the appearance of mudbrick architecture – in both domestic and funerary contexts – seems to be connected with the rise of élites, and it may indicate a similar process in Lower Egypt at the beginning of Naqada III (Wilkinson 1996b: 95). Several prestige artefacts, notably carved stone palettes, have been found at sites in the north-eastern Delta (Leclant 1952; Fischer 1958, 1963; Kroeper 1989), apparently confirming the existence of local élites in the area during the last phase of the Predynastic period. All the evidence seems to point towards the incorporation of the Delta into the socio-economic pattern characteristic of Predynastic Upper Egypt: local élites enjoying differential access to resources, expressing their status in the conspicuous consumption of prestige materials and in the wealth of their burials. In short, by the beginning of the Naqada III period, Upper and Lower Egypt shared the same material culture, and were increasingly characterised by the same social structure (von der Way 1993: 96). The stage was set for the process of state formation to begin in earnest.

EARLY CENTRES OF KINGSHIP

The heartland of the technological, social, ideological, economic and political changes that led Egypt to statehood was the southern part of the Nile

valley. Here, in the narrow floodplain of Upper Egypt, the conditions seem to have been most favourable for the rise of early élites (Butzer 1976; Bard 1987). Basin irrigation could be practised with little difficulty, the fertile alluvial land producing more food than was necessary for mere subsistence. At a number of key locations, **wadis** gave access to the mineral resources of the western and eastern deserts, providing communities with the prestige materials required by their leaders for conspicuous consumption. Control of trade routes, whether overland or by river, gave certain sites a further advantage, allowing local élites to dominate economic exchange over a wider area than their immediate hinterlands. The combined effect of these factors was to give rise to a number of flourishing Predynastic communities ruled by highly developed élites displaying some of the features later associated with kingship (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 242–5). Four sites in particular seem to have played a major part in the concentration of political and economic power that was to characterise the formation of the Egyptian state (Figure 2.1; Wilkinson 2000b).

The site of Naqada has given its name to the Predynastic material culture of Upper Egypt as a whole, and to the chronological divisions which modern archaeologists impose on the development of that culture. On the west bank of the Nile, opposite the entrance to the Wadi Hammamat that gives access to the mineral-rich Red Sea Hills, a large settlement grew up in early Predynastic times, accompanied by extensive cemeteries on the desert edge (Kemp 1989: 36, fig. 9). Since the name for Naqada in historic times was Nubt, 'city of gold', it is possible that the site's early prosperity was founded on this precious commodity, available at various sites in the eastern desert and no doubt traded throughout Predynastic Egypt (Trigger *et al.* 1983: 39). Certainly, by the Naqada II period, the local ruling class had grown wealthy and differentiated themselves increasingly from the general population. This is most noticeable in the mortuary sphere, élite burials being located in a separate cemetery (which, however, continued to include less wealthy interments as well). Cemetery T, as it is known, contained a number of large brick-lined tombs, furnished with abundant grave goods, many of them in prestige materials (Kemp 1973: 38–43, 1989: 35–7, esp. 36, fig. 9). Judging from the size and splendour of their burials, the Predynastic rulers of Naqada seem to have controlled a territory of some size, perhaps amounting to a 'kingdom'. The importance of Naqada and its ruling family in the process of state formation is highlighted by the construction of two royal tombs to the south of the Predynastic necropolis at the very beginning of the First Dynasty (Kemp 1967: 24–5, footnote). One of these belonged to Queen Neith-hotep (de Morgan 1897), probably the wife of Narmer, who may have been a descendant of the Predynastic rulers of Naqada. Moreover, the local god of Naqada, Seth, was closely associated with the kingship in Early Dynastic times, being one of the two deities embodied in the person of the king. Hence, a title borne

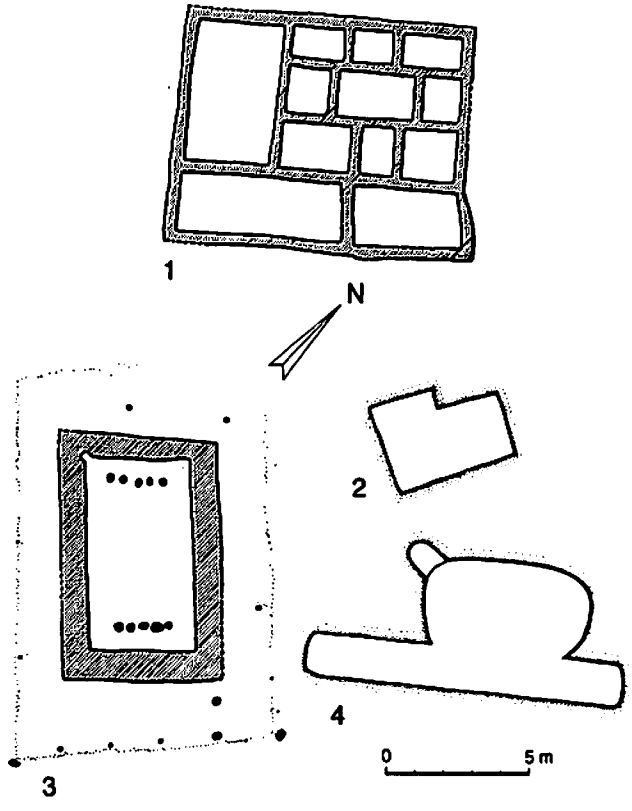


Figure 2.1 Early centres of kingship. Tombs of late Predynastic rulers: (1) Abydos tomb U-j (after Dreyer 1993: 33, fig. 4); (2) Naqada tomb T5 (after Kemp 1989: 36, fig. 9); (3) Hierakonpolis Locality 6 tomb 1 (after Hoffman 1982: 44, fig. I.13); (4) Qustul tomb L24 (after Williams 1986: 358, fig. 170).

by First Dynasty queens was 'she who sees Horus-and-Seth', whilst the Second Dynasty king Peribsen chose to emphasise Seth as his protector deity in preference to Horus. As we shall see, Naqada may have played a key role in the political consolidation of Upper Egypt that preceded the unification of the whole country (Kemp 1989: 35–7).

A large Predynastic settlement, extensive cemeteries and a concentration of élite burials in one cemetery are also features of another Upper Egyptian site, Hierakonpolis (B. Adams 1987, 1995, 1996; Hoffman 1982; Kemp 1989: 37–41, esp. 40, fig. 11). The area covered by the Predynastic town exceeds any other contemporary settlement in Egypt, marking Hierakonpolis out as perhaps the dominant centre in the fourth millennium BC (Kemp 1989: 44). Like Naqada, Hierakonpolis benefited from access to the mineral resources of the eastern desert, via the Wadi Abbad.

Close contacts with Lowe
Hierakonpolis control of, o
connecting Egypt and sub-S
cultivable land provided the
an expanding sector of non-
members of the local élite we
designated Locality 6 (B. Ad
II period chose a cemetery c
the famous painted tomb wa
Predynastic period, Naqada
back to Locality 6, construc
places. Tombs are not the
Hierakonpolis in the late Pr
excavated on the low desert a
has been interpreted as a ter
First Dynasty seal-impression
II, the main focus of local r
the walled town of Nekhen
adjoining paved area repres
(Quibell and Green 1902: pls
here that Egypt's first histor
votive palettes and macehead
Although Narmer was proba
This, King 'Scorpion' may
of Hierakonpolis (Trigger, i
Seth of Naqada, the close id
kingship emphasises the imp
rulers in the process of state f
ideology (R. Friedman 1994:
of the painted tomb.

