

Egypt: A comparative case

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- Egypt: The setting
 - The Nile
 - Flows NORTH, into the Mediterranean Sea (up on the map)
 - so the UPPER Nile is to the SOUTH (down on the map)
 - and the LOWER Nile is to the NORTH (up on the map)
 - The Upper Nile:
 - a narrow valley some 600 miles long (plus much more that we won't look at)
 - Sharp valley walls limit agriculture to the valley floor, typically just 5-10 miles wide
 - settlements tend to be small, since not much farmland is available at any given point
 - The Lower Nile:
 - the wide, triangular, green Nile Delta, plus a little of the adjacent narrow valley
 - criss-crossed by shallow waterways
 - geographically, ecologically, and culturally distinct from the Upper Nile
 - Nile provides easy transportation
 - the current runs from south to north, into the Mediterranean Sea
 - the prevailing wind blows from north to south
 - so travel along the Nile is easy
 - you drift downriver (north) with the current
 - and sail upriver (south) with the wind
 - since the valley is so narrow, everyone in the Upper Nile lives right on the freeway
 - facilitates cultural uniformity
 - and political unity
 - compare to Mesopotamia, with towns scattered over a plain
 - The same is true of people in the Delta, but to a lesser extent
 - Because everyone is surrounded by a network of navigable streams, canals, and lakes
 - settlement sizes and locations suggest that Nile population overall was well below the valley's carrying capacity until recent times
 - suggesting that population pressure probably was not an important factor
 - although concentrations of population in larger towns or cities might have put a strain on resources in the that particular part of the valley
 - Temperatures
 - in the Delta: temperate year 'round
 - in Upper Egypt (Hierakonpolis): comfortable in winter, very hot in summer
 - Almost no rainfall
 - 1.5" per year in Cairo (the Delta, or Lower Nile)
 - virtually 0 at Aswan in the south (Upper Nile)
 - Floods
 - the Nile floods regularly, every year
 - or did, until first Aswan dam was built

- but the flood was somewhat variable in date and height
- the floods were convenient for farmers
 - they covered the farmland with fertile silt
 - farmers planted in the mud as the water recedes
 - and kept the fields wet with small-scale systems of ditches, levees, and retaining ponds
- but the flood level was unpredictable, so sometimes big floods wiped out the levees
- so there was no point in building big canal or levee systems
 - any expensive canal or levee project would just be destroyed
 - natural flooding plus simple irrigation systems run by families or villages were adequate for the entire valley floor
- floods enforced several months of “free” time every year
 - good for craft production, pyramid building, etc.
- Sources of information:
 - Lots of archaeological evidence, but it is skewed towards cemeteries
 - due to incredible preservation of cool stuff in the dry desert environment
 - also because it is hard to miss grave markers like the pyramids!
 - also due to where cemeteries and towns are located
 - cemeteries are located in dry, elevated desert outside the valley floor
 - preservation is excellent, and they are easily accessible
 - towns were mostly in or near the floodplain
 - close to the river and farmland
 - now often buried under silt and below the water table
 - hard to find
 - poorly preserved
 - very expensive and difficult to study
 - this means we don’t know as much about towns, cities, administration as we would like
 - except indirectly from the graves of rulers and nobles
- We have some written sources on early Egyptian history (there are *lots* for later periods):
 - Several later monuments had king lists carved on them, listing past kings of Egypt and a few details about their achievements
 - Other king lists are on papyrus
 - a few go back to the first few dynasties
 - These lists include kings who reigned up to 1500 years before the lists were made!
 - Manetho, an Egyptian historian of the 3rd century BC (2,200 years ago!), used documents like these to compile a history of kings and events
 - but with many errors due to being almost 3000 years after the fact
 - Yet, an amazing amount stands up to excavated evidence
 - These records provide a chronological framework starting very early
 - but don’t say much about life and society until later periods
 - unlike Mesopotamia, where early documents are accounting records
 - which initially don’t help much with chronology or history

