SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN PREDYNASTIC BURIALS

By ALICE STEVENSON

Of all Ancient Egyptian eras, it has been the Predynastic (primarily the fourth millennium BC) that has received the greatest attention from anthropologically derived models of mortuary behaviour. Yet these have in the past been limited mainly to models of social status and wealth derived from archaeological theories of the early 1970s, which have long been critiqued in other areas of archaeological discourse. There is emerging within Egyptology, however, an increasing engagement with more recent thinking. Following an overview of developments in mortuary archaeology, this article aims to contribute to this discussion of alternative social models of Predynastic mortuary remains. In particular it aims to challenge the overriding assumption that burial form and content is a reflection or correlate of individual status or identity, or that it simply forms an index for social ranking. Rather, it will be argued that these contexts may additionally reveal aspects of the relationships between people, objects, and places. In doing so it is possible to consider some of the ideological aspects of Predynastic burials in addition to the social-economic aspects that are more often discussed.

Introduction

NO other ancient society is as intimately associated with its mortuary rituals as that of Egypt, so much so that it was singled out in the inter-disciplinary *Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* as being of 'special interest'.[1] It is therefore unsurprising that Egypt's funerary practices have caught the attention of anthropologists, including the influential scholar Arnold Van Gennep,[2] who interpreted Osirian funeral rituals as part of his seminal work on rites of passage, and Metcalf and Huntington who provided an influential treatise of the ostentatious burials of rulers using the Predynastic to the Old Kingdom Egyptian royal burials as a key case study.[3] Yet, until recently, within Egyptology itself scholarly engagement with, or contribution to, the extensive cross-disciplinary literature on mortuary rituals has been restricted,[4] which is somewhat surprising given that for Egyptologists too burials have long been '… the foundation of Egyptological studies'.[5] This insularity from other disciplines,

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[1] S. Gallery, 'Egypt' in G. Howarth and O. Leaman (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Death and Dying* (London, 2001), 170–1.

[2] A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960 [1909]).

[3] P. Metcalf and R. Huntington, *Celebrations of Death. The anthropology of mortuary ritual* (New York, 1979).

[4] P. Ucko, 'Review of Chapman et al and Humphreys et al.', *Proceeding of the Prehistoric Society* 48 (1982), 522–4.

[5] J. Garstang, *Burial Customs of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1907), 1.

particularly from the social sciences, has been often observed.[6] There are a plethora of books that describe burial customs in ancient Egypt, but on account of the relative wealth of textual and iconographic data, albeit from the perspective of the minority elite, interpretation is often limited to the sphere of religious belief.

In the absence of standard historical points of reference, it has been the Predynastic period that has attracted greater interest in the application of anthropologically derived models of mortuary analysis than other Egyptian phases.[7] For the Predynastic, one such positive focus has been the engagement with the anthropological and archaeological literature pertaining to social evolution and the rise of social inequality. Methodologically, such theories have been realised in the form of empirical measurement of social status. Whilst these approaches have been useful for drawing out patterns, they can also marginalise the diversity of ancient practices and over-emphasise the deceased individual at the expense of additionally considering the responses of and relationships with the surviving community. More elaborate discussions have been forthcoming and these have begun to take a more nuanced approach to the interpretation of Predynastic mortuary evidence based on alternative social theories of burial. These include valuable contributions from: Wengrow[8] who, although he has not focussed on the minutiae of Egyptian mortuary archaeology, has looked at Egyptian material from a theoretical perspective; Hassan and Smith,[9] who have demonstrated the importance of good data collection and analysis by tackling the understudied area of gender in the Predynastic; and Savage[10] and Rowland[11] who have also utilized more recent cross-cultural archaeological and ethnographic studies to evaluate Predynastic cemetery evidence.

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[6] See, for example: T. Chapman, 'Beyond Egyptology: Egypt in 19th and 20th Century Archaeology and Anthropology', in P. Ucko and T. Chapman (eds), *The Wisdom of Egypt: changing visions through the ages* (Encounters with Ancient Egypt 5; London, 2003), 185; L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life* (Oxford, 1999), 2–3; D. Redford, 'The historiography of ancient Egypt', in K. Weeks (ed.), *Egyptology and the Social Sciences* (Cairo, 1979), 10–12; D. Jeffreys, 'Introduction: Two hundred years of ancient Egypt. Modern history and ancient archaeology', in D. Jeffreys (ed.), *Views of Ancient Egypt Since Napoleon Bonaparte. Imperialism, Colonialism and Modern Appropriations* (Encounters with Ancient Egypt; London, 2003), 5–6. The problem is compounded by the 'great divide' between Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology. See discussion in J. Richards, *Society and Death in Ancient Egypt: Mortuary Landscapes of the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2005), 52–4. The nature of the relationship between Egyptology and anthropology has also been examined, see J. Lustig, (ed.), *Anthropology and Egyptology. A Developing Dialogue* (Sheffield, 1997).

[7] Recent exceptions include: J. Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, (Ithaca, 2005); L. Meskell, 'Dying young: the experience of death at Deir el Medina', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13(2) (1994), 35–45; L. Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life* (Oxford, 1999); Richards, *Society and Death*; S. T. Smith, *Wretched Kush. Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire* (London, 2003), 37–43; U. Steffensen, 'The ritual use of mortuary pottery in Ancient Nubia. Some interpretational thoughts on the rituals and symbolism behind the mortuary ceramics of the Ancient Nubian C-Group', in *Archéo-Nil* 17 (2007), 133–52.

[8] D. Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt. Social transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC* (Cambridge, 2006).

[9] F. Hassan and S. Smith, 'Soul birds and heavenly cows', in S. Nelson and M. Rosen-Ayalon (eds), *In Pursuit of Gender* (Oxford, 2002), 43–65.

[10] S. Savage, 'Descent group competition and economic strategies in Predynastic Egypt', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 16 (1997), 226–68.

[11] J. M. Rowland, 'Death and the Origins of Egypt: Mortuary Variability as an Indicator of Socio-political Change during the Late Predynastic to Early Dynastic period', in J.-C. Goyon and C. Cardin (eds), *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists, Grenoble, 6–12 September 2004* (OLA 150; Leuven, 2007), 1629–43; J. M. Rowland, 'Grave Consequences: Developing Analytical Methods to Elucidate Patterns of Social Differentiation at early Egyptian Cemetery Sites', in M. Barta (ed.), *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology: Proceedings of a Conference* (Prague, 2006),

It is the aim here, therefore, to contribute to the emerging engagement with more recent archaeological approaches to interpreting burials. In particular, the dominant assumption that burial form and content is a reflection or correlate of individual status or identity, or that it simply forms an index for social ranking, will be challenged. Through a discussion of a few case studies inspired by some of the more recent threads of mortuary analysis and anthropological thought, alternatives to the dominant, one-dimensional discussion of early Egyptian burial will be advanced.

