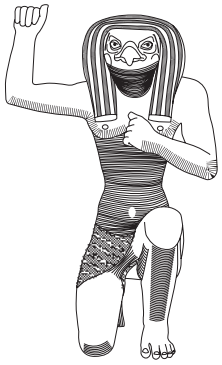

1

Egyptian Archaeology

From Text to Context

Willeke Wendrich

The Egyptian archaeological record, with its almost intact temples, vividly decorated tombs, relatively undisturbed desert sites, and incredible preservation of organic materials, makes for an embarrassment of riches. The effect of this was that until recently Egyptian archaeologists felt that this wealth of information simply spoke for itself. Wood, papyrus, textiles, basketry, leather, zooarchaeological and archaeobotanical remains were recovered without difficulty. The uniqueness of their preservation was often not even recognized and exploited, because these organic materials represented only a fraction of an impressive material culture, and an equally impressive textual record. No need was felt for an approach that would explicate research questions, and provide a theoretical framework to enhance our knowledge. Consequently, very few publications on Egyptian archaeology specifically mention method or theory. In the 1960s and 1970s, while much of world archaeology was participating in, or at least aware of, the debates, Egyptian archaeology was ancillary to Egyptology (Andrén 1998:37–38). In both scholarly and popular publications one encounters unspecified claims phrased as "archaeology has shown that … ." The misunderstanding here is, of course, that archaeology is not capable of "showing" something. It is the careful weighing of information, and the explication of how data are collected and taken to relate to the research question and theoretical context, which contributes to our knowledge. This naïve take on what archaeology is, and how it relates to our (re)construction of the past, was an effect of Egyptology's focus on textual sources, while archaeology's task was to provide illustrations or support for the texts.

Even today some Egyptologists question how archaeological theory would improve our understanding of the ancient Egyptian culture, while the question should of course be turned around: how flawed is our understanding *without* theory? Every archaeologist works from assumptions, concepts, and a knowledge base which has been built up during years of training, experience, growing insights, and perceptions, both related and unrelated to the academic world. Theory is the explication – in the sense of rendering explicit – the mutual agreement and sharing of these concepts, in order to not only record, but also interpret remnants of the past.

Theory enables us to observe more than the obvious and allows us to go beyond the anecdotal, based on unsystematic examples, without a methodical incorporation of the ancient and modern context. At the same time theory prevents simplified, naïve conclusions, and by explicating our assumptions and methods, we render our work open to criticism.

In fact every archaeologist uses theory, but often this is an implicit or even subconscious process. Phenomena are explained and "facts" are seen in the light of particular ideas, or discourses, which are all-encompassing to the point that they are never questioned. Several examples from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century work of Petrie, Reisner, and Caton Thompson serve to illustrate this.

Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853–1942) was ahead of his time in his interest in the material culture of daily life, and his meticulous excavation and recording methods. He excavated sites dating to the Predynastic and the Greco-Roman periods, and anything in between. His explanations of the cultural development of ancient Egypt, however, followed the trends of the time. Based on Darwin's theory, archaeologists developed an evolutionary approach, which made a developmental distinction between races and cultures. Famous Egyptologists such as Lepsius, Reisner, and also Petrie were strongly influenced by this deterministic evolutionary approach. Lepsius divided the population of Africa into distinct, separately evolved Hamitic and Negroid populations, which translated into a division into Negroids and Caucasians, with the former being considered an "inert" race, while the cultural impetus came from the latter (Trigger 2006:202). Based on this division, Petrie claimed that the pyramids could not have been built by people stemming from the African Neolithic. He, and others, surmised a "Dynastic Race," a distinct group which migrated from the Near East, and replaced the Predynastic population of Egypt. This explanation of cultural change was based on two concurrent theoretical premises: first that the ancient African "inert" race was not capable of rapid improvement, and secondly that cultural changes were the effect of migration, rather than local developments. Many others adhered to similar theories, and as recently as the 1960s the transition from Predynastic to Dynastic Egypt was characterized as follows: "Authorities are divided in their opinions as to the reason for this sudden cultural advance, but it would seem probable that the principal cause was the incursion of a new people into the Nile Valley" (Emery 1961:38). Reisner's writings are blatantly racist:

> The social mingling of the three races, the Egyptian, the Nubian, and the negro in one community, would naturally be supposed to have a marked cultural effect on the community. The most obvious result in all such cases is of course the production of offspring of mixed blood who do not inherit the mental qualities of the highest race, in this case the Egyptian. (Reisner 1923:556)

The explicit judgment of ethnic groups goes hand in hand with implicit suppositions about gender, when he continues the previous statement with: "But a portion of the offspring will perpetuate the qualities, physical and mental, of the male parent, and thus the highest race will not necessarily disappear, even after some generations" (Reisner 1923:556).