- but do shed some light on economic activities and occasionally other aspects of life
- Chronology chart
 - The early time periods on the chart are based on pottery and stone artifact styles
 - Starting with the Early Dynastic (also called the Archaic period), they are based on king lists and other historical data
 - Note: the Early Dynastic period in Egypt is completely different from the Early Dynastic period in Sumer.
 - 31 generally recognized dynasties, covering about 3000 years of history
 - That is a LONG TIME: compare to England with 1000 years of history...
 - These dynasties are supposed to be literally family lines of kings
 - when the family line was broken (no heir, palace coup, etc.), a new dynasty started
 - there was probably a lot of fudging for political expedience
 - historians have lumped these dynasties into a sequence of “Kingdoms” (periods of political unity) and “Intermediate Periods” (periods of political fragmentation)
 - this is for convenience only; people at the time would not have recognized these periods
 - we will cover only the Predynastic period and Early Dynastic period
 - at that point, civilization was definitely present
 - The pyramids were not built until later, in the Old Kingdom
- The Predynastic period
 - Neolithic period
 - Neolithic in Lower Egypt started around 5,000 BC
 - long after farming began in the Levant and Mesopotamia
 - by this time in Mesopotamia, ‘Ubaid people had settled towns and small temples
 - At Merimda and elsewhere in the western delta, roughly 5000 BC to 4100 BC
 - simple, perishable pole and thatch houses
 - some changes late in the sequence (maybe 4300 BC):
 - some houses were dug partially into the ground
 - storage “granaries” associated with individual houses
 - grinding stones
 - sites up to 20 ha (8 acres)
 - site populations up to 1,300 to 2,000 people
 - suggests heavy dependence on cereals
 - broadly similar to late Natufian and PPNA settlements in the Levant, but much later
 - simple graves within villages, without goods, unlike in upper Egypt
 - social stratification: no evidence; burials at Merimda all roughly equivalent in wealth
 - Neolithic in Upper Egypt: Badarian culture, also started around 5000 BC
 - very different from Lower Egypt
 - as in Lower Egypt, small farming villages, maybe only semi-sedentary
 - settlements:
 - perishable pole-and-thatch houses, hearths
 - basketry-lined “silo” pits
 - subsistence:

- lots of sheep/goat droppings suggest herding
- wheat, barley, lentils
- hunting, fishing
- material culture
 - more technologically sophisticated than lower Egypt
 - pottery much finer, better made than in lower Egypt: thin-walled, shiny, elegant red vessels with blackened rims
- burial tradition was quite different from lower Egypt
 - burials were in the desert, in cemeteries separated from the areas where people lived
 - burials in shallow pits, roofed with branches, probably covered with a pile of gravel
 - bodies dressed in skins or linen cloth
 - with varied grave goods
 - stone tools
 - strings of shell and steatite (stone) beads as anklets, bracelets, necklaces
 - ivory and bone beads, pins, needles, awls, combs; needle cases; animal figurines
 - female figurines made of bone
 - stone palettes for preparing eye paint (especially malachite green)
 - some stained green from use
 - beginning of a long Upper Egyptian tradition of palettes
- Naqada I (also called Amratian) period 4000-3600 BC (400 years long)
 - contemporary with Early Uruk (3900-3600 BC)
 - Naqada I in Lower Egypt: no great changes
 - Naqada I in Upper Egypt: no clear break, just gradual evolutionary changes
 - villages of 50 to 250 people in pole and thatch houses (around Naqada)
 - gradually changing styles of pottery, palettes, stone vessels, ceramic female figurines
 - continued and expanded customs of burying in cemeteries with extensive grave goods
 - disk-shaped stone mace heads in burials
 - many are too small, or have holes too small, to have been functional
 - several known with impractical ivory or horn handles
 - could have been models specifically for funerary use
 - an idea that became common later in Egypt
 - apparently were symbols of status or power based on the idea of force
 - but not necessarily the actual use of it?
 - Upper Egypt at this point seemed to be relatively isolated from Mediterranean and Near Eastern traditions
- Naqada II (also called Gerzean) period 3600-3200 BC (400 years long)
 - This is when things really started to change
 - Contemporary with Middle Uruk (3600-3400 BC) and Late Uruk (3400-3100 BC)
 - interesting that this is just when urbanism, technology, the power of the temple, etc. really picked up in Sumer, too
 - Naqada II in Upper Egypt (3600-3200 BC)
 - significant changes in material culture