Predynastic burials in the Upper Egyptian tradition prior to Naqada III are the main focus of the discussion presented here rather than any of those of the Lower Egyptian communities as represented at Maadi, Wadi Digla[12] or Heliopolis.[13] This is partly because there are more burials of the former region known than the latter,[14] but also because the evidence demonstrates that the construction of burials at these Lower Egyptian sites represent starkly different practices than had evolved in the south and these differences should not be underplayed. The graves of the Maadian groups were constructed within a limited space that left little room for the inclusion of grave furniture. If objects were included these were restricted in number and were largely limited to empty ceramic vessels. In the Maadian burial sphere the body was the singular focus of the grave, in contrast to Upper Egyptian contexts where the body could act as a foundation around which associations and images could be constructed and experienced through the medium of grave goods. In Upper Egypt the grave pit itself can be described tentatively as an arena for display,[15] in which a final 'memory picture'[16] of the deceased could be created. This is not to suggest that the Maadian communities were any less complex in their social management of death, which may have been conducted away from the mortuary arena or in an intangible or ephemeral manner.[17] It nonetheless highlights the way in which the performance of their funerals engendered an alternative set of values. This is why one of the principal sites

297–313; J. M. Rowland, 'The application of Mortuary Data to the Problem of Social Transformation in the Delta from the Terminal Predynastic to the Early Dynastic Period', in S. Hendrickx, R. F. Friedman, K. M. Ciałowicz, and M. Chlodnicki (eds), *Egypt at its Origins: Studies in Memory of Barbara Adams. Proceedings of the International Conference 'Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt', Krakow, 28th August–1st September 2002* (OLA 138; Leuven, 2004), 991–1007; J. M. Rowland, 'The Transition to State Society in Egypt: Problems and Possibilities of Applying Mortuary Evidence', in A. Cooke and F. Simpson (eds), *Proceedings of Current Research in Egyptology, II: Liverpool 2001* (BAR IS 1380; Oxford, 2005), 57–63; J. M. Rowland, 'Trends in Burial Evidence: Evaluating Expectations for the Regional and Temporal Distribution of Mortuary Behaviour in Predynastic Egypt', in R. Ives, D. Lines, C. Naunton, and N. Wahlberg (eds), *Current Research in Egyptology, III* (BAR IS 1192; Oxford, 2003), 63–8.

[12] I. Rizkana and J. Seeher, *Maadi IV. The Predynastic Cemeteries of Maadi and Wadi Digla* (AVDAIK 81; Mainz, 1990).

[13] F. Debono and B. Mortensen, *The Predynastic Cemetery at Heliopolis: Season March – September 1950* (AVDAIK 63; Mainz, 1988),

[14] About 15,000 are known from the Upper Egyptian tradition, compared to only 600 of the Maadi-Buto groups. See S. Hendrickx and E. C. M. van den Brink, 'Inventory of Predynastic and Early Dynastic cemetery and settlement sites in the Egyptian Nile Valley', in E. C. M. van den Brink and T. Levy (eds) *Egypt and Levant: Interrelations from the 4th Through the Early 3rd Millennium B.C.E.* (London, 2002), 499–513.

[15] J. Thomas, *Understanding the Neolithic* (London, 1999), 160

[16] E. Hallam and J. Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Oxford, 2001), 132; S. Tarlow, 'The aesthetic corpse in nineteenth-century Britain', in Y. Hamilakis, M Pluciennik and S. Tarlow (eds), *Thinking Through the Body. Archaeologies of corporeality* (New York, 2002), 93. A. Stevenson, 'The aesthetics of Predynastic burial: Funerary performances in the fourth millennium BC', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 22(1) (2007), 75–91; D. Wengrow and J. Baines, 'Images, human bodies and the ritual construction of memory', in Hendrickx et al., *Origins*, 1095–7.

[17] See also Rowland, in Hendrickx et. al., *Origins*, 998–9.

examined here, Gerzeh, is considered together with Upper Egyptian material despite its location in the north. As argued more extensively elsewhere[18] the social practices evident here suggest that the community at Gerzeh were embedded in the traditions practised in the south and they were most likely migrants to Lower Egypt at this time, an interpretation which runs counter to opinions expressed elsewhere.[19] There are undoubtedly regional traditions, and no two Predynastic burials are identical, but nevertheless there are broad structuring principles that Upper Egyptian communities shared and drew from in the creation of the own local ceremonies, and their display-orientated practices are wholly different from what is represented by the Maadian burials. A fuller treatise of this is beyond the scope of this paper, but in essence the premises stems from the belief that groups cannot simply be identified by the presence of typical artefacts, but have to be examined critically with reference to the full assemblage and how it is used. The burials at Gerzeh not only included the full grave assemblage repertoire known from the south, but more importantly this material was deployed through specific rituals that had evolved in the south, including the choreography of objects in specific positions in the grave, the inclusion of a variety of substances within vessels and the secondary treatment of corpses. Such complexity is unlikely to have been so fully adopted and articulated as it was at Gerzeh without an intimate social affiliation with groups in the south.

The case studies below will consider the arrangement of graves within cemeteries, the variety of substances used in bead sets, as well as the fragmentation and life-history of grave goods. Whilst necessarily selective these examples can demonstrate that funeral contexts, generally, have the potential to reveal dimensions of the relationships between people, objects, and places, as well as the ideological role of burial.[20]

Standard approaches, a background.

To generalize, there are two broad approaches common to the interpretation of early Egyptian burials. The first attributes funerary elaboration to the need to establish an afterlife for the deceased.[21] Whilst this is not an unreasonable assumption given the well-documented framework of Egyptian historical practices, there are other additional and alternative interpretations, as will be elaborated below. The second approach associates investment in funerals with the social status of the deceased and

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[18] A. Stevenson, *The Predynastic Egyptian cemetery of el-Gerzeh: Social identities and mortuary practices* (OLA 186; Leuven, forthcoming); A. Stevenson, 'Ethnicity and migration? The Predynastic cemetery of el-Gerzeh', in B. Midant-Reynes and Y. Tristant (eds), *Egypt at its Origins 2*, (OLA 172; Leuven 2008), 545–62.

[19] C. Köhler, 'The state of research on Late Predynastic Egypt: New evidence for the development of the Pharaonic state? *GM* 147 (1995): 79–91; C. Köhler, 'The interaction between and the roles of Upper and Lower Egypt in the formation of the Egyptian state. Another review', in Midant-Reynes and Tristant, *Origins 2*, 515–44; N. Buchez and B. Midant-Reynes, 'Le site prédynastique de Kom el-Khilgan (Delta oriental). Données nouvelles sur les processus d'unification culturelle au IVe millénaire', *BIFAO* 107 (2007), 43–70.

[20] See similar discussion in J. Brück, 'Material metaphors. The relational construction of identity in Early Bronze Age burials in Ireland and Britain', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 4(3) (2004), 307–33. The notion of the body in the grave as a 'container' for social relations has also been discussed by Wengrow, *Early Egypt*, 165, 187.

[21] See comments in B. Midant-Reynes, *The Prehistory of Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 187; R. F. Friedman, 'Trauma at HK43', *Nekhen News* 10 (1998), 6–7, 7; A. J. Spencer, *Death in Ancient Egypt* (Harmondsworth, 1982), 29.

thus as a measure of social hierarchy. Both perspectives dominate interpretive commentaries of the Predynastic period.

Michael Hoffman was the first to promote the latter approach in Egyptian archaeology,[22] following the work of Metcalf and Huntington.[23] He felt that there had been a tendency to see the tombs of Egypt as technical and aesthetic products in themselves, and that the greater functional significance of death and burial had been ignored. For Hoffman, this was the function of burials as 'powerfacts', and from this perspective he suggested that the elaboration of mortuary cult '… was one of the most socially, economically, and politically sensitive indicators of the rise of the state'.[24]

Hoffman's outlook was embedded within a wider American archaeological ethos in which mortuary studies had gained currency as exemplary contexts for the kind of positivistic view of archaeology that was advocated in many US institutions at this time.[25] It is here that an explicit 'archaeology of death and burial', in the Anglo-American world at least, became visible, marking a dislocation from previous concerns with discovering cultural beliefs, to modelling past social systems on the basis of mortuary evidence. Key proponents were Binford[26] and Saxe,[27] whose combined work on this subject is often referred to as the 'Saxe-Binford approach', and which became fundamental to many studies of the archaeology of burial practices through the ensuing decade.[28] The details of this approach are so pervasive in background reviews of mortuary studies that they need little elaboration here.[29] The 'Saxe-Binford' approach is often cited to validate the assumption that a direct relationship existed between the energy expended on grave construction and provision, and the social status that the grave occupant held in life. This idea is also associated with Tainter[30] who developed 'energy expenditure' models for assessing burial facilities and these were also widely adopted.