One of the earliest examp
rated incense burner from t
Lower Nubia (Williams 1986:
together – including the rule
and a niched building similar
vator argued in favour of a
(Williams 1986: 163–90, 1987
iconography (for example,
painted tomb) make such a
1995: 104–5), there is no dou
L had adopted much of the
Egyptian counterparts. Cattl
cemetery and are also attested
55–6; Williams 1986: 176). T

Close contacts with Lower Nubia may have given the rulers of Hierakonpolis control of, or at least access to, lucrative trade routes connecting Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa, whilst a broad expanse of cultivable land provided the necessary base for a growing population and an expanding sector of non-productive specialists. As early as Naqada I, members of the local élite were buried in a remote spot out in the desert, designated Locality 6 (B. Adams 1996). Their successors of the Naqada II period chose a cemetery closer to the cultivation, and it was here that the famous painted tomb was discovered. During the final phase of the Predynastic period, Naqada III, the local élite moved its burial ground back to Locality 6, constructing massive rock-cut tombs with offering places. Tombs are not the only sign of the important role played by Hierakonpolis in the late Predynastic period. A large ceremonial centre excavated on the low desert and dating back to the early Naqada II period has been interpreted as a temple, closely resembling shrines depicted on First Dynasty seal-impressions (R. Friedman 1996). At the end of Naqada II, the main focus of local religious activity was apparently relocated to the walled town of Nekhen, where a circular stone revetment and an adjoining paved area represent the earliest temple on the town mound (Quibell and Green 1902: pls LXV, LXXII; Hoffman 1980: 131–2). It was here that Egypt's first historic kings ('Scorpion' and Narmer) dedicated votive palettes and maceheads, to honour the local god, Horus of Nekhen. Although Narmer was probably descended from the Predynastic rulers of This, King 'Scorpion' may have been a member of the ruling family of Hierakonpolis (Trigger, in Trigger *et al.* 1983: 50). In common with Seth of Naqada, the close identification of Horus of Nekhen with divine kingship emphasises the important role played by Hierakonpolis and its rulers in the process of state formation, and in the formulation of kingship ideology (R. Friedman 1994: 17), a role already attested in the decoration of the painted tomb.

One of the earliest examples of classic kingship iconography is a decorated incense burner from the Naqada III royal cemetery at Qustul in Lower Nubia (Williams 1986: pls 34 and 38). So many motifs are presented together – including the ruler wearing the **white crown**, the god Horus, and a niched building similar to early *serekhs* – that the cemetery's excavator argued in favour of a Lower Nubian origin for Egyptian kingship (Williams 1986: 163–90, 1987). Whilst earlier Egyptian examples of royal iconography (for example, the Abydos vessel and the Hierakonpolis painted tomb) make such a theory unlikely (W.Y. Adams 1985; Baines 1995: 104–5), there is no doubt that the rulers buried in Qustul Cemetery L had adopted much of the symbolism of rule developed by their Upper Egyptian counterparts. Cattle burials are a feature of the Qustul royal cemetery and are also attested at Hierakonpolis Locality 6 (Hoffman 1982: 55–6; Williams 1986: 176). Together with the iconographic evidence, this

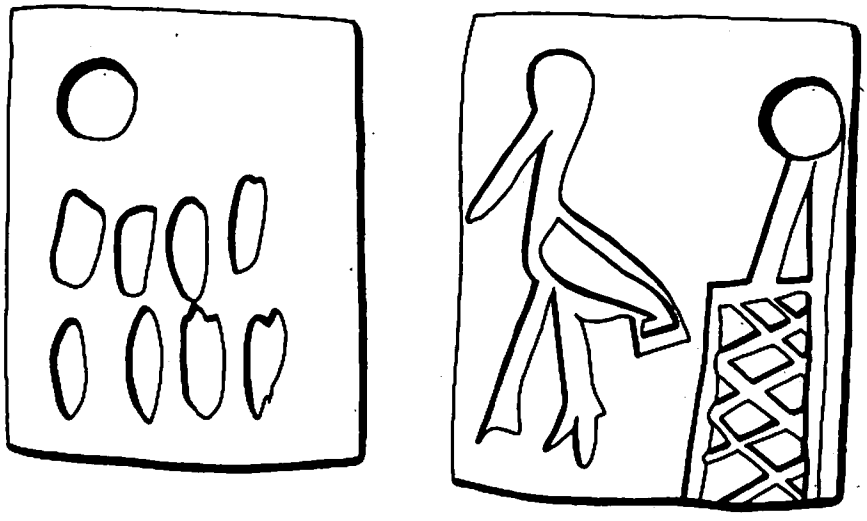
seems to indicate significant cultural exchange between these two late Predynastic kingdoms on the Upper Nile. The size and wealth of the Qustul royal tombs make it likely that their owners were powerful rulers, perhaps exercising authority over much, if not all, of Lower Nubia. The basis of their economic and political power seems to have been the trade between Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa in which the rulers of Qustul would have acted as middlemen. As we shall see, access to and control of trade routes were key factors in the process of state formation.

The fourth centre of early kingship is the site where that institution is first attested iconographically, Abydos. Cemetery U, the site of high-status burials since Naqada I, continued to be used by the local rulers and their associates throughout the Predynastic period, although graves dating to Naqada II are rather scarce, perhaps suggesting that high-status tombs were located elsewhere in this period. In the final phase of the Predynastic, Cemetery U clearly underwent a transformation into a burial ground reserved for the rulers of the Thinite region. Whereas in Naqada I élite burials were intermingled with simple sand-cut pits, the Naqada III tombs are exclusively high status (cf. Dreyer 1993a; Dreyer *et al.* 1996). This demarcation of a separate élite cemetery, paralleled at the other three sites discussed above, is one of the key indications of political consolidation and incipient kingship (Baines 1995: 109). The earliest town levels at Abydos also date to the Naqada III period (Petrie 1902: 22; Kemp 1977: 189; Wilkinson 1993a: 218–19), demonstrating a link between the concentration of political power and the beginnings of urbanism. If some of the votive objects from three deposits are to be dated to the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, as seems plausible, then Abydos, like Hierakonpolis, appears to have been the site of an early shrine (for further examples, at less prestigious sites, see Chapter 8). Unlike the situation at Naqada and Hierakonpolis, there is no evidence at Abydos for significant Predynastic settlement. The regional capital – and presumably the residence of the rulers buried at Abydos – was This, an ancient site which has not been located but which probably lies beneath the modern city of Girga. As at Naqada and Hierakonpolis, we would expect evidence of substantial late Predynastic construction at This as well. In the absence of such evidence, it is impossible to compare the three Upper Egyptian sites directly, but the mortuary record certainly indicates the primacy of This/Abydos towards the very end of the Predynastic period. The Naqada III tombs in Cemetery U are large, brick-lined structures, several of them with multiple chambers (Dreyer 1993a: 32–6, pls 4.d and 5). The most lavish burial, tomb U-j (*c.* 3150 BC), comprises eight chambers, some of them linked by small slits which probably symbolise doorways. The tomb as a whole may represent the royal palace in microcosm (Dreyer 1992b: 295), in which case it would be the earliest example of palace symbolism in Early Dynastic mortuary architecture (Baines 1995: 107). The provision

of an arena for the ritual of kingship, modelled on the courts and buildings of the royal residence, was a key component of the royal mortuary complex in the first three dynasties. Tomb U-j may allow us to trace this aspect of royal mortuary architecture and ideology back into the Naqada III period, once again emphasising the Predynastic origins of Egyptian kingship. One of the objects recovered from tomb U-j was an ivory *heqa*-sceptre in the form of a shepherd's crook (Dreyer 1993a: pl. 7.a, 1993b: 11). This remained one of the essential elements of royal regalia throughout Egyptian history, and its presence among the grave goods of tomb U-j leaves no doubt as to the royal status of the occupant. Moreover, the tomb is by far the largest of its date anywhere in Egypt, suggesting the strong possibility that its owner exercised rule or at least hegemony over much, if not all, of the Nile valley. The extent of his influence is highlighted by the other grave goods with which tomb U-j was furnished.