Others, who did not adhere to racist theories, nevertheless were children of their time and the then current paradigm. Gertrude Caton Thompson (1888–1985) started working with Petrie in 1921. She had received archaeological training in London, after having experienced the joy and excitement of prehistoric archaeology at a Neolithic excavation in France during two holiday periods. In Egypt she was one of the few archaeologists concentrating on survey work and the study of lithic assemblages, and consequently she discovered the late Neolithic settlement of Hammamiya. In 1923 she started working in the Fayum, excavating several Neolithic sites located in the desert north of Lake Qarun, and recording activity areas at two different elevations, related to a series of ancient lake level variations. She worked together with the geologist Elinor Gardner, who meticulously plotted the ancient shore lines and the elevations at which the cultural remains were found. It was clear that the lake level, at present at 44 m below sea level, had been 46–56 m higher in the past. Shore lines were found at around 2–4 and 10–12 m above sea level. Caton Thompson surmised that this enormous ancient lake had gradually diminished in size. She remarked as noteworthy that the oldest culture, the Fayum A, found at the highest level, was more advanced than the Fayum B culture, which was found in relation to the 2–4 m shore line and thus had to be later in date. Her explanation of cultural change by population movements and replacements, rather than internal developments, was typical for the time (Trigger 2006:207). This presupposition led her to suggest that the primitive Fayum B people overran, or conquered, the more advanced Fayum A population, destroying the more advanced knowledge of the Fayum A in their wake (Caton Thompson and Gardner 1934; Wendrich 2008). Later research by Wendorf and Schild (1976) established that the lake level changes were much more complicated than suggested by Caton Thompson and Gardner, and, supported by radiocarbon dates, they recognized that the "primitive" Fayum B culture actually appeared to be almost 800 years older than the Neolithic, pottery-producing Fayum A culture. Caton Thompson was an excellent archaeologist, whose fieldwork, methods, and publications were ahead of her time. She recorded the observations on the ground precisely, but failed to account for her premises by implicitly accepting two theories: first that the lake diminished in size over time, and second that changes in the material culture implied an influx of a different cultural group. The use of theory gave her observations a greater explanatory power, but resulted in incorrect conclusions.

In 1929 Caton Thompson was faced with an extreme example of irrational archaeological explanation, based on racist theory. She was asked to research the stone monuments of Greater Zimbabwe, an archaeological and political minefield. Based on similar arguments as outlined above, it had been maintained that the impressive stone monuments of Greater Zimbabwe must have been built by a non-African population. This fitted the need of the white population to negate the occurrence of a local ancient civilization. It was suggested, based on no archaeological information whatsoever, that the stone structures had been built by King Salomo, or the Queen of Sheba, in any case a "race" that had crossed the Red Sea from the Arabian Peninsula to Africa. Level-headed Caton Thompson studied the stratigraphy and published a report which unequivocally stated that the Greater Zimbabwe monuments had been built by a local Bantu population,

and were a few centuries, rather than a few millennia, old (Caton Thompson 1931, 1983; Wendrich 2008).

In these examples theory functions as the overarching principle, the main ideas which lead to a particular explanation or interpretation of the data, and at the same time determine the method used and type of data collected. Studying the development of Egyptian archaeology shows that we can discern two main aspects which dictate changes in approach over time: the relation between theory and data, and the shift in research questions and interests.

