

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PHARAONIC EGYPT

In this book, Richard Bussmann presents a fresh overview of ancient Egyptian society and culture in the age of the pyramids. He addresses key themes in the comparative research of early complex societies, including urbanism, funerary culture, temple ritual, kingship, and the state, and explores how ideas and practices were exchanged between ruling elites and local communities in provincial Egypt. Unlike other studies of ancient Egypt, this book adopts an anthropological approach that places people at the centre of the analysis. Bussmann covers a range of important themes in cross-cultural debates, such as materiality, gender, non-elite culture, and the body. He also offers new perspectives on social diversity and cultural cohesion, based on recent discoveries. His study vividly illustrates how our understanding of ancient Egyptian society benefits from the application of theoretical concepts in archaeology and anthropology to the interpretation of the evidence.

Richard Bussmann is Professor of Egyptology at the Institute of African Studies and Egyptology at the University of Cologne. His research focuses on the intersection of Egyptology with archaeology and social anthropology. He currently co-directs excavations in Zawyet Sultan, Middle Egypt.

CAMBRIDGE WORLD ARCHAEOLOGY

SERIES EDITOR

NORMAN YOFFEE, *University of Michigan*

EDITORIAL BOARD

CORISANDE FENWICK, *Institute of Archaeology, University College London*

STEPHEN SHENNAN, *Institute of Archaeology, University College London*

CARLA SINOPOLI, *University of Michigan*

TOM DILLEHAY, *Vanderbilt University*

TIM PAUKETAT, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*

DAVID WENGROW, *Institute of Archaeology, University of London*

The Cambridge World Archaeology series is addressed to students and professional archaeologists, and to academics in related disciplines. Most volumes present a survey of the archaeology of a region of the world, providing an up-to-date account of research and integrating recent findings with new concerns of interpretation. While the focus is on a specific region, broader cultural trends are discussed and the implications of regional findings for cross-cultural interpretations considered. The authors also bring anthropological and historical expertise to bear on archaeological problems and show how both new data and changing intellectual trends in archaeology shape inferences about the past. More recently, the series has expanded to include thematic volumes.

RECENT BOOKS IN THE SERIES

RICHARD BUSSMANN, *The Archaeology of Pharaonic Egypt*

DOUGLAS B. BAMFORTH, *The Archaeology of the North American Great Plains*

RAPHAEL GREENBERG, *The Archaeology of the Bronze Age Levant*

KATINA T. LILLIOS, *The Archaeology of the Iberian Peninsula*

RICHARD BRADLEY, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland*

STEPHEN SHENNAN, *The First Farmers of Europe*

KOJI MIZOGUCHI, *The Archaeology of Japan*

ANTONIO SAGONA, *The Archaeology of the Caucasus*

D. T. POTTS, *The Archaeology of Elam*

ROBIN CONINGHAM AND RUTH YOUNG, *The Archaeology of South Asia*

CLAUDIA SAGONA, *The Archaeology of Malta*

PETER MAGEE, *The Archaeology of Prehistoric Arabia*

FRANCES F. BERDAN, *Aztec Archaeology and Ethnohistory*

LUDMILA KORYAKOVA AND ANDREJ EPIMAKHOV, *The Urals and Western Siberia in the Bronze and Iron Ages*

A. BERNARD KNAPP, *The Archaeology of Cyprus*

MIKE SMITH, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*

LI LIU AND XINGCAN CHEN, *The Archaeology of China*

STEPHEN D. HOUSTON AND TAKESHI INOMATA, *The Classic Maya*

THE ARCHAEOLOGY
OF PHARAONIC EGYPT

Society and Culture, 2700–1700 BC

RICHARD BUSSMANN

University of Cologne





Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107030381

DOI: 10.1017/9781139343435

© Richard Bussmann 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

A Cataloging-in-Publication data record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-107-03038-1 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	page vii
<i>Chronology of Egypt</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xiii
Part I Orientation	I
1 Studying the Pyramid Age	3
2 Historical Outline	16
Part II Living Together	37
3 People in Landscapes	39
4 Life in Settlements	58
5 Urban Growth	91
6 Egypt in the Wider World	111
Part III Ritual and Discourse	151
7 Funerary Culture	153
8 Temple Ritual	209
9 Kingship Sacred and Social	249
Part IV Organising People	285
10 Scaling the State	287
11 Archaeology beyond Elites	317
12 Civilisation at Grass-Roots Level	353
<i>Bibliography</i>	357
<i>Index</i>	403

