'Today these are troubled waters which most people who write about ancient Egypt from within the mainstream of scholarship avoid.'

B. J. Kemp (2018: 47)

1 Introduction

This Element introduces various readers to ancient Egyptian collective identity and Egyptological research on ethnicity. The chronological boundaries will not play a significant role here; still, each case discussed in the text will be chronologically and geographically framed. Most of the provided examples are from the third and second millennium BC in Egypt and Nubia, which is the period of my scholarly interest. However, as this Element should serve to give readers an overview of works on ethnic identity and ethnicity in Egyptology, examples from first millennium BC are also provided.

It is not possible to summarise ancient Egyptian history in great detail in a single passage without using Egyptology specific terms such as dynasties, kingdoms, or intermediate periods. Still, several phases of Egyptian history are referred to throughout this Element and it is therefore necessary to summarise them. The formation of the ancient Egyptian state started around 3200 BC in the Naqada region in Upper Egypt. By around 3000 BC, this proto-state expanded to include Lower Egypt and establish domination over southern Levant. It also had contact and conflict with the population in Lower Nubia. Around 2700 BC, began a period of monumental funerary constructions (pyramids), building of monumental temples, and expeditions to foreign lands such as Byblos in Lebanon, Nubia (Sudan), and Punt at the Horn of Africa. Around 2200 BC, the state lost its control of the provinces where local rulers slowly but surely took over. The domain of the successor state was limited to Lower Egypt. In Upper Egypt, local rulers of Thebes managed to defeat their rivals and form their own kingdom. They eventually defeated the state in Lower Egypt and united the land around 2055 BC. Since the unification, more investment is seen in monumental architecture again. Military fortresses were built in Lower Nubia to support the expeditions and diminish the threat from even further south (Kerma in Upper Nubia). Eastern Delta, a corridor to Egypt with mixed population since prehistory, became the entry point for population from the Levant. There is evidence for close ties with Byblos. Around 1800 BC, the state again lost its power in the provinces and its fortresses in Lower Nubia. Rulers of foreign origin known as the Hyksos took over the control of Eastern Delta and later on of the entire Lower Egypt. The kingdom of Kush, centred in Kerma, took control of Egyptian military fortresses in Lower Nubia. The kings centred in Thebes, now had to fight the Hyksos state in the north and the kingdom of Kush in the south. They eventually defeated their rivals and united the land around 1550 BC. This is when a period of expansion began. Egypt took control of both Levant and

Nubia. Egyptians settled in Nubia and built military fortresses in the Levant. Egypt had close contacts with Aegean polities from fifteenth to fourteenth century BC, but also conflict with state Mitanni and eventually with the Hittite state in which it lost control of the northern Levant. Conflicts with the Libyans in the west and the incursion of various groups of Sea People marauders brought new challenges to the pharaohs. Around 1100 BC, Egypt lost control of its domains in both Levant and Nubia and faced internal fractured rule as it also lost its control of Thebes where priests of Amun became powerful. The state in this period was divided between the kings of Egypt ruling in Lower Egypt and the priests and god Amun ruling in Middle and Upper Egypt. A rival state was slowly but surely also forming in Nubia, now under control of the locals. Around 950 BC, Egypt was united again for a century or so, and after that again fell into a fragmentary state, with several parallel dynasties and rulers of Libyan origin controlling different parts of the country. Around 750 BC, the Nubian rulers took this opportunity and defeated different dynasties in Egypt, establishing a double kingdom. They were in war with Assyria, which was their downfall around 670 BC. Egypt was left to a local dynasty which ruled the country until around 530 BC when the Achamenide Persian empire expanded to Egypt. In 332 BC, Alexander the Great defeated Persian-controlled Egypt and a Ptolemaic state was formed in 305 BC and ruled by a dynasty of Macedonian origin. This dynasty was eventually a client state of Rome and was defeat in 31 BC by Octavian August who made Egypt into a Roman province in 30 BC. From fourth to sixth century AD, Christian Roman Egypt was a diocese, regional governance district in the late Roman empire. Around 650 AD, it was conquered by the Arabs.