Although Herodotus' characterization of Egypt as the gift of the river (Book II, 5) is often quoted, a much later standard work that not only enhanced, but radically changed the understanding of the Nile as central to Egyptian civilization was Karl Butzer's *Early Hydraulic Civilization in Egypt* (1976). In his introduction, Butzer explicitly states that he has taken an ecological perspective and he defines the purpose of his study to be an examination of "the emergence of a floodplain civilization in the Egyptian Nile Valley, viewed as a test case of man–land relationships" (1976:2). The book highlights environmental parameters, technological developments, and settlement patterns. This was a new approach to Egyptian archaeology, dominated by publications of excavated sites, richly illustrated, but often merely descriptive. Discussions of broader archaeological issues were rare. A successful attempt to incorporate archaeology into an overview of Egyptian history, while emphasizing the social and economic aspects, rather than the "traditional" historical narrative that concentrates on the king, chronology, and religion, was *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Trigger et al. 1983). This book meticulously referenced the archaeological reports on which the authors' descriptions were based. Their purpose was to stress a continuous development through time, an approach contrary to a tendency among Egyptologists to admire ancient Egypt, but despise the contemporary country and its inhabitants. In his seminal work *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*, Kemp (2006) goes further, and attempts to tease out the ancient Egyptian attitudes and ways of thinking. His emphasis is on material culture, on the meaning it carries, and on how in ancient Egypt material, textual, and visual culture were continually reinterpreted. Kemp characterizes his efforts as the creation of an imaginary world, a marquee in the wind, pegged to the ground through the use of references to the extensive Egyptological literature (2006:3). His is a mildly relativist approach, allowing for multiple alternative explanations or narrations, but based on an enormous amount of archaeological material and a deep knowledge of the literature. In fact, his approach is well in keeping with the ancient Egyptian attitude to reality, which encompassed a firm belief in order, defined differently in various contexts or periods, and an enormous flexibility in allowing non-harmonized parallel truths.

Relativism is often criticized as leading to unsubstantiated speculation, with as a main argument that interpretations based on speculation "become conduits through which all sorts of unexamined prejudices and personal biases are introduced into archaeology. They ignore the alternative course of remaining silent regarding matters that are unknowable" (Trigger 2006:518). Reflecting Wittgenstein's seventh position ("Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen", in Ogden's translation: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" [Biletzki and Matar 2009]), Trigger criticized the

construction of insufficiently supported interpretations. Wittgenstein's position, however, focused not on archaeology, but on belief systems dealing, for instance, with ideas about, and beliefs in, the afterlife. It is a reaction against both unfounded theories on supernatural phenomena and the scientific optimism of the late nineteenth century that everything will be explained by rational scientific means. One can, however, certainly speak about all aspects related to archaeology that could potentially be known. Not the personal biases of researchers are a threat to scholarship, but the presentation of those biases as an objective account. Archaeology from an explicit and methodical bias, on the other hand, has proven to provide important insights. The development and increased acceptance of gender theory has clarified that certain points of view have been systematically excluded from the archaeological interpretation (Wilfong, this volume). In the early days, when gender theory was not an accepted approach, groups of scholars and the approach itself have been actively and sometimes viciously attacked as non-scientific. A similar argument can be made for the discussion around multivocality. Granting a voice to individuals or groups whose participation has been actively prevented enables an open debate on personal or political interests, which are always an integral part of archaeology (Meskell 1998; Reid 2002; Wendrich in press). The local population, New Age devotees, school children, and tourists have their own perspectives and interests (see my Epilogue to the volume). This is not the same, however, as accepting every opinion as equally valid in a scholarly or scientific context and debate. Instead archaeologists who give serious attention to multivocality recognize that academic endeavors are one among several ways of considering ancient remains, and are not isolated, but firmly embedded in society. For archaeological work that takes place outside the country of origin of the researcher, and Egyptology is an excellent example, archeologists are embedded in their academic surrounding, their home, and their host societies.

In Egypt the integration of scientific research methods has developed in the last century. A shift in focus from architecture to stratigraphy marks this development most clearly. Multi-disciplinary excavation and survey projects which use sound stratigraphical excavation methods, and scientific study of context, soil, objects, animal bones, human bones, and botanical materials, have become the standard. The publications, however, for the most part have been descriptive. It is not until quite recently that publications have explicitly stated that the excavation of a cemetery has as its objective the understanding of social stratification or the gender-related division of labor (Wilfong, this volume).

