The Nile Delta as a centre of cultural interactions between Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant in the 4th millennium BC
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Of pots and myths – attempting a comparative study of funerary pottery assemblages in the egyptian Nile Valley during the late 4th millennium BC.[1]

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1. Introduction: questions and hypotheses

The Upper Egyptian Naqada culture is best defined by its material remains found in the graves of the 4th Millennium BC., and in particular by the pottery deposited therein. Already Flinders Petrie used the various ceramic wares and their typological developments as a guide for his Sequence Dates upon which the relative chronology of that period was founded. This funerary pottery was also key to understanding the overall character and distribution of this culture along the Nile Valley in time and over time. Although not without early criticism (*e.g.* Scharff 1926: 71-78), it had been suggested that this culture exhibited a remarkable uniformity over a stretch of hundreds of kilometres (Kaiser 1957: 74; Rizkana & Seeher 1987: 67; Hendrickx 1996: 63). Any observable changes in the ceramic assemblages were not only considered indicative of the progress of time, but also of more far-reaching cultural and social processes such as ethnic migrations or invasions (*e.g.* Petrie & Quibell 1896; Petrie 1920; Kaiser 1957). These concepts dominated the scholarly discourse of almost the entire 20th century. Only the last two decades of that century also saw the introduction of a more nuanced discussion when new and ever growing archaeological evidence, especially from the Nile Delta, started to cast shadows on these concepts, exposed their shortcomings and caused scholars to rethink traditional approaches. This paper will pursue a number of these more recent thoughts, engage in an attempt at comparing and re-interpreting various pottery assemblages and thereby potentially challenge existing paradigms. It will focus on the funerary pottery assemblages of the late 4th Millennium BC. which correspond to the relative chronological stages of

[1] This paper is dedicated, with respect and gratitude, to the memory of Werner Kaiser without whose work and initiatives research on early Egypt would not be where it is today. The writer would also like to thank the organizers of this conference for the invitation to contribute.

late Naqada II and early III. These assemblages arose out of a Neolithic ceramic tradition (= Badarian/early Naqada I) that itself was the result of a variety of nomad, hunter, herder, farmer and settler cultures from the areas in and around the Egyptian Nile Valley and that eventually developed into a well-formed Chalcolithic culture. Like other crafts, such as metallurgy, stone vessel manufacture, flint knapping and textile weaving, pottery production had now developed into a specialized industry in the more populated parts of the valley, where access to resources was favourable and where early commercial centres allowed for the infrastructure and created sufficient consumer demand for the specialized production of ceramic wares. Although domestic pottery had up to this point been largely made in household production, changing burial customs in the southern Nile Valley increased the demand for pottery and thereby stimulated the growing industrialization of its manufacture. Some wares, *e.g.* Black-Topped vessels, were mainly exchanged in regional market networks, whereas others, such as Decorated Marl clay jars, experienced a very wide distribution at hundreds of kilometres distance from their place of manufacture. It has been acknowledged for some time now that Chalcolithic pottery production of the lower Nile Valley was a rather diverse industry which operated in different places at different levels and in different scales of production (Friedman 1994; Köhler 1997; 1998).

On the other hand, regional differences in the pottery assemblages have also been attributed to political, ethnic or cultural boundaries, especially when comparing the two geographic ends of the Egyptian Nile Valley: Upper and Lower Egypt. One of the most recurrent and crucial questions raised in these discussions is therefore just how different the regional assemblages really are from each other. After all, the postulated uniformity of the pottery in southern Egypt has been interpreted as a sign of cultural or ethnic identity and conversely, variation between the assemblages has therefore been read as evidence for cultural or ethnic difference. And yet, most scholars of today would agree that when considering the domestic contexts there is far greater homogeneity in the material culture of north and south than in the funerary sphere (in summary Köhler 2008; Mączyńska 2011), in particular with regard to the pottery of the time. But most comparisons have been largely reduced to an apparent contrast of north and south, and what has been rarely questioned with sufficient scrutiny in recent times is just how homogeneous or heterogeneous southern funerary assemblages really are[1] and if a simple comparison between north and south may actually lead to a viable result. In an attempt at addressing these questions, a number of funerary pottery assemblages from different sites of the late Naqada II period will be examined. It will be proposed that there is significant variation between the region of southern Upper Egypt in comparison to northern Upper Egypt, between northern Upper Egypt and Middle Egypt, and between Middle Egypt and the Fayum Region. Consequently, this paper will question just how homogeneous the Naqada culture really is, based on funerary pottery assemblages of the late Naqada II period.

[1] Exceptions being Scharff (1926) and Mortensen (1991: 15). Also Hendrickx (1996: 61-63) suggested that regional variation may have been obscured by Petrie's method of classification.

Further, following decades of archaeological excavations in the Nile Delta, it has also been suggested that as a result of the apparent northward expansion of the Naqada culture material remains of the Naqada III period had become so homogeneous in the entire Nile Valley and Delta that the term ‚cultural unification' was introduced. This has caused some archaeologists at northern sites to even label archaeological strata or phases of an advanced date ‚Naqadan' in contrast to an earlier ‚Buto-Maadi' or ‚Lower Egyptian' phase (*e.g.* VON DER WAY 1991-1997). In consequence of the problematic notion of an apparent homogeneity of the Naqada culture, this paper will also examine how ‚unified' the funerary material culture in early Naqada III really was, whether or not regionalism persisted for longer than previously assumed; and call into question the validity of the term ‚cultural unification'.

2. Regional comparisons

In order to examine regional pottery assemblages, it is unfortunately still necessary to work with cemetery data from the late 1890s and early 1900s which were classified with PETRIE's two pottery corpora (PETRIE 1921; 1953). This old database has significant limitations given a) the lack of scientific control and documentation of the excavations that PETRIE and his contemporaries conducted, b) the summary and incomplete publication of most of the sites they excavated and c) the built-in methodical problems with PETRIE's classification system, that reduced tens of thousands of hand-made pottery vessels to less than a dozen classes and some 1500 outline type drawings, and d) its subsequent arbitrary and often subjective application (these issues are also acknowledged and discussed in detail by HENDRICKX 1996: 44). More recent excavation projects have started to employ modern typological classification systems that also involve accurate technical drawings of all vessels encountered plus descriptions of their manufacture, clay fabrics and surface treatments. But many of these are not yet fully published and others still adhere to PETRIE's system for better comparability. And considering the thousands of tombs already excavated from the periods under study and the large number of vessels that have been registered, classified and thankfully entered into a database of more than 35000 entries by STAN HENDRICKX[2], there is at least the possibility to engage in a simple presence/absence statistic that only involves the major types *e.g.* R26, and not also the subtypes, *e.g.* R26E, in order to avoid arbitrary or erroneous type assignments and to remain within broader type groups.[3] Even with this restriction, there remains the major task for the analyst to manage thousands of data sets, which would certainly warrant a longer dissertation project than what can be offered here.

[2] I am grateful to STAN HENDRICKX for allowing me to use this database and for making useful suggestions on this paper. It is important to particularly mention his comment that our use of the word ‚type' is highly problematic in this context given that many of the vessels PETRIE published were only recorded once. Given that typologies are yet to be established for so many vessel groups, it might be more appropriate to refer to forms instead of types. The writer would also like to thank RITA HARTMANN and CHRISTIAN KNOBLAUCH for providing thoughts and feedback on this paper.

[3] Even this broad approach is not without problems as for example type 54 in PETRIE's *Proto-Dynastic Corpus* demonstrates. This type number comprises a variety of open and closed vessel shapes and should not be considered a ‚type' at all (PETRIE 1953: pl. X).

