



CHIEFS, KINGS AND RELIGION IN EARLY EGYPT

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Abstract: There is some evidence for the steps that turned communities from the absence of an institutionalized inequality to the emergence of hereditary chiefs that when successful in expanding their power base and area of dominance in Upper Egypt, resulted in regional kings and in time, the first pharaohs of a united Egypt. However, there is not much to go about as data for the first steps, that becomes more abundant later on in predynastic Egypt, but after assessing what is available I decided to sum it up bringing together what I could identify in previous publications and from new other sources. In this paper an attempt is made to locate relevant evidence for many aspects of this transition, with special emphasis on the first steps in this direction, and the importance of early religion and its representatives in validating the new social, political and economic reality.

Keywords:

Dossier

I have already discussed elsewhere the probable conditions that brought about the birth of institutionalized inequality in predynastic Egypt that, according to the mostly funerary archaeological evidence, took place between mid-Naqada I and early Naqada II in Upper Egypt (CASTILLOS, 2007, pp. 9-24).

The archaeological and ethnographic evidence from other parts of the world provides many useful criteria to start to understand how this development could have taken place in Egypt².

Lower Egyptian communities at the time exhibited low inequality in the funerary record and seem to have been outside these developments in Upper Egypt until quite late in the predynastic (CASTILLOS, 1998, pp. 25-36; CASTILLOS, 2010; CASTILLOS, 2006, pp. 13-18; JUCHA, 2010, pp. 81-87).

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2 "In sum, our findings resonate with the argument that controlling access to economically defensible resources such as intensively worked land or other scarce resource-producing sites (e.g., salmon streams, livestock herds, trade routes) is a potent contributor to the emergence and persistence of high levels of inequality" (SMITH, 2010, p. 92).



The transition from communities without institutionalized inequality to others in which this process was well under way has been addressed in many of its dimensions in the last few decades³.

It is quite clear that we are dealing at this stage with hereditary chiefdoms since in the cemeteries the graves of children and subadults that exhibit special treatment as to grave size or wealth are invariably situated within elite areas, as befits members of those communities that died without being able to, as time went by, occupy the privileged positions that their birth assigned to them (CASTILLOS, 2015, pp. 33-48; CASTILLOS, 2016, pp. 91-102).

I doubt emerging rulers and priests or shamans were one and the same person in early Egypt and perhaps many other parts of the world⁴.

3 "Assurance of equal access to resources and status positions and the repression of interpersonal dominance is achieved by institutions that reduce the transaction costs of social and economic exchange in small-scale societies. Whether some individuals do better than others within these institutions and receive recognition for their achievements does not alter this role of egalitarian institutions" (WIESSNER, 2002, p. 262); "Limited status hierarchies among egalitarian foragers suggest that even in these societies, some individuals have traits that enhance their dominance or prestige. When resources or new forms of wealth can be monopolized, such individuals (and their kin and allies) are poised to assert differential control of resources and use these over time to assume more permanent positions of leadership and economic advantage [...] Market transitions in contemporary populations on the periphery of high-density, stratified societies are often accompanied by the development of inequalities in previously egalitarian societies, whether as a result of their assimilation into stratified systems or inherent properties of novel (typically material) forms of wealth associated with market transition" (MATTISON, 2016, p. 197).

4 "Expressive powers involved displays of crests and performances of songs, dances, and narratives, and of spirit powers. Chiefs could be shamans, but not necessarily. In the north, their spirit powers were related to, but different than, shamanic power (e.g., Guedon 1984). Organizing and participating in the public rituals in which the House's privileges were shown was a central part of the chiefs job. The continued stature and prestige of the House depended on his taking part in potlatches and/or other public rituals. The activities of chiefs 'above' Haida House chiefs were primarily expressive or ceremonial. Coast Tsimshian tribal chiefs, in contrast, could call on all the young men of their group to do their bidding and could field war parties against opposition" (AMES, 1995, p. 71); "Whereas cognitive archaeologists might accept a link between a material political-economic base and religion, the historical record suggests that religion has a relative autonomy and therefore does not necessarily change with shifts in the associated political economy" (LOUBSER, 2008, p. 192); "The traditional Palace-Temple model, which combines the political and the religious under one roof, owes more to Evans' particular views of Minoan society and his cultural and intellectual background than it does to the archaeological evidence that has accrued during the century since it was first formulated. It has been argued here that the Palace-Temple model is anomalous in the context of the wider east Mediterranean because in none of the major Bronze Age societies in the east Mediterranean is political and sacred authority ever concentrated in a single building. Even in theocratic societies, where a single person has religious and political power, the main political and sacred venues are geographically separated [...] The second point made in this paper is that a model in which the main political and sacred venues of power are located in different venues may actually more faithfully describe the Cretan Bronze Age data" (SCHOEP, 2010, p. 237).