- in general: the development of elaborate, specialized crafts
- many changes in pottery style
 - especially the appearance of pots with painted designs, usually showing boats
 - the boats often have features thought to be a “standard” or “emblem” similar to the standards that later identified regions
- many changes in the styles of other artifacts, often well made and decorated
 - like cosmetic palettes, often finely made in animal shapes
- the “signature” objects of Naqada II: incredibly well-made flint knives
 - blade was first ground to shape
 - then long, parallel flakes chipped off of one face only (“ripple flaking”)
 - small flakes, also chipped off the same side (“retouch” flakes), perfected the shape
 - sometimes with carved ivory handles
 - must be the work of highly skilled specialists
 - clearly for show, not use
- increasing (but still rare) use of copper, very rare silver and gold
- social implications:
 - rise of highly skilled specialists making elaborate display goods
 - rise of a high-status clientele able to support this work
 - many of these objects were apparently destined for show and/or burial, not use
- House style changed from round, semisubterranean, with pole and thatch superstructure, to rectangular, aboveground, mudbrick with walled courtyard as in Mesopotamia
 - Late Naqada II clay house model illustrates this
 - rectangular, with door at one end and two windows at the other
 - half roofed, half an open courtyard
 - similar to houses still used today
- a few large towns or small cities developed
 - possibly just two or three in Upper Egypt
 - not nearly as widespread a phenomenon as in Mesopotamia
 - the vast majority of Egyptians were still rural, as they remained throughout Egyptian history
 - there was never any hyper-urbanism in Egypt
 - These few large towns were probably the centers of chiefdoms that each controlled a nearby stretch of the Nile farmland and its population
- Hierakonpolis (also called Nekhen)
 - became a major urban center
 - a “population explosion” at this site around the beginning of Naqada II
 - at 3800 BC (middle of Naqada I), it was a village of several hundred people
 - by 3400 BC (middle of Naqada II), it had 5,000 to 10,000 residents
 - this *could* reflect population increasing in the area
 - but it more likely reflects people moving from the countryside into the town
 - that is, people concentrating into one place, rather than a big increase in numbers of people in the region
 - this would have put pressure on the food production capacity right near the town

- may have encouraged taxation or other control of production from the surrounding hinterland
- densely packed rectangular mudbrick houses, similar to Mesopotamia
 - with a range of sizes, suggesting differences in wealth or status
 - apparently was the residence of important chiefs or kings
 - probably much smaller than Uruk at this time, but at least in the same league
- economy:
 - subsistence based on wheat and barley, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs
 - apparently already a major pottery production center for Upper Egypt
 - because ceramics from Hierakonpolis were widespread in Upper Egypt
 - implies specialization, organization of workshops, concentration of capital, probably specialized traders
 - probably some people getting wealthy while others worked for ceramic workshops or merchants
 - Hierakonpolis also produced stone vases, maceheads, palettes, other stone goods
 - suggests considerable specialization, differentiation, complex division of labor...
- big constructions were built at Hierakonpolis between 3400 BC and 3200 BC
 - second half of Naqada II
 - an oval retaining wall almost 50 m across, of sandstone blocks, maybe a platform for a monumental building
 - dating is rough, but probably in Naqada II
 - a thick mudbrick wall around part of the town, presumably for defense
- with an extensive cemetery
 - including some rich burials that suggest wealthy, powerful leaders
- Naqada (a settlement; where Naqada I, II, III pottery styles were identified)
 - similar layout of rectangular mud-brick buildings
 - by the beginning of Naqada II, the town was enclosed by a mudbrick wall
 - presumably for defense
 - very important cemetery
 - containing some large, rich burials comparable to the richest at Hierakonpolis
- This (a site called “This”), near Abydos
 - a poorly known town that was probably the center of another regional chiefdom
- pottery from just a few clay sources was traded up and down the Nile, suggesting specialized mass production
- gold, malachite, other minerals were probably collected or mined from the desert highlands east of Hierakonpolis and Naqada
 - this may have involved organization that could reinforce status differences
 - that is, leaders in these places may have been able to use their access to mines, trading routes, and manpower to exploit them to further build their wealth and power
- burial practices for the highest-status people got increasingly elaborate, suggesting increasing status differences
 - moderate-status burials were still in oval pits, with a modest quantity of goods

- example moderate-status grave lot: a necklace of gold, turquoise, garnet, and malachite beads, some common ceramics, two small decorated pots, and a crude flint knife
- highest-status burials began to be placed in rectangular chambers with mudbrick walls
 - maybe echoed the shift to rectangular houses
- highest-status burials started to have “mastabas”, or bench-like rectangular mounds built over them
- the “painted tomb” at Hierakonpolis
 - the largest, most elaborate Naqada II tomb known
 - presumably the tomb of an Upper Egyptian chief or ruler
 - unfortunately looted before excavation in 1899, only a few artifacts remained
 - walls and floor of brick
 - the walls are painted (the only known example from this period) and show:
 - boats similar to the ones on the Naqada II pots
 - men thought to be hunting animals and/or fighting each other
 - one seems to hold three captives tied by a rope
 - another seems to hold a figure upside down, ready to hit it with a long stick
 - but these are ambiguous, since some of the “victims” are clearly animals
 - also, one seems to hold two animals, much like the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh
 - suggests two things
 - first, Mesopotamian influence
 - second, maybe the painting does not describe real Egyptian events at all...
 - this is evidence for an emerging elite or ruling class
 - albeit not nearly as marked as in the following periods
 - it might be evidence for the elites’ connection to warfare – or it might not...
 - it might be evidence for the elites’ having some sort of connection to Mesopotamia, maybe ethnic, trade, religious, or...?
- Naqada II in Lower Egypt (3600-3200 BC)
 - again: contemporary with Middle and Late Uruk
 - Unfortunately, it is more difficult to tell what happened in Lower Egypt, due to sites being located in the Nile delta, where early evidence is mostly deeply buried under silt
 - As in Upper Egypt, a few large towns developed
 - extensive trade with the Levant, maybe Mesopotamia
 - But lower Egyptian culture evolved gradually, without the fairly abrupt changes seen in Upper Egypt at the start of Naqada II
 - town of Ma’adi (3650 BC - ~2700 [through Early Dynastic])
 - up to 18 ha (about 1 and 1/2 Çatal Hüyük)
 - continued Lower Egyptian traditions
 - plain pottery
 - oval houses, some semi-subterranean, pole and thatch roofs
 - relatively simple burials, both in the town and in cemeteries, with some variation in richness