Drawing heavily from these works scholars, following Hoffman's innovative lead, turned to statistical methodologies in order to measure the emergence of hierarchy, inequality and status in the Predynastic through the mortuary record.[31]

[22] M.A. Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs* (New York, 1979).

[23] Huntington and Metcalf, *Celebrations of Death*.

[24] Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs*, 336.

[25] See, for example, P. J. Watson, S. A. LeBlanc and C. L. R Redman, *Explanation in Archaeology: An explicitly scientific approach* (New York, 1971).

[26] L .R. Binford, 'Mortuary practices: their study and their potential', in L. R. Binford (ed.), *An Archaeological Perspective* (New York, 1972), 235.

[27] A. A. Saxe, *Social Dimensions of Mortuary Practices in a Mesolithic Population from Wadi Halfa, Sudan* (New York, 1971).

[28] See, for example, J. A. Brown, 'The search for rank in prehistoric burials', in R. Chapman, I. Kinnes and K. Randsborg (eds), *The Archaeology of Death* (Cambridge, 1981) 25–38; J. Tainter, 'Social inference and mortuary practices: an experiment in numerical classification', *WorldArch* 7 (1975), 1–15; L. Goldstein, *Mississippian Mortuary Practices. A case study of two cemeteries in Lower Illinois Valley* (Illinois, 1980).

[29] C. Carr, 'Mortuary Practices: their social, philosophical-religious, circumstantial, and physical determinants', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 2 (1995), 105−200; R. Chapman, 'Death, society and archaeology: the social dimensions of mortuary practices', *Mortality* 8(3) (2003), 305−12; I. Morris, 'The archaeology of ancestors: the Saxe/Goldstein hypothesis revisited', *CAJ* 1 (1991), 147−69; M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud, 1999); G. Rakita, J. Buikstra, L. Beck and S. Williams (eds), *Interacting with the Dead. Perspectives on Mortuary Archaeology for the New Millennium* (Gainesville, 2005); Richards, *Mortuary Landscapes*, 54−6.

[30] J. A., Tainter, 'Mortuary practices and the study of prehistoric social systems', in M. B. Schiffer, (ed.), *Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory* 1 (New York, 1978), 105–41.

[31] K. Bard, *From Farmers to Pharaohs* (Sheffield, 1994); J. J. Castillos, *A Reappraisal of the Published Evidence on Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Cemeteries* (Toronto, 1982); J.J.

Energy expenditure on tomb construction, the presence of 'badges of office'[32] or 'prestige goods', and abstract numerical scales of object value have all been calculated from burial data with the aim of gauging the development of social hierarchies within the frame of state formation.

Yet the Saxe-Binford theory, which underpins these studies, was soon after publication subject to extensive critique.[33] Egyptologists who have engaged with the Saxe-Binford hypothesis have generally acknowledged this critical debate.[34] On the whole, however, they have not addressed the ramifications of this, or sought to employ additional approaches to enrich the understanding of mortuary rituals. Instead, some have preferred to simply concentrate on quantifiable socio-economic models, as it is perceived to be 'perhaps the only social trait in an evolving state that can be demonstrated by the Predynastic mortuary evidence'.[35] Nevertheless, there are the beginnings of a greater engagement with this literature in Egyptology, which is demonstrating that it is possible to examine other social traits beyond the socio-economic.

In the last 25 years, mortuary studies in archaeology have expanded considerably beyond the search for status gradations based on burial paraphernalia and interment facility. Mortuary interpretations, often citing a root in the work of anthropologist Robert Hertz,[36] have become more focused upon the active roles of the mourners in burial rites and their relationship to the grave goods and the corpse(s). Initially, for archaeologists this meant modelling power relations amongst the living who were thought to have used funerals as platforms for ostentatious displays of wealth to their peers.[37] More recently, theoretical consideration has been given to the

Castillos, 'Evidence for the appearance of social stratification in Predynastic Egypt', in C. Eyre (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists, Cambridge, 3 – 9 September 1995* (OLA 82; Leuven, 1998), 255–9; J. J. Castillos, 'Wealth evaluation of Predynastic Tombs', *GM* 163 (1998), 27–31; J. J. Castillos, 'Social development in Predynastic Egypt: Matmar, a case study', in L. Krzyzaniak, K. Kroeper and M. Kobusiewica (eds), *Recent Research in the Stone Age of Northeastern Africa* (Poznañ, 2000), 159–70; C. Ellis, 'A statistical analysis of the Protodynastic "valley" cemetery of Kafr Tarkhan', in E.C.M. van den Brink (ed.), *The Nile Delta in Transition: 4th – 3rd Millennium B.C.* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 241–58; C. Ellis, 'Expressions of social status: a statistical approach to the late Predynastic/Early Dynastic cemeteries of Kafr Tarkhan', in L. Kryzaniak, K. Kroeper and M. Kobusiewicz (eds), *Interregional Contacts in the later Prehistory of North Eastern Africa* (Poznañ, 1996), 151– 64; W. A. Griswold, 'Measuring inequality at Armant', in R. F. Friedman and B. Adams (eds), *The Followers of Horus. Studies Dedicated to Michael Allan Hoffman 1944–1990* (Oxford, 1992), 193–8; S. Hendrickx, *Elkab V. The Naqada III Cemetery* (Brussels, 1994); S. Savage, 'Descent group competition and economic strategies in Predynastic Egypt', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 16 (1997), 226–68; T. Wilkinson, *State Formation in Egypt. Chronology and Society* (BAR IS 651; Oxford, 1996).

[32] Binford, in Binford (ed.), *An Archaeological Perspective*, 235.

[33] D. P. Braun, 'A critique of some recent North American mortuary studies', *American Antiquity* 46 (1981), 398–416; R. Chapman and K. Randsborg, 'Perspectives on the archaeology of death', in Chapman et al. (eds), *Archaeology of Death*, 1–24; I. Hodder, *Symbols in Action: ethnoarchaeological studies of material culture* (Cambridge, 1982); E. Pader, *Symbolism, Social Relations and the Interpretation of Mortuary Remains* (BAR IS 130; Oxford, 1982); M. Parker Pearson, 'Mortuary practices, society and archaeology: an ethnoarchaeological study', in I. Hodder (ed.), *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology* (Cambridge, 1982), 99–112.

[34] Bard, *From Farmers to Pharaohs*, 30–4; Richards, *Mortuary Landscapes*, 57–8.

[35] Bard, *From Farmers to Pharaohs*, 36.

[36] R. Hertz, 'A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death', in R. Needham and C. Needham (eds), *Death and the Right Hand* (New York, 1960).

[37] I. Hodder, 'Social structure and cemeteries: a critical appraisal', in P. Rahtz, T. Dickinson and L. Watts (eds) *Anglo-Saxon Cemeteries 1979: The Fourth Anglo-Saxon Symposium at Oxford* (BAR 82; Oxford, 1980), 167; Parker Pearson, in Hodder (ed.) *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*.

role of funeral performances in the creation of social memories and collective histories.[38] Other analytical avenues have considered the sensual and emotional elements of burial rites.[39] In striving for these more nuanced examinations of the social texture of relationships between the living and the dead, workers have come to recognise that there is more ambiguity in the archaeological record than had been appreciated,[40] with fragmentary and multi-layered interpretations employed to tackle the emergent complexity of the evidence.[41] Despite this mosaic of approaches, a starting principle common to many recent interpretive strategies is that funerals and their material correlates are better viewed in terms of social practice than direct social record.[42] This draws attention to not only what was in a tomb, but also how grave goods were deployed, manipulated or otherwise used as part of ritual practice.

There are thus numerous different theoretical avenues through which Egyptian evidence can be explored, only some of which can be examined in the space here.

Problems and possibilities in interpretation

Although not denying the contribution of previous studies of Predynastic Egyptian burials to understanding certain aspects of social organisation, there remain some methodological and interpretive shortfalls. Two key problems with conventional interpretations will be identified here.