During this more than 3,000-year-long history, both how ancient Egyptians viewed themselves and others and which foreigners lived among them was changing. Therefore, three main questions will be addressed in this Element:

a) How did ancient Egyptians understand their own collective identity in comparison to their neighbours and other foreigners, and can this be translated into a modern concept such as ethnic identity? Answering this question is important because we need to balance ancient concepts and our translations of these concepts into our own vocabulary and theoretical discourses.

b) How did early scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth century approach ancient Egyptians and their neighbours and are there remnants of their ideas in contemporary Egyptology? The reason this question has to be addressed is that more often than not certain ideas belonging to a disciplinary past emerge in a new form in contemporary scholarship (Matić, 2018a).

c) How do modern scholars approach various groups inhabiting the Egyptian Nile Valley? Are contemporary discussions on ethnic identity useful in

approaching ancient Egypt? We need to critically reflect on the concepts we use in order to better understand how they form our interpretations and what we can do to balance the premodern–modern dichotomy.

1.1 The Categories of Evidence

Egyptology is a discipline dealing with the history, society, language, and culture of ancient Egypt. Although often criticised because of its narrow philological focus on ancient Egyptian texts and language, there have been considerable developments in the last few decades which also turn attention to more up-to-date understanding of archaeology and art history (Kemp, 2018; Verbovsek, Backes & Jones, 2011; Wendrich, 2010). Depending on the period of ancient Egyptian history they focus on, Egyptologists are in a unique position in comparison to other scholars dealing with ancient cultures because of the rich visual, textual, and archaeological evidence at hand. The categories of evidence important for studying ethnic identity in ancient Egypt are:

1 Visual Sources
Subjugating the enemy is a motif known in ancient Egyptian iconography since around 3500 BC (Köhler, 2002: 511) and detailed depictions of enemies from around 3200 to 3000 BC predate the first texts mentioning various groups of enemies (Bestock, 2018). These testify to already developed ideas on 'us' and 'them'. For example, already on the so-called Libyan palette from this period, a throwstick hieroglyph is used in association with seven towns depicted being destroyed. This sign is later used to designate *Ṯmḥ.w* or *Ṯḥn.w* Libyan groups, as Egyptians called some of their neighbours in the west (de Wit, 2015: 650). By the time the hieroglyphic script appears in its fully developed form, we can also recognise specific types of enemies in iconography. Traditional enemies and neighbours of Egypt in the south-Nubians, the north-Syro-Palestinians and the west-Libyans are a recurrent motif in ancient Egyptian art over several millennia (Figure 2; Roth, 2015). We find them as bound captives or as enemies on the battlefield, but also as trade partners and inhabitants of Egypt of different status and occupations (e.g. slaves, soldiers, musicians, dancers). The contexts in which their representations are found in different periods of ancient Egyptian history range from small objects such as palettes, throne chairs, cosmetic vessels, wooden boxes, walking sticks, weapons, chariots, and sandals to paintings and reliefs on the walls of private and royal tombs and state temples (Anthony, 2016; Hallmann, 2006; Roth, 2015; Saretta, 2016). The common denominator behind these contexts is their elite background. Such representations provide us with a specific view of a small percentage of the society with its own agenda and politics. The

advantages of visual representations of foreigners are not only that they provide us with information on ancient Egyptian neighbours, but also that they provide us with a specifically elite ancient Egyptian view of these peoples and the criteria of difference. The disadvantage of visual representations is that they provide us neither with the perspective of ancient Egyptian non-elites, which in some contexts could have been different, nor with the perspective of those depicted. These ideologically framed and culturally relative depictions of foreigners were sometimes approached as accurate representations of reality (for details see Section 2). However, several cases demonstrate that this was actually not entirely the case (for details see Section 3).