TRADE, OWNERSHIP AND POWER

Perhaps the most striking categories of object from Abydos tomb U-j are those which illustrate the economic and administrative apparatus at the ruler's command (Figure 2.2). Dozens of inscribed bone labels constitute the earliest corpus of writing yet found in Egypt (Dreyer 1992b: pls 6.1–4, 1993a: pl. 7.c–j). The short inscriptions, comprising no more than two or three individual signs, refer to places which presumably supplied the ruler's court with commodities. The labels themselves would originally have been attached to these consignments, recording their quantity and provenance. Localities mentioned on the labels include Delta towns such as Bubastis (Dreyer 1992b: 297, pl. 6.4, 1993a: pl. 7.i). Either the Thinite king already ruled Lower Egypt or he possessed sufficient status to command supplies from the Delta. There is no doubt that his court engaged in large-scale trade with the Near East: the tomb contained over 400 imported vessels from **Syria-Palestine** (Hartung, in Dreyer 1993a: 49–56, pl. 9). (Note that the word 'trade' as used here refers to the exchange of commodities without the profit motive that characterises trade in the modern world.) Many types are previously unattested in Egypt, and petrographic analyses have led to the conclusion that some of the vessels may have come from as far afield as northern Israel and the Lebanon (van den Brink, personal communication). The closed forms indicate that the pots were used as containers for liquids; the residues which have survived inside some vessels suggest wine as one of the principal commodities (Dreyer 1992b: 297). We do not know what Egyptian products passed in the other direction, but the sheer number of pots illustrates the scale of trade conducted between Upper Egypt and the Near East in the late Predynastic period.



1a 1b

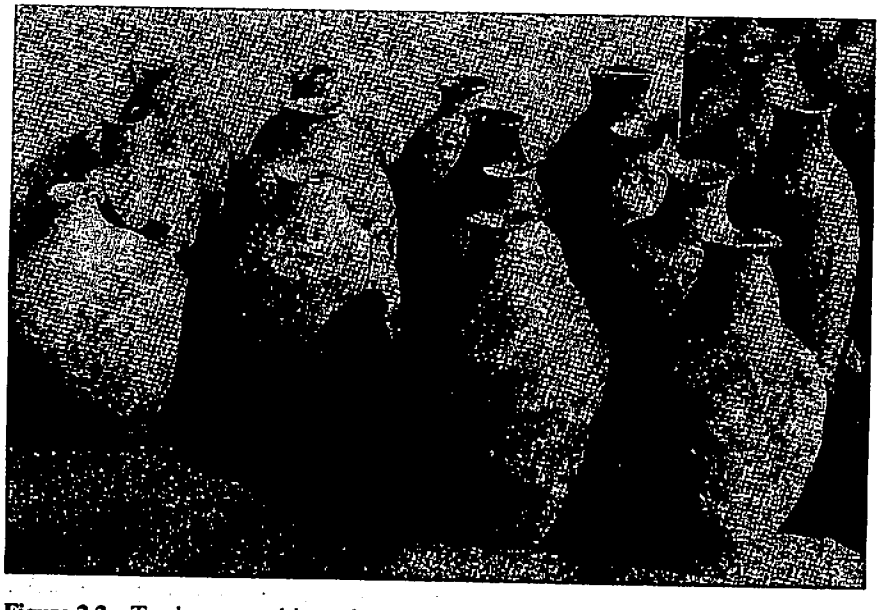
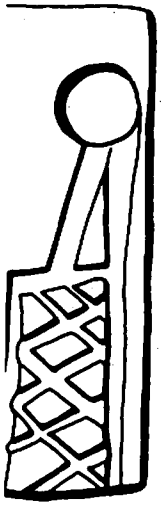


Figure 2.2 Trade, ownership and power. Objects from Abydos tomb U-j: (1) Bone labels (enlarged), originally attached to commodities. The short inscriptions record the quantity or provenance of the goods: (a) the number eight; (b) Bubastis (ancient Egypt *B3st*) in the north-eastern Delta (after Dreyer 1993: pl. 7.d, i). (2) Some of the hundreds of imported vessels found in the tomb; petrographic analysis suggests many of the vessels were manufactured in northern Israel, and may have contained wine (author's photograph).

Long-distance trac
Egyptians from early
of Badakhshan (pres
Naqada I period (Mat
from Syria-Palestine a
from this time onwar
hand-made bowls are
of early Naqada II.
powerful during the s
to require prestige goc
status. A particular t
handles – was evident
to copy it, giving ris
known as wavy-handle
Demand for genuine
trade practised by m
Minshat Abu Omar
Predynastic graves at
close contacts with its
1985: 97–8). At the ot
buried at Qustul undo
ability to control Egyp
as ebony, ivory and c
of an extensive long-d
were furnished with i
Palestine (Williams 19
nities (and their rule
powerful from trade,
the most influential U
routes. As we shall s
seems to have been on
unification.

The mass of forei
commodities importec
of the trading relatio
important export for
the ancient world and
one major Upper Egy
exploitation of this pr
crops, its fertility and
nate lands. Such expo
the archaeological rec
been found in the N
vessels), made in Egyp



ıb U-j: (1) Bone
:riptions record
ubastis (ancient
i). (2) Some of
nalysis suggests
have contained

Long-distance trade in high-status goods had been practised by Egyptians from early Predynastic times. Lapis lazuli from the mountains of Badakhshan (present-day Afghanistan) is attested in graves of the Naqada I period (Matmar 3005: Brunton 1948: pl. LXX); imported vessels from Syria-Palestine and even Mesopotamia turn up sporadically in burials from this time onwards (Kantor 1965: 6–14, figures 3–4), whilst Nubian hand-made bowls are a rare, but characteristic, type of pottery in graves of early Naqada II. As the élites of Upper Egypt grew increasingly powerful during the second half of the fourth millennium BC, they came to require prestige goods to demonstrate and reinforce their exalted social status. A particular type of Palestinian vessel – a jar with wavy ledge handles – was evidently so sought after that it inspired Egyptian potters to copy it, giving rise to a whole class of Naqada II Egyptian pottery known as wavy-handled jars (Bourriau 1981: 130–3; Needler 1984: 212–17). Demand for genuine imports grew, and with it the intensity of foreign trade practised by middlemen such as the Predynastic inhabitants of Minshat Abu Omar. The frequency of Palestinian pottery in the Predynastic graves at Minshat indicates that the community maintained close contacts with its neighbours to the north-east (Kroeper and Wildung 1985: 97–8). At the other end of the Nile valley, the Lower Nubian rulers buried at Qustul undoubtedly derived their power and influence from their ability to control Egyptian access to goods from sub-Saharan Africa, such as ebony, ivory and ostrich eggs. Qustul seems to have been at the hub of an extensive long-distance trade network, since some of the royal tombs were furnished with imported vessels from both Upper Egypt and Syria-Palestine (Williams 1986: pls 17–24 and pl. 25, respectively). With communities (and their rulers) on the frontiers of Egypt growing rich and powerful from trade, it is perhaps not surprising that the jealous eyes of the most influential Upper Egyptian rulers should have turned to trade routes. As we shall see, gaining direct access to imported commodities seems to have been one of the main motives behind the process of political unification.

The mass of foreign vessels from Abydos tomb U-j illustrates the commodities imported by Egypt from the Near East, but the other side of the trading relationship is less well attested. Gold may have been an important export for Predynastic Egypt; it was highly valued throughout the ancient world and, as we have seen, the early importance of at least one major Upper Egyptian centre, Naqada, may have been based upon exploitation of this precious metal. Egypt may also have exported cereal crops, its fertility and agricultural potential the envy of other, less fortunate lands. Such exports would be difficult, if not impossible, to detect in the archaeological record, but a few indications of trade with Egypt have been found in the Near East. Pottery storage vessels (or sherds from vessels), made in Egypt and incised before firing with marks of the royal

treasury, have turned up throughout northern Sinai and southern Palestine, at sites such as el-Beda, Rafiah, Tell Arad and Nahal Tillah (van den Brink, in preparation). Some of these sites may have been Egyptian 'colonies', established to exploit local economic resources directly (Brandl 1992; Porat 1992). Others, notably Tell Arad, are known to have been flourishing centres of the indigenous late **Chalcolithic**/Early Bronze Age Palestinian civilisation (Amiran 1978), and it comes as little surprise that they maintained active trade links with Egypt.