In the first place, I think it can be safely assumed that from the moment beliefs in the afterlife can be attested in the archaeological record, people also wondered about other related subjects and someone must have been considered for a wide range of personal characteristics, as the one (or the ones) fit to fulfil that role⁵.

Even before then, faith healers and shamans must have been active to tip the scales in people's favour in their daily lives, so those involved in early religion certainly arose long before (neolithic, mesolithic, even late paleolithic times?) anybody dreamt of and had the opportunities to rise as hereditary chiefs⁶.

The element of coercion is considered by some as defining state formation in which what is called the 'legitimate' monopoly of coercion was held by the rulers⁷.

It assumes that only under early state conditions that is possible and also that the logic of kinship bars emerging hereditary chiefs from imposing their will through any means on their own community.

5 "While the cult may not have extended hierarchy in the sense of allowing big men to take on new social roles, it served as a justification for their continued violation of the egalitarian ethos. Ultimately, this allowed them to extend their efforts to participate in regional trade networks and to finance other major ceremonial events related to warfare and war reparations, among other things [...] Religion, then, used by clever agents, enables them to maintain persistent inequality, but appears to be limited as an enabler of persistent leadership. This is a critical distinction" (ALDENDERFER, 2010, p. 86; p. 89).

6 "There are arguments that shamanism has very ancient origins. How ancient is a critical question. We have just reviewed some of the earliest evidence for religious behavior from the Paleolithic. Is there any hint of shamanism in the archaeological evidence from the Lower or Middle Paleolithic? Hints there are, but no clear demonstrations. It seems certain that concepts of an 'other world' were firmly in place by the time burials first occur, some 150,000 years ago if not before, as indicated by the use of red ochre in general rituals and the defleshed skull from Bodo, Ethiopia, some 600,000 years ago" (HAYDEN, 2003, p. 118).

7 "In contradistinction, funerary practices of the emerging State describe a remarkably different space organization, centred around each royal tomb, which, although still keeping the traditional link between tomb and house, now reflect the architectural - and symbolic - characteristics of the royal palace, the material core from which emanate the decisions of a new social power, capable of imposing its will, thanks to the possession of the legitimate monopoly of coercion" (CAMPAGNO, 2003, p. 24); "In effect, it is through the exclusive availability of means of coercion that a social minority is capable of imposing its will on the majority of the population, of extracting a regular and permanent surplus, and of organizing and supporting bureaucrats and specialists in its service. Such a monopoly of coercion is radically new not only because it does not exist in non-state societies, but mainly because the logic of kinship prevents its emergence in such contexts" (CAMPAGNO, 2013, p. 214).



But I think this is a misconception if we tightly associate one and the other, state and coercion, denying the capability of these emerging ambitious individuals to exercise some measure of coercion over members of their community⁸.

Hereditary chiefs arose and started consolidating their power base in Egypt in a quite narrow time period, as the mainly funerary record shows, and as I pointed out before, between mid-Naqada I and early Naqada II, well before state formation was beginning to take shape.

Coercion was part of the steps by emerging hereditary chiefs, in their wide spectrum of tactics, since without it, they would hardly have been able to overcome the natural resistance of communities to change their long attested ways, regardless of how much you manipulate people⁹.

My research has shown that predynastic tombs containing weapons and most likely belonging to chiefs and warriors tended to be located in clusters and within elite areas of the cemeteries (CASTILLOS, 2018).