This is why this study will focus on a selection of sites and on dated graves only, *i.e.* graves that have received a date according to the Kaiser/Hendrickx Naqada Stufen system. The datasets were extracted from Hendrickx's database for a representative number of tombs and from various sites in different parts of Egypt primarily dating to Naqada IICD and Naqada IIIAB. Two separate analytical series were established which list the various corpus forms registered for each site in order to arrive at a presence/absence correlation.[4] The individual sites were then grouped in broad geographically defined regions. In some cases, certain diagnostic ceramic forms were identified in order to investigate the implications of these analyses in more detail. It would have been useful, too, to compare the combination of types, *i.e.* grave assemblages, with each other and across regions, but given the space restrictions this would be difficult to accommodate in this study. Hence, although the sheer quantity of data may be able to compensate for errors and omissions in the old tomb registers, the results achieved here always have to be taken *cum grano salis*.

2.1. Comparison of funerary pottery assemblages across the regions in late Naqada II

According to W. Kaiser, cemetery sites in the Egyptian Nile Valley between Hierakonpolis and Girza of Naqada phase IIC onwards are thought to belong to the Naqada culture following this culture's earlier expansion from a core area between Naqada and Abydos. This conclusion was drawn from the observation of an increasingly wider distribution of typical Naqada culture ceramic types that resulted in further homogenization of material culture beyond the original core area (Kaiser 1957: 75). Indeed, J. Seeher stated in 1987 that 'as early as Naqada I a stretch of over 400km along the Nile, from Assiut to Aswan, was settled by people with identical pottery' (Rizkana & Seeher 1987: 67). With that premise, it should be expected that the funerary assemblages of the cemeteries along this stretch of the Nile exhibit the same, or at least a very similar range of ceramic forms.

The data used for the comparison of funerary assemblages dating Naqada IICD between Girza and Hierakonpolis derive from a total of 1047 tombs at 12 sites distributed over the four regions of the Fayum area, around Badari, near Abydos, and in southern Upper Egypt (Tab. 1). In these regions, variable numbers of forms were recorded, the lowest number (N=129) was registered in the Fayum area, the highest in southern Upper Egypt (N=213), which is in part explained by the fact that Naqada was one of the sites upon which Petrie's *Prehistoric Corpus* was founded. This site alone contributes 186 forms to this count (but see below).

Table 2 shows the result of a comparison of 755 tombs from the stretch of Nile between Middle and Upper Egypt (Assiut to Aswan). In total 267 different forms were registered over 10 sites, but only 90 forms, 33% occur in both regions[5] (Fig. 1A) and even

[4] For the purpose of correlation, it was also necessary to only include those vessel numbers that occurred more than once.

[5] Although a different method was employed, this result is very comparable with Hendrickx's evaluation of the same area which concluded that *‚out of 339 types, 103 occur in all four regions* [Badari, Abydos, Naqada, Armant = 30,4% correspondence] (Hendrickx 1996: 63).

Table 1. Regional funerary assemblages of Naqada IICD used.

Region	Fayum	Badari	Abydos	Southern Upper Egypt
Sites included	Girza, Haraga	Matmar, Mostagedda, Badari, Qaw	Mahasna, Salamani, Amra	Naqada, Armant, Hierakonpolis
Number of tombs included	292	226	153	376
Number of Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms registered	129	151	162	213

less, *i.e.* 5 forms or 1,9% at all these sites. The types that the two regions have in common derive from seven pottery classes, the majority of which made of Nile silt and belonging to the Black Topped, Polished Red and Rough categories. This is significant because many of these are likely to have been produced locally. On the other hand, the common types also include 16 forms of the Decorated and Wavy Handle classes, which are pottery vessels made of Marl clays, produced in highly specialized workshops and traded over long distances for the sake of their contents. Some of the Late vessels, in particular L36-59, may also fall under this group. Although such trade commodities should not be discounted altogether, they only indicate that the regions were in commercial contact with each other. Considering that such vessels were also found in Nubia as well as in the southern Levant, they certainly cannot count as signs of cultural identity. At 33% correspondence, the ceramic assemblages of the two larger regions of Upper and Middle Egypt should not be considered identical or homogeneous and Seeher's generalizing statement, cited above, cannot be supported unless it could be demonstrated that correlations were greater in Naqada I than later.

However, when comparing sites at a more restricted regional level, such as southern Upper Egypt compared with northern Upper Egypt, *i.e.* the region around Abydos, the statistic looks slightly different. An analysis of 529 dated tombs from six sites can draw from a total of 229 forms (Tab. 3). 50% of forms (N=120) are shared between both regions and only 12 forms, 5,2%, occur at all six sites. However, this result also includes 27 vessel forms of the Decorated and Wavy Handle classes. Were these to be excluded, the correspondence would amount to only 41% for much of the core region of the Naqada culture. The regions of Abydos and Badari share 45% of forms, including 19 forms of the Decorated and Wavy Handle classes (Tab. 4), but only 3,8% of forms occur at all 7 sites analyzed.

Finally, the region of Badari has been compared with the sites of Girza and Haraga in the Fayum area (Tab. 5). They only have 38% of forms in common, including 15 Decorated and Wavy Handle forms, although this time, 5,1% of forms occur at all six sites in this dataset. When looking at the correlation of the four regions across the Nile Valley, the correspondences decrease in northward direction from 50% to 38% (Fig. 1B).[6]

[6] It would have been helpful to also include cemeteries from the Nile Delta in this evaluation, but unfortunately, there are only very few contemporary cemeteries of this period and even fewer that have been published to a satisfactory level allowing for an inclusion.

Table 2. Comparison Middle – Upper Egypt Regions.

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded at all 10 sites	
755	267	Black Topped:	B1, B11, B27, B35, B36, B38, B39, B42, B47, B53, B57, B58, B62, B66, B74, B76	Polished Red:	P40
		Decorated:	D1, D8, D10, D31, D41, D43, D50, D61, D63, D67, D68	Rough:	R69, R76, R81
		Fancy:	F15, F31, F80	Wavy Handle:	W43
		Late:	L7, L12, L16, L19, L30, L33, L36, L53, L59		
		Polished Red:	P11, P14, P21, P22, P23, P24, P26, P38, P40, P41, P45, P46, P57, P81, P82, P84, P85, P93, P95, P98		
		Rough:	R1, R3, R22, R23, R24, R26, R34, R38, R44, R65, R66, R67, R68, R69, R74, R75, R76, R81, R82, R83, R84, R85, R86, R91, R92, R94		
		Wavy Handle:	W3, W19, W41, W43, W47		
Correlation:		90 forms = 33%		5 forms = 1,9%	

Table 3. Comparison Abydos – Southern Upper Egypt Regions.