- but now added extensive trade with Levant and possibly Late Uruk and Jemdet Nasr cities of Mesopotamia
- domesticated donkeys (*Equus asinus*: ass) present; used for trading expeditions?
- possible trade with Upper Egypt (debated)
- storage was not only in individual houses in town, but also in segregated areas around the edge of the town
 - one of these areas contained underground, roofed “cellars” for storage of goods
 - another had rows of large storage jars set into the ground
 - one jar contained stone vases and carnelian beads
 - others had ceramic vessels, grain, animal and fish bones, lumps of asphalt, flint tools, spindle whorls, etc.
 - such large quantities of goods must have been for exchange, rather than the use of any one family or group
 - this storage was NOT centralized, as at Mesopotamian temples, but dispersed
 - maybe controlled by various different families, “businesses”, or other institutions?
- considerable evidence of craft production
 - copper smelted and worked on site
 - ore possibly brought from Sinai
 - apparent workshop areas for stone production
 - specialized craft producers making goods for exchange?
- Buto
 - poorly known due to being deep under water table
 - but evidently a large town
 - its location suggests that it could have been a port for trade with the Mediterranean and the Levant
 - we’ll see more evidence for this in a moment...
- Some evidence suggests contact between Egypt and Mesopotamia during Naqada II and Naqada III
 - whether this contact involved a significant number of people, and whether it had any significant effect on Egyptian culture, is highly debated
 - while Egypt picked up many ideas from Mesopotamia, Mesopotamia does not seem to have picked up any from Egypt; the influence seems one-way
 - Mesopotamian influence in Lower Egypt
 - Lower Egypt was clearly part of the Uruk expansion
 - Mesopotamian Uruk period pottery, cylinder seals, and other items are found at Buto and elsewhere in Lower Egypt
 - at Buto, locally made “clay cones” for wall mosaics - a Mesopotamian style
 - implies at least one important building in Mesopotamian style, probably the presence of Sumerian people, some trade...
 - also goods from Syria, even Susa
 - Mesopotamian influence in Egypt in general
 - locally made cylinder seals may be imitations of Mesopotamian models
 - paneled “palace-façade” mudbrick architecture appeared in Egypt in Naqada II
 - no known local antecedents in Egypt

- very similar to buttressed architecture of Mesopotamia
- some artistic motifs (and myths or events that they represent) that appeared during Naqada II seem to have come from Mesopotamia
 - Ivory knife handle of Gebel-el-Arak
 - Mesopotamian Gilgamesh-like (or Enkidu-like) figure holding two lions
 - battle scene with Naqada II style boats and Mesopotamian style boat!
 - suggests that the “influence” may not always have been peaceful
 - The motif of a person holding two animals also appears in the Naqada II tomb painting in the Painted tomb at Hierakonpolis
 - you remember that this was a Sumerian motif
 - the figure might be dressed in Sumerian style
 - this motif is not likely to have been invented coincidentally by the Egyptians
 - Intertwined serpent-necked animals (“serpo-felines”) appear in Egyptian art by the end of Naqada II
 - slightly later example on the palette of Narmer (Naqada III period)
- Generalizations about Naqada II
 - Upper and Lower Egypt were still very different
 - Upper Egypt
 - Upper Egypt seems to have been organized into regional chiefdoms with a few capital cities and obvious rulers
 - who had to wall their towns for self-defense
 - most people still lived in small rural settlements
 - apparently militaristic chiefdoms
 - growing wealth of burials and towns suggest that these chiefdoms were extracting surplus production from increasingly large stretches of the Upper Nile valley
 - Lower Egypt
 - little sign of regional polities, obvious leaders, or militarism
 - although the absence of evidence might be due to poor preservation and little data
 - overall, much more trading activity than in Upper Egypt
 - possibly due to greater agricultural potential of the Delta
 - and easier access to trading partners in the Levant and beyond
 - many centers of wealth in each town, probably multiple important families or groups per town, rather than a single hierarchy
 - only minor variation between burials found so far
 - even so, specialized production, trade, and storage of lots of valuable goods at Ma’adi make it likely that some families had more wealth and status than others
 - some large towns or cities, maybe the centers of regional chiefdoms or small states, but this is still largely hypothetical
- Relationship between Upper and Lower Egypt in Naqada II
 - Upper Egyptian goods and styles began to appear in Lower Egypt late in Naqada II, getting to the Delta town of Buto
 - suggesting increasing contact, trade, and desire in Lower Egypt for Upper Egyptian goods (and ideas?)
- this relationship began to change towards the end of Naqada II, as we will see...