The reinterpretation of materials and assemblages that were excavated over a century ago, and are often part of badly provenanced museum collections, has shown real promise as well. Good examples are David Wengrow's overview of prehistoric and Predynastic Egypt (2006), and Lynn Meskell's work on Deir el-Medina (1999, 2002, 2004). The Greco-Roman period (332 BCE–395 CE), much like the Late Period (Wilson, this volume) long considered as "un-Egyptian" and an age of decline "after the pharaohs," has recently been reflected on in a number of thought-provoking publications. An increased interest in cultural diversity, the problematic issue of ethnicity, and the expression of identity in the material culture has resulted in several recent books which advocate a new approach to the archaeological materials, but also a new understanding of ancient textual accounts

(Johnson 1992; Riggs 2005; Vasunia 2001; see also Grajetzki and my chapter on "identity and personhood" in this volume). These tend to gravitate towards the Greco-Roman period because of the fascinating Egyptian–Hellenistic interaction. This is a relatively recent period, and many excavations of cemeteries, temples, and settlement sites have yielded Greco-Roman material overlying the remains of earlier periods. Yet most of the contributors to this volume only refer to the Greco-Roman period in passing. This was an explicit editorial choice because this period displays enormous breaks in tradition. Where change in the earlier periods was always couched to resemble a continuation of age-old traditions, developments in the Greco-Roman period merely pay lip service to such conventions.

Stressing the role of archaeology in understanding ancient Egypt is of urgent importance to correct several biases which are the result of the overwhelming presence of the textual and visual record on the walls of temples and tombs, as well as in scholarship. The idea that Egyptian Pharaonic culture suddenly "emerged," a perception that gave rise to the racist theories outlined above, is untenable when studying the archaeology rather than the written sources (Hendrickx et al., this volume). The development of writing should be put in the context of increased craft specialization, economic changes, and state formation (Köhler, this volume). The official textual sources are colored by the state ideology, they represent only the upper levels of Egyptian society, and they operate in a different time frame than the archaeological record. The image that comes to the fore from the textual sources is a well-balanced, homogeneous, society that is characterized by continuity of thought, habits, and interhuman relations. Egyptologists have taken this imagery at face value and tried to find explanations for such a level of stagnation by suggesting that there is a relation between the cognitive structure of Egypt's ancient inhabitants and its geographical location and natural circumstances (e.g. Grimal 1992:17). The explanation of Egypt's perceived homogeneous and unique character has thus often been sought in its landscape, or topographic circumstances. The Egyptian natural borders are the steep rocky Eastern Desert, rich in copper and turquoise in the Sinai, gold in the south, and hard decorative stones in the center; then the impenetrable Western desert, dotted with a few oases, but a landscape exactly as one imagines the Sahara – a bare, arid limestone plateau with large sandy dunes; and finally the marshes in the northern Delta, which forced the people to live on *gezira*s or turtlebacks, islands of Pleistocene sands embedded in a thick layer of fluvial deposits and surrounded by water during the months of the Nile inundation. Even the topographical organization was dictated by the Nile: the dead were buried at the dry top of the islands; the living stayed as close as they could near the water, so that the remains of their settlements gradually were buried under the yearly addition of a thick layer of Nile silt. Egypt's southern border was protected by the First Cataract, rapids in the Nile which formed because the river had to find its way through a threshold of hard pink granite, rather than the Nubian sandstone in the south, or the limestone north of Esna. Even though the inhabitants of Elephantine were well aware that the Nile arrived at the First Cataract from further south, the turbulent waters were considered the source of the Nile. The inundation provided temporal regularity, which was expressed in the three seasons of four months each: *Akhet*, the inundation, from August through November, which each year brought

not only water to the parched land, but also a thick layer of fertile black Nile silt; *Peret* the growing season from December through March; and *Shemu*, the period of drought when the ground cracked open and aired through, from April through July. Thus pointing at the natural circumstances, Pharaonic Egypt has been represented as an isolated country, a self-sufficient kingdom that looked inwards, was never faced with a complete occupation by foreigners, and therefore had no need to change in reaction to external factors.