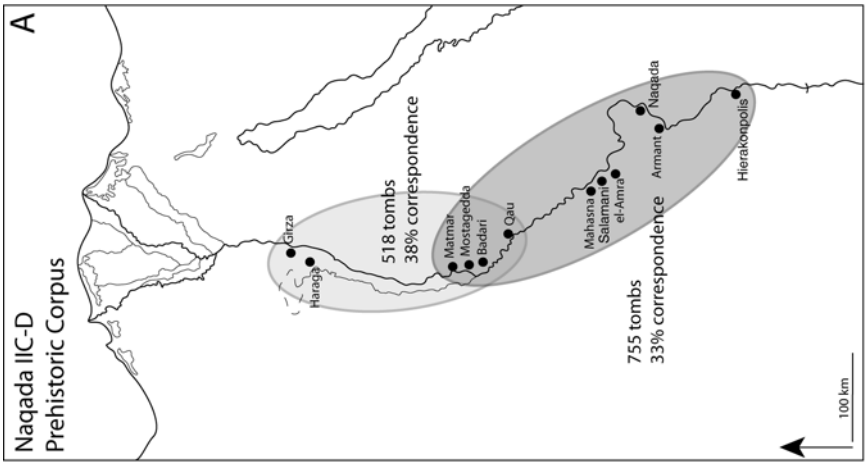
Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded at all 6 sites	
529	229	Black Topped:	B1, B2, B11, B24, B25, B27, B29, B35, B36, B37, B38, B39, B42, B47, B50, B53, B57, B58, B62, B66, B72, B74, B76	Late:	L7, L16, L53
		Decorated:	D1, D2, D8, D9, D10, D13, D14, D31, D33, D35, D36, D41, D43, D47, D50, D61, D63, D67, D68	Polished Red:	P40, P93
		Fancy:	F15, F31, F58, F80	Rough:	R26, R65, R69, R76, R81, R85
		Late:	L7, L12, L16, L17, L20, L21, L30, L33, L36, L40, L53, L59	Wavy Handle:	W43
		Polished Red:	P11, P14, P16, P21, P22, P23, P24, P26, P38, P40, P41, P42, P43, P45, P46, P47, P57, P81, P82, P85, P93, P95, P98		
		Rough:	R1, R3, R16, R21, R22, R23, R24, R26, R34, R38, R42, R44, R57, R65, R66, R67, R68, R69, R74, R75, R76, R81, R82, R83, R84, R85, R86, R91, R92, R93, R94		
		Wavy Handle:	W3, W14, W25, W19, W41, W42, W43, W47		
Correlation:		120 forms = 50%		12 forms = 5,2%	

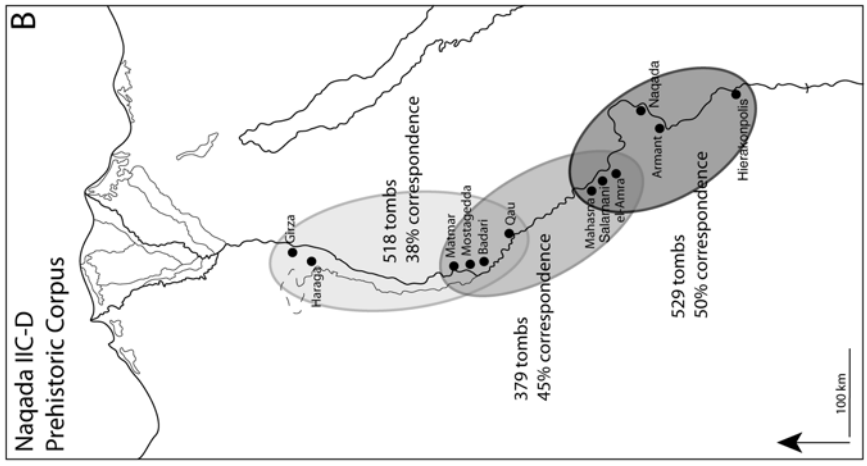
Table 4. Comparison Badari – Abydos Regions.

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded at all 7 sites	
379	207	Black Topped:	B1, B11, B27, B36, B38, B39, B42, B47, B53, B57, B58, B62, B66, B68, B74, B76	Black Topped:	B53
		Decorated:	D1, D8, D10, D31, D41, D43, D50, D61, D62, D63, D67, D68	Late:	L12
		Fancy:	F15, F31, F80	Polished Red:	P40
		Late:	L7, L12, L16, L30, L33, L36, L53, L59	Rough:	R69, R76, R81, R85
		Polished Red:	P11, P14, P21, P22, P23, P24, P26, P38, P40, P41, P45, P46, P57, P81, P82, P85, P93, P95, P98	Wavy Handle:	W43
		Rough:	R1, R3, R17, R22, R23, R24, R26, R34, R38, R44, R65, R66, R67, R68, R69, R71, R74, R75, R76, R81, R82, R83, R84, R85, R86, R90, R91, R92, R94		
		Wavy Handle:	W3, W19, W23, W41, W43, W44, W47		
Correlation:		94 forms = 45%		8 forms = 3,8%	

Table 5. Comparison Fayum - Badari Regions

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded at all 6 sites	
518	197	Black Topped:	B38, B39, B47, B53, B57, B76	Polished Red:	P24, P40
		Decorated:	D10, D11, D20, D34, D41, D43, D59, D60, D61, D62, D63, D67, D68	Rough:	R66, R69, R74, R75, R76, R81, R84, R94
		Fancy:	F31, F58, F80, F83, F85		
		Late:	L7, L12, L19, L53, L59		
		Polished Red:	P11, P14, P22, P23, P24, P38, P40, P41, P45, P46, P75, P81, P82, P84, P85, P93, P95, P96, P98		
		Rough:	R23, R24, R26, R33, R34, R44, R45, R61, R62, R63, R65, R66, R67, R68, R69, R71, R74, R75, R76, R81, R84, R85, R90, R91, R94		
		Wavy Handle:	W19, W23		
Correlation:		75 forms = 38%		10 forms = 5,1%	


A
Naqada IIC-D
Prehistoric Corpus
Giza
Haraga
Matmar
Mostagedda
Badari
Qau
Mahasna
Salamani
el-Amra
Armant
Naqada
Hierakonpolis
518 tombs
38% correspondence
755 tombs
33% correspondence
100 km


B
Naqada IIC-D
Prehistoric Corpus
Giza
Haraga
Matmar
Mostagedda
Badari
Qau
Mahasna
Salamani
el-Amra
Armant
Naqada
Hierakonpolis
518 tombs
38% correspondence
379 tombs
45% correspondence
529 tombs
50% correspondence
100 km