8 "The monopolization of violence occurs at the state level of organization [...] Monopolization of the means of violence is not necessary for ongoing coercion, however, concentration of the means of violence is sufficient [...] Recent theory and experimental research shows how indirect coercion can help stabilize the chiefdom by adding power relations to the already existing influence relations of the status lineage system [...] The protection of sinners from the wrath of their god by priestly advice is also an example of indirect coercion [...] Importantly, for the development of power in the chiefdom, unlike coercion, indirect coercion does not require that the means of violence be either concentrated or monopolized. To the contrary, all that is needed is an external threat from which the chief and associated warriors can provide protection. In theory, indirect coercion is not the simplest form that coercion can take, however, for chiefdoms, it is the easiest to institute. All that is needed is another chiefdom that is in hostile contact: that is threatening or can be made to appear threatening [...] As the warriors become a caste and differentiate themselves from commoners, the means of violence becomes increasingly concentrated in the hands of a chief backed by a warrior caste and separated from the commoners. As that separation progresses, the chief need no longer rule only by influence or by citing external dangers, but rules more and more by direct coercion [...] With the development of direct coercion, the chiefdom is a relatively stable social structure built for war and justified through war [...] As a chiefdom successfully incorporates other groups, warfare transforms status relations into coercive relations that lead to a paramount chiefdom. Throughout indirect coercion and later direct coercion, the paramount chief and his supportive warrior caste oversee a larger territory with diverse populations" (CHACON, 2014, pp. 71-73; 76-77).

9 "In the less stratified societies, in which chiefs were intimately bound to the people through direct ties of kinship, first-fruit offerings and contributions of food and valued goods for major ceremonials were generally redistributed back to the individual households. In the increasing stratified societies, however, this was not the case, and the goods rendered to the chief tended to concentrate near the apex of the socio-political pyramid. In other words: the goods channeled into the redistributive network were mainly used to support the chiefly hierarchy and to finance the political activities of the ruling elite" (CLAESSEN, 2011, p. 10).



As to the probable use of coercion in conjunction with what appears to be religious (funerary) beliefs and practices, in the transition to hereditary chiefs, I found out many years ago in my research that body orientation in Upper Egyptian cemeteries was mostly head south, facing west (CASTILLOS, 1982, Table 4, pp. 185-186).

During Badarian times it was so, but somewhat relaxed with a 17% differing, then in the transition period I am concerned with, it became a radical orthodoxy with an average of only 4% differing, which later on became somewhat relaxed with an average of 28% differing.

I find it difficult to accept that such a temporary switch to orthodoxy in a burial custom could have happened spontaneously, without some form of coercion or direction from above.

So in the absence of any other reasonable explanation for this, we would be here in the presence of coercion well before the appearance of a state structure¹⁰.

Since these high levels of orthodoxy as to body orientation are part of the archaeological record in several Upper Egyptian locations at the time, we might be in the presence of a network of hereditary chiefdoms, perhaps lending one another mutual support when not in confrontation, and sharing a similar approach to certain funerary practices¹¹.

Body and tomb orientation in Upper Egypt haven't been studied well enough with some still writing fairly recently that tomb orientation was parallel to north-south (TUCKER, 2003, p. 534) when it's clear that the vast majority were parallel to the local course of the river (CASTILLOS, 2015, pp. 35-40).

¹⁰ "I wonder whether ideological conformity in terms of body orientation became less enforceable, so to speak, as populations expanded and new village centres were founded away from the core area of control. Hereditary chiefs no matter how powerful would have limited control further from their core. By the late Naqada II and early Naqada III periods there are vast differences between sites in Lower Egypt/Fayum in terms of orientation practice so it would appear that any over-arching rules that may have existed were not enforced at a local level", Lisa Mawdsley, private communication.

¹¹ "The paramount chiefdom phenomenon is best interpreted as an ever-shifting alliance network of chiefdoms, perpetuated not by a fixed administrative order, but by threat, warfare, and temporary extortion inflicted on the weak by the powerful" (BLITZ, 1999, p. 580); "Warfare seems to be an almost continuous occurrence in many chiefdoms, one of a number of forms of peer polity interaction that are politically transformative in a variety of ways. Political loyalties may be shifted to military victors who control the ideology of warrior prestige and who increase their political currency through captured labor and valuables, resulting in larger alliance networks" (JUNKER, 2015, p. 380).