How realistic is this image of an isolated, calm, and orderly life, protected by impenetrable borders and regulated by the Nile inundation? It was the ideal, certainly, but probably one that reflected a situation that was strived for, rather than one that was commonly present. The seemingly impenetrable mountainous Eastern Desert has been an access route from the Neolithic period onward: the desert track to the Red Sea where we have evidence for shipping from at least the Middle Kingdom onwards. The Sahara was a fully inhabited region in the late Holocene (Hendrickx et al., this volume), and after gradual desiccation it still was a regularly traveled region to and from the Oases, but also along ancient tracks to the plains and Nuba mountains in the south. The Nile branches in the Delta were convenient inroads for ships from the Mediterranean, which could pass the marshy region along well-traveled channels to inland harbor towns, such as Buto, Avaris, and Tanis. The regions of Wawat (Lower Nubia) and Kush (Upper Nubia) to the south of the First Cataract were involved in a constant cultural exchange with Egypt, and in many periods of its history Egypt tried successfully to have direct political control over extensive areas that were the source for important prestige goods such as gold, ostrich feathers, elephant tusks, leopard skins, and ebony.

The tension between ideal and reality found an expression in Egypt's religion. Apart from an emphasis on the afterlife (Taylor, this volume), the most important concept is that of *maat*, which stands for order or justice and is visualized as a feather, or a goddess with a feather on her head. It is the king's duty to uphold *maat* and to abhor and subdue *isfet*, social chaos. *Maat* encompasses more, however, than the opposite of *isfet*. It is the cosmic order, the very fabric of which earthly life and the afterlife are integral parts (Richards, this volume). The cosmic order can only be maintained by a constant renewal and re-creation. To the modern reader this forms a potential tension field, between stability and renewal, continuity and change. The emphasis on rebirth and rejuvenation is, however, focused not on change, but on the repeated re-creation of an existing state of affairs. It represents a sense of time depth, in which generation follows upon generation. Through Egyptian history one can follow the traces of ancient Egyptians being fascinated and in awe of that time depth of their own culture. In the New Kingdom period, around 1350 BCE, a visitor left a graffito on a wall of one of the chapels of the 3rd-Dynasty complex of Djoser, dated to approximately 2650 BCE, to express his admiration for the great accomplishments of previous generations (Firth et al. 1935; Fischer-Elfert 2003). A good illustration that ancient history was of importance and carried the weight of authority is the Memphite theology, found on a stela dated to the rule of Shabaka (c. 690–664 BCE) which literally claims to be a copy of an old worm-eaten papyrus (Lichtheim 1980:5). The deep sense of the importance of forebears and of tradition translated into a creative reinterpretation of what went before. Presented as being rooted in age-old wisdom,

upon closer inspection many traditions appear to show a definite development from, or even complete breach with, the past (Kemp 2006:160; Wegner, this volume).

Likewise, the writing of historical accounts, or more precisely the composition of annals, was an ideological endeavor which had a very specific purpose. It was the task of the king to uphold *maat*, maintain order in Egypt and actively fight chaos, represented by the foreign lands surrounding Egypt. The king of Egypt had to be victorious in order to ensure that order. Perhaps the best example of what we would consider a falsification of history is the account of the Battle of Qadesh between Egypt and the Hittites during the reign of Ramesses II (c. 1279–1213). Presented as a victory on several temple walls, comparison with contemporary Hittite sources reveals that this battle ended in a stale-mate at best (Kitchen 1982). The location of these battle scenes, on the pylons and outside walls of the temples of Karnak, Luxor, and the Ramesseum (Yurco 1999), is highly relevant in the interpretation of these texts: the temple as sacred space is surrounded by scenes that ward off the chaos. The ideology of kingship as the institution and person that upholds *maat* lies at the root of ancient Egyptian representations of foreigners, lands outside the Egyptian borders, and accounts of the past (O'Connor 2003, Wegner, this volume).

Materiality, and thus archaeology, does not represent a more "objective" approach to understanding ancient Egyptian society. Just as texts and images, the material remains convey messages that should be understood in their context, and we should take into consideration which parties are involved in the tacit communication. Unlike texts and wall paintings, archaeology gives us the opportunity to study the material traces of all levels of society, without mediation of the upper classes in representing the lower classes, such as is the case in "scenes of daily life" in tomb paintings. By understanding the material record in its temporal, regional, and social context, we are beginning to tease out the variation, idiosyncracies, conflicts, and changes within Egyptian society, in contrast to the stable, seemingly unchanging flow of its official history.