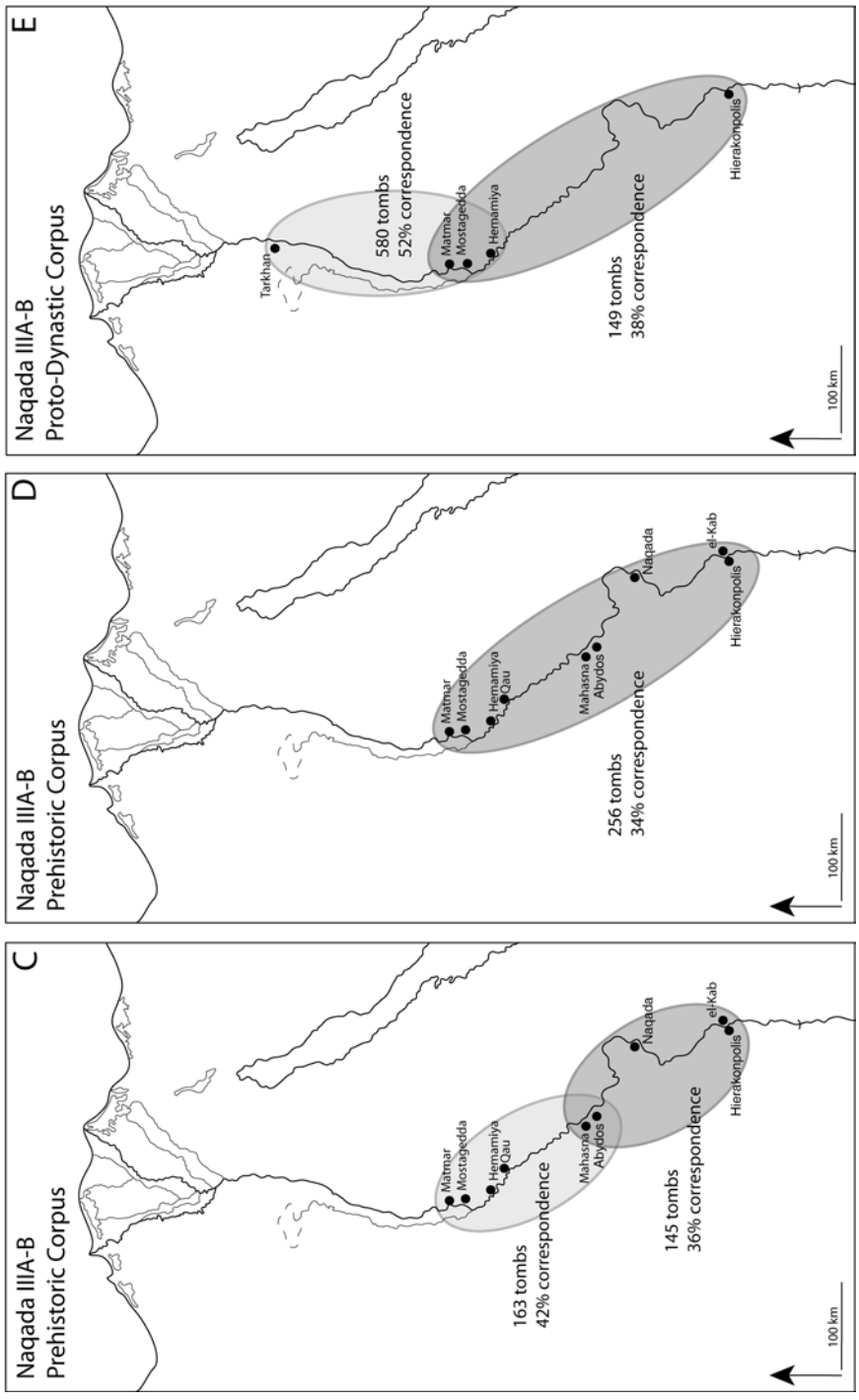
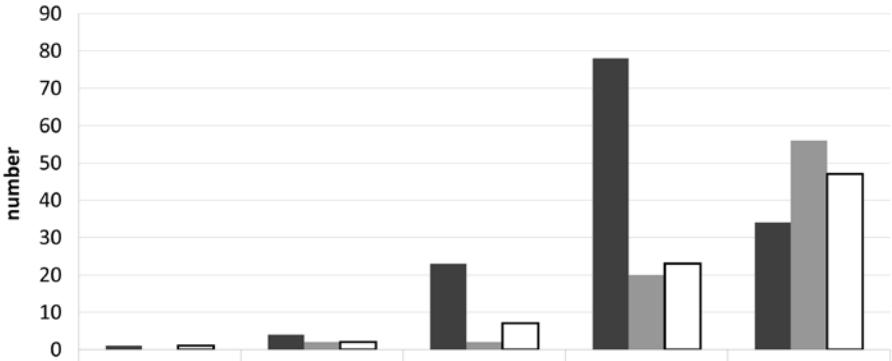


Figure 1. Correlation between regional funerary pottery assemblages based on Petrie's Corpus of Prehistoric Pottery and Corpus of Proto-Dynastic Pottery and Hendrickx's database.



	IC	IIA	IIB	IIC	IID
R69	1	4	23	78	34
R65		2	2	20	56
R66	1	2	7	23	47

Figure 2. Distribution of R69, R65 and R66 according to date (N=300).

In conclusion, these evaluations have one clear result, namely that funerary ceramic assemblages of the late Naqada II period in adjacent regions of the Egyptian Nile Valley never share more than half of the pottery forms registered. Although there are a few types that are consistently used across those regions, in particular P40, R69, R76 and R81, the different regions employed a varying spectrum of locally made ceramic types (especially Rough, Black Topped and Polished Red types) in addition to pottery vessels exchanged over longer distances (Decorated, Wavy Handle and some Late types). This is broadly consistent with Friedman's definition of regional pot-making traditions observed in Upper Egyptian settlements (Friedman 1994: 862) and forces us to reconsider the postulated homogeneity of the Naqada culture and the implications this result has for the wider questions surrounding the apparent cultural difference between northern and southern Egypt.

The implications can be illustrated with an interesting detail that arose from the same statistical analyses. Among the most frequently occurring ceramic forms are small vessels of Nile silt with restricted necks and globular or ovoid bodies, Petrie's R65, R66, R67, R68 and R69. This writer has noted previously[7] that their consistent appearance in settlements and cemeteries of the Nile Delta, prior to the postulated arrival of the ‚Naqadans', indicated that sites such as Minshat Abu Omar should not be interpreted as trading posts or pioneer colonies of the Naqada culture (Kaiser 1987: 124), but should be understood within their regional Lower Egyptian context. This thought was further pursued by N. Buchez and B. Midant-Reynes when they discussed those vessels from Kom el-Khilgan in the Nile

[7] At the Toulouse Origins conference of 2005 (*cf.* Köhler 2008). See also Mączyńska *in press*.

Delta and proposed that they actually represented a cultural marker of Lower Egyptian culture (Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007; 2011). This conclusion was primarily based on the observation that the earlier variant R69 (also known as ‚lemon-shaped' vessels) probably developed from comparable vessel forms in the Maadi/Wadi Digla assemblages and also occurred in much lower numbers in the south. In view of our analyses, both points can be supported in principle, but they may also require a more nuanced interpretation. In Buchez and Midant-Reynes' analysis of the Haraga cemeteries the vessels under discussion were divided into type R69, being more elongated in shape, and the more globular types R65-66, and the authors suggested that R69 was the earlier and R65-66 the later variants, which generally can be confirmed. For this study, dated tombs containing these forms have been extracted from Hendrickx's database and plotted according to date. The graph in Figure 2 shows that R69 increases in number and dominates during early Naqada II, whereas R65 and R66 increase slightly later until they outnumber R69 in Naqada IID. Importantly, however, one type does not replace the other, but there is a gradual shift from one more common form to the other over time.

These vessels can all be described as being of small size (usually c. 10-15cm, rarely over 20cm height, Fig. 3), hand-made from a coarse mixture of Nile silt, tempered with straw and sand and fired at medium-low temperatures. Their surface is wet smoothed and rough, frequently coated with a thin colourless, micaceous slip.[8] Importantly, they occur in settlements as well as in cemetery contexts, although there does not seem to be agreement on just how common they are. Buchez and Midant-Reynes observed at Adaima that fragments of such vessels were poorly represented in the settlement sector (Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2011: 840), whereas R. Friedman, who classed them under Type 2d, noted that they were common to all settlement sites in the Badari, Naqada and Hierakonpolis regions (Friedman 1994: 908).

For broader comparative purposes it will be necessary to also include R67 and R68 because they not only share the same characteristics but are also easily confused with R65, 66 and 69. Together, Petrie's R65, R66, R67, R68 and R69 comprise 23 sub-forms (Petrie 1921: pl. XL).[9] It has been suggested that the elongated, lemon-shaped varieties are not only earlier, but also that their origin may be sought in the Maadi/Wadi Digla assemblages (Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007; 2011). This is very possible but requires closer examination. If this sequence were to be established with certainty, it would then probably describe a gradual development from the more elongated shapes with slightly polished or wet smoothed surface (Maadi Type 3a; Fig. 3: 1-2) to a reduction in size, quality and volume of the shorter, more globular type (Fig. 3: 7, 12). The numerous variations along the way (Fig. 3: 3-6, 8-11) and their chronological overlap, however, undermine any attempt at separating them as distinct types. Because of the aforementioned chronological development as well as their general morphological

[8] Of all the specimens this writer has seen so far, this detail of the micaceous slip is common in both Lower and Upper Egypt.