- Naqada III (roughly 3200 - 3050 BC): the last century of the Predynastic period
 - Dating
 - Contemporary with the last century of the Late Uruk period (3400-3100 BC)
 - Naqada III was a brief, eventful transitional period during which Upper and Lower Egypt became culturally and politically unified
 - Hence sometimes called the “unification era”
 - Naqada III in Upper Egypt
 - accelerating trends of Naqada II
 - the highest-status graves continued to get more elaborate
 - Cemetery at Abydos
 - rectangular tombs, mud walled
 - one to several rooms
 - roofed with wood and reed matting
 - example: the most elaborate Predynastic tomb at Abydos
 - 12 rooms
 - 9.10 X 7.30 m (27 x 21 feet)
 - despite looting, contained hundreds of pots, sorted by type
 - craft goods continued to get even more elaborate and expensive
 - such as palettes with elaborate carved decoration, many (but not all) with scenes of war
 - implications
 - these burials imply increasingly rich and powerful elites
 - emerging at just one or a few places in all of Upper Egypt
 - which probably implies the consolidation of regional Upper Egyptian chiefdoms into fewer, larger polities
 - since creating the more expensive burials would have required access to more surplus and laborers
 - this was probably at least in part based on military domination
 - which probably culminated with a single Upper Egyptian chiefdom, centered at Hierakonpolis, with its high status cemetery at Abydos
 - The macehead of Scorpion hints at the nature of Upper Egyptian kings in Naqada III
 - first, the object itself is a highly decorated weapon
 - probably symbolic, not for use, but indicating the military overtones of kingship
 - Scorpion is identified by a symbol next to him - incipient writing? (more on this later)
 - he wears a hat shaped like a bowling pin, which in later times clearly symbolized rule of Upper Egypt
 - called the white crown of Upper Egypt
 - Scorpion is using a digging tool to open an irrigation canal
 - some interpret this as a repeated (annual?) ritual that linked the king to agricultural success - a religious role
 - others see it as commemorating Scorpion's role in building a canal system - an economic, administrative role
 - Naqada III in Lower Egypt

- Historical sources claim there was a single Upper Egyptian realm and a separate, single Lower Egyptian realm, with its capital at Buto
- This was long thought to be a mythologized, simplified account to go with a simple story of conquest by Upper Egypt
- but increasing evidence suggests it might be at least partially true
 - the very extensive trading in Lower Egypt might indicate that regional conflicts were controlled, maybe by political unity
 - large towns might imply complex political organization
 - wall cones found only at Buto suggest that this place might have been more important than any other Lower Egyptian city: a capitol?
- Unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
 - Cultural unification, accelerating a trend started in Naqada II
 - Lower Egypt was increasingly influenced by Upper Egypt
 - excavations at Buto:
 - bottom levels had only 2% Naqada pottery
 - by late Naqada II (3300 BC), 40% Upper Egyptian pottery
 - by Naqada III (3200 BC), 99% Upper Egyptian pottery
 - by the end of Naqada III, Buto is thought to have been thoroughly “Naqada-ized”
 - Along with this “Naqada-ization” of material culture came the rise of pronounced social status differences in Lower Egypt
 - evidence: wide variation in grave goods at Minshat Abu Omar
 - in sample of 370 terminal Predynastic/Early Dynastic tombs
 - but no rich burials of juveniles
 - suggests that in the Delta, status was earned during life, NOT largely hereditary, in contrast to the pattern in Upper Egypt
 - Political unification
 - The cultural “Naqada-ization” of Lower Egypt was accompanied by a lot of warfare
 - at least, there is a lot of warfare depicted on palettes
 - these are basically Upper Egyptian artifacts
 - they are decorative, probably not really used (or only used ritually), kept in temples
 - Battlefield palette
 - Towns palette - animals breaking into walled towns with agricultural digging tools
 - other fancy artifacts also suggest warfare
 - decorated maceheads
 - The Egyptian historian Manetho, writing around 300 BC, said that just before the beginning of the First Dynasty of Egyptian kings, a king of Upper Egypt named Menes conquered Lower Egypt and founded the united kingdom of Egypt
 - We don't know if either region was really that formally organized
 - Hierakonpolis was certainly an important center
 - Buto was too, although it is still not well known
 - Menes supposedly established a new city, Memphis, to be its capital
 - archaeological evidence suggests that Memphis did indeed either begin or grow dramatically at about the end of the predynastic period