The State of Archaeology in Egypt

Egyptian archaeology has gone through a number of rapid changes in the last few decades, and many of these are related to a growing awareness of the importance of archaeology as an independent discipline, with theories, methods, and subject matter that differ fundamentally from the traditional Egyptological approach. The criticism of the myth of Eternal Egypt is accompanied by a recognition that archaeologists in Egypt cannot work in a vacuum, removed from archaeological debates elsewhere in the world. The discourse has changed, and so has the emphasis and reliance on textual evidence. The study of segments of society that are underrepresented in textual evidence, and therefore in much of the previous research, is actively pursued, as is the archaeology of temporal and regional variations. This volume is representative of those changing discourses. As a counterbalance against the long-lived emphasis on ancient Egypt as an unchanging monolithic culture, each chapter has a main focus on a specific period and theme.

The chapters have been arranged in chronological order, from prehistory (Hendrickx et al., Chapter 2) to the present (Hassan, Chapter 14), but they do not represent a historical narrative or "evolutionary development." Broadly speaking each chapter focuses on a particular topic, covering the major themes in Egyptian archaeology today. These themes have been set in a specific temporal context, which enables the authors to present well-argued case studies based on recent or ongoing field projects. In some cases a deliberate choice is made to focus a theme in a period which has not been subject to such a study before. A good example is the section on villages. Settlement archaeology has been underrepresented, compared with the massive amounts of work published on tombs and temples. Most recent literature on village life has concentrated on Deir el-Medina, a village with a very specific group of inhabitants and a high level of literacy (McDowell 1999; Meskell 1999, 2002, 2004). An exception is Szpakowska's work on Middle Kingdom Kahun (2008). Chapter 5 (Lehner) considers villages in the Old Kingdom period, and relates the economic and political power of villages to that of the central authority.

The book develops a focus on temporal, spatial, human, and multiple contexts. The first three chapters have in common that they concentrate on very early periods of Egyptian history, from prehistory through early state formation. In traditional text-focused Egyptology the early expressions of religious thought and political organization were often interpreted from much later textual sources. Because it is challenging to construct an underlying belief system through the interpretation of shapes, color, human interventions, and spatial distribution of objects and buildings, Egyptology has found it extremely tempting to use later religious expressions to explain such early cultic phenomena. The continuous development of Egyptian culture should prevent us from using quite explicit versions of Egyptian mythology (mostly dated to the Greco-Roman period and 4000 years younger) to interpret much earlier cultural expressions. Thus Chapters 2, 3, and 4 ("Worship without Writing"; "Theories of State Formation"; and "Kingship and Legitimation") concentrate on the importance of interpreting these themes within their temporal context. If a comparison with later sources needs to be made, then the authors do so explicitly and with the notion that it is problematic. The essay in Chapter 2, by Stan Hendrickx, Dirk Huyge, and myself, discusses non-textual religious expression and explicates the grounds on which meaning is ascribed to technological changes, burial customs, visual culture, and the built environment. To discuss this in the context of the Late Palaeolithic, Neolithic, and Predynastic periods, for which textual sources are simply not available, gives a particular urgency to this approach. It can be argued that using the same methods to study religious practice from later periods will provide a very different level of understanding than focusing mostly on textual sources. Intellectual and spiritual explanations of the conditions of life and death are expressed in cultic sites such as found at Nabta Playa, Heliopolis, Elephantine, and Hierakonpolis. The formative period of complex society and state formation gives Christiana Köhler reason to criticize the traditional narrative of the unification of the two lands (Chapter 3). Represented in official textual or visual accounts such as the Narmer Palette, and repeated in royal titulary and iconography, the mythical representation of the birth of the Egyptian nation state has

long been taken at face value. The essay outlines the importance of taking both functional and regional context into account: interpretation is inevitably skewed by a bias in the archaeological database, which has a wealth of funerary materials from the south of Egypt, but a dearth of reliable information on settlements, and on the archaeology of the Delta. Early kingship has been considered analogous with the position of the king of 1000 years later, based on a comparison of the iconography. This same emphasis of the proper temporal context permeates Janet Richards' discussion of the need and forms of legitimation of kingship in the Old Kingdom period (Chapter 4). Through the study of grand architectural projects, grave-good analysis, and the identification of elite goods and trade, the essay corrects the long-held characterization that Old Kingdom kingship was absolutist, a divine power far removed from the non-elite layers of Egyptian society. The change in emphasis is illustrated with two case studies, the first concentrating on legitimation through the content and distribution of private tomb biographies, and the second analyzing the development of the landscape at Abydos.