[9] It is possible that R70 and R90 also belong to this group of vessels.

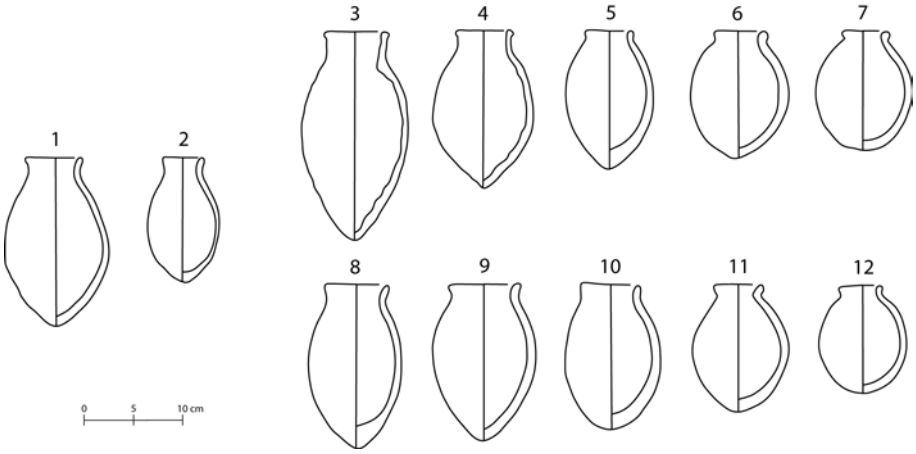
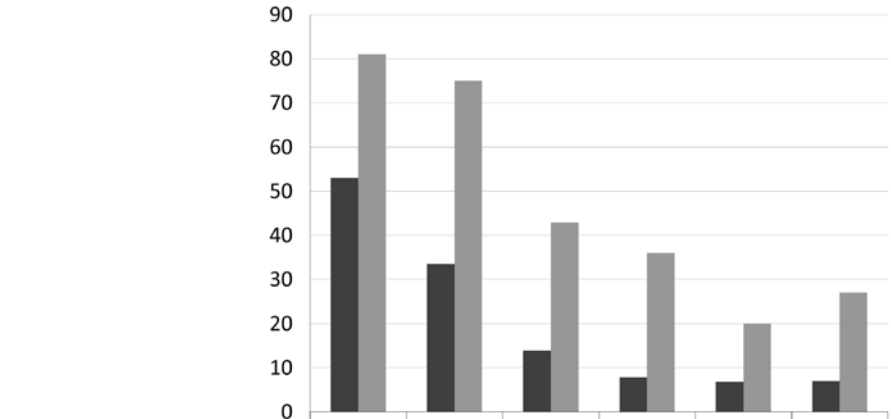


Figure 3. Possible typological sequence of Type 3a at Maadi and R69-65 (nos. 1-2: Maadi, Nos. 3-4 Kom el-Khilgan, nos. 5-12 Salamani. Based on Rizkana & Seeher 1987; El Sayed 1979; Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007).

and technological similarities, these vessels will be considered as one type group here in order to examine their geographical distribution. To this end, Hendrickx's database, which is largely based on cemeteries south of Maadi, and other published data[10] was consulted resulting in a data set of over 1600 dated graves from 14 sites of the Naqada II period. These produced 1144 specimens of R65-69 from a total of 7231 registered pottery vessels. On average, they make up 15,8% of the entire ceramic assemblage of dated Naqada II tombs across the Egyptian Nile Valley. Because there are so few early cemeteries in the north that have also been classified with Petrie's corpus, and in order to enhance the statistical comparability across the Nile Valley, it will be necessary to focus on the graves from the late Naqada II period (Fig. 4).

In agreement with Buchez and Midant-Reynes, the data show that the further south a site is located, the less is the quantity these vessels take within the overall ceramic assemblage (Fig. 4: dark grey columns) and one is tempted to conclude that a presence of less than 10%, such as across Upper Egypt, would indicate that these vessels played only a marginal role in southern assemblages. Conversely, northern sites exhibit far greater numbers. For example at Minshat Abu Omar (MAO), these vessels make up more than 50% of the pottery assemblage in the early graves and it would be appropriate to conclude that they are indeed more common in the north. On the other hand, this study also examined the context occurrence, *i.e.* the number of tombs where such vessels occurred (Fig. 4: light grey columns), which additionally allows for a more comprehensive picture. In the north such vessels feature in more than 80% of tombs whereas in the

[10] In particular from the more recent publications on Minshat Abu Omar as well as Girza.



	MAO	Fayum Region	Badari Region	Abydos Region	Naqada Region	HK
percent of R65-69 of all pots	53	33,5	13,9	7,8	6,8	7
percent of tombs with R65-69	81	75	42,9	36	20	27

Figure 4. Distribution of R65-69 across different sites and regions in late Naqada II.

regions south of the Nile Delta, this number gradually drops to 20%.[11] But it is also important to look at these vessels' distribution at a regional level. For example in the region of Abydos, comprising the sites of Mahasna, Salamani, Abydos and el-Amra, there is great variance between 21% of tombs at Salamani and 59% of tombs at el-Amra containing such vessels. This is significant when more than half of the tombs at el-Amra contained these vessels, the majority being the lemon-shaped form R69, which have recently been labelled a cultural marker of the north. If that thought were to be followed in its consequence, one would have to ask if the owners of such tombs with R69 were northerners and if southern cemeteries with a high percentage of tombs containing R69 were mixed cemeteries.[12] Further, some of the more poorly equipped tombs in the south, such as Badari 9303[13] or Hierakonpolis HK27/93[14], to mention but two, not only contain this form, but generally also pottery assemblages that are very comparable to northern assemblages at Haraga and Girza as well as at Minshat. In other cases, such as tomb 22 at Salamani, tomb 1563 at Armant as well as tombs 364 and 823 at Naqada, these vessels

[11] The figures from Naqada are to be treated with great caution because vessels of the Rough class seem to be underrepresented in the tomb registers, where more than 60% of tombs of Naqada IICD date did not contain any such vessels. The percentage of tombs containing no Rough pottery at other sites in the south is between 10% and 25% and the low occurrence at Naqada is therefore most unusual. It is not clear if this is due to incomplete recording or indeed reflects reality (see also Hendrickx 1996: 63).

[12] As has been suggested for Girza and Haraga where the combination of southern and northern traits has been equally interpreted as evidence for a mixture of two cultures or ethnies; but see below.

[13] Containing only forms R65, R68, R69 and R94.

[14] Containing only forms R69 (3x) and R76.

represent the only ceramic grave goods recorded, rendering the pottery from these tombs indistinguishable from certain Lower Egyptian graves.[15] The notion of the lemon-shaped vessels being a cultural marker of the north would therefore be difficult to sustain.

When considering this type group's chronological development over a period of some four hundred years between their first appearance in late Naqada I[16]/Maadi/Wadi Digla and their latest occurrence in early Naqada III as well as their wide geographical distribution and morphological variability, it would be reasonable to suggest that, although they may have a northern ancestry, their further typological development occurred contiguously in the different regions.[17] This can be argued especially because of their small volume and poor quality, which would not support the notion of them being manufactured as a specialized trade commodity in one area and then continuously exported over long distances and over such a long period of time.