Both practices may have had to do with rebirth in the tombs from the reanimating force of the river or from the sun in its daily course through the sky (BARD, 1992, p. 11; p. 14).

These emerging hereditary chiefs were most likely successful hunters and also temporary military leaders that had worked hard over time to accumulate wealth with their immediate kin, when conditions in their communities were relaxed and such a behaviour was tolerated, although considered by others eccentric, unnecessary and pointless¹².

However, these ambitious individuals by means of a wide variety of tactics and using their wealth, secured a power base (persuasion, manipulation, bribing, debt management, feasting (CASTILLOS, 2016, pp. 14-18), cajoling and intimidating those likely to respond to that, recruiting those willing to take part in the big scheme, outsiders in precarious position within the communities, and perhaps, the early representatives of religion within them, that could initiate a very convenient and mutually beneficial association for both that would endure for millennia, etc.), and thus made sure they enjoyed enough support to radically change the previous social, political and economic arrangement¹³.

12 "[...] understanding the process requires more than a consideration of demographic conditions and economic justification. History and human agency play key roles in the evolutionary process and were undoubtedly important at Keatley Creek. Given the late pattern of emergent inequality under increasingly adverse resource conditions, Arnold's suggestion that resource adversity provided conditions whereby weaker human groups might be willing to work for others despite loss of social status does appear to be relevant. Thus, we suggest that it was not simple resource abundance that broke the binds of egalitarianism. Rather, it was the need to feed and/or protect one's family that caused people to join and support a cultural system that at some point began to permit elite wealth building strategies resulting in resource control, ownership, hoarding, and use of surplus to create long term debt. It is possible that increasingly unpredictable resource conditions, demographic changes and socially altered households initiated a competitive process for acquisition of goods and new productive household members. This selectively 'driven' process may have had the effect of temporarily rewarding the most successful households with large self sustaining groups, better defense, resource access via control of sources, and community respect" (PRENTISS, 2007, pp. 322-323).

13 "Timothy Earle, Jeanne Arnold and others have summarized the major theories about how chiefs come to power. Aside from cognitive factors, the major contenders are circumscription, warfare, trade and wealth financing (control over political economies), control over staple production, population pressure, the systemic advantages of central administration or redistribution, and extortion. A number of reviewers and commentators maintained that ritual and ideology were much more entrenched and powerful in chiefdoms than in transegalitarian societies and that chiefs were obeyed primarily because of people's belief in their claims to ancestral sacredness and spiritual power [...] The results have influenced claims that elites and chiefdoms develop due to ideological factors with little acknowledgement of who promoted those ideological changes, the economic leverage that underwrote the claims, the physical coercion sometimes used to instill fear and obtain compliance, how claims to spiritual power were used to justify economic privileges, or how these claims achieved widespread acceptance in communities or, as is more likely, widespread acquiescence" (HAYDEN & VILLENEUVE, 2010, p. 104; p. 135).



It has been said that nothing prevented those who disagreed with the new state of affairs to vote with their feet and leave (FITZHUGH, 2000). But where and under what conditions? It was wiser to stay and try to accommodate to the new circumstances, especially if later expansion to include weaker neighbouring communities would benefit all those in the original one who would become part of a ruling elite.

Craft specialization was one of the consequences of the new state of affairs, with hands freed in those communities to manufacture a wide range of luxury high quality goods on a massive scale for short and long distance trade and also to underline the status of the local elites in life and in death as part of their funerary endowment¹⁴.

Kinship was always a strong bond among people in Egypt at all times but for these Upper Egyptian hereditary chiefs on the way to become regional kings as they expanded their rule and influence by a variety of means, kinship was a hindrance and had to be somewhat limited in order to generate other forms of loyalty that would cement their power in their growing domains¹⁵.