The second premise, referring to spatial context, is found mostly in Chapters 5 ("Villages and the Old Kingdom"), 6 ("Regionality, Cultural and Cultic Landscapes"), and 7 ("Tradition and Innovation: The Middle Kingdom"). In these chapters, regionality and the relative geographical position of land, landowners, and workers is put in an economic and ideological perspective. The location and in particular the economic power of villages as counterbalance to a putative absolutist and centralized state organization is laid out in Chapter 5, in which Mark Lehner points out how the dearth of written material from settlement contexts brings to the fore how many of our ideas about the Old Kingdom are based on the well-advertised state apparatus, while there are some apparent discrepancies between the ideal of statehood and the daily realities of life in a village in Egypt during that time. By combining the archaeological data with information on land holdings and taxes, Lehner sketches a coherent image of the complexity of the village, and the limited power of the central authority. This concurs with the consideration of culture, cult, and landscape, the subject of Chapter 6, written by David Jeffreys. The chapter emphasizes the role of the nomes, or provinces, in the context of the First Intermediate Period, a time when the provincial centers rose to increased independence. The geography of the nomes differed markedly, and Jeffreys therefore includes the specific location within the Egyptian landscape in relation to regional differences, regional persistence as well as the cultic and symbolic significance of the landscape. Josef Wegner considers the Middle Kingdom developments as basis for an analysis of the establishment and reinvention of tradition in ancient Egypt. He demonstrates how the "classical" period of Egyptian history is firmly rooted in the Old Kingdom and in its turn forms the foundation for the development of the New Kingdom by highlighting examples of innovations, such as the establishment of a new capital city, the emergence of a middle class, and changes in burial customs, firmly presented as traditions.

Four chapters concentrate on what could be called the "human context," aspects of identity, defined by ethnicity, class, gender, age, and concepts of personhood. In Chapter 8, "Foreigners in Egypt: Archaeological Evidence and Cultural

Context," Thomas Schneider discusses the Egyptian attitude towards foreign individuals, countries, and influences. He argues that the concepts of "being foreign," ethnicity, and acculturation should be defined in order to understand the complexity of this subject. Archaeology is vital to balance the negative imagery of state propaganda and, in contrast to this negative discourse, provides evidence for the integration of foreigners in Egypt. The chapter gives a diachronic overview of evidence for the position of foreigners in the formal, royal inscriptions and iconography, as well as the sparse indications of actual foreigners living in Egypt who were able, and chose, to express their identity. The case study, excavations in Tell el-Dabaa, centers on the Second Intermediate Period and the insights that this archaeological case study has yielded for the rewriting of the history of the Hyksos "invasion." Previously the Hyksos were thought to be foreign hordes who conquered Egypt by force, but from the archaeology the Eastern Delta appears as a region which has known a long-lived cultural exchange, and several generations of inhabitants with a Syro-Palestinian background. The cultural identity of these inhabitants was expressed in material remains ranging from burials to weapons, and use-ware ceramics. The texts that vilify the Hyksos most fervently were written approximately five decades after Egypt had be "re-conquered" by rulers of the Theban house which would form the 18th Dynasty. In its historical context, the claims of the disputed King/Queen Hatshepsut take on a very different meaning. In Chapter 9, "Gender in Egypt," T. G. Wilfong provides a diachronic overview of the presentation and role of gender in different Egyptian sources with emphasis on the New Kingdom. The discussion of "women" and "men," as well as more complex gender categories, is based on his integration of archaeological, visual, and textual sources. The most accessible archaeological material is available in burials, where grave goods and tomb architecture can be connected to a sexed body. Settlement archaeology, for instance at Amarna, provides insights into the relation between domestic space and gender. Chapter 10, "Class in Egypt: Position and Possessions," is a critical discussion of the use of the term "elite." This is coupled with the question of how pervasive the concept of class was in ancient Egypt. Wolfgang Grajetzki illustrates how social stratification can be defined archaeologically, with mostly examples dated to the New Kingdom period. The role of the king, and that of the high-level state officials as intermediaries between the next level of society and the pharaoh at the very top, is correlated to archaeological evidence from cemeteries and settlements. In Chapter 11, "Identity and Personhood," I present a diachronic overview of how Egyptians understood themselves as a person or individual within society. The main focus is on New Kingdom evidence, and includes a brief overview of how aspects of identity feature in the large historical narrative of the New Kingdom. To understand identity and personhood the discussion explores the importance of the name as identifier both in life and after death, as well as the supernatural aspects of personhood. These relate directly to the socially negotiated identity markers which provide a material expression of ethnicity, age, health, wealth, and class.