First, there is a tendency for scholars to draw a direct link between individuals and their burial paraphernalia. Whitney Davis, for example, claimed to identify artists and craftsmen on the basis of grave goods at Naqada; the presence of copper chisels, for instance, was said to indicate that the person was a woodworker.[43] In other interpretations personal possessions of the deceased have been identified by their spatial proximity to the cadaver.[44] Certainly, the individual was recognised as a basis for the choice of grave goods,[45] but not everything within a grave necessarily referenced their individual identity or was the personal property of the deceased during life. In particular archaeologists[46] have pointed out that at least some items in graves are conceivably offerings from the surviving community, whether as a gift, debt repayments, or tributes. The idea of the 'gift' is one of the axiomatic concepts in

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[38] M. S. Chesson (ed.), *Social Memory, Identity and Death: Anthropological Perspectives on Mortuary Rituals* (Arlington, 2001); Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*; H. Williams (ed.), *Archaeologies of Remembrance. Death and memory in past societies* (New York, 2003). The theme has is also discussed by Wengrow throughout *Archaeology of Early Egypt*.

[39] Meskell, *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 13(2); Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life*, 129, 133, 212; S. Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration* (Oxford, 1999); Tarlow, in Hamilakis et al, *Thinking Through the Body*, 85–97.

[40] A. Ashmore and P. Geller, 'Social dimensions of mortuary space', in Rakita et al. (eds), *Interacting with the Dead*, 82.

[41] J. Barrett, 'Comments', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 11(1) (1992), 157–67.

[42] R. Chapman, 'Other archaeologies and disciplines: Mortuary analysis in the 21st century', in R. Jeske and D. Charles (eds), *Theory, Methodology and Practice in Modern Archaeology* (Westport, 2003), 10.

[43] W. Davis, 'Artists and patrons in Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt', *SAK* 10 (1983), 122.

[44] E. Crubézy, T. Janin and B. Midant-Reynes, *Adaïma 2 – La Nécropole Prédynastique* (FIFAO 47; Cairo, 2002), 473.

[45] E. Crubézy, S. Duchesne and B. Midant-Reynes, 'The Predynastic cemetery at Adaima', in Hendrickx et al. *Origins*, 304–5.

[46] Brück, 'Material metaphors'; J. M. King, 'Grave goods as gifts in early Saxon burials', *Journal of Social* Archaeology 4 (2004), 214–38; Parker Pearson, *Archaeology of Death*, 82.

social anthropology and is seen to reproduce relations.[47] This is because in contrast to commodities which are purchased, a gift received does not 'buy' other things; rather it encourages indebtedness and draws people together. Identifying gifts from belongings in burials is far from problematic, but indications might include incongruous items unlikely to have belonged to the individual, duplication of artefacts, or artefacts in unusual positions, where an item such as a hairpin is recorded outside its expected position in the grave. For example at Adaima,[48] the excavators noted that ivory or stone bracelets appeared to be too big for the infant arms upon which the artefacts were found, and some necklaces were overly long. These might have been presented to the departed during the funeral, underscoring the intimacy and emotional connection between the mourning community and the deceased. Similarly, where items such as ivory and stone bangles are found lying beside a corpse, rather than worn on the body, such as one of the bodies in grave 7626, Naga-ed-Dêr,[49] it is possible to suggest that this was a gift rather than a personal possession and that it played a similar role in representing particular connections between mourner and mourned.

A second related assumption often made is that the display of personal belongings directly expresses the wealth, status and personal identity of the deceased[50] or, as most readily argued for the burials of children, expresses the position of surviving family members. If it is accepted that direct ownership might not account for everything in a grave then the significance of these material offerings should additionally be considered from an alternative angle. The investigation into identity may still remain key, but this can elaborated from simply searching for individual status or reflections of power. Work by archaeologists and anthropologists has stressed that identities cannot be examined uni-dimensionally, since human identities are constructed from multiple influences[51] and must be examined relationally. Given the multiplicity of social relations that individuals and groups are involved in, whether kinship, class, ethnicity, gender, age or professional groups for instance, it is unlikely that social identity will be mirrored directly by material culture. In contrast then to a vision of funerals as arenas in which unambiguous identity statements were made or competitive displays of wealth/status took place, the argument followed here is that mortuary rituals were also about contemplating the *character* of the relationships that made individuals and communities who they were. Through a selective discussion of Predynastic graves and graves goods, some of these ideas can be explored.

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[47] M. Mauss, *The Gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies* (London, 1990); N. Thomas, *Entangled Objects. Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, 1991); A. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions. The Paradox of keeping while giving* (Berkley, 1992). A discussion of gift exchanges is also included in L. Meskell, *Object Worlds in Ancient Egypt. Material biographies past and present* (Oxford, 2004), Chapter 1.

[48] S. Duchesne, C. Petit, B. Baduel, B. Midant-Reynes and E. Crubézy, 'Le rôle des parures dans les cérémonies funéraires au prédynastique: l'exemple des sépultures d'enfants à Adaïma', *BIFAO* 103, 133–53.

[49] A. M. Lythgoe and D. Dunham, *The Predynastic Cemetery, N7000. Naga-ed-Dêr, Part IV* (Los Angeles, 1965).

[50] As explicitly stated by Hoffman, *Egypt Before the Pharaohs*, 110. See also P. Delrue, 'The Predynastic cemetery N7000 at Naga ed-Dêr. A re-evaluation', in H. Willems (ed.), *Social Aspects of Funerary Culture in the Egyptian Old and Middle Kingdoms* (OLA 103; Leuven, 2001), 27, for the argument that the wealth of a tomb was proportional to the wealth of the occupant.

[51] M. Diaz-Andreu. and S. Lucy, 'Introduction', in M. Diaz-Andreu, S. Lucy, S. Babic and D. Edwards (eds), *The Archaeology of Identity* (London, 2005), 2; C. Gosden, *Anthropology and Archaeology. A changing relationship* (London, 1999), 123. R. Jenkins, *Social Identity* (London, 1996).

Relational attributes of graves

Cemetery organisation

One of the areas within which relationships in the mortuary realm of both historic period and Predynastic Egypt have been widely acknowledged is in the organisation of cemeteries. Within Predynastic cemeteries graves rarely intersect suggesting that some form of above ground marker remained visible as focus for community remembrance and for the construction social histories. There is limited evidence for the form that these memorials might have taken, but a simple hillock, as has been observed at Adaima is one possibility.[52] These would have been particularly striking for large graves,[53] and certainly for elite graves at Hierakonpolis where evidence for more substantial superstructures has been found recently and which seem to have been acknowledged at least until the Third Dynasty.[54]

Such prominent burials could provide a basis for further clustering[55] over several generations. One of the best known historical examples is the cult of Heqaib at Elephantine, which became a nucleus for memorial shrines of prominent Middle Kingdom families.[56] Clustering in the Predynastic is materialized in discernable cemetery patterns. For example, circular arrangements of interments have been observed at some Predynastic cemeteries, where excavation plans are available. For example, at Mostagedda Brunton[57] conjectured that tombs may have been arranged around a hearth, and at HK43, Hierakonpolis, it was suggested that grave plots may have surrounded an above-ground monument.[58] At Naga-ed-Dêr relationships between graves in close proximity has also been proposed.[59] Such clusters have been interpreted by some as evidence of kinship or descent groups.[60] For example, Bard[61] tentatively hypothesised the existence of 'descent groups' at Armant on the basis of a loose spatial division between east and west in Cemetery 1400-1500, dateable to Naqada IIB, while Anderson's[62] review of the arrangement of Badarian burials also led her to posit the existence of family or clan groups. Podzorski,[63] however, using a

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[52] Crubézy et al. *Adaïma 2*, 454.

[53] As argued by Rowland, in Goyon and Cardin (eds), *Proceedings*, 1638.