- Whether or not it happened as a single, dramatic military campaign, the Naqada III period did end with the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under a single king (pharaoh)
 - evidently in part through military actions during the preceding decades or century
 - archaeological support for the story of political unification by military force is based mostly on a few decorated palettes and maceheads
 - these may reflect propaganda as much as literal history
 - Palette of Narmer
 - complex iconography that we don't have time to discuss
 - hieroglyphs identify Narmer
 - one side shows Narmer with the
 - white crown of Upper Egypt (“bowling pin”)
 - and the other shows him with the
 - red crown of Lower Egypt (“chair and spiral”)
 - the identification of the crowns is based on later, better documented use of them
 - Lots of imagery of warfare, decapitated victims, etc.
 - All this seems to suggest a military victory by Narmer of Upper Egypt over part or all of Lower Egypt
 - so Narmer was probably the same person that Manetho called Menes, a military leader who unified Egypt
 - if so, though, this would have been just the last step in a process that probably took up to 200 years during Naqada II and Naqada III
 - Macehead of Narmer
 - shows Narmer wearing the crown of Lower Egypt
 - but the serekh surrounding his name is surmounted by Horus, the hawk who symbolized Upper Egypt
 - again suggesting that Narmer ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt
- So Naqada III saw
 - the culmination of the process of formation of larger and larger political units
 - ending with the cultural and political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt into a single polity under a single king
- Egyptian Early Dynastic Period (First and Second Dynasties) 3050 - 2686 BC
 - Also called “Archaic Period” in some sources
 - Contemporary with Jemdet Nasr (3100-2900 BC) and first half of Sumerian Early Dynastic (2900-2373 BC)
 - *not* the same period as the Mesopotamian Early Dynastic, but partially overlapping
 - in Sumer, this was the period of
 - hyper-urbanism
 - competing city-states and increasing warfare
 - powerful temples and maybe the first hints of the palace and kings
 - note that while Sumer was more urbanized, it was not regionally unified at this point
 - Egypt was much less urban, and possibly economically and socially less complex, but unlike Sumer, it was already an enormous region united under one military leader

- the *Egyptian* Early Dynastic began with the political unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
- Foreign influences from Mesopotamia continued from the earlier Naqada III period, but faded away by late in the Egyptian Early Dynastic (3050-2686 BC)
- Cities in Early Dynastic Egypt
 - Egypt is often said to have been a civilization without cities
 - Partially true: the great bulk of the population was rural
 - But the lack of cities was NOT complete: there clearly were some major cities, too, even if not as gigantic as the Mesopotamian ones
 - Lower Egypt:
 - Memphis (at the boundary between Lower and Upper Egypt)
 - Capital of the unified Egypt established by Narmer (Menes) at start of First Dynasty
 - First Dynasty levels are deep below silt and water table
 - may have been very large, based on size of area in which slightly later Old Kingdom ceramics are found
 - Buto
 - Upper Egypt:
 - Hierakonpolis
 - Elephantine
 - hints of others
- Warfare
 - probably continued from earlier times
 - the newly consolidated kingdom would probably have had to use or threaten force at times to keep provinces from breaking away, refusing to pay tribute, etc.
 - Lots of war imagery in Early Dynastic art
 - Early Dynastic kings are often shown clubbing victims
 - this could reflect real, frequent military activity
 - it could also have been propaganda or a metaphor for the king's power
 - the Palermo stone and other inscriptions record a variety of First Dynasty expeditions or campaigns to the south and east, but without details
 - A wall was built around the Upper Egyptian town of Elephantine in the Second Dynasty, suggesting a continuing real threat of attack
 - but Elephantine was close to the southern border of the Egyptian state, so it may have been subject to raids from the Nubian people to the south
- Royal palaces came into use
 - they may have existed earlier, but we don't have evidence of them
 - the existence and appearance of early palaces is suggested by the practice of writing the king's name inside a symbol (serekh) that represented a "palace-facade" building
 - one paneled wall with a monumental doorway is known from a First Dynasty context at Hierakonpolis; this may be part of an early palace
 - increasing administrative activities on behalf of the king must have been managed from some appropriately impressive setting
 - maybe a royal palace
 - great increase in use of seals suggests increasing management of goods that might indicate a royal bureaucracy