The identification of commodity consignments – both those destined for foreign markets and those traded within Egypt – by means of pot marks illustrates the growing obsession of the Upper Egyptian rulers with ownership, accounting and the detailed management of economic resources. The very development of Egyptian writing can be seen in this context (Postgate *et al.* 1995), and the bone labels from tomb U-j emphasise the link between economic activity (especially long-distance trade) and bureaucratic sophistication. Since their control of resources gave the rulers of Predynastic Upper Egypt their political authority, it was clearly of great importance to ensure that accurate records were kept of receipts and deliveries, and that property was easily identified. The *serekh* – a panelled rectangle representing a section of the façade of the royal palace – seems to have been chosen as a mark of royal ownership. A *serekh* incised or painted in ink on a vessel denoted that the contents were the produce and/or property of the royal court. At first, a simple *serekh* was enough to convey this message; later, the individual ruler incorporated his name within the panel to specify ownership more precisely (Müller 1938: 13–17; cf: Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: fig. 14). *Serekh*s incised or painted on pottery vessels for this purpose constitute our earliest corpus of royal names. The distribution of particular royal names gives an indication, albeit a rough one, of the extent of a king's economic influence or political power. Hence, it is possible in some degree to trace the rise of the Egyptian state. Whereas vessels bearing the names of some kings (such as 'Ka') are attested rather rarely, Narmer's name has been found incised on vessels from sites throughout Egypt and southern Palestine, emphasising that his rule probably extended over the entire Nile valley and beyond.

THE DYNAMICS OF STATE FORMATION

As we have seen, the various trends which led to the formation of the Egyptian state were gradual processes which began in the early Predynastic period. Increasing social stratification, the development and expression of an ideology of rule, the spread of Upper Egyptian technology and other cultural attributes throughout the country, the concentration of economic

and political power in the hands of a few ruling families, the intensification of foreign trade, the invention of writing and the emergence of a literate bureaucracy: these were not sudden developments, although the pace of change seems to have accelerated during the last quarter of the fourth millennium BC. What is clear is that these processes did not affect all regions of the country to the same extent. Local and regional factors such as the economic resource base, topography, communications and distance from the centres of power affected to a considerable extent the pace of developments at individual sites (Malek 1986: 26; Wilkinson 1996b: 89–90). Those localities which already enjoyed economic and political influence continued to develop rapidly, whilst the quieter backwaters (for example, Middle Egypt) participated hardly at all in the momentous changes sweeping the country. Indeed, it is likely that many smaller farming communities were relatively unaffected by Egyptian unification and the advent of a national government, except that they now paid taxes to the central treasury rather than to local or regional élites. When considering state formation in Egypt, it is important to recognise this pattern of regional variation, and of local variation within regions. The process was not a monolithic one, and although its ultimate effects were felt throughout Egypt, certain localities played a much greater role in determining the outcome.

Although the characteristics of early states are broadly similar for different regions of the ancient world, the factors involved in state formation are likely to have varied according to particular circumstances (Cohen 1978). Different authors have postulated different 'prime movers', that is principal factors, for the emergence of the Egyptian state (Bard 1994: 1–5). These include population pressure (Carneiro 1970; Bard and Carneiro 1989), prompting Upper Egyptian rulers to annex the fertile fields of the Delta to support a growing population (F.A. Hassan 1988: 165–6); the influence of irrigation in the concentration of power (Wittfogel 1957); trade (Bard 1987); and ideology (Bard 1992; cf. Kemp 1989: 32 and 35). Although all these factors are likely to have played a part in the concentration of political and economic power, some can be rejected decisively as 'prime movers'.

For example, given the carrying capacity of agricultural land in Upper Egypt and the probable size of the ancient population, it seems unlikely that population pressure was a significant factor in the formation of the Egyptian state (F.A. Hassan 1988: 165; Kemp 1989: 31; contra Hoffman 1980: 309). Even though the strip of cultivable land is often very narrow in Upper Egypt, it seems always to have been sufficient to support the ancient population. None the less, the end of the **Neolithic subpluvial** and the accompanying desiccation of the savannahs probably caused an influx of desert pastoralists into the Nile valley in the late Predynastic period. Such a phenomenon seems to be attested at Hierakonpolis (Hoffman

et al. 1986), and it may have played a part in the social processes which led to the formation of the state. The Scorpion macehead is an exception amongst early royal iconography which generally makes no reference to irrigation works. It is also unlikely that water management in the Nile valley was organised on a national scale in Early Dynastic times. The evidence from later periods of Egyptian history indicates that irrigation was not centrally controlled, nor would central control have been practicable: basin irrigation was the most efficient way of harnessing the floodwaters of the Nile (Butzer 1976), and this would have been most effectively managed at the local or regional level by communities, perhaps overseen by local governors. Hence, the control of irrigation on a nation-wide basis can probably be discounted as a major factor in Egyptian state formation (Janssen 1978: 217; Lamberg-Karlovsky and Sabloff 1979: 129; F.A. Hassan 1988: 165; cf. Hoffman 1980: 315–16). It has been argued that the need for ever more complex information processing was a key factor in Mesopotamian state formation (Wright and Johnson 1975). In Egypt, too, there is little doubt that the increasing centralisation of political and economic authority required sophisticated forms of administration – notably record-keeping and the invention of writing (Postgate *et al.* 1995). However, this seems to be a correlate or effect of state formation rather than a primary cause.

It is now generally accepted that a combination of factors was responsible in the Egyptian case (Lamberg-Karlovsky and Sabloff 1979: 207–11, 329–30; F.A. Hassan 1988: 164–6; Wilkinson 1996b: 90). The archaeological and iconographic record emphasises two factors, trade and ideology. In discussing them, an obvious danger arises: because these two factors were clearly at work in late Predynastic Egypt (more clearly, perhaps, than other factors mentioned above), it is all too easy to overstate their influence on the process of state formation as a whole. The emergence of the Egyptian state is best understood as having a 'multiplicity of causes' (F.A. Hassan 1988: 165).

Recent excavations at Abydos and in the Delta – at sites such as Buto and Minshat Abu Omar – have highlighted the important part played by foreign trade in the dynamics of state formation (contra Kemp 1989: 31). Of course, the increasing demand for prestige goods acquired by trade was a consequence, not a cause, of social inequality (F.A. Hassan 1988: 165). None the less, a strategic location for trade seems to have been the common factor in the rise of particular Predynastic centres. From Buto and Minshat Abu Omar in the Delta to This, Naqada and Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt, and Qustul in Lower Nubia: all seem to have gained importance and power through access to, or control of, trade routes. The vast numbers of imported vessels buried in tomb U-j at Abydos demonstrate the importance of foreign commodities to the late Predynastic rulers of Upper Egypt, and the active part they played in long-distance trade.

It is probably no coincidence that the territory conquered by the kings of Upper Egypt to achieve political unification was that which gave them direct access to Near Eastern trade routes, via land and sea. The rapid demise of the indigenous Lower Nubian **A-Group** at the beginning of the First Dynasty can also be attributed to Egyptian expansionism, as the early kings sought to eliminate the middlemen in their trade with sub-Saharan Africa. The desire for direct access to foreign commodities is manifested in the phenomenon of 'core and periphery', attested for other early civilisations (Rowlands *et al.* 1987; Algaze 1993). In the process of political and economic consolidation, the kings of the late Predynastic period and early First Dynasty temporarily extended their power beyond the natural borders of Egypt, mounting raids into Lower Nubia to subdue the local population and establishing outposts in southern Palestine to exploit the local resources directly. The character of the Egyptian presence in southern Palestine has been understood only recently, and it underscores the central importance of trade in the state formation process.