14 "Prestige goods are characterised through a number of elements. 1. Prestige goods are often produced from special raw material that is either rare, or difficult to work, or hard to get, or that was transported over long distances. 'Special raw material' thus does not mean automatically that it is economically expensive but it might be culturally expensive. 2. Prestige goods can have been transported over long distances themselves, regardless of the material (that can be achieved through exchange, trade, raids, etc.). 3. Prestige goods require time, their production, design and decoration is usually of a high quality. 4. The decoration of the objects is often elaborate [...] A starting point for the discussion about the relationship between craft specialisation and social organisation is given in statements such as 'Intensive craft specialization is one characteristic of civilization' and 'One of the most striking things about the evolution of culture is the rapid improvement in the products of craft specialization at the point of the rise of chiefdoms' [...] The connection between specialisation and social hierarchy cannot be finally resolved. The development of independent specialists for pottery can have worked very well without any prior social inequality. The existence of most likely attached metal specialists on the other hand relies on the existence of an elite, which remains in most other aspects of Late Chalcolithic life rather shadowy. More knowledge about the distribution pattern of metal production sites and metal finds will help to clear these questions" (KERNER, 2010, p. 182; p. 184; p. 192); "State formation in Egypt has been discussed by Michael Hoffman, whose excavations at Hierakonpolis uncovered evidence of craft specialization (pottery and bead production). Hoffman identified long distance trade and exchange of goods as prime movers of socio-political complexity -significant factors in the formation of the Egyptian nation-state" (BARD, 2008, p. 111).

15 "Originally Hawaiian land units were semi-independent chiefdoms whose inhabitants were related by bonds of kinship and whose chiefs were senior relatives in a corporate descent group. This ancestral Polynesian social and land-tenure system existed while the population concentrated along the coast but changed radically during the pre-contact years as the population expanded inland. At that time the pattern of economic exploitation changed from the coastal zone to a coastal-inland axis. With the formation of self-sufficient ahupua'a, kinship ties slowly disintegrated and the gap between chief and commoner widened. The highest chiefs, at the tip of a hierarchical



There were a whole series of tactics that enabled the emerging hereditary chiefs and then kings to generate loyalty in many of their new subjects beyond the ties of kinship (UZOIGWE, 1977, p. 23; DEFLEM, 1999, pp. 371-391)¹⁶.

The probable migration of members of the local elites to the growing political centres at the time also provided the regional kings with candidates to fill the positions in the emerging bureaucracy, giving them the loyal support of outsiders (GRISWOLD, 1992, pp. 193-198; MIDANT-REUNES, B.; BUCHEZ, N.; CRUBÉZY, E. & JANIN, 2002, p. 490; CASTILLOS, 2015, pp. 31-49).

That the emerging hereditary chiefs in Egypt could also be the religious figures seems doubtful since the element of coercion, natural to military leaders and essential to give a decisive push to their ambitions, is usually not associated to them in the ethnographic record¹⁷.

It is in most cases two different spheres of activity that rarely coincide, since it would be very difficult for a single person to be proficient in both due to the complexity of the actions and preparations over a long period of time in order to succeed¹⁸.

pyramid, gained sole stewardship of the land, while the commoners, who had no ownership rights and worked the land, formed the broad supporting base. Competition among chiefs over control of productivity led to formation of socio-political boundaries through force. Power rather than kinship determined control and led to the formation of the Hawai'i emergent state" (GREENE, 2001; KIRCH, 1985, pp. 229-231; HOMMON, 1976).

16 "(Shaka) As the Zulu chief he then reorganized the Zulu army along Mthethwa lines based on age rather than kinship" (HOUSTON & MBELE, 2011, p. 50); "A man's tribe makes no difference to his duty of allegiance [...] Whatever his tribe he immediately becomes subject to the Native Authority of the chieftom where he elects to live, and to the chief of his chieftom and to Kazembe" (CUNNISON, 1960, p. 179; p. 194).