PREFACE

Herodotus of Halicarnassus (ca. 480–430 BC) was one of the first travellers in the ancient world to compare societies and customs from around the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. He treated Egypt in the second book of his famous *Histories* and remarked that this country differed from others in every respect: the sky and the river; the distribution of work, with women bartering in the marketplace and men staying at home weaving; the custom among priests of shaving their hair instead of letting it grow; and a tendency to religiosity that he found excessive. Herodotus' rhetoric still echoes in debates that surround early civilisations today. Scholars have, for example, argued that Egyptian urbanism was weaker than in all other early complex societies; that Egypt was the only pristine territorial state (apart perhaps from the Inca kingdom and the Shang state); that only Egyptian kings were truly believed divine (but possibly also the Japanese kings of the Edo period); and that the Egyptians were curiously obsessed with death rather than with life. Yet similarities between Egypt and other early complex societies are salient, for instance, the relevance of agriculture in a state-level surplus economy, the steep hierarchies, the use of writing for display and administration, and the epic monumentality. Each society is evidently unique and ultimately challenges any category with which we choose to organise our knowledge, but this should not prevent us from treating ancient Egypt in comparative terms as one among other early complex societies.

This book discusses developments in ancient Egyptian society and culture during the age of the pyramids – the Old through Middle Kingdoms in Egyptological terminology – from around 2700 to 1700 BC. Chronologically, it continues where David Wengrow's treatment of north-east Africa, also published in the Cambridge World Archaeology series, ends.¹

Most syntheses of ancient Egyptian society concentrate on the monuments, texts, and images produced for its elites. This book looks at the same society, but I proceed from a somewhat different perspective. Following the social anthropologist Thomas Eriksen, I believe that 'small places' are ideally suited to

address ‘large issues’.² As I understand it, small places are local places: the lived contexts of society and culture; the communities of provincial Egypt; places of individual agency. Most of these small places produced few – if any – texts, inscriptions, or pictorial evidence, and for this reason archaeology is the most relevant discipline for the agenda of this book. Still, texts, inscriptions, and visual culture offer a wealth of information, which partially overlaps, often complements, and sometimes contradicts the material record. A combined assessment of the available evidence remains a productive approach to any study of the pyramid age, irrespective of where the focus lies.

When I began my studies, my primary interest was in ancient Egyptian texts, and I chose as minor subjects Near Eastern studies and theology, both subjects that are heavily text oriented. My interests changed when I visited Egypt for fieldwork in 1997. There my task was to draw the preserved architecture and associated objects in the ancient settlement of Elephantine, near modern Aswan, and I found the place every bit as fascinating as the pyramids and the grand temples of Luxor that I had visited on my way south from Cairo. By documenting the walls of houses, the dirt floors, and the rubbish heaps I felt that I was observing people in the past, as opposed to just studying monuments. I also recognised similarities between the ancient settlement of Elephantine and the present-day village located next to the archaeological site. My fascination has continued, and I later took part in fieldwork projects at the courtly cemeteries of the Old Kingdom in Dahshur, in the provincial town of Edfu, and at the Predynastic and Early Dynastic site of Hierakonpolis. As I write this, I am co-directing a fieldwork project at Zawyet Sultan in Middle Egypt. The apparent discrepancy between intellectual history of the type typically studied using texts and monuments and the sort of social analysis accessible through material remains has become the essence of how I think about ancient Egypt. It also forms the backbone of this book.