A factor which must have played a part in the unification of Egypt is the 'generative power that works from the top downwards and from the centre outwards' (Kemp 1989: 7) or, to put it another way, political ambition and the charisma of particular rulers (Service 1975: 291; Wilkinson 1996b: 89). Although Hierakonpolis and its rulers appear to have been at the heart of the unification process, it was the royal family of This that ultimately seized the prize of kingship. The reasons behind this are not clear, but perhaps the character of the competing rulers played a part in the final outcome. Once a unified state had been forged, Egypt's early kings lost no time in promulgating an ideology of kingship which presented the unification of the country as the fulfilment of a predestined order. We cannot hope to know if a similar belief in the divine ordination of Egyptian unity inspired the late Predynastic rulers of Upper Egypt with the missionary zeal to annex the north and make Egyptian unity a political reality (Lamberg-Karlovsky and Sabloff 1979: 133; cf. Kemp 1989: 35). However, ideology is a powerful force for historical change and, as one leading scholar has pointed out, 'states are ... built on the urge to rule and on visions of order' (Kemp 1989: 9; cf. Wenke 1991: 283–4). We must now examine the process of conquest and annexation that resulted in Egyptian unification, and attempt to reconstruct the course of events that led to the birth of Egypt as a nation state.

POLITICAL UNIFICATION: A HYPOTHESIS

The archaeological evidence makes it clear that, by the end of Naqada II (*c.* 3200 BC), the most powerful centres were This, Naqada and Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt (Kemp 1989: 34, fig. 8). The regional

traditions of pottery manufacture identified in Naqada I Upper Egypt may hint at the existence of incipient territories even earlier (R. Friedman 1994: 4–5); these 'social regions' may have formed the basis for the later political divisions (R. Friedman 1994: 569). There is an unbroken sequence of élite/royal tombs at Hierakonpolis from the Naqada I period to the very threshold of the First Dynasty. At Naqada, there is a slight hiatus between the sequence of élite tombs in Cemetery T – the latest of which (T36) dates to early Naqada III, even though a relatively poor grave (T33) in the same cemetery dates to the threshold of the First Dynasty (Hendrickx 1993; cf. Baumgartel 1970: LXIX) – and the royal tombs of the early First Dynasty. This break is probably significant, and suggests that Naqada was eclipsed by one of its neighbouring territories (either Abydos to the north or Hierakonpolis to the south) during the final stages of the state formation process. At Abydos, the First Dynasty royal tombs on the Umm el-Qaab are the direct successors of the Predynastic élite burials in Cemetery U which span the period between late Naqada I and the end of the Predynastic period, with an apparent, unexplained gap during the middle of Naqada II. Moreover, the size of tomb U-j may indicate that its occupant already ruled much of Egypt as early as Naqada III (*c.* 3150 BC). The process of political unification seems to have been well under way, if not already complete, by the time tomb U-j was constructed. Indeed, the wide geographic distribution of similar types of pottery by the end of Naqada II may suggest that a degree of political unity already existed several generations before tomb U-j was built (R. Friedman 1994: 435). The royal cemetery at Qustul attests the short-lived existence of a powerful Lower Nubian **polity** during the Naqada III period. The largest grave in Cemetery L – which contained the decorated incense burner mentioned earlier – is roughly contemporary with Abydos tomb U-j. Rock-cut inscriptions in the vicinity of the Second Cataract seem to record punitive expeditions mounted by Egyptian rulers against Lower Nubia, leading to the extirpation of the indigenous A-Group and the demise of the Qustul kingdom by the beginning of the First Dynasty. Hence, the evidence of tombs provides some clues about the dominant players in the final centuries of state formation.

Iconography and ideology may also be of some help. The later importance of Horus and Seth in the doctrine of divine kingship points to the significance of Hierakonpolis and Naqada in the process of unification (Kemp 1989: 37). The two crowns associated with the king from the very beginning of the First Dynasty may have originated at these two places. The **red crown** is shown in relief on a sherd from a large black-topped red ware vessel from Naqada (Payne 1993: 94, fig. 34.774; Baines 1995: 149, fig. 3.1). The vessel probably dates to late Naqada I (*c.* 3600 BC), making this by far the earliest occurrence of the red crown and suggesting that this item of royal regalia may have originated at Naqada,

perhaps as the headgear worn by the local ruler. The white crown is first attested on two royal artefacts from the late Predynastic period, the carved ivory handle of a flint knife (Williams and Logan 1987, esp. 273, fig. 1) and the decorated incense burner from Qustul Cemetery L. The knife handle is unprovenanced but is likely to have come from somewhere in Upper Egypt. Given the evidence for cultural contacts between Qustul and Hierakonpolis in Naqada III, it is tempting to locate the origins of the white crown at Hierakonpolis. In this case, the red crown would have symbolised a northern power to the Predynastic kings of Hierakonpolis, just as in the historic period the red crown was transferred to symbolise Lower Egypt (cf. F.A. Hassan 1988: 174). The so-called 'monuments of unification' – the decorated ceremonial palettes and maceheads commissioned by rulers of the late Predynastic period and early First Dynasty – were traditionally interpreted as records of actual events in the process of state formation. The Narmer palette, in particular, was thought to represent the king's victory over a Lower Egyptian ruler. Even recently, it has been suggested that this latter ruler may have been based at Buto, and that he controlled a territory which may have included Memphis and Tarkhan. This line of argument leads to the romantic suggestion that Buto was the last, northernmost refuge of a Lower Egyptian dynasty contemporary with the late Predynastic kings of Upper Egypt, giving rise to the later myth about two competing kingdoms (von der Way 1993: 96). The argument against such hypotheses centres around the purpose and interpretation of artefacts like the Narmer palette. They may just as easily depict symbolic or ritual activities as actual events in the political consolidation of Egypt (Millet 1990; Fairservis 1991; Baines 1995: 117). Literal interpretations of the scenes are now generally regarded as old-fashioned (Shaw and Nicholson 1995: 197), and it is perhaps safer to ignore the palettes and maceheads as potential historical sources. (Note, however, that an historical interpretation of the Narmer palette may be given new weight by the recent discovery of a label of the same king which names the event depicted on his palette (Dreyer *et al.* 1998: 139, fig. 29, pl. 5.c).)

Taking into account all the evidence, it is possible to suggest the following hypothetical reconstruction of events leading to the political unification of Egypt. As early as Naqada I, powerful centres had developed at This, Naqada and Hierakonpolis in Upper Egypt, whilst local élites at other sites exercised varying degrees of economic and political control over their respective territories. During the course of Naqada II (*c.* 3400 BC), powerful local rulers are attested at Abadiya (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 244; Williams 1986: 173) and Gebelein, but it was the three major centres and their ruling families that continued to dominate the processes associated with state formation. Towards the end of Naqada II, a flourishing polity arose in Lower Nubia, ruled by kings who shared the

emergent iconography of rule with their counterparts in Upper Egypt. At some point early in Naqada III, the Predynastic kingdom of Naqada was probably incorporated – whether by political agreement or by military force cannot be established – into the territory of a neighbouring kingdom. The amalgamation of these two polities would then have preceded the unification of Upper Egypt as a whole (F.A. Hassan 1988: 165). The Cairo fragment of the Palermo Stone shows, in the top register, a line of kings wearing the **double crown** (hand copy by I.E.S. Edwards in the library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Cambridge University; cf. Trigger *et al.* 1983: 44 and 70). If the red and white crowns originated at Naqada and Hierakonpolis respectively, then these figures – often interpreted as kings of a united Egypt before the beginning of the First Dynasty – may represent rulers of an Upper Egyptian polity comprising the territories of Hierakonpolis and Naqada. Furthermore, the adoption of the local god of Hierakonpolis, Horus of Nekhen, as the supreme deity of kingship, and the special attention paid to the temple of Horus by early kings, suggests that it was the rulers of Hierakonpolis who made the first move in the game of power-play that was ultimately to lead to the unification of Egypt. The annexation of Naqada would explain the gap in the sequence of élite burials at the site at the end of Naqada III, a period which is marked at Hierakonpolis by the large tombs at Locality 6. Alternatively, Naqada may have been eclipsed by its northern rival: despite the undoubted importance of Hierakonpolis, the unparalleled size of Abydos tomb U-j (slightly earlier in date than the élite tombs at Hierakonpolis Locality 6) suggests that the kingdom of This was already dominant by early Naqada III, at least in the northern part of the Nile valley. Perhaps the ruler of This also exercised hegemony over Lower Egypt by this time, giving him access to the foreign trade which is so dramatically attested in the imported vessels buried in his tomb. Nevertheless, it is still possible that several rulers, each with his own regional power-base, continued to co-exist and to claim royal titles. This may account for a number of the royal names attested at the end of the Predynastic period.