17 "I would like to consider the basic concept latent in the relationships of priest, shaman, and king, and the functional features of each. All three have something to do with the sacred sphere, and I am looking for the source of their power and authority in this sphere, but there are several points in common as well as differences in the ways in which they are involved with the sacred or express their power and authority, and in their social and cultural meanings [...] One might say the king's position stands upon a religious culture formed by a priest axis and a shaman axis; hence, in order to explain the realities of a king or kingship endowed with a sacred character or a priestly character, it is not enough to consider the matter merely from the perspective of a sacred-versus-profane dichotomy or in terms of power structures. What is needed is an approach from a perspective that looks carefully at the whole picture of the religious culture and the religious structure itself" KOKAN, 1990, pp; 108-109; p; 123).

18 "The ethnographic record provides numerous examples of this same strategy by which emerging elites use the control of ritual activities and the appropriation of sacred powers as a basis for economic and political centralization [...] The close association between irrigation, socio-



It is only in the later stages of state formation that kings appear as religious leaders in the iconography, thus reflecting a duality of attributes that was not present in the early stages that I am most interested to identify and this may lead to confusion and unwarranted anachronistic assumptions¹⁹.

In the Naqada I and early Naqada II iconography those larger than life individuals, accomplishing impossible feats for normal human beings, are sometimes accompanied by figures involved in ritual dancing, as if approving and supporting these manifestations of their great divinely sanctioned power (PETRIE, 2000, Pl. XXVIII, p. 74; LANKESTER, 2000, p. 9).

So the interplay of the two roles, political and religious, the cooperation between chief and shaman (or similar) involved both becoming part of a ruling elite, the chief holding the real political power and the current representative of religion in a supportive role, in a mutually beneficial symbiosis²⁰.

economic differentiation and the appearance of temples suggests that ritual elaboration played an important role in generating and maintaining these economic differences" (STEIN, 1994, p. 42; p. 44).

19 "Regarding belief systems, I accept the premise that the early Predynastic Egyptians had a belief system which helped them to understand the world and life's events. Since death is the final event in life, it forms part of that belief system [...] The main themes of the belief system were that the concept of fertility, rebirth and regeneration were paramount; there was a belief in an afterlife and the supernatural and symbolism played an important role. The evidence strongly suggests that shamanism formed a substratum of belief [...] Utilising a framework of theoretical approaches including rock-art, landscape, shamanism and ethnography, which are brought together by cabling, the evidence indicates the origin of early Predynastic beliefs lay in the east (Dakhleh Oasis and environs) and south-east (Nabta Playa) of the Western Desert. It has been demonstrated that there were contacts between those two sites and those of the Badarian period, whereas archaeological evidence shows there was no direct contact between Wadi Sura and the Nile Valley. In order to determine the cognition of the early Predynastic Egyptians, the Badarians, secure funerary contexts were examined. The main theoretical approaches used were those of personhood/relationship, shamanism together with multifunctionality and multi-layered meanings" (WOODS, 2015, p. 9; p. 10; p. 264).

20 "Another characteristic of chiefdoms, underscored in the essays by Gellner and Ira Lapidus, is the importance of religion to their maintenance. Religious ideology could enhance the legitimacy of the ruler or chief by granting him religious or saintly authority; moreover, infused into the ideology of the chiefdom, it could strengthen existing bonds between ruler and ruled and provide a *raison d'être* for a chiefdom's expansion" (KHOURY & KOSTINER, 1987, p. 9); "The legitimation of authority and social order can take many forms. Claims to military qualities or to a special relationship with the divine as the basis of political legitimacy are, however, especially important, since a necessary corollary to political and social power is the belief in the particular ability of the ruling elite to protect the community from external attack and to maintain appropriate relations with the divine world" (WHITTAKER, 2001, p. 355); "The religious dimension of the most noble lineages was often emphasized as the kinship element declined. Temples were usually the first massive examples of large-scale coordinated effort, and the first rulers were often priest-kings derived directly from tribal chieftains whose roles often mixed sacred and economic/political leadership. Early kings usually claimed to rule by sacred right, and often to be gods themselves.



Another probable example of such a symbiosis is provided by the decoration of a Naqada I pot found in tomb U-239 at Abydos (DREYER, 1998, pp. 79-167) that has been interpreted in various ways by scholars, among them, as an example of the 'smiting the enemy' scene²¹.