[54] A. Figueiredo, 'Locality HK6 at Hierakonpolis: results of the 2000 field season', in Hendrickx et. al., *Origins*, 1–23; R. F. Friedman, 'Remembering the Ancestors: HK6 in 2008' *Nekhen News* 20, 10−11.

[55] K. Mizoguchi, 'Time in the reproduction of mortuary practices' *WorldArch* 25(2) (1993), 223−35.

[56] D. Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Heqaib auf Elephantine: Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich* (SAGA 9; Heidlberg, 1995); L. Habachi, *Elephantine IV: The sanctuary of Heqaib* (AV 33; Mainz, 1985).

[57] G. Brunton, *Mostagedda and the Tasian Culture* (London, 1937), 42.

[58] R. F. Friedman, A. Maish, A. G. Fahmy, J. C. Darnell and D. Johnson, 'Preliminary report on field work at Hierakonpolis: 1996–1998', *JARCE* 36 (1999), 4.

[59] R. F. Friedman, *Spatial Distribution in a Predynastic Cemetery. Naga-ed-Dêr 7000*, MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1981, 73–4.

[60] S. Savage, *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology*, although these interpretations were strongly refuted by Delrue, in Willems (ed.), *Social Aspects*, 21–66. See also M. Campagno, 'Kinship and the Emergence of the State in Egypt', *BACE* 11 (2000), 35–47. Tomb groupings based on familial relations has also been observed for historic Egypt, e.g. see E. J. Brovarski, *The Senedjemib Complex I: The mastabas of Senedjemib Inti (G 2370), Khnumenti (G 2374), and Senedjemib Mehi (G 2378),* (GMas 7; Boston, 2001).

[61] Bard, *From Farmers to Pharaohs,* 69.

[62] W. Anderson, 'Badarian burials: evidence of social inequality in Middle Egypt during the early Predynastic era', *JARCE* 29 (1992), 62.

[63] P. Podzorski, *Their Bones Shall Not Perish* (New Malden, 1990), 90.

limited sample of the surviving human remains from Naga-ed-Dêr, found little scientific support for family groups in discrete areas of the cemetery. This does not necessarily discount the use of cemetery space as a way of making statements about relationships, however, as other allegiances may also have been employed, such as occupational affiliations.[64]

At Gerzeh,[65] for example, a circular arrangement of burials can also be observed, not just in the clustering of the burials, but also in the orientation of tombs relative to each other (see Fig. 1). This irregularity in the alignment of grave pits and bodies across the cemetery could be interpreted as evidence for shifting patterns of belief,[66] but given that there is no clear chronological dimension to the different orientations the circular patterning may possibly be due to the community's practice of making explicit reference to previous burials when digging a new plot, rather than appealing to abstract cosmological concepts of 'correct alignment'. The human remains of the site are no longer available for study[67] and thus proving such a family link scientifically is not possible. There is, however, some evidence for possible social clusters: the grouping of infants or 'small children' in the middle of the cemetery, the juxtaposition of three graves in the south-west corner of the cemetery containing ripple-flaked knives,[68] and a concentration of burials with 'forehead pendants'[69] that overlaps with the group of infants. Some form of group membership may thus have been important for creating identities in death for certain members of the community, which may or may not have included kin-based considerations. Therefore, the spatial organisation of cemeteries could be built up through relational ties and viewed as the accumulation of small-scale 'micro-traditions'.[70] Consequently, long-term changes in social practices, such as in orientation, might have been motivated as much by the gradual accumulation of consensus in local-based practices over time (from the bottom-up), as by the abstract dictums of 'cultural' traditions or religious beliefs (from the top-down).[71]

A second obvious scenario in which social relations are easily postulated is in multiple burials. Those that are not intrusive graves often show signs of enlargement so that more bodies could be added to the original interment. This is particularly noticeable for the graves at Naga-ed-Dêr. This may, therefore, in some instances undermine the evaluation of relative wealth based on tomb size if there were several occupants. The so-called 'elite' cemeteries, such as HK6 at Hierakonpolis and Naqada Cemetery T, undoubtedly stand out from the graves in the vicinity[72] on account of their size, architecture and associated finds (particularly at the former site), but they do not necessarily represent elite 'individuals'. Indeed many of the tombs at

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[64] For an example from the Old Kingdom see A.M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants: Including G 2084-99, G 2230+2231 and G 2240* (GMas 6; Boston, 1995).

[65] G. A. Wainwright, 'Chapter 1. The site of el-Gerzeh', in W. M. F. Petrie, G. A. Wainwright, and E. MacKay (eds), *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh* (BSAE/ERA 21; Warmister, 1912), 1–24; Stevenson, *Predynastic Egyptian Cemetery of el-Gerzeh*.

[66] Summaries of burial orientations in Castillos, *A Reappraisal*; and Debono and Mortensen, *Heliopolis*, 45–6.

[67] Wainwright noted that the bones '... fell to pieces at a touch', in Petrie et al., *The Labyrinth*, 8.

[68] Graves 12, 25 and 43. Only one other grave, not in this cluster, contained such a knife.

[69] Graves 70, 72, 81 and 110.

[70] J. Chapman, *Tension at Funerals. Micro-tradition analysis in later Hungarian prehistory* (Budapest, 2000).

[71] A similar argument is presented by Kemp for Amarna period burials. See B. Kemp, 'The Orientation of Burials at Tell el-Amarna', in Z. Hawass and J. Richards (eds), *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt. Essays in Honor of David B. O'Connor* (Cairo, 2007), 29.

[72] Although see W. Davis, 'Cemetery T at Naqada', *MDAIK* 39 (1983), 17–28.

these two cemeteries, although badly plundered, enclosed the remains of several individuals. Whether the remains are of family groups or retainers for another burial is not clear, but the role of the expression of relationships represented rather than simply of rich individuals needs to be considered. Unfortunately, the statistical frequency of and relationships expressed in multiple burials are not completely clear at present given the deficiencies of most early excavation reports,[73] although recent excavations, together with the application of modern scientific analysis, such as at Hierakonpolis, Adaima and Kafr Hassan Dawood[74] may shed more light on these linkages, as well as the order of interment. Yet, even in the absence of scientifically proven linkages, it is still possible to model other social relationships in burials by examining the choice of material goods and their positioning around bodies.

Relational attributes of grave goods

Material compositions of beads
In the study of burials, beads – especially those made of exotic or rare materials – have assumed importance as material indicators of the wealth and status of the deceased. Their significance resides in the fact that they imply access to economic networks that would feed displays of prestige.[75] They have also been considered 'the most personal category of objects from a grave'[76] and jewellery is often classified under the heading 'personal adornment'.[77] Beads, however, as well as possibly being personal items, are also potentially a prime medium for the expression of interpersonal relationships. They perhaps communicated membership of social groupings based upon perceptions of gender or age,[78] but they can also relate the deceased to multiple geographical locations, as well as many different people or groups. Two views on this can be presented: one informed by social anthropological thinking on the nature of long-distance trade goods, and the other influenced by the notion of fragmentation and life-histories (discussed in next section). Both perspectives are strongly linked to models of the relationship between persons and objects developed in response to Mauss'[79] classic discussion of gift exchange, and the relationships between people and objects.[80]

The first of these views takes its inspiration from the work of social anthropologist Mary Helms, who has linked exotic goods to the argument that

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[73] Summarised in A. Thomas, 'Some comments on the Predynastic cemetery of el-Mahasna', in Hendrickx et al., *Origins,* 1041–54.

[74] A high frequency of multiple burials has been observed at Kafr Hassan Dawood. Ongoing research is being conducted with reference to more recent cultures within Africa as a means of considering how these multiple burials can be understood (Rowland, pers. comm.).