2 Written Sources

The first written sources on foreigners in ancient Egypt appear very early, *c.*3200–3000 BC, in the form of signs indicating foreign toponyms and ethnonyms, as we have seen in the case of the Libyan palette. Already on the ivory label of King Den from Abydos from the beginning of third millennium BC, an easterner is depicted and his origin from the East is indicated in the accompanying text (Köhler, 2002: 504–5). Later on, starting from about mid third millennium BC (Gundacker, 2017; Saretta, 2016), foreigners are mentioned regularly in different texts ranging from private elite autobiographies, royal texts on stelae, temple walls, and administrative documents to literary texts in which foreigners can also be some of the key figures (Di Biase-Dyson, 2013; Loprieno, 1988). The advantage of the written sources is that they provide us with personal names and places of origin of foreigners, but also descriptions of their appearance and customs (Hinson, 2014). The disadvantage of written sources is that the image of foreigners we obtain from them was in fact probably not the image foreigners had of themselves. The way they are described, named and grouped by the ancient Egyptians was ordered by many factors and does not directly reflect the reality of foreign identities. Whenever we read an ancient Egyptian text describing foreigners we should ask ourselves who wrote it, when, for which audience, and why?

3 Foreign Material Culture in Ancient Egypt and Ancient Egyptian Material Culture in Foreign Contexts

The most often used evidence for exchange and trade with the neighbouring countries and regions, but also for tracing foreign presence in Egypt is the material culture of foreign origin. This category among other things includes foreign pottery, jewelry, and weaponry. Considerable amounts of foreign material culture made out of organic materials is rarely preserved, but its presence in Egypt is indicated by written and visual sources. The main disadvantage of foreign material culture in Egypt or Egyptian material culture in foreign contexts is that it is often extremely

difficult to differentiate between an object imported through exchange and trade on one side, and an object imported by a travelling or a resident foreigner on the other. Although modern application of techniques from physical, chemical, biological, and earth sciences and engineering, to address archaeological questions and problems, can sometimes provide us with the origin of the raw material from which these objects were made, 'foreign' objects could have also been made in local materials by foreigners or imitated in local or imported materials by Egyptians. The fact that not only objects can travel, but also artisans and raw materials, significantly complicates the assumptions on origins no matter the analyses involved (Feldman, 2006). The same is valid for Egyptian material culture outside of Egypt, which can equally be imported through exchange and trade or through actual presence of an Egyptian. The underlying problem is that foreign material culture in Egypt and Egyptian material culture in foreign contexts is more often than not interpreted as evidence for foreign or Egyptian presence and as such connected to the question of ethnic identity. This is especially the case when foreign material culture in Egypt is found in a burial in Egypt or when Egyptian material culture is found in a burial outside of Egypt. If the burial also indicates Egyptian or foreign burial customs, the case is taken as prime example of a foreigner in Egypt or an Egyptian in a foreign land. The associated problems behind such assumptions are extensively discussed in Section 2.

4 Skeletal Remains

Skeletal remains have been used to identify ancient Egyptians and foreigners since the establishment of Egyptology as a discipline in the nineteenth century. Although methods used to identify them changed from initial craniometrical measures and racial assumptions (Section 2), to modern methods such as analyses of ancient DNA and isotope analyses (Section 4), the underlying assumption is more often than not that ethnic identity is something written in the body. The advantage of skeletal remains is that DNA and isotope analyses can, among other things, provide us with clues on the origin of a person, where they were born, spent their life, and eventually died. However, these information should not be confused with ethnic identity, which is a social construct related to a person's feeling of belonging to a certain group, on one side, and the way others perceive the identity of this person, on the other (Section 3).

1.2 Terms

Often, explicit theoretical and methodological statements in Egyptology are lacking in research on social phenomena, such as ethnic identity and ethnicity. Like in other archaeologies, few people actually explicitly define what they

mean by ethnic group or ethnicity (Jones, 1997: 56). The standard reference works in Egyptology, such as *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* or *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, do not contain entries on ethnicity (Helck, 1977a; Helck, 1977b; Gordon, 2001). Some, like *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, even have an entry on race (Shaw & Nicholson, 1995: 239; see Section 2). Although slowly but surely appearing in works of Egyptologists (e.g. Goudriaan, 1988; Köhler, 2002) and extensively discussed by S. T. Smith (2003b), the first entry on ethnicity in a standard reference work of encyclopedic format appeared relatively late in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology* (Riggs & Baines, 2012). Thus, discussions on ethnicity outside of Egyptology have gradually entered the discipline quite recently and are still largely unknown even to most Egyptologists. This is why it is important to start with a short list and definitions of terms frequently encountered in this Element:

1.   Ancient Egypt designates a civilisation of ancient northern Africa primarily concentrated in the Nile Valley from the Nile Delta in the north to the First Cataract (shallow length where the water is broken by many small boulders) on the Nile in the south (Figure 1). Ancient Egyptians called their land *Kmt* 'black land' referring to fertile soil of the Nile Valley; *T3-mry* 'beloved land' indicating an emotional relationship to their land; *T3-wy* 'two lands', a dual referring to both Lower Egypt (*T3-mḥ.w* or *T3-bity*), from Nile Delta to Memphis (one of the ancient capitals), and Upper Egypt (*T3-šmᶜ.w*), from Memphis to Elephantine on the First Cataract (Kilani, 2015: 75).

The ancient Egyptian state, which initially developed in the region of Naqada in Upper Egypt around 3200 BC, first expended its territory to include the rest of Upper Egypt and then Lower Egypt. In the course of its history, this state managed to establish and lose its control of different own and neighbouring regions such as Lower Nubia (from First to Second Cataract on the Nile) and Upper Nubia (from Second to Sixth Cataract on the Nile) in the south and the Levant in the north (Morris, 2018). Therefore, when talking about ancient Egypt and ancient Egyptians we have to bear in mind that these terms do not refer to a static society resistant to demographic, social, and cultural change (Schneider, 2003). Strictly speaking there is no such thing as 'ancient Egypt' and 'ancient Egyptians'. The land we refer to as ancient Egypt, although having its core in the Nile Valley from the Delta to the First Cataract, either expanded or lost parts of its territories only to regain control of them again. The people we refer to with the term ancient Egyptians were men, women, and children of different class backgrounds living in different towns and regions of the land. Some of them had foreign origins; others were married to foreigners or to people of foreign origin. Some never left their villages, towns, or regions; others travelled far away and
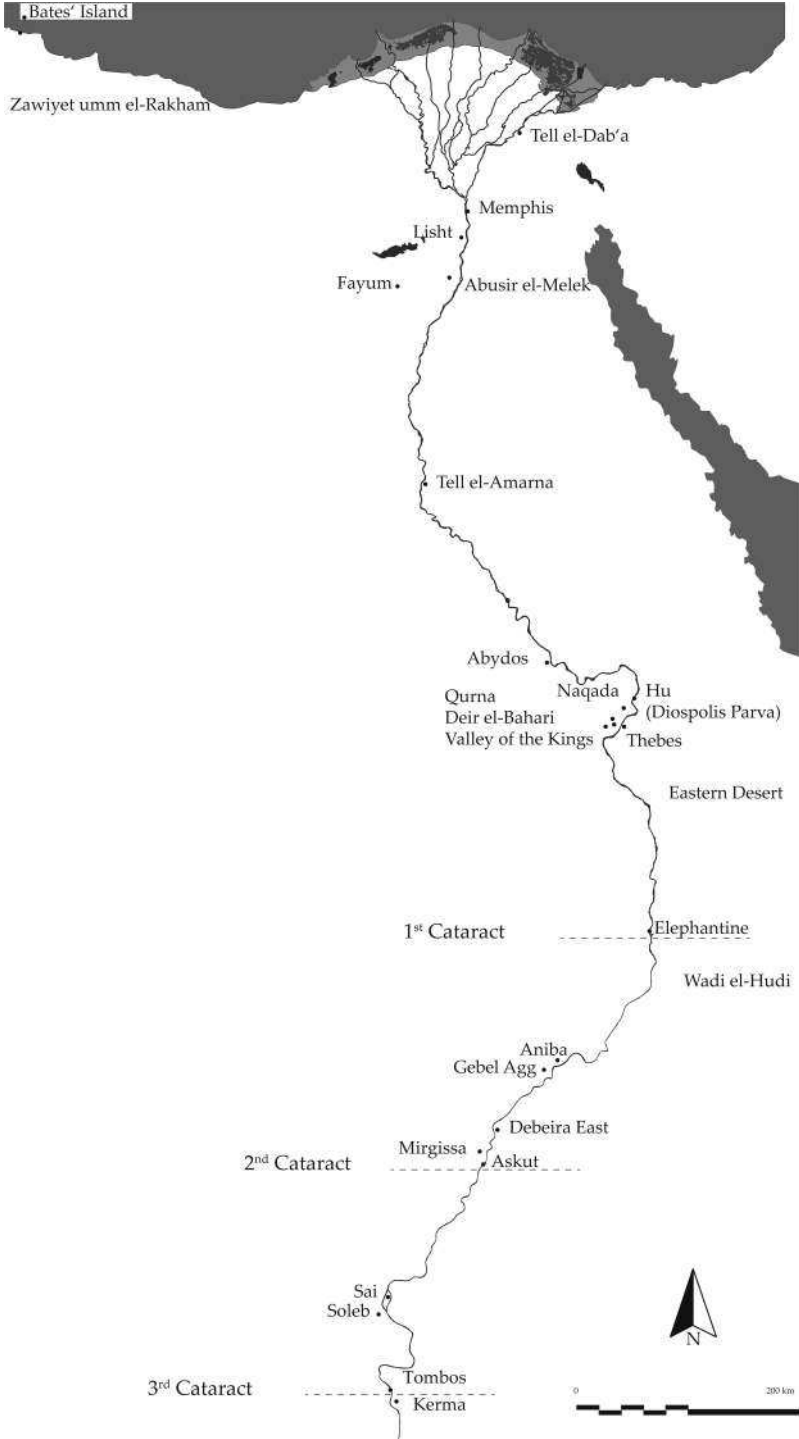
Figure 1 Map of Egypt and Sudan with sites frequently referred to in the
Element (graphic by A. Hassler, ÖAI/ÖAW).