Inconsistencies in the image such as one of the large figures armed with a mace supposedly holding enemies represented as smaller figures, was doing so with the same arm he held a mace, a rather impossible feat, and to the right, two more of such 'enemies' were free, on their own, next to another large figure with upraised arms.

In my view, the whole thing represents members of a community and warriors celebrating perhaps a victory, the person with upraised arms possibly

Monumental religious architecture develops to impressive heights as advanced chiefdoms evolve into states" (RICHERSON, 2001, p. 488); "While the secular character of Oaxaca's social hierarchy is most prominent in residential architecture, household activities, and burial practices, it is by no means disconnected from religious belief [...] The strongly economic character of social differentiation in Oaxaca is as clear as its reinforcement in ritual is unmistakable. Hierarchy in Oaxaca has its center of gravity, and perhaps its origins, in the economics of local communities, but it is clearly also strengthened through ritual, especially in its supralocal projection" (DRENNAN & PETERSON, 2006, p. 3964); "No matter what the degree and the quality of the interrelation between ritual and social or emotional realities, the concern of these approaches is essentially the effect on ritual by the individual, social groups or the society. Within neo-functionalism, ritual may be perceived as the cause of production and reproduction of social relations and cultural interactions (Radcliffe- Brown 1945, 1964, Malinowski 1925, Rappaport 1968, Bell 1997:29-33). Within the framework of these approaches, it is explained why ritual is practiced and what ritual does", V. Koutrafour, *Ritual in Prehistory, Definition and Identification, Religious Insights in Early Prehistoric Cyprus*, PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, Volume I, 2008, 79; "Ritual practice is understood to have a social role involved in the reproduction and renegotiation of social order (Braithwaite 1984, 93-110). Shanks and Tilley (1982, 133) encapsulate ritual as an ideological practice that legitimises the social hierarchies" (WOODS, 2015, p. 61).

21 "The scene was described as follows: Die Interpretation dieses Bildfeldes fällt schwer, mangelt es doch an zeitgleichen aussagekräftigeren Parallelen. Sicher ist, daß wir es hier mit Szenen zu tun haben, in denen eine Personengruppe, nämlich die der großen Zentralfigur, die andere Gruppe der kleineren, nackten Gefangenen dominiert. Möglicherweise ist dies der gewünschte Ausgang eines Konfliktes zwischen zwei Gruppen, ganz im Sinne der späteren pharaonischen Idee des 'Erschlagens der Feinde', die bisher im Grab 100 in Hierakonpolis bis zur Auffindung dieses Gefäßes ihren frühesten Beleg fand; mit dem Neufund aus Grab U-239 können wir diesen Gedanken nun bis in frühe Naqada-Zeit zurückverfolgen (Dreyer et al. 1998, 112)" [...] "The various examples presented above clearly demonstrate that anthropomorphic figures, usually female, with upraised arms and incurved hands, have a special significance in the iconography of Predynastic Egypt. This is indicated both by the long duration of the motif, from the fifth until the end of the fourth millennium BC, as well as the wide variety of decorated objects and techniques involved: pottery (applied relief and painting), clay figurines, rock carving and linen. This body posture must bear a ritual or ceremonial message. It has been suggested that the position of the arms imitates bovid horns, and that the female figure represents the goddess Hathor. Discussing the Predynastic clay figurine, Arkell remarked that "the position [is] still used in the Dinka cow dance" [...] "The religious character of the events is emphasized by the upraised arms of the leading figure" (GARFINKEL, 2001, pp. 244-247).

a representative of early religion, the different size and location of the smaller figures being a crude attempt at providing perspective.



Examples of such crude attempts at perspective can be seen for example in Petrie, Prehistoric Egypt, plates XVIII, 73 and XXII, 47G, in which animals appear to be on top of one another or on top of boat cabins, actually being represented smaller and at a certain distance.

The actual scenes of smiting like in tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis or in the Narmer palette are nothing like the one on the U239 pot.

In this political landscape the emerging hereditary chiefs most certainly felt the need of proclaiming their special and divinely granted powers by means of propaganda in the decorated pottery and in the rock art, to help convince those subject to their rule of the validity of the new situation (CASTILLOS, 2018).

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