Norman Yoffee, the editor of the Cambridge World Archaeology series, once asked me what Egyptology can bring to the table for comparative discussions in archaeology. Like other books in the series, mine does not offer a systematic comparison of past societies but develops a panorama of a specific world region to address comparative questions on how societies were organised in the remote past, and what it meant to be human in those societies. I have developed my perspective from studying how elite culture, which attracts so much attention in the Egyptological research literature, was anchored in the lives of ‘commoners’, and hence how we might model cultural cohesion in Egyptian society. I believe that this is relevant in general for modelling complex societies, of which ancient Egypt, with its wealth of preserved archaeological remains, is a good example of an early type. However, the sources do not reveal answers in any simple way; they require interpretation. To this end, I have preferred discussion over description whenever I had to balance source-critical presentations of the evidence and broader

modelling. I have quoted field reports and the primary editions of key texts in the discussion of case studies wherever possible, but even here I had to restrict the references to what I regard as the most relevant, sometimes to only the most recent publications. In other cases, references are only made to the secondary literature in order to keep their number manageable.

The book is organised into four parts: 'Orientation', 'Living Together', 'Ritual and Discourse', and 'Organising People'. The chapters in each build upon one another but can also be read separately, with occasional cross-references. Some repetition is unavoidable, whenever a certain body of evidence or an argument is relevant to more than one discussion, but hopefully has been kept to a minimum.

It is an exciting task to bring a diverse, sometimes idiosyncratic, and always complex record under the purview of one book. In the research process, I realised how many different histories could be written about the pyramid age, and how much potentially relevant material and research literature had to be set aside so as not to exceed a reasonable scope. I hope that the book will eventually appeal to Egyptologists interested in interpretation, archaeologists studying other world regions, and readers who generally want to learn more about the lives of the ancient Egyptians.

I would like to thank many colleagues and friends who have helped me with the writing process. Norman Yoffee offered much inspiration and motivation, and I am grateful for his patience. I owe special thanks to John Baines, Mark Lehner, Willeke Wendrich, and Andréas Stauder for their detailed comments on an earlier draft of the manuscript. R. Gareth Roberts copy-edited the manuscript in an exemplary fashion, and I am grateful for his critical reading and thoughtful improvement of style and coherence. All remaining insufficiencies are mine.

Many colleagues have kindly undertaken the time-consuming task of reading, correcting, and commenting on individual chapters, early drafts, and even the initial proposal. Others have offered valuable thoughts in discussions of selected aspects. I list supporting colleagues here in alphabetical order, without being able to express my great gratitude to them individually: Bettina Bader, Dores Cruz, Ulrike Dubiel, Katja Goebis, Wolfram Grajetzki, Leonie Koch, David Jeffreys, Clara Jeuthe, Nadine Moeller, Hans-Hubertus Münch, Rune Nyord, Adela Oppenheim, Mike Parker-Pearson, Stephen Quirke, Robert Schiestl, Danijela Stefanović, Bart Vanthuyne, Joseph Wegner, and David Wengrow. I wish I could have responded to their ideas in greater depth than was possible. I also had to refrain from adding all of their suggested references, as this would have pushed an already full bibliography too far. Some of the points that were raised in our discussions are not ultimately settled, and on some questions disagreement remains. I think that this is a good sign for the intellectual vitality of Egyptological research: if things were simple and evident, there would be no need to write about them.

I owe much inspiration to the intellectual life at the Institute of Archaeology at University College London, where I began the research for this book. I also thank my current employer, the University of Cologne, for granting me a sabbatical semester, which ultimately allowed me to complete it.

Many thanks are due to colleagues who sent me images and granted me permission to reproduce their artworks. Their support has greatly helped me finish the book: Felix Arnold, Johannes Auenmüller, Kathryn Bard, Miroslav Bárta, Christian Bayer, Marion Berti, Manfred Bietak, Charles Bonnet, Emanuele Brienza, Judith Bunbury, Linda Evans, Wolfram Grajetzki, Silvia Gomez Senovilla, Willem van Haarlem, Peter Jánosi, Naguib Kanawati, Barry Kemp, Karin Kindermann, E. Christiana Köhler, Mark Lehner, Harald Meller, Georg Meurer, Miriam Müller, Christiane Müller-Hazenboos, Kerry Muhlestein, Mohamed Osman, Cornelius von Pilgrim, Lea Rees, Regine Schulz, Stephan Seidlmayer, Steven Snape, Elena Tiribilli, Agnese Vacca, Bart Vanthuyne, Josef Wegner, Paul Whelan, and colleagues in the British Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Egyptian Museum Cairo, the Garstang Museum, the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, and the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.