frequently. Some spoke only ancient Egyptian language; others spoke other languages too. A small percentage of the population was fully literate; a large percentage was of limited literacy or no literacy at all. Some of them lived in land ruled by a ruler of local origin and some in a land ruled by a ruler of foreign origin. This diversity is important to stress from the very beginning and it will be extensively discussed throughout the Element.

2.   Race designates biological variations inscribed with explanatory value. Scientific racism implies that physical attributes (mostly external, such as, e.g. skin and hair colour) or morphological features of the skeleton (more often than not the cranium) correspond to inner mental capacities (Siapkas, 2014: 68). According to modern physical anthropology major features of human biological diversity are polymorphic (variation within a group being quantitatively predominant), clinal (i.e. structured as gradients), and culturally mediated. Folk taxonomies of races are culture specific, as they develop from unique historical and demographic factors. Therefore, agglomeration of physically diverse peoples into 'races' is culturally determined (Williams, Belcher & Armelagos, 2005: 340–2). There is no biological validity for the racial construct (Zakrzewski, Shortland & Rowland, 2016: 219–20). For example, M. Hefny, an Egyptian immigrant to the USA, considered himself to be black. According to the rules of USA government on race and ethnicity from 1997, all people originating in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa are classified as white. Hefny filed a lawsuit to change his official classification from white to black (Saini, 2019: 4). Ancient Egyptians did not have the concept of race, as their attitudes towards peoples were based on cultural status and not colour (Foster, 1974: 187). Therefore, the concept of race, although paramount for Egyptology of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, has no scientific credibility in modern scholarship. Section 2 of this Element deals with the problem of race and scientific racism in Egyptology because, although not based in modern anthropology, these concept continue to exist in one form or another even in some recent works.

3.   Archaeological culture was best defined by Australian born archaeologist V. G. Childe (1892–1957) who argued that: 'We find certain types of remains pots, implements, ornaments, burial rites and house forms constantly recurring together. Such a complex of associated traits we shall call a "cultural group" or just a "culture". We assume that such a complex is the material expression of what today we would call "a people".' (Childe, 1929: v–vi)

The concept of archaeological culture was marked by a modernist understanding of a nation state – a unity of territory, material culture, language, and ethnic affiliation (Sherratt, 2005: 27; Thomas, 2004: 112). G. Kossina (1858–1931), German linguist and archaeologist, developed an ethnic paradigm which

he called 'settlement archaeology' with the basic premise that artefact types could be used to identify cultures and that clearly distinguishable cultural provinces reflect the settlement areas of past tribes or ethnic groups (Jones, 1997: 2). This approach is quintessential for the so-called culture-historical or traditional archaeology.