These figures bring home two very important points; one being that using these vessels as an indication of cultural identity is not advisable (*cf.* also Stevenson 2009). The other point confirms the general observation about the variability of ceramic assemblages in the area traditionally assigned to the Naqada culture, considering that the occurrence of such vessels ranges between 75% and 20% in just that area. Although the presentation of data here is highly abbreviated and would deserve far more in-depth analysis and interpretation, the examples used and results achieved raise a number of questions surrounding the notion of the Naqada culture as a concept of cultural or ethnic identity. These statistics indicate that late Naqada II funerary ceramic assemblages between the area of the Fayum and southern Upper Egypt exhibit a high level of regional variation, which is in accordance with observations made for the settlements. Although these regions were clearly in contact with each other, as suggested by traded commodities such as Decorated and Wavy Handle pottery and other goods, the spectrum of ceramics likely produced at a regional level (the Rough class as well as Polished Red and Black Topped pottery) varies so significantly that it would be difficult to still argue in favour of overall homogeneity.

2.2. Comparison of funerary pottery assemblages across the regions in early Naqada III

The more excavations at sites in the Nile Delta started to yield material evidence relevant to the question about the roles of Upper and Lower Egypt in the emergence of the early Egyptian territorial state, the more solidified became doubts about the notion of a conquest, invasion or violent takeover of the North by the South as is opaquely suggested by later

[15] It has been emphasized as a significant northern detail by Buchez and Midant-Reynes that some graves at Kom el-Khilgan as well as at Haraga only contained the lemon shaped vessels.

[16] According to Hendrickx' database the earliest occurrence of R69 seems to be in Armant, tomb 1417 dating Naqada IC; R66 occurs first at Salamani tomb 66, also in Naqada IC. The other types of this group appear during Naqada II. However, the author is grateful to Rita Hartman for pointing out that the early date of just those two tombs at Armant and Salamani may need to be corrected.

[17] It is possible that the more necked varieties are more typical for the north, although such vessels have also been recorded in the south, *e.g.* at Armant (*cf.* Mond & Myers 1937: pl. XXVI). Petrie's type R90 could also be a candidate for such a necked form.

Table 6. Regional funerary assemblages of Naqada IIIAB (Prehistoric Corpus).

Region	Badari	Abydos	Southern Upper Egypt
Sites included	Matmar, Mostagedda, Hemamiya, Qaw	Mahasna, Abydos*	Naqada, El-Kab, Hierakonpolis
Number of tombs included	111	52	93
Number of forms registered	51	67	91

Table 7. Regional funerary assemblages of Naqada IIIAB (Proto-Dynastic Corpus).

Region	Fayum	Middle Egypt	Upper Egypt
Sites included	Tarkhan	Matmar, Mostagedda, Hemamiya	Hierakonpolis
Number of tombs included	473	149	42
Number of forms registered	68	42	20

Pharaonic mythology.[18] Because this notion of conflict could not be substantiated with material evidence, the idea of a cultural process, the ‚cultural unification' of Egypt, was proposed during the early 1990s and pursued ever since, although an ethnic dimension was never fully abandoned. This concept takes the continuous expansion of the Naqada culture from its core zone between Abydos and Naqada as the point of departure and eventually culminates in this culture encompassing also the region around Memphis and the inner Nile Delta by early Naqada III, thereby resulting in only one culture of Upper and Lower Egypt (von der Way 1991-1997; Kaiser 1957-1995). The assumed ‚arrival of the Naqadans' has since been examined in a number of studies and various scenarios of interaction have been added to the discussion, including small-scale migration, acculturation and integration. Although these are acknowledged to be a matter of interpretation, the notion of one material culture of Naqada III, with a ‚registre commun'[19] as a homogeneous entity, was seen in extension of this culture's previous expansion and has long persisted.

The task is to test if the pottery assemblages of this stage exhibit a greater degree of uniformity than previously, although it must be remembered that such uniformity could actually not be established for the south in the first place. This exercise, however, has one great hindrance because some tombs of early Naqada III were classified with Petrie's *Prehistoric*, others with the *Protodynastic Corpus* and again others with entirely different classification systems. It will therefore be necessary to treat such sites separately, which

[18] W. Kaiser pondered such doubts already in his early work, *e.g.* 1957: 75; 1964: 114, but continuously returned to his more favored hypothesis of ethnic migration and conquest as that seemed to better reflect the iconography of the time (*e.g.* Kaiser 1990; 1995). The iconography, however, is also not without ambiguities, especially in this context (*cf.* Köhler 2002).

[19] Buchez and Midant-Reynes recently explained this expansion by a process of acculturation, but an expansion from south to north explicitly remains as the underlying premise in their model (*cf.* Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007).

also reduces the level of interregional comparability as the number of tombs in different regions of the same date, which have been classified according to the same system, is now very small. The number of tombs used between Matmar and Hierakonpolis dating Naqada IIIAB and classified by the *Prehistoric Corpus* is 256, whereas the number of tombs used between Tarkhan and Hierakonpolis classified by the *Proto-Dynastic Corpus* is 622 (Tabs. 6-7). Particularly problematic with the *Proto-Dynastic* comparison is that there is only Hierakonpolis in all of Upper Egypt that fulfils the above mentioned criteria, but this site is represented with only 42 graves, which stands in contrast with Tarkhan that features 473 dated tombs. It will therefore be necessary to consider the comparisons of both corpora in order to balance out this statistical unevenness (Fig. 1: C-D).

The greatest consistency arises from the comparison of Tarkhan in the Fayum area with three sites in the region of Badari exhibiting 52% correspondence of types (Tab. 8), which does represent an increase from Naqada II. Although it is more difficult to identify ceramic vessels, which were obviously manufactured for interregional exchange in the *Proto-Dynastic Corpus*, forms 43, 46, 47, 60, 74 and 81, in particular the typological descendents of Wavy Handle and certain Late vessels, are likely candidates. For example form 46, also comprising cylindrical vessels with wavy relief decoration and painted net-designs, is usually made of a very distinct pink Marl clay which probably has its source in Upper Egypt. Vessels like these occur at almost all early Naqada III sites, even at archaeological sites in the Nile Delta, but were in all probability produced in specialized manufacturing centres in the south and traded with other regions.

Comparing the region of Badari with Abydos (Tab. 9) the correspondence in the *Prehistoric Corpus* is 42%, and Northern and Southern Upper Egypt combined show 36% correlation (Tab. 10). When collating the data from both corpora for all of Middle and Upper Egypt, the correspondences are 34% and 38%, respectively (Tabs. 11-12), again with numerous vessel types probably being trade goods. What is very interesting in comparison to the previous Naqada II period, where the degree of correspondence increased in southward direction from 38% to 50%, it is the exact opposite with 52% to 36% in early Naqada III. Also, correlations across Middle and Upper Egypt never exceed 40% in either period and either corpus.

Again, this analysis causes us to seek the postulated uniformity of assemblages in Naqada IIIAB, but when the greatest degree of correlation is at 52%, *i.e.* only 2 percentage points up from the greatest value in Naqada IICD, it may ultimately be a question of semantics and definitions: what makes homogeneity? Is it justified to speak of homogeneous ceramic assemblages when less than half of the forms are undoubtedly manufactured in local ceramic workshops and for local consumption? Is it possible that this oft-cited, yet unconvincing Naqada III uniformity rather represents an extension from equally unfounded concepts of cultural identity in Naqada II that were ultimately the result of ill-conceived projections from ancient Egyptian mythology and state ideology? The answer may come from later periods of Pharaonic material culture and its development over time.

Table 8. Comparison Fayum – Middle Egypt Region (Proto-Dynastic Corpus).

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Proto-Dynastic Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions	Forms recorded at all 4 sites
580	69	1, 2, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 25, 27, 36, 43, 46, 47, 54*, 55, 56, 60, 63, 65, 67, 70, 73, 74, 81, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 94, 95	46, 47, 60, 87, 88
Correlation:		36 forms = 52%	5 forms = 7,2%

* Form 54 comprises a very heterogeneous group of open and closed vessel shapes and should therefore be disregarded

Table 9. Comparison Middle Egypt and Abydos Region (Prehistoric Corpus).