It is not clear how politically advanced the Delta was in late Predynastic times. A more hierarchical social structure may have developed rapidly in the wake of Upper Egyptian cultural influences which permeated Lower Egypt in late Naqada II (von der Way 1993: 96). There were probably powerful local élites at several sites, notably Buto and Saïs. Some Lower Egyptian rulers may have adopted elements of early royal iconography, particularly the *serekh*, since many of the vessels incised with *serekh* marks have a Lower Egyptian provenance (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: figs 14 and 15). It is quite likely that the Upper Egyptians who spearheaded the drive toward political unification had to overcome or accommodate local Lower Egyptian rulers. None the less, we cannot discount the possibility that the Delta had been incorporated into a larger polity centred on This by

the Naqada III period (*c.* 3200 BC). Certainly it was the rulers of This who ultimately triumphed in the contest for political power and claimed the prize of kingship over the whole country, even though Hierakonpolis seems to have remained important until the very end of the Predynastic period. Control of Lower Egypt would undoubtedly have given the Thinite rulers a major advantage over their southern rivals.

Given that King 'Scorpion' dedicated his ceremonial macehead in the temple at Hierakonpolis, and that he is not attested at Abydos, the theory that he belonged to the royal house of Hierakonpolis is an attractive one. If this was the case, there may have been two rival polities governed from This and Hierakonpolis up to the very threshold of the First Dynasty. The reverence shown to Hierakonpolis by the Early Dynastic kings may reflect the site's importance during the final stages of state formation. The end of Scorpion's reign may have marked a decisive turning-point, the moment at which the king of This assumed an uncontested position as sovereign of all Egypt. During the peak of activity that accompanied political unification, Egyptian control was extended beyond the borders of Egypt proper into Lower Nubia, crushing the local kingdom centred at Qustul and leading to the rapid disappearance of the indigenous A-Group culture. Military raids by early Egyptian rulers are commemorated in two rock-cut inscriptions at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman in the Second Cataract region (Needler 1967; Murnane 1987). Egyptian 'colony sites' also seem to have been established in southern Palestine, suggesting a degree of political control, or at least influence, in the region (Braun 2000). The final stages of state formation may have been accomplished quite quickly, within two or three generations, and Narmer may, after all, have been the first king to exercise authority throughout the country unchallenged. He seems to have been regarded by at least two of his successors as something of a founder figure (Shaw and Nicholson 1995: 18). It remains impossible to define the moment at which a single king ruled Egypt for the first time. From the evidence, this must have occurred at some point between the lifetime of the owner of Abydos tomb U-j (*c.* 3150 BC) and the reign of Narmer (*c.* 3000 BC) (cf. Malek 1986: 26). Many scholars favour an earlier rather than a later date for political unification, but the evidence is by no means unanimous.

The actual means by which the rulers of This ultimately gained control over the whole country is not known. Annexation of neighbouring territories must have involved negotiation and accommodation at the very least. It is not unlikely that more forceful tactics were required, and the possibility of military action cannot be ruled out, despite the difficulties involved in interpreting monuments like the Narmer Palette. The 'Libyan Palette' depicts attacks on a number of fortified cities (Petrie 1953: pl. G; Kemp 1989: 50, fig. 16; Spencer 1993: 53, fig. 33), but again the symbolism of the decoration may not be straightforward. However, the campaigns

of Khasekhem against northern, perhaps Lower Egyptian, rebels at the end of the Second Dynasty may provide a later parallel for the sort of action that was required to subjugate the Delta.

KINGS BEFORE THE FIRST DYNASTY

As we have seen, there is convincing evidence for the emergence of at least three Upper Egyptian polities by the Naqada II period (*c.* 3500 BC). The sites of This (with its cemetery at Abydos), Naqada and Hierakonpolis appear to have stood at the centres of powerful territories, each ruled by an hereditary élite exercising authority on a regional basis. The rulers of the three territories – plus an individual buried at Gebelein, who may have controlled a smaller area – used recognisably royal iconography to express the ideological basis of their power, and may justifiably be called 'kings'. However, the respective owners of the Abydos vessel, the tombs in Naqada Cemetery T, the Hierakonpolis painted tomb and the Gebelein painted cloth are anonymous. Whilst their status is clear, they are quite literally prehistoric, having left no written evidence. It has been proposed that these kings exercising only regional authority might be grouped together as 'Dynasty 00' (van den Brink 1992a: vi and n. 1), recognising their royal status but emphasising their place in prehistory. The term is perhaps rather contrived, and has not won general acceptance. None the less, the place of these late Predynastic anonymous rulers at the head of the later dynastic tradition should be acknowledged.

History begins with the advent of written records, in Egypt's case the bone labels from Abydos tomb U-j. Despite the number of inscribed labels from the tomb, the name of the owner himself is not certain. Several pottery vessels from U-j were inscribed in ink with the figure of a scorpion (Dreyer 1992b: pl. 4), and this has been interpreted as the owner's name, not to be confused with the later King 'Scorpion' who commissioned the ceremonial macehead found at Hierakonpolis (Dreyer 1992b: 297 and n. 6, 1993a: 35 and n. 4). Other vessels from tomb U-j bear short ink inscriptions consisting of a combination of two signs (Dreyer 1995b: 53, fig. 3.a–d). Some of the inscriptions have one sign in common, interpreted by the excavator as a stylised tree, perhaps indicating 'estate'. It has been suggested that the accompanying sign in each case is a royal name, giving the sense 'estate of King X' (Dreyer 1992b: 297, 1993a: 35, 1995b: 52 and 54). This hypothesis is based upon later parallels which may not be appropriate to the Naqada III period, and the identification of a large number of new royal names on vessels from a single tomb may be questioned. However, many scholars accept the hypothesis, even if the existence of late Predynastic kings called 'Fish' and 'Red Sea shell' seems somewhat unlikely.

Subsequent kings of
ancestral burial grou
section known to mo
one pre-First Dynast
on rocks in the easte
named kings before
which may or may no
It is these rulers tha
caused some confusi
suggests a single ruli
the whole of Egypt.
various polities from
impossible to establi
Egypt. However mis
theless come into ge
able and more neutr

1

3

Figure 2.3 Kings befo
rulers, incised on pott
(1) *serekh* of 'Scorpion'
of 'Ka' (after Kaiser an
King A (after van den
(after Wilkins

'Dynasty 0'

Subsequent kings of the Thinite royal family were interred in the same ancestral burial ground, those rulers prior to Djer being buried in the section known to modern scholars as Cemetery B. The name of at least one pre-First Dynasty king is known, whilst inscriptions on vessels and on rocks in the eastern and western deserts attest the existence of further named kings before the reign of Narmer (Figure 2.3). Other inscriptions which may or may not be kings' names have also come into the discussion. It is these rulers that collectively constitute 'Dynasty 0'. The term has caused some confusion, and it is rather unhelpful as the word 'Dynasty' suggests a single ruling line, moreover one which exercised control over the whole of Egypt. The various names undoubtedly represent rulers of various polities from different regions of the country, and it is practically impossible to establish which king was the first to rule over the whole of Egypt. However misleading it may be, the term 'Dynasty 0' has nevertheless come into general use and is unlikely to be discarded. A preferable and more neutral term might be 'late Predynastic kings'.