- But notice: no spectacular temples, ziggurats, etc. in the Early Dynastic
 - there was no obvious, separate religious institution as in Mesopotamia
 - instead, there was a clear religious aspect to the king
 - even Early Dynastic kings were associated in art with animals that later stood for gods
 - The palette of Narmer and other expensive objects with royal imagery were found in a temple at Hierakonpolis
 - this was a modest structure compared to the Mesopotamian ones
 - and from very early, the king was a central figure in religious art
- Burial customs got ever more stratified, and much more elaborate for the highest classes
 - for the top nobility, there were now two places to be buried: Abydos in Upper Egypt, and Saqqara in Lower Egypt
 - many kings and nobles had burial structures in both places
 - one was a “cenotaph”, or empty tomb
- Royal tombs at Abydos
 - the First dynasty royal cemetery in Upper Egypt
 - each king had a royal tomb, plus a royal enclosure for associated rites some distance away
 - tombs continued to be basically brick-lined holes, but
 - increasingly large, more rooms, wood floors and paneling
 - roofed with wooden beams and reeds
 - filled with tremendous wealth of grave goods
 - many objects in the tombs were labeled with ivory tags
 - indicating things like the number of beads in a necklace, or identifying them as “the royal sandals”, etc.
 - usually showed where the object came from
 - this may have been a way of assuring credit for the nobles who provided the offerings
 - high status burials increasingly had a “palace-façade mastaba” built on top
 - both the tomb and the enclosure were surrounded by (or adjacent to) rows of subsidiary graves (“retainer burials”)
 - apparently contained servants or members of the court who were sacrificed for the burial of the king
 - example: tomb of King Aha (Narmer’s successor, second ruler of the 1st dynasty)
 - 34 subsidiary burial pits
 - all were looted in antiquity, so we don't know whether all contained human bodies, or how many were in each
 - human bones scattered by the looters were all of people 25 years old and younger
 - that is, at least some of these people did not die of natural causes
 - both men and women
 - the subsidiary burials were furnished with copper tools, stone vessels, ivory carvings
 - some were identified with inscribed limestone stelae with the name of the occupant
 - officials, dwarfs, artisans
- retainer burials peaked with King Djer, the third king of the first dynasty

- less than a century after the unification of Egypt
- this was centuries before the pyramids were built
- King Djer's tomb at Abydos was surrounded by 338 subsidiary tombs
 - estimates from 317 to over 580 retainers total
 - (the higher estimate may include others from his cenotaph at Saqqara)
- but the practice of retainer burials tapered off quickly
 - by the end of the First dynasty, kings were buried with just a few retainers
 - so maybe this kind of conspicuous consumption had something to do with the earliest functioning or legitimization of Dynastic rule
 - once people got accustomed to powerful kings, retainer burials were less necessary?
- Social hierarchy during Early Dynastic (3050-2686 BC)
 - Wide variation in burial richness, from huge, rich mastaba tombs of kings and nobles to simple pit burials with nothing but a basketwork coffin
 - incredible wealth of officials' tombs at Saqqara suggests their importance and status
 - Craft specialization, esoteric burial practices, labor and military mobilization, scribes, royal burials all suggest many statuses in life
- compare King Djer's burial with 317 to 580 retainers to the 50-odd people buried in each of the Royal Tombs at Ur
 - and consider the much, much bigger structure and greater volume of rooms filled with goods in Egyptian royal tombs
 - the Egyptian Early Dynastic kings were apparently 5 to 10 times wealthier and more powerful than the greatest known Early Dynastic kings in Sumer
 - maybe not surprising, given that they were exploiting essentially the entire Nile valley for their personal gain, compared to just the land around a single city-state in Sumer
- Egyptian writing: hieroglyphics
 - “cracked” using the Rosetta stone, which recorded a decree by Ptolemy V (196 BC), written in Greek (which could be read), hieroglyphic, and demotic (a late, vernacular form of Egyptian writing used for daily, secular purposes)
 - First writing in Egypt appeared in Upper Egypt, shortly before the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt
 - earliest, very simple examples around 3200 BC, maybe as early as 3300 BC
 - vs. about 3400 BC in Uruk period Sumer
 - that is, around beginning of Naqada III
 - Very early examples
 - The names of various kings thought to be one or two before Narmer were inked on offering jars in their tombs
 - some are labeled as produce from Upper or Lower Egypt
 - Scorpion's name on a mace head (Scorpion was probably the predecessor of Narmer)
 - but is it a hieroglyph or a picture of the head of a standard?
 - A German team re-excavating the tomb of a different, earlier king also named Scorpion in 1998 found lots of very early Egyptian writing
 - some 300 items with very simple hieroglyphs, including:
 - jars with hieroglyphs written in ink
 - postage-stamp sized clay tablets with holes (labels) with scratched-on hieroglyphs