The fourth section of the book stresses the complex multiple contexts for a period which in traditional Egyptology has often been considered to fall outside Pharaonic Egyptian history. By contributing change to foreign rule, the Late Period, as noted above, has been characterized as "un-Egyptian." Especially the

pharaohs of the 25th Dynasty have suffered this fate, while several of the changes they introduced were adopted by later generations, and considered "truly Egyptian" in the Greco-Roman period. The roots of such misrepresentations lie in the disregard of development and change over time, manifest in the fact that few Egyptologists feel the need to define "real" Egyptian culture. In Chapter 12, "Changes in the Afterlife," John Taylor considers whether the beliefs of the Libyan ruling elite in the Delta should be considered as inspiration for or cause of a minimization of investment in burials during the Third Intermediate Period. By providing a diachronic analysis of funerary aspects such as the location, architecture, decoration, and equipment of burials, the contrast in investment becomes apparent, but the world of ideas behind the rituals does not appear to change significantly. Penelope Wilson uses the concept of the "two lands," an organizing notion during most periods of Egyptian history, in relation to archaeological and other evidence for the multitude of Delta states and the loss of integrity during the Third Intermediate and Late Periods (Chapter 13, "Consolidation, Innovation, and Renaissance"). Through the discussion of major settlement sites such as Sais and Naukratis, she considers the tendency towards restoration and archaizing apparent in these periods. Often dismissed as a period of decline, she suggests that, depending on one's perspective, the Late Period could be considered one of renaissance, "dynamically interwoven with the paradigm of past ideologies." In Chapter 14 ("Egypt in the Memory of the World") Fekri Hassan gives an analysis of the fascination that ancient Egypt has held for Europe. The essay deconstructs how Egypt has survived and has been reconstituted in the memory of the world. Hassan quotes the classical authors and the biblical tradition, where Egypt is praised for its (secret) wisdom or vilified as a land of paganism, or as the abode of Pharaoh, the quintessential enemy of the Jewish people. Egypt remains at the forefront of intense interest, starting with Islamic scholars in the medieval period, and early travelers from the seventeenth century onwards, towards modern-day commercialism.

The conclusion (Chapter 15, "Epilogue: Eternal Egypt Deconstructed") draws together the common theme of these chapters: the deconstruction of "Eternal Egypt," through a change in emphasis from text to context. This is based on archaeological interpretation, in which text and iconography are imbedded as sources with their own purpose, audience, and ideology. These fifteen chapters thus provide an overview of recent trends in and developments of Egyptian archaeology. In different ways each chapter illustrates not "what we know," but "how we know," by explicitly presenting and weighing the evidence. This inevitably also brings to the fore where our knowledge is lacking. Such an approach allows us to integrate the complex interdisciplinary information needed to piece together different histories, with particular explicitly formulated perspectives. While each chapter concentrates on a methodological theme, the gradual chronological shift, from prehistory to the present, provides a framework that allows the reader to situate these accounts within the traditional timeline of Egyptian history, and contrasts the archaeologically contextualized chapters with the traditional Egyptological narrative. Bringing archaeology to the fore, *Egyptian Archaeology* stimulates the study of major themes within a specific historical and archaeological context.

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