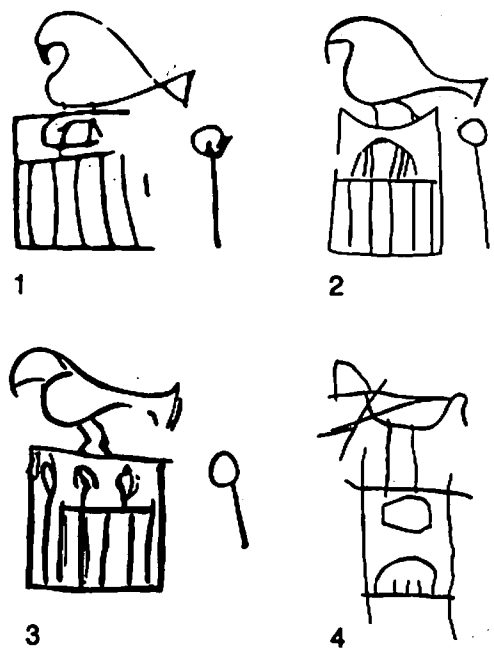


Figure 2.3 Kings before the First Dynasty. Royal names of four late Predynastic rulers, incised on pottery vessels to indicate royal ownership of the contents: (1) *serekh* of 'Scorpion' (after Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 263, fig. 14.34); (2) *serekh* of 'Ka' (after Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 263, fig. 14.23); (3) *serekh* of unidentified King A (after van den Brink 1996: pl. 30.a); (4) *serekh* of unidentified King B (after Wilkinson 1995: 206, fig. 1.b). Names not to same scale.

Several tall storage vessels from Tura and el-Beda (at the western end of the north Sinai coastal route) are incised with the motif of a *serekh* surmounted by two falcons (Junker 1912: 47, fig. 57.5; Clédat 1914; van den Brink 1996: table 1 nos 5–6, pl. 25.a). Some scholars have suggested that this represents the name of a particular late Predynastic ruler, perhaps based in Lower Egypt (von der Way 1993: 101). It could equally be a mark designating royal ownership without specifying the ruler in question.

The more famous of the two rock-cut inscriptions at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman in Lower Nubia shows an early *serekh* presiding over a scene which apparently records a punitive Egyptian raid into the Second Cataract region at the end of the Predynastic period. Once erroneously dated to the reign of Djer, the inscription has now been shown conclusively to date to the period of state formation (Murnane 1987; cf. Shaw and Nicholson 1995: 86). The *serekh* is empty and therefore anonymous, but we may hazard a guess that the ruler who ordered the inscription to be cut was an Upper Egyptian king, perhaps based at Hierakonpolis. The Gebel Sheikh Suleiman inscription proves that Egyptian military involvement in Lower Nubia – probably aimed at maintaining Egyptian access to sub-Saharan trade routes – began before the start of the First Dynasty. The process of Egyptian expansionism which led to the collapse of the Qustul kingdom and the disappearance of the indigenous A-Group culture may therefore have lasted several generations (cf. Williams 1986: 171).

Although the rulers buried at Qustul in Cemetery L adopted royal iconography, they do not seem to have recorded their names in recognisable form. An incised inscription on a pottery vessel from tomb L2 has been interpreted by the excavator as the name of an otherwise unattested Lower Nubian king, *Pe-Hor (Williams 1986: 149). However, once again, the inscription may not be a name at all, but rather a general mark of royal ownership.

Two pottery vessels from the Early Dynastic cemetery at Tura (Junker 1912: 47, fig. 57.3–4; van den Brink 1996: table 1 nos 7–8, pl. 25.b and d) are inscribed with a *serekh* which has been read as *Ny-Hor (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 264–8) but which may simply be a cursive rendering of the name of Narmer (Fischer 1963: 44–7), since abbreviated writings of this king's name are common (cf. Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: fig. 14.38). The same may be true of the *serekh* from Tarkhan (Petrie 1914: pls VI and XX.1; van den Brink 1996: table 1 no. 9, pl. 26.a), read by some scholars as *Hat-Hor (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982). However, in both cases, the vessels themselves suggest a date somewhat earlier than the reign of Narmer (van den Brink 1996), and the possibility that they record the names of earlier rulers cannot be excluded. The name written in ink on a vessel from tomb 412 at Tarkhan (Petrie *et al.* 1913: pl. XXXI.71) is unlikely to be royal (contra von der Way 1993: 100–1), as it is not written within a *serekh*. More probably the tomb owner was a member of the local or regional élite.

Many sherds
B0 at Abydos
on a mouth-s
presumed owr
Petrie 1902: 4)
1993b; O'Brie
found in a *sere*
names prior t
seeks to coun
Cemetery L di
Hor has gainec
it is possible
(Wilkinson 19
the discovery
likely that the
stretching back
their Predynast
twin chambers
the location of
of the complex
succession (He
fig. 1, who seen
of a *serekh*).

In contrast witl
the late Predy
Because neithe
and King B. Th
inscription cons
signs/maces in i
den Brink 1996:
name, it should
other vessels da
1996: pls 26.a, 2
jar may simply
inscription as a
serekh' (Hendri
attested on vess
though both la
signs/maces occu

The owner of Abydos tomb B0/1/2

Many sherds and complete vessels from tomb B1/2 and the adjacent pit B0 at Abydos are inscribed with a device consisting of a falcon perching on a mouth-sign. This has been read as the name of a king and the presumed owner of the tomb, *Iry-Hor (Kaiser and Dreyer 1982: 212; cf. Petrie 1902: 4). There are problems with such an interpretation (Wilkinson 1993b; O'Brien 1996: 131–2), not least the fact that the 'name' is never found in a *serekh*, despite this device already having been in use for royal names prior to the construction of tomb B0/1/2 (von der Way 1993: 99, seeks to counteract this argument by citing the pot mark from Qustul Cemetery L discussed above). None the less, the existence of a King *Iry-Hor has gained wide acceptance (for example, van den Brink 1996). Whilst it is possible that the tomb belonged to a contemporary of Narmer's (Wilkinson 1993b), the recent re-excavation of chambers B1 and B2 and the discovery of an adjoining pit B0 (Dreyer *et al.* 1996) make it more likely that the whole complex belongs in the sequence of royal burials stretching back from the First Dynasty tombs in Abydos Cemetery B to their Predynastic forerunners in the adjacent Cemetery U. Moreover, the twin chambers closely resemble the tombs of kings 'Ka' and Narmer, and the location of B0/1/2 – if not the pottery – also suggests that the owner of the complex should be placed immediately before 'Ka' in the order of succession (Hendrickx, personal communication, contra Kaiser 1990: 289, fig. 1, who seems to place *Iry-Hor rather earlier, to account for the lack of a *serekh*).

King A

In contrast with some or all of the above cases, two royal names from the late Predynastic period almost certainly refer to particular kings. Because neither can be read as yet, they are designated here as King A and King B. The first is attested on a vessel from the eastern Delta. The inscription consists of a *serekh*, surmounted by a falcon, with three *ḥḏ* signs/maces in its upper part (Fischer 1963: 44, fig. 1, pl. VI.a and c; van den Brink 1996: pl. 30.a). Although the signs may be a writing of a royal name, it should be noted that maces and *serekh*s occur together on several other vessels dating to the threshold of the First Dynasty (van den Brink 1996: pls 26.a, 28, 30.b–c). Hence, the three maces on the eastern Delta jar may simply represent general symbols of royal authority, and the inscription as a whole could be 'an extended version of an anonymous *serekh*' (Hendrickx, personal communication). Two similar *serekh*s are attested on vessels from Tura (Junker 1912: 46 and 47, fig. 57.1 and 2), though both lack the Horus falcon. Moreover, in both cases the *ḥḏ* signs/maces occur in the lower part of the frame, replacing the more usual

vertical strokes by which the palace façade is indicated, and three circles are shown beneath the *serekh* (van den Brink 1996: table 1 nos 18–19). Because of these differences, the Tura *serekh*s may not represent the ruler whose mark appears on the jar from the eastern Delta. If, on the other hand, the three inscriptions do signify one and the same king, the fact that he is unattested outside Lower Egypt may be significant (van den Brink 1996: 147), but it would be dangerous to reconstruct the extent of a ruler's authority on the basis of a few pot marks.