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Forms recorded at all 6 sites	
163	80	Decorated:	D21, D24, D66	Late:	L36, L53
		Late:	L12, L16, L17, L30, L31, L33, L36, L42, L43, L44, L47, L53, L58		
		Polished Red:	P23, P40		
		Rough:	R1, R22, R23, R24, R26, R36		
		Wavy Handle:	W49, W50, W51, W55, W58, W60, W61, W62, W71, W80		
Correlation:		34 forms = 42%		2 forms = 2,5%	

Table 10. Comparison Abydos – Southern Upper Egypt Region (Prehistoric Corpus).

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Forms recorded at all 5 sites	
145	111	Decorated:	D21, D24, D66	Late:	L17, L30, L33, L36, L43, L53
		Late:	L12, L16, L17, L30, L31, L33, L36, L42, L43, L44, L47, L53, L58, L59	Rough:	R26
		Polished Red:	P23, P40	Wavy Handle:	W51, W62
		Rough:	R22, R23, R24, R26, R36, R57, R65, R81, R84		
		Wavy Handle:	W47, W49, W50, W51, W55, W56, W58, W60, W61, W62, W71, W80, W85		
Correlation:		40 forms = 36%		9 forms = 8,1%	

Table 11. Comparison Badari – Upper Egypt Region (Prehistoric Corpus).

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Prehistoric Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions		Forms recorded at all 9 sites	
256	120	Decorated:	D20, D21, D24, D66	Late:	L36, L53
		Rough:	R1, R22, R23, R24, R26, R28, R36, R88		
		Wavy Handle:	W43, W49, W50, W51, W55, W58, W60, W61, W62, W71, W80		
Correlation:		41 forms = 34%		2 forms = 1,7%	

Table 12. Comparison Middle – Upper Egypt Region (Proto-Dynastic Corpus).

Number of tombs used in both regions	Number of forms recorded in either or both regions	Proto-Dynastic Pottery Corpus forms recorded in both regions	Forms recorded at all 4 sites
149	42	1, 3, 16, 46, 56, 60, 63, 65, 70, 73, 81, 87, 90, 92, 94, 95	46, 60, 87
Correlation:		16 forms = 38%	3 forms = 7%

3. Comparison of early Naqada III with later periods preceding and following political unification

Pharaonic history can be characterized by an alternating rhythm of periods with strong, centralized political and economic control (as during certain dynasties of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms) and periods of decentralization and political fragmentation of the country (during the three so-called Intermediate Periods[20]). Although the specific historical circumstances for each period differ greatly each time, these phases have a number of general traits. The periods of decentralized governments and regional kingdoms saw a degree of regional autonomy; they could last for more than 300 years with relatively long periods of political stability and prolific interregional exchange. Later, the rulers of new, increasingly dominant dynasties aimed to unify the country under their political power and to reintegrate the other territories into a centralized economic system. The latter however, was not immediately achieved as soon as the country was unified under one dynasty's rule; the process of economic and administrative reintegration of all towns and villages along the river often took a long time and involved the new foundation or deliberate re-establishment of old primary centres (*e.g.* Itj-Tawi, Memphis, Thebes) and dependent secondary centres in order to respond to economic and administrative demands. Hence, when regarding *la longue durée* of almost 3000 years of Pharaonic history, periods of continuously strong political and economic control, as probably during the 4th, 5th, 6th, 12th, 18th, 19th and early 20th Dynasties, are actually the exception, rather than the rule, and burn down to about a third of this time. Unsurprisingly, the development of industries and of material culture followed these dynamics and any delays in economic integration are well-visible in the pottery assemblages of the time. For example, in his comprehensive analysis of the cemeteries from the Old to the Middle Kingdoms, S. Seidlmayer observed that during the First Intermediate Period the ceramic assemblages developed along different regional patterns in Lower and Upper Egypt. The material culture of the provincial sites adhered to these regional traditions until well into the 12th Dynasty, *i.e.* for about 150 years after the point of political unification by king Menthuhotep II of the 11th Dynasty and the historical end of the First Intermediate Period (Seidlmayer 1990). Similarly, archaeologists in the eastern Nile Delta (Tell el-Daba) have observed strong continuity in the composition of ceramic assemblages from the Second Intermediate Period onwards, *i.e.* until about 100-130 after the re-unification of the country by the Theban kings of the 18th Dynasty. The fact that the ceramics hardly changed initially resulted in an incorrect dating of archaeological layers (Bietak *et al.* 1994; Aston 2007). And again, D. Aston observed a time lag of about 100 years after the historical end of the Third Intermediate Period before increased uniformity of ceramic assemblages was again achieved under the rule of the late 26th Dynasty (Aston 1996).

[20] The term ‚Intermediate Period' and the traditionally negative associations with these phases of Egyptian history have been under sound review in modern Egyptology and are no longer considered periods of social or cultural decline, but rather of stronger regional character.

These delays can be easily explained through the locally dominant roles that the political centres of the various regions and provinces played during the Intermediate Periods, which resulted in a regional pottery manufacture that mainly catered for local consumption. It was only in times of strong political control, such as during the later 12th Dynasty when potters' workshops were fully established in the new capital city Itj-Tawi that such economic patterns could be changed and that the workshops of the primary centre again catered for interregional demand and thereby also set the standards for the provinces causing increased homogeneity of material culture. It therefore would be useful to compare the situation of Predynastic and Proto-Dynastic Egypt with those periods of political and economic fragmentation and to use these as analogues for the time before and after the first political unification of the country.

4. Interpretation

This paper has tried to examine the validity of certain archaeological concepts surrounding the interpretation of material culture in early Egypt. Certainly, terms such as ‚culture', ‚identity', ‚ethnicity', ‚acculturation', ‚integration', ‚diffusion', ‚exchange' and the like offer possibilities to explain material difference and change. But it is necessary to use caution and to be sure about each concept's criteria of definition as well as their implications. To this writer, the uncritical use and mixture of such concepts in the past has caused a series of misunderstandings and problematic interpretations that are unhelpful in furthering our learning about early Egypt. And one of these is the linking of pottery assemblages to cultural, ethnic or political identity. This simple equation has been well deconstructed in different parts of the world of archaeology over the past 20 years (*e.g.* Renfrew 1993; Jones 1997; Sherratt 2005 and in particular Hall 1997-2009) and it is opportune that Egyptian archaeology also embrace this awareness. The questions pertinent to the topic of these proceedings, and especially to this paper, are if it is still appropriate to apply early 20th century definitions and distinctions to the cultures of Predynastic Egypt and if any observed variances in material remains are indicative of discrete cultures or ethnic groups.

The issues raised in this paper are very significant because they are generally considered to be at the core of the discourse on the emergence of the ancient Egyptian territorial state. This writer and many others have repeatedly pointed out that one would be ill-advised to employ ancient ideologies and mythologies of Pharaonic kingship and power as a historical source to interpret archaeological evidence. Although this retrospective approach is no longer considered appropriate by most scholars, the consequences of its past application are still present and influential on archaeological interpretations, if perhaps only unintentionally. This is especially relevant to studies on the Nile Delta in Predynastic times since the role of Lower Egypt in the traditional scholarly narratives is one of receiving cultural input, rather than actively contributing to the process of state formation in early Egypt (*e.g.* Seeher 1990; 1991; 1992; but see also Köhler *in press*).