[75] R. Moorey, 'On Tracking Cultural Transfers in Prehistory. The Case of Egypt and Lower Mesopotamia in the Fourth Millennium B.C.', in M. Rowlands, M. Larsen and K. Kristiansen (eds), *Centre and Periphery in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1987), 40–4; L. Bavay, 'Matière première et commerce à longue distance: le lapis-lazuli et l'Egypte prédynastique', *Archéo-Nil* 7 (1997), 65–79.

[76] For example by T. Bagh, 'First Dynasty jewellery and amulets. Finds from the royal Naqada tomb: proposed reconstructions and interpretations', in Hendrickx et al., *Origins*, 591–606.

[77] Baumgartel, *The Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt I* (London, 1955), 20; J.C. Payne uses the term 'personal decoration' in *Catalogue of the Predynastic Egyptian Collection in the Ashmolean Museum* (2nd edn; Oxford, 2000).

[78] Aspects of which are beginning to be explored, e.g. V. Gashe, 'Beads from Badari: Their use in a mortuary context', in K. Griffith, *Current Research in Egyptology VIII* (Oxford, 2008), 71–81.

[79] Mauss, *The Gift*.

[80] C. Gosden and Y. Marshall, 'The cultural biography of objects', *WorldArch* 31(2) (1999), 169–78.

geographical distance is a symbolic construction invested with power.[81] Long-distance interests for 'prestige goods' in this model are not merely trade pathways. They also inextricably involve intangible knowledge of distant realms that may be made manifest, or to use another term 'presenced',[82] by the exotic substances from those places. Power, Helms argues, may be obtained by access to such exotic materials and those who acquire such items may lay claim to specialist, esoteric knowledge that such things imply. It is not merely the peculiar nature of such knowledge that is significant in these systems, but the politics that are involved in dealing with and acquiring such information.[83] The precise geographical locations may not have been known (especially as most long-distance goods were probably acquired via down-the-line trade, or in other words passed through multiple hands), but the nature of the goods, the unusual colours and textures, could well have conveyed the sense of distant lands and mystery. Certainly, such a fascination with the ideological role of materials is attested for Egypt in historic times, as John Baines has discussed,[84] with the remoteness of stones having great significance. The evidence from later historical sources as presented by Baines suggests that the Egyptians were more interested in the colours, textures, symbolism and provenance of material than their technical capabilities. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the properties and geographies (real or imagined) of stones were also of concern to Predynastic Egyptians.

The significance of the great diversity of materials used in some bead sets across Predynastic sites may be more fully realised with reference to Helms' discussion. For instance, grave 133 at Gerzeh, datable to Naqada IIC–IID, contained not only the highest number of beads from the site,[85] but more importantly also one of the most diverse assemblages of materials.[86] Within this one context were bright blue beads of lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, glossy black obsidian from Ethiopia or the Near East, iridescent meteoric(?) iron of unknown provenance,[87] as well as vibrant gold and carnelian probably from the Eastern Desert. The bead corpus also included shells from both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean coast, together with a tooth of a canine, perhaps from a dog or jackal. Moreover, there was a scatter of 16 natural pebbles of different colours and textures in carnelian, green jasper and quartz, as well as a lump of red resin, which may be an import from western Asia. The bringing together of such a wide, eclectic corpus of material from all across Egypt, and beyond, to be placed in one bounded context may have signified, as Helms suggests, that this individual possessed, had access to, or was associated in death with, special knowledge of far-off places and of the properties of the earth's resources. It would thus become a conceptual geography with ideological resonance. Similar

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[81] M. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail. An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge and Geographical Distance* (Princeton, 1986).

[82] 'Presencing' is a term introduced by K. Ray in, 'Material metaphor, social interaction and historical reconstructions: Exploring patterns of association and symbolism in the Igbo-Uko corpus', in I. Hodder (ed.), *The Archaeology of Contextual Meanings* (Cambridge, 1987), 66–77. It refers to the virtual introduction of individuals or categories into contexts and interactions that they are not directly involved in by means of material culture.

[83] Helms, *Ulysses' Sail*, 13.

[84] J. Baines, 'Stone and other materials in ancient Egypt: Usages and values', in C. Karlhausen and T. Dr Putter (eds), *Pierres Égyptiennes, chefs d'oeuvre pour l'eternité* (Mons, 2000), 29–41.

[85] Over 600 beads were removed from around the head and the hands.

[86] For the non-ceramic elements see Payne, *Catalogue*[2]: cat. nos. 1130, 1159, 1199, 1603, 1655, 1719–23, 1854, 1927, 1934, 2063, 2067, 2081, 2112.

[87] That these are meteoric in origin has not been definitively confirmed, see J. Ogden, 'Metals', in P.T. Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge, 2000), 166–7.

interpretations could be put forward for other bead sets at Gerzeh that brought together material of disparate provenances to create internal material dialogues within the burial pit.[88] The aesthetic effect created by the combination of several striking materials could have made apparent certain relationships between people, places and things[89] in an evocative way that could visually impress the moment of interment upon memory.[90] Memory here, therefore, could be constructed via this medium in two ways: memory of the individual self who *may* have worn or used such materials in life and which conceivably could communicate membership of groups by gender or status, and also the interpretation of the individual as part of a wider network of social relations.

Wealth indices may have flagged this grave as something special, but the closer interpretation above suggests that this is more than just a 'rich' grave indicative of economic prowess, as standard interpretations would contend. It may have belonged to an individual that was revered not because of 'wealth' but because of their particular role in mediating the social distances between the distant world and the community, whether in life or death. Whilst individual identities may have been encoded here it is also meaningful in terms of social ability and spheres of involvement that would have been necessary for such an array of materials to be brought together. Thus although still interpretable as part of socio-economic models, this perspective may also permit consideration of ideological factors in the creation of social identities, factors which have tended to be seen as a way to maintain or reflect power[91] rather than as a resource that may be appropriated competitively to confer it.

The nature of the assemblage in grave 133 also undermines assumptions made in previous studies on the most appropriate way to measure status and wealth since despite the extent of internal variability in the assemblage, amongst the highest in the cemetery, only ten ceramic vessels were included with the corpse (only just above the average for the cemetery of eight),[92] and the grave's size was modest in comparison to others in the cemetery.[93] If it had been plundered for its exotic goods, as so many Predynastic burials were, the reliance upon pot counts or grave size would have rendered the significance of this tomb invisible. Even if the tomb were brought into relief via a diversity index (a quantification of the number of different materials present) this would still overlook the significance of the assemblage.[94]

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[88] Grave 63, for instance, contained agate, copper, lapis lazuli, limestone and peridot, whilst grave 80 held beads of carnelian, lapis lazuli, limestone, gold, rock crystal, steatite and turquoise. For the provenance of various materials used by Ancient Egyptians, refer to B, Aston, J. Harrell, and I. Shaw, 'Stone', in Nicholson and Shaw, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*, 5–77.

[89] Brück, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 4(3), 22, refers to the manner in which burial contexts in which 'the relationship between different locations could be set out, the qualities of the materials that defined those places compared and contrasted, and the position of the deceased person within that world made evident'.

[90] For the affective nature of combining colours and textures of beads see A. Jones, 'Matter and Memory: colour, remembrance and the Neolithic/Bronze Age transition', in E. DeMarrais, C. Gosden and C. Renfrew (eds), *Rethinking Materiality. The engagement of mind with the* material *world* (Cambridge, 2005), 175; F. Stevens, 'Identifying the body: representing self. Art, ornamentation and the body in later prehistoric Europe', in J. Sofaer (ed.), *Material Identities* (Oxford, 2007).

[91] As stated by Richards, *Mortuary Landscapes*, 15; Midant-Reynes, *Prehistory*, 236.

[92] The largest number of ceramics was 40 (grave 25), and 70 other graves at Gerzeh had more than ten ceramics.

[93] Grave 133 was 1.1 sq. m. The largest grave was 3 sq. m (grave 25).