King B

Two rock-cut inscriptions in the western desert behind Armant show another royal name (Wilkinson 1996a). The **epigraphy** of the inscriptions, particularly the rendering of the falcon atop the *serekh*, confirms that the king in question reigned at the very end of the Predynastic period ('Dynasty 0', *c.* 3100 BC). Because of difficulties in deciphering early Egyptian script, a plausible reading of the name has not yet been proposed. Given the southerly location of the inscriptions, it is possible that the king was a member of the royal family of Hierakonpolis, which seems to have maintained control over the southernmost part of Upper Egypt until the threshold of the First Dynasty. The extent of King B's authority cannot be ascertained, but he was clearly in a position to mount expeditions into the western desert. The inscriptions highlight the extent of Egyptian interest in the peripheral areas prior to the First Dynasty. The *serekh* of King B may occur again, but without the falcon, on a rock-cut inscription in the eastern desert (Winkler 1938, I: 10 and 31). The site lies on the ancient Qena to Quseir route to the Red Sea coast, in an area visited regularly by Egyptian expeditions in late Predynastic and Early Dynastic times.

'Scorpion' and/or 'Crocodile'

One of the most striking royal monuments from the period immediately preceding the First Dynasty is the Scorpion macehead from Hierakonpolis. Despite the objection of some scholars (for example, Malek 1986: 29), the scorpion sign almost certainly records the name of the king, since it has been convincingly demonstrated that the **rosette/palmette** sign above the scorpion signified the ruler (H.S. Smith 1992: 244). In view of the close stylistic similarities between the Scorpion macehead and the monuments of Narmer, the two kings were probably near contemporaries (Kaiser 1990: 289, fig. 1). However, since no evidence of Scorpion has been found at Abydos – but note that the four-chambered tomb B50, devoid of any inscriptions, has been suggested as a possible burial place for Scorpion (Dreyer 1990: 71) – he may not fit into the Thinite dynastic sequence at

all. Instead, he m
(Trigger *et al.* 19
his ceremonial m
contemporary wit
jar from Minshat
1996: pl. 28), alth
Aha (Wildung 19
from Tarkhan (Pe
read as 'Scorpion'
any further comp
sible for the prese

A recent hyp
proposed king of '
reading is based u
their comparison
dated to the reign
a governor of the
which probably re
themselves and th
fied as a usurper
main Thinite royal
pretation, the Min
attributed to 'Hor
The proposed new
a King 'Crocodile'
macehead remains
Predynastic king o

The horizontal stra
evidence – the typ
make it fairly cert
of This, and perh
name shows a pair
as he is generally
double tomb B7/9
forebears in Ceme
the First Dynasty
of 'Ka' from tomb
1975: 31; repeated
by the occurrences
sealings from tom
and XIII.89). 'Ka'
having been found

all. Instead, he may have belonged to the royal house of Hierakonpolis (Trigger *et al.* 1983: 46), as suggested by the place he chose to dedicate his ceremonial macehead. In this case, he may have been at least partly contemporary with Narmer. The *serekh* of 'Scorpion' may occur on a wine jar from Minshat Abu Omar (Wildung 1981: 37, fig. 33; van den Brink 1996: pl. 28), although this inscription has also been read as the name of Aha (Wildung 1981: 35) Two *serekh*s written in ink on pottery vessels from Tarkhan (Petrie *et al.* 1913: pl. LX; Petrie 1914: pl. XL) have been read as 'Scorpion' (Kaplony 1963, II: 1090), although in the absence of any further comparable inscriptions a definitive reading remains impossible for the present.

A recent hypothesis assigns the Tarkhan inscriptions to another proposed king of 'Dynasty 0', the Horus 'Crocodile' (Dreyer 1992a). This reading is based upon new infra-red photographs of the inscriptions and their comparison with a seal-impression from a third tomb at Tarkhan, dated to the reign of Narmer. The sealing, which may have belonged to a governor of the Tarkhan region, shows a series of crocodiles above coils which probably represent water. On the basis of the inscribed vessels themselves and the form of the *serekh*s, the Horus 'Crocodile' is identified as a usurper or alternatively a king reigning concurrently with the main Thinite royal family, early in the reign of 'Ka'. Following this interpretation, the Minshat Abu Omar *serekh* mentioned above has now been attributed to 'Horus (Crocodile) the Subduer' (van den Brink 1996: 147). The proposed new reading of the three inscriptions and the existence of a King 'Crocodile' is not universally accepted. By contrast, the Scorpion macehead remains a powerful piece of evidence for the existence of a late Predynastic king of this name.

'Ka'

The horizontal stratigraphy of the royal burials at Abydos and the ceramic evidence – the types of pottery associated with the early royal names – make it fairly certain that Narmer was immediately preceded (as ruler of This, and perhaps as king of all Egypt) by the king whose Horus name shows a pair of arms, the hieroglyph later read as *k3*. King 'Ka', as he is generally known (but note Kaplony 1958), was buried in the double tomb B7/9, situated between the graves of his Predynastic forebears in Cemetery U and the tombs of his successors, the kings of the First Dynasty (Petrie 1901: pl. LIX). (The theory that the *serekh*s of 'Ka' from tomb B7/9 refer to the *ka*(-tomb) of Narmer [Baumgartel 1975: 31; repeated by O'Brien 1996: 132] would seem to be invalidated by the occurrences of the same *serekh* at sites other than Abydos.) Clay sealings from tomb B7/9 confirm its attribution (Petrie 1901: pls II.1 and XIII.89). 'Ka' is the best attested king before Narmer, his name having been found at sites from Lod in Israel (Braun 2000) and Tell

Ibrahim Awad in the north-eastern Delta (van den Brink 1992b: 53, n. 14) to Abydos in Upper Egypt. Two jars incised with the *serekh* of 'Ka' were found in graves at Helwan (Saad 1947: 111 and 112, figs 11–12), apparently indicating that the city of Memphis – which the Helwan necropolis served – was already in existence before the reign of Narmer. This is despite later tradition that Menes founded Egypt's new capital at the beginning of the First Dynasty. The *serekh* of 'Ka' also occurs on a **cylinder vessel** from Tarkhan (Petrie *et al.* 1913: pl. LXI). Here, and in the numerous inscriptions from the king's tomb at Abydos (Petrie 1902: 3, pls I–III), the accompanying signs refer to revenue received by the royal treasury. They illustrate the functioning of the centralised economy before the beginning of the First Dynasty, and they confirm that, from earliest times, tax collection was organised separately for Upper and Lower Egypt.

A NATION IS BORN

From the beginning of the First Dynasty, the Nile valley and Delta, from Elephantine to the Mediterranean coast, was under the control of a single government, presided over by a king from the Thinite royal family. Although the First Dynasty kings chose to be buried in their ancestral royal necropolis at Abydos, for at least part of the year they probably resided at and governed from a new capital city, located strategically at the junction of Upper and Lower Egypt, 'the balance of the two lands'. The foundation of Memphis as the national administrative centre really represents the culmination of the unification process. The earliest élite tomb at North Saqqara dates to the reign of Aha (*c.* 2950 BC), but burial activity at Helwan – which served as the capital's second cemetery – began at least as early as the reign of 'Ka' (cf. Saad 1947: 111 and 112, figs 11–12). It was 'Ka's' successor and Aha's predecessor, Narmer (probably the historical Menes), who became associated in later tradition with the foundation of Memphis, and he may have been the first king to establish his residence in the city.

Once the prize of national unity had been won, Egypt's early kings set about establishing mechanisms of rule that would maintain and bolster that unity, guaranteeing their own privileged position at the same time. The ideology of divine kingship, elements of which had been developed by Upper Egyptian rulers in Predynastic times, was promulgated vigorously through iconography, architecture, ritual and royal activities. The king was presented as the binding force of national unity and as the champion of Egypt and its people against the forces of chaos, embodied in Egypt's neighbours. Official xenophobia, nationalism and a strong sense of Egyptian identity were deliberately fostered by the early state as part

of its propaganda of rule. In essence, the concept of the nation state, so dominant in world politics today, was the invention of Egypt's early rulers. The means they employed to promote this concept and the character of the state they moulded form the subjects of Parts II and III.