I am very grateful to Monika Feinen for producing high-quality maps for this book and for bringing in her own ideas and expertise during the compilation of the maps. I also thank Anja Rüschemann and Hilke Spänhoff for their excellent drawings of objects and plans. Pia Evening, Lilian Schalla, Salome Thyen and Isabel Conrads have kindly assisted the compilation of place names for the maps and the proofreading of the bibliography.

I would also like to thank the team of Beatrice Rehl at Cambridge University Press for guiding me through the production process.

And finally, I wish to thank Christian Lindhorst for his patience and continued encouragement during the long writing process.

NOTES

1. Wengrow 2006.
2. Eriksen 1995.

CHRONOLOGY OF EGYPT

The chronology of the Old Kingdom to the Late Period follows von Beckerath 1997; see also Chapter 2. For the dates of the Neolithic, Predynastic, Early Dynastic, and Roman periods, see Shaw 2000: 479–83, and for post-Roman history, see *The Cambridge History of Egypt 1 and 2*, edited by Carl F. Petry and Martin W. Daly. Dynasties and royal names mentioned in this book are added.

Neolithic 8800–4400 BC

Predynastic period 4400–3300 BC

Early Dynastic period (Archaic Period) 3300–2657 BC

Old Kingdom 2657–2120 BC

- Dynasty 3
 - Nebka
 - Djoser
 - Sekhemkhet
 - Khaba
 - Sanakht
 - Huni
- Dynasty 4
 - Sneferu
 - Khufu
 - Radjedef
 - Khafra
 - Menkaura
 - Shepseskaf
- Dynasty 5
 - Userkaf
 - Sahura
 - Neferirkara
 - Shepseskara
 - Raneferef
 - Nyuserra
 - Menkauhor
 - Djedkara Isesi
 - Unas

- Dynasty 6 Teti
 - Userkara
 - Pepy I
 - Merenra
 - Pepy II
 - Nitiqret
- Dynasty 7
- Dynasty 8
- First Intermediate Period 2120–2046 BC
 - Dynasty 9
 - Dynasty 10
 - Dynasty 11 Mentuhotep I
 - Intef I
 - Intef II
 - Intef III
- Middle Kingdom 2046–1645 BC
 - Dynasty 11 Mentuhotep II
 - Mentuhotep III
 - Mentuhotep IV
 - Dynasty 12 Amenemhat I
 - Senwosret I
 - Amenemhat II
 - Senwosret II
 - Senwosret III
 - Amenemhat III
 - Amenemhat IV
 - Sobekneferu
 - Dynasty 13 [numerous kings]
- Second Intermediate Period 1645–1550 BC
- New Kingdom 1550–1069 BC
- Third Intermediate Period 1069–664 BC
- Late Period 664–332 BC
- Ptolemaic Period / Hellenistic Period 332–30 BC
- Roman and Byzantine Egypt 30 BC–AD 640
- Islamic and Mameluke Egypt AD 640–1517
- Ottoman Egypt and British Protectorate AD 1517–1922
- Kingdom of Egypt AD 1922–1953
- Arab Republic of Egypt AD 1953 to present

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Ä&L</i>	<i>Ägypten und Levante</i>
<i>BMSEAS</i>	<i>British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan</i>
<i>BIFAO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>CAJ</i>	<i>Cambridge Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>GM</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen</i>
<i>IFAO</i>	<i>Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale</i>
<i>JAIE</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections</i>
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian History</i>
<i>MDAIK</i>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo</i>
<i>ÖAI</i>	<i>Österreichisches Archäologisches Institut</i>
<i>ÖAW</i>	<i>Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften</i>
<i>RdÉ</i>	<i>Revue d'Égyptologie</i>
<i>SAK</i>	<i>Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur</i>
<i>WA</i>	<i>World Archaeology</i>
<i>ZÄS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>