[94] The meaningfulness of this context derives not from the classification of the individual components of the assemblage, but from the positioning of all the objects together with the corpse; the collection alters the significance of the individual objects by placing them in a set of relations with each other and the body that are particular to the collection itself.

When the assemblage of 133 is compared to other contemporary graves at Gerzeh the contrast is starker still. For instance, intact grave 220 contained 37 ceramic offerings,[95] the second highest number of pottery vessels on site, but no other type of offerings. This grave too, like 133, might be conventionally described as being 'rich', indicative of the 'wealth' and 'status' of the deceased, but the two assemblages are clearly qualitatively different. This has implications for the interpretation of the character of the relationships embodied by these two assemblages; one has clear links to relationships of production and consumption of locally produced consumables, the other with links to wider exchange networks of exotic substances and possibly specialist knowledge. These are two very different pathways in the negotiation of power, which could point to the tensions within communities in the construction of identities and the social abilities of its members. To say then that the composition of these burial contexts is a reflection of the social position and economic wealth of the deceased is an over-simplification, but more importantly if both assemblages are measured on a single scale of wealth and status it does little to explain the differences between them. Both of these domains of activity may allow for the beginnings of political inequality[96] and therefore, in formulating models of the development of social complexity, should be decoupled. Consequently, new models that attempt to consider horizontal or 'heterarchical'[97] aspects of society might be considered alongside vertical, hierarchical aspects, as one possible way to more fully appreciate the development of social complexity in early Egypt.

In considering the *kinds* of differences between political, economic and symbolic status, for example, one axis of differentiation that remains to be fully assessed in this case study is that of gender. There have been suggestions[98] that there existed in the Predynastic a greater relationship between females and a variety of object types, and males and physically larger graves containing higher quantities of goods, often ceramics. This may possibly account for the stark qualitative differences between the assemblages of grave 133 and 220 at Gerzeh, but unfortunately there are no sex data available for this site. This highlights that it is just as important to obtain solid data and analyse it rigorously as it is to integrate social theory in order to evaluate possibilities. In this regard, the brevity of earlier site reports can often hamper the effective assessment of alternative interpretations, which must remain tentative suggestions for future evaluation.

Fragmentation and the re-use of objects
In contrast to the assortment of beads described above, there are also contexts at Gerzeh where only one or two beads have been found. These may at first seem unimpressive, but nevertheless they too may have significance for the relational construction of mortuary remains. At many sites assessing the number of beads in a context is problematic given the prevalence of grave robbing.[99] Gerzeh, however, is

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[95] Primarily rough ware pieces dated to Naqada IIC–IID.

[96] C. A. Hastorf, 'One path to the heights: negotiating political inequality in the Sausa of Peru', in S. Upham (ed.), *The Evolution of Political Systems: Sociopolitics in Small-scale Sedentary Societies* (Cambridge, 1990), 146–76.

[97] R. Ehrenreich, C. Crumley and J. Levy (eds), *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies* (Arlington, 1995).

[98] Rowland, in Goyon and Cardin (eds), *Proceedings*, 1637−8; S. Savage, 'The status of women in Predynastic Egypt as revealed through mortuary analysis', in A. Rautman (ed.) *Reading the Body*: *Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (Philadelphia, 2000), 91.

[99] R. F. Friedman, 'Excavations at the Predynastic cemetery HK43', *Nekhen News* 9 (1997), 2; G. Wrobel, 'HK43: Deeds of the disturbers', *Nekhen News* 13 (2001), 11.

one of the least plundered of the Predynastic cemeteries thus far excavated[100] and the care taken by its excavator in recording the site lends weight to the veracity of the observations. For example, Wainwright's interest in all cases of disturbance as evidence of deliberate bodily mutilation at the site meant that skeletal positions were all exceptionally well recorded for his time. As one of Petrie's most capable students, Wainwright was well-aware of the need for tight control of excavation contexts, even for small artefacts.[101] Thus the limited number of beads, '2 dark stone beads', in intact grave 208, for example, in which the body was wrapped tightly in an undisturbed mat raises interesting interpretive possibilities in light of recent anthropological research into the circulation of goods and their relationship to people.

Andrew Jones,[102] for instance, has argued for deliberate fragmentation of composite artefacts such as bead necklaces in burials of Neolithic and Bronze Age Britain. After noting only a few beads in a grave he suggested that by depositing only a few beads within the burial, the remainder were available to be displayed in the world of the living thereby serving as a tangible reminder, a mnemonic device, for the relationship between the living and the deceased. We might posit a similar scenario for the evidence from Predynastic contexts based upon this principle. Thus, not only might bead sets potentially reference several geographical locations, but also different temporalities of the past, the present and extension of a relationship into the future.

Analogous arguments may also be tentatively advanced to account for other incomplete or broken grave goods, such as those Rowland has mentioned.[103] Only one half of an Early Bronze Age I Canaanite imported twin vessel was recovered from the otherwise intact grave 87 at Gerzeh.[104] Like beads, it too may have been fragmented with the remaining half kept in circulation in the community. A similar scenario might account for the portion of the rhomboid palette from grave 7590 Naga-ed-Dêr, which the excavator noted had been interred incomplete.[105]

Other grave goods that have sometimes been found broken, incomplete or heavily worn include stone vessels. Whilst some damage may be due to post-depositional processes it is likely that many were originally added to the grave already in a worn state[106] and this is most certainly true for artefacts that were clearly repaired prior to interment.[107] Even ceramics such as decorated pottery, once assumed to have been specifically made for mortuary consumption, have been found in settlements and to have use-wear indicating a longer history of use prior to the funeral.[108] Severe

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[100] 88.3% of the interments were found intact.

[101] In *Naqada and Ballas* (ERA 1; London, 1898), p. x, Petrie describes at some length the care with which beads were excavated, relating how 'very small beads occupied about two hours to pick out and secure'.

[102] A. Jones, 'Matter and Memory: colour, remembrance and the Neolithic/Bronze Age transition', in DeMarrais et al., *Rethinking Materiality*, 167–78.

[103] Rowland, in Goyon and Cardin (eds), *Proceedings*, 1637.

[104] There is reference on the tomb cards to a second double pot in grave 118, also broken.

[105] Lythgoe and Dunham, *Naga-ed-Dêr*, 386.

[106] Traces of polish on stone vessel handles caused by hanging are frequently observed, e.g. Payne, *Catalogue²*, 137. Ancient mending is also visible on some mortuary specimens e.g. Ibid, cat. no. 706.

[107] B-ware pot in Crubézy et al. *Adaïma*, 77; 2 B-ware vessels and 1 R-ware vessel in Brunton, *Mostagedda*, pls. XXXIII (14), XXXVI (16), XXXVII (7).