- 2/3 identified offerings of oil and linen, sometimes including numbers
- almost all seem to identify the source of the offering, either as a geographic region, an institution, or an official
- radiocarbon dates fall from 3300 to 3200 BC, that is, end of Naqada II
- palette of Narmer has many individuals named by symbols adjacent to them
- these show that a writing system was established and in use in royal contexts right around the unification of Egypt
- but notice that all these early examples are simple identifications and counts of things, not anything like a spoken phrase or sentence, or even accounting, as in Mesopotamia
- was Egyptian writing caused by Mesopotamian influence?
 - the timing is awfully close to be just coincidental
 - Egyptian hieroglyphics appeared only a century or two after pre-cuneiform appeared in Sumer
 - with the dates are this close, it is possible that future finds could prove that both appeared at the same time, or even that Egyptian writing was earlier
 - coincided with known Mesopotamian influence in art styles, architecture, cylinder sealing, etc.
- but the Egyptian writing system is so different that it cannot have developed from precuneiform
 - hieroglyphs normally read right to left, opposite of precuneiform
 - also can be read left to right, with signs reversed!
 - if the logic of design calls for it
 - precuneiform and cuneiform were never reversed in this way
 - Egyptian logograms are far more representational (picture-like) than precuneiform ones
 - Egyptian writing recorded only consonants, not vowels, unlike precuneiform
 - Egyptian writing had a very different context of use from precuneiform
 - hieroglyphs were initially and principally used together with pictures, as labels that identified pictures of people or places, or as explanations of a scene
 - as on the macehead of Scorpion or the palette of Narmer
 - Precuneiform was very rarely used with pictures
 - the other major context of early hieroglyphs was as labels for objects, like the tags in Scorpion's tomb
 - again, this was rarely if ever done with precuneiform, which was usually written on tablets that were stored in archives
- the two systems were used for very different purposes
 - Sumerian pre-cuneiform was initially used for accounting or transaction records
 - initially used by the temple, but for secular, not inherently ritual or political purposes
 - while early Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was used for royal and ritual activities
 - royal names and propaganda, activities of the royal court, royal burial inventory labels
 - relatively few, special transactions (like providing offerings for a royal burial) that involved luxury goods and high-status people

- inscriptions on pottery or stone vessels, usually identifying the owner and/or contents and/or place of origin
- markers for the tombs of kings, queens, nobles, and their pet dogs (!)
- personal identification seals of kings, queens, and nobles
 - or offices, like “the sealer of the shipyard” and “the sealing of everything of gold”
- ceremonial objects like the palette of Narmer
- recordkeeping, but of a royal or ritual nature:
 - lists of booty from war
 - lists of Nile flooding levels in successive years (which later kings could supposedly forecast and influence)
 - lists of royal activities by year: festivals, erecting statues of gods, founding and conquering towns
- Very fragmentary evidence of early writing in ink on papyrus, unlike Sumerian, which had no inked version
 - this also suggests that we have lost a great deal of the early content and development of Egyptian writing
 - maybe we would have a different impression if the early writing on papyrus were available
- From the very beginning, there were two different styles of writing
 - Hieroglyphs ("sacred signs")
 - cursive, inked handwriting that represented the same symbols (“hieratic”)
 - which changed relatively rapidly, while hieroglyphs did not
- little evidence of early development; even in the earliest examples, the basic symbol system was already pretty well developed
 - although the early uses were apparently just identifying a person or place
 - suggestion (by no means certain) that hieroglyphics may have been invented by a single individual, maybe after encountering Mesopotamian writing
 - there are historical examples of this happening in other languages
 - Sequoia (c. 1765-1843), invented a syllabic writing system for Cherokee, inspired by European writing systems, even though he never spoke or read any other language
- Cuneiform was used to write many different languages and contributed to our own writing system, but hieroglyphic writing was only ever used for Egyptian, and had little effect on the rest of the world or other writing systems

- Is this civilization yet?
 - try applying some of the different definitions
 - what would you like to know about to help out here?
 - What should future research efforts in Egypt try to figure out?

- The pyramids were built in the Third and Fourth Dynasties
 - well after a complex, hierarchical, bureaucratic state ruled by a divine king was already established
 - for those, you will need to take a different class...