The results of the data analysis comparing funerary pottery assemblages of late Naqada II have one clear outcome: the locally manufactured funerary assemblages across the Nile Valley and Delta share certain characteristics, in particular those types that occur at most sites considered (*i.e.* P40, R65, R69, R74, R75, R76, R81, R84 and R85), which correspond well to types also shared in the domestic sphere, thus supporting the notion of certain common economic and behavioural patterns and, to a degree, of underlying cultural consistency which includes the Nile Delta. However, the correspondences cannot be regarded sufficient to speak of overall uniformity, especially in Middle and Upper Egypt, where such homogeneity had been postulated for a long time. The degree by which the assemblages of the regions in the south increasingly differ from one another in northward direction is very indicative. One could say that the characteristics commonly ascribed to the Naqada culture decrease continuously as one travels down the Nile river and the further north a site is located the less commonalities it has with the south. In consequence, the funerary pottery assemblages of the Nile Delta should be regarded as a continuation of this trend of regional variation and should not be interpreted as representing a different cultural entity, unless a case be made that also the southern regions each represented a different culture, which would also be difficult to sustain. The assemblages at Girza and Haraga have long been acknowledged to be of a mixed character (Kaiser 1990; von der Way 1993: 91; Stevenson 2009; Buchez & Midant-Reynes 2007; 2011). But this detail does not necessarily bear witness to a mixture of two cultures or ethnic groups, but rather to an organic blending of material traits of neighbouring regions in the north and south. Material culture in the Fayum area is as much extracted from and has correlations with Lower Egyptian as with Middle Egyptian assemblages.

Conversely, there is an insufficient degree of increased homogeneity in the locally produced assemblages of early Naqada III in comparison to Naqada II to suggest that the entire Egyptian Nile Valley and Delta now formed part one cultural entity in the sense of ‚cultural unification'. Overall, the degree of uniformity has only increased by a small percentage and the regions continue to manufacture much of their own pottery according to their local demands and resources. This time, however, the correspondences of regional assemblages decrease in a southward direction. In contrast to Naqada II, the larger production centres of Naqada III no longer seem to be located mainly in the south, but also concentrate around the area of later Memphis from where increased standardization can be detected as time goes by. In both periods, certain ceramic types are produced in centralized, specialized workshops which also cater for interregional trade. This flourishing exchange of commodities, which is not reduced to pottery, but also comprises secondary products stored therein, as well as tools, stone vessels and cosmetic utensils etc. is the material evidence for close interregional contacts, which were certainly mediated by people who engaged in such trade and exchange. A similar case could be made with Levantine merchants who may have settled in Maadi and Buto to facilitate interregional trade between the Nile Valley and the Levant in the early 4th Millennium BC, causing a degree of influence on the character of material culture, including

house structures, ceramics and lithics. However, no modern archaeologist would want to propose that there was a substantive Levantine migration to or conquest of Egypt. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that larger groups of Upper Egyptians left their homeland and took with them their entire, or even partial set of material culture, technologies and ideologies which they then transplanted in the new area they decided to settle in and control, which is the reasoning behind the concept of Naqada culture expansion. Even if most modern archaeologists would no longer speak of large scale migrations and would rather consider concepts such as acculturation, they still work with the premise of a cultural expansion of the Naqada culture from south to north. For this premise, however, there is simply no evidence, given that what is considered as typical Naqada material culture not only thins out from south to north, but also that northern elements equally spread to the south.

This exchange of material culture is evidence for well established channels of contact along the Nile river which were the actual means of transport through which not only material values, but also ideological and religious concepts were conveyed over long distances with the effect that the regions eventually adopted ideas and customs of their neighbours. It is very possible that one region was the source of inspiration for certain concepts or innovations at a certain time, but such stimulation never remained unidirectional. Instead, there was a continuous and dynamic flow of ideas from different directions; cultural cross-pollination involving north, middle and south as well as areas adjacent to the Nile Valley. It is probably not a coincidence that just at the time when this interregional exchange was at its most active, boat representations became one of the most frequent motifs in two-dimensional art (especially painted media, such as pottery, textile and wall painting, as well as rock art).

We have noted above that despite the observed regional variations in Naqada II there is a degree of consistency in material culture from the Nile Delta to the very south of Egypt, which applies to both the settlements as well as the cemeteries, and importantly, to the locally manufactured material. This observation is perhaps far more important than the regional differences, because it can assist in understanding a significant notion that has been rarely appreciated in the modern literature on the subject. It has been observed previously that the ceramic and lithic assemblages of the Neolithic and early Chalcolithic stages already indicate a degree of material consistency, although to a lesser degree than later. This can be explained, at least in part, because also other key aspects, such as comparable economic and ecological conditions may have resulted in common behavioural patterns already at this early stage. Across the Nile Valley in Predynastic times, the villages' subsistence primarily depended on the growing of crops, such as emmer wheat and barley, as well as the breeding of farm animals, in particular sheep, goats and cattle, although the domesticated pig seemed to be better adapted to the more humid climate of the north (Abd El Karem 2013). This subsistence basis represents the essential foundation upon and around which the lives of Nile Valley inhabitants were centred, and which structured the distribution of labour and overall economic management. Whether they lived in the

Delta or in Upper Egypt, they were equally dependent on the annual river floods, built and organized their dwellings accordingly and subscribed to the same annual plantation and harvest cycles, although it has been suggested that pastoralism of a Saharo-Sudanese character played a greater role in the south in the earlier periods (Wengrow 2006: 45). But ever since the transition to these Neolithic subsistence strategies had been accomplished, the village communities were mostly concerned with the demands of their day-to-day subsistence economy, which was very comparable across the Egyptian Nile Valley, and distinct from neighboring regions, which possibly contributed to forging comparable ideas of land ownership, belonging and identity. Although there was a high degree of mobility in early prehistoric times, Pre- and Protodynastic farmers were probably very much bound to their land and their crops; there was also no cause for mobility at that time. This is supported by regional studies in Predynastic settlement patterns, especially in the Abydos area (Patch 2004: 914-916), which demonstrate that population was relatively low at all times and that there is no indication of a variation in population density as a result of population shifts from south to north.

Similarly, it is today recognized that earlier suggestions of an unequal social development in north and south are unfounded. Although north and south may have expressed certain ideologies as well as social and economic differentiation differently, as can be measured for example by the effort some southern communities invested in their funerary culture, they both exhibit a comparable overall level of social complexity in Pre- and Proto-Dynastic times (Köhler 2008; *in press*). This is not to say that, apart from featuring contracted burials in pit tombs furnished with grave goods, Maadian burial customs are in any way comparable to elite burial customs at Hierakonpolis, especially when considering HK6 with its unusual architecture and numerous animal burials. But neither can the latter in any way be compared to those at Naqada or elsewhere. It is of utmost importance to avoid such simple contrasts between north and south, because also burial customs in the south, and how they potentially reflect their performers' social or economic complexity, are not homogeneous. Importantly, they also continue to differ in later, Pharaonic periods.

We can therefore conclude that despite the acknowledged differences in material culture, which persist well into the Naqada III period, north and south shared a degree of cultural, social and economic complexity which further increased over time. Now these factors are the very foundation, upon which modern archaeology builds its definition of early civilizations (in summary: Trigger 2003: 43-52), and it is just these defining criteria that are becoming increasingly evident during the later 4th Millennium BC. Ultimately, they set down the parameters from which early Egyptian civilization could emerge as '*the larger social order and set of shared values*' (Yoffee 2005: 17) in which the Proto-Dynastic regional kingdoms were culturally embedded and upon which the first territorial state of Egypt was founded. Finally, the absence of uniformity in the material assemblages before the 1st Dynasty, *i.e.* prior to political and economic integration, is not a question of lacking cultural identity, but of lacking centralized economic control in a political landscape of numerous regional polities and kingdoms.

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