[108] N. Buchez 'Le mobilier céramique et les offrandes à caractère alimentaire au sein des dépôts funéraires prédynastiques: éléments de réflexion à partir de l'exemple d'Adaïma. *Archéo-Nil* 8 (1998); R. F. Friedman, *Settlement Ceramics of Upper Egypt: A Comparative Study of the Ceramics of Hemamieh, Nagada, and Hierakonpolis* (Berkley, 1994), 84–6.

abrasion of vessel bases and the rounding of corners on mortuary ceramics has also been observed beyond what would be expected from post-depositional processes.[109]

All of these lines of evidence suggest the transference of objects from the sphere of the living to that of the dead. Sometimes, such goods are linked to the inability of the mourners to furnish the grave with new pieces purposively made for that context and by default it is assumed that these goods are indicative of the relative poverty of the owner.[110] Yet these goods can be interpreted differently. As objects transferred from the realm of the living to that of the dead, they potentially also transfer with them relationships and contexts of their previous use. These objects could be considered heirlooms, as argued by David Jeffreys,[111] or as objects passed through multiple hands, entangling the histories of objects, perceptions of their place of origin and memories the people associated with them. These objects may still, therefore, have importance, not as a direct reflection of wealth or status, but as commentaries on social relationships and/or evidence of kinship connections that when deposited around the corpse located the deceased within a web of relations. One of the most salient examples in later Egyptian history is the accumulation of stone vessels bearing the names of first and second Dynasty kings in the Step Pyramid, which linked Djoser to previous rulers.[112] Such evidence also provides an important caveat to ascribing static, abstract scales of object value to measure status since worth may oscillate as objects circulate and become entangled with social networks and associations. In the social anthropological and archaeological literature, this is often referred to as 'biographies' or 'life-histories'[113] of artefacts. These models follow an artefact's origins, phases of production, distribution and consumption, phases which may be repeated over the course of an object's existence and thus things, like humans, can be considered to have lives.[114] Further discussions have emphasised that it is not only the objects that change in different contexts, but their significance can also alter as they become caught up in the histories of their owners. This model thus also emphasises the relationship between people and objects.[115]

Predynastic palettes are a good example of these processes. These artefacts were made almost exclusively out of mudstone from the Wadi Hammamat and as argued elsewhere[116] the implication is that the significance and value of the palette may have resided as much in its originating area, or visually perceptible qualities, as in its functional capabilities. This again highlights the ideological importance of material, in addition to socio-economic value. Some of the earliest palettes in this stone were rhomboid-shaped. It has been noted that over the course of the early

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[109] P. Podzorski, *The Northern Cemetery of Ballas in Upper Egypt* (Salinas, 1994), 235.

[110] See comments in R. F. Friedman, 'The Predynastic cemetery at HK43: Excavations in 2002', *Nekhen News* 14 (2002), 9.

[111] D. Jeffreys, 'All in the family? Heirlooms in Ancient Egypt', in J. Tait (ed.), *'Never had the like occurred' Egypt's view of its past* (Encounters with Ancient Egypt; London, 2003), 197–212; K. Lillios, 'Objects of memory: the ethnography and archaeology of heirlooms', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 6 (1999), 235–62.

[112] P. Lacau and J. -Ph. Lauer, *La Pyramide à Degrés, Inscriptions gravées sur les vases, IV, 1-2; Inscriptions à l'encre sur les vases. V* (Cairo, 1959; 1961; 1965)

[113] The departure point for this is A. Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (Cambridge, 1986).

[114] M. Shanks 'The life of an artifact in an interpretive archaeology' *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* 15 (1998), 15–30.

[115] Gosden and Marshall, *WorldArch* 31(2), 169.

[116] A. Stevenson, 'The material significance of Predynastic and Early Dynastic palettes', in R. Mairs, and A. Stevenson (eds), *Current Research in Egyptology VI* (Oxford, 2007), 148–62.

Predynastic (IB–IIC) rhomboid palettes decreased in size.[117] This trend has previously been assumed to be evidence of a shift towards amuletic forms or models,[118] but the worn state of several of these later examples may suggest an alternative scenario. For instance, two small rhomboids from Naqada[119] are both heavily worn in the centre suggesting an extensive term of use prior to mortuary deposition. A concurrent erosion of the overall shape is also apparent, and is especially pronounced in the two heavily used larger pieces (94 and 97). Another example is the small rhomboid palette (4.7 cm x 3.4 cm) from grave b62 at el-Amrah (Naqada IID1), which is noted by to have been hollowed by use on both faces and thus was not merely a magical model, but had actually been used.[120] Hendrickx has also carefully noted the wear on the Naqada III palettes at el-Kab and the smoothing of broken edges.[121] It is thus possible to infer that, in at least a few cases, smaller palettes in burials may only reveal evidence of the final stage in their life-histories. This stage would have been reached after being physically transformed over time through use, reuse, and reworking, perhaps being passed on from hand to hand for a variety of reasons, and through a variety of mechanisms (such as inheritance, loan, barter, payment, small scale gift-exchange, larger scale ceremonial exchange or theft) before finally being consumed in a mortuary context. As argued by Skeates[122] from ethnographic analogies and for similar observations in the size reduction of hand axes in the Mediterranean these processes could have involved the construction of social relationships between people, and objects may have gained value through links to different individuals. In the context of a funerary performance these could have taken on a greater resonance that very possibly may have expressed more than a direct reflection of simply wealth or status.

Concluding Remarks

The observations made here focus on the minutiae of a limited number of contexts, and it could be argued that such forays into the idiosyncrasies of Predynastic practices are of little significance when compared to wider issues, such as state formation. But these perspectives can inform our thinking on broader scale issues. For one thing, these detailed engagements have significance given the nascent consensus in Egyptology that regional variations and identities were common phenomena throughout the course of Egyptian history.[123] The challenge, therefore, is to formulate a range of models that interlink both local and global developments. The phenomenon of state formation was undoubtedly not uniform and, as argued by Chlodnicki et al,[124] the interaction of different communities should be reviewed from the perspective of

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[117] K. Cialowicz, *Les Palettes égyptiennes aux motifs zoomorphes et sans décoration: etudes de l'art prédynastique* (Kraków, 1991); C. Regner, *Schminkpaletten* (Wiesbaden, 1996).

[118] Cialowicz, *Les Palettes*, 27–8.

[119] Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas*, pl. L, 95 and 96.

[120] Payne, *Catalogue*[2], 228.

[121] Hendrickx, *El Kab*, 133.

[122] R. Skeates, 'Animate objects: a biography of prehistoric 'axe-amulets' in the central Mediterranean region', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 61 (1995), 279–301.

[123] J. Baines, 'Contextualising Egyptian representations of society and ethnicity', in J. S. Cooper and G. M. Schwartz (eds), *The Study of the Ancient Near East in the 21st Century* (Indiana, 1996), 339–84; Friedman, *Predynastic Settlement Ceramics*, 924; Köhler, in *Origins 2*; S. J. Seidlmayer, *Gräberfelder aus dem Übergang vom Alten zum Mittleren Reich* (SAGA 1; Heidelberg, 1990), 431–2; Wilkinson, *State Formation in Egypt*, 89.

[124] M. Chlodnicki, R. Fattovich and S. Salvatori, 'The Nile Delta in transition: A view from Tell el-Farkha', in van den Brink (ed.), *Nile Delta in Transition*, 182. See also Wengrow, *Early Egypt*, 36.

regionalisation and integration processes within an interpretative framework that incorporates differential interrelation spheres. Thus in order to achieve a full understanding of large-scale transformation it is necessary to consider ideologies and social practices at finer-grained levels.

What Predynastic scholars have demonstrated clearly is that social differentiation and stratification are characteristic trends, but the identification of this has become an end in itself and Egyptology's engagement with the social sciences has become overly reliant on socio-economic models at the expense of other possibilities. Such a typological exercise does not explain the specific historical contexts in which these transformations in Predynastic society occurred or what kinds of social, economic or political inequalities developed in these different regions; inequality cannot be measured on a single axis of differentiation. By refocusing on social relationships, identities and practices we may better model the changes that occurred in society, which were clearly not just vertical in scale, but reorganised relationships and their constituent identities across a wide range of political, economic, religious and social domains. Therefore, the approaches mentioned here are not replacements for rigorous investigation of the broader picture, and statistical methodologies remain necessary for the perception of long-term patterns. It would be limiting, however, to ignore the symbolic, ideological, emotional and alternative social dimensions of burial rites for the sake of analytical tractability. Quantitative measures can be a background against which more qualitative evaluation of contexts occurs, one that is sensitive to the qualities of objects and how they were engaged with by ancient communities. Such a consideration of the theoretical agenda and scope of Predynastic studies is timely given the recent increase in the quantity and crucially the quality of published reports of graves excavated from Predynastic sites. The rich potential of this data, indeed of much of ancient Egyptian material, even from sites excavated over a century ago, makes it a fertile resource for future inspiration from and contributions to the wider social sciences.