Section 2 of this Element deals with the use of the premises of culture-historical archaeology on material culture and ethnic identity in Egyptology. Although a theoretical position with flaws which have been recognised since 1960s, culture-historical archaeology is still the dominant way of thinking in archaeology, including archaeology of Egypt. This is why it is necessary to point again to its pitfalls and demonstrate them with several examples.

4. Ethnicity is a concept with a complex history (Jones, 1997; McInerney, 2014: 2). The word comes from the ancient Greek word *ethnos* which primarily denoted a group of beings, humans or animals, which share certain characteristics and form a group. Its use to designate different groups of foreigners is more related to the fifth century BC and the writings of Herodotus (Isaac, 2004: 112; Sherratt, 2005: 31; Siapkas, 2014: 67). The concept of ethnicity can include many aspects and their combination results in a group identifying itself as a people (McInerney, 2014: 2). M. Weber (1864–1920), German sociologist, has already argued for many notions of ethnicity found in later scholarship, such as those that ethnic groups are social constructs, based on a subjective belief in a shared community (Jenkins, 2008: 10).

Ethnic labels are not fixed because the identities and the relations to which they are applied are in a constant flux of inclusion and exclusion (McInerney, 2014: 3). According to M. Fischer, ethnicity is 'reinvented and reinterpreted with each generation by each individual. . . . Ethnicity is not something that is simply passed on from generation to generation, taught and learned; it is something dynamic, often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided' (Fischer, 1986: 195). It is not so much a 'deep-seated force surviving from the historical past', but a process (Sollors, 1989: xiv–xv). The task of archaeologists who attempt to research ethnic identity is to identify those who choose to act or look the same, and then to explore the contexts in which they do so and whether these changed over time (Lucy, 2005: 108).

The key reference in archaeological studies of ethnicity in the last two decades has been the monograph *Archaeology of Ethnicity* by S. Jones (1997). According to Jones, ethnic identity is 'that aspect of a person's self-conceptualisation which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent' (Jones, 1997: 13). She understands ethnic identification as involving objectification of cultural practices (unconscious behaviour) in the recognition and signification of

difference in opposition to others (Jones, 1997: 128). According to Jones 'ethnicity is a product of the intersection of similarities and differences in people's habitus and the conditions characterising any given historical situation' (Jones, 1997: 126). For example, she argues that domestic architecture such as bath houses and villas in Roman Britain were an important part of the habitus, and these may have been involved in recognition and signification of a broad Roman identity (Jones, 1997: 134). Section 3 deals with various contemporary Egyptological approaches to ethnic identity and ethnicity in ancient Egypt. Using several examples, this section will discuss how ethnic identities in ancient Egypt have to be approached bearing in mind their diverse social and historical contexts.

5.   Habitus is a term primarily associated in sociology with P. Bourdieu (1930–2002) and his theory of practice. According to Bourdieu it is composed of 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them' (Bourdieu, 1990: 53).

According to R. Jenkins, habitus is 'the embodied and unreflexive everyday practical mastery of culture: unsystematic, the empire of habit, neither conscious nor unconscious' (Jenkins, 2008: 79). Crucial for the concept of habitus is that it involves unconscious dispositions people share towards certain perceptions and practices such as daily tasks, labour skills, cooking, cleaning, dressing, etc. Within this context, ethnic identity is understood as the result of the intersection of one's habitual dispositions and the social conditions in existence within a particular historical context (Curta, 2014: 2508). The reconceptualisation of Bourdieu's habitus is related to the work of G. C. Bentley who argued that 'sensations of ethnic affinity are founded on common life experiences that generate similar habitual dispositions' (Bentley, 1987: 32). The concept of habitus has seen increased attention by scholars studying ethnic identity in ancient Egypt and will be discussed on several examples in Section 3.

1.3 Being Egyptian and Being Foreign: Over 3000 Years of Ethnogenesis

'Egyptian' could be anyone who inhabited the urban zones of the Nile Valley (Assmann, 1996: 97; Espinel, 2006: 452; Moers, 2001: 177), spoke Egyptian language, worshipped Egyptian gods, and was loyal to the Egyptian state, no matter if he or she was born in Egypt or not.