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La chronologie relative de la Basse Vallée du Nil jusqu'au 3<sup>e</sup> millénaire BC  
(coord. E.C. Köhler)

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# Naqada IIIC-D – The end of the Naqada Culture?

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*This article gives a brief overview of a number of key archaeological sites, where the stages Naqada IIIC and D, which historically correspond to Dynasties 1 and 2, are well represented and where they can be studied in well-defined sequences. It also examines certain artifact types as potential index fossils and identifies those areas of evidence where promise is given for a more comprehensive relative chronology of this period. Importantly, this article also highlights problems with the current definition of sub-stages. The fact that the end of the period Naqada IIID has as yet not been successfully defined, especially as there is consistent evidence for a continuation of ceramic typologies into the material culture of the Old Kingdom, is of particular importance, raising significant conceptual questions regarding the validity of the term Naqada Culture.*

*Cet article donne un bref aperçu d'un certain nombre de sites archéologiques clés, où les phases Naqada IIIC et D, qui correspondent historiquement à la 1<sup>re</sup> et la 2<sup>e</sup> dynastie, sont bien représentées et peuvent être étudiées selon des séquences correctement définies. La présente étude examine également les types d'artefacts qui peuvent être utilisés comme fossiles directeurs et identifie les catégories les plus prometteuses pour l'élaboration d'une chronologie relative plus complète pour la période considérée. Cet article a surtout pour but de mettre en évidence les problèmes liés au découpage actuel de la chronologie nagadienne. Le fait que la fin de la période Naqada IIID n'ait pas encore été complètement définie, notamment parce qu'il y a des preuves évidentes que les typologies céramiques perdurent durant l'Ancien Empire, est d'une importance toute particulière, soulevant ainsi des questions conceptuelles significatives quant à la validité du terme « Culture de Naqada ».*

## Introduction

The last two phases of what is currently defined as Naqada III represent a relatively seamless continuation from the previous stages, which is especially apparent when considering the typological development of Petrie's Wavy Handled Class, in particular cylindrical vessels (Hendrickx 1996; 1999; Köhler 2004), upon which its definition and subdivision largely relies. Phase Naqada IIIC exhibits a relatively well defined chronological sequence resulting from intensive synchronization of ceramic typology with historical chronology that is also supported by evidence from a number of well stratified settlement sites. However, what is less well defined is the ending of this period, and thus of the Naqada Culture as a whole, including its transition into the material culture historically defined as the Old Kingdom.

It is therefore opportune to evaluate to what extent the current definition of Naqada IIIC and D is valid and what other evidence can be consulted in an attempt at periodization. For example, there are a number of other diagnostic and well-defined key types that may have to be considered; these are especially large storage vessels (the so-called wine jars) as well as so-called beer jars that can be observed in both stratified settlement as well as cemetery contexts. On the other hand, there are also a number of lithic tools that have been defined via typological sequences that can assist in establishing broad relative sequences. This chapter will provide a general survey of important sites and diagnostic material groups as well as problems related to their applicability for relative dating.

## Important sites

The chronological cornerstones for this period are the settlement sites of Buto in the western Delta, Tell el-Farkha in the eastern Delta, numerous cemeteries at the apex of the Nile Delta, in particular Saqqara and Helwan as well as the region of Abydos, especially the royal cemetery at Umm el-Qaab. The well-stratified settlement at Elephantine allows for insights not only into aspects of regionalism but also for bridging southern Egypt and Lower Nubia.

### **Buto**

In Buto, the period in question is mainly represented by the upper strata of Layers IV, IV-V and V (Köhler 1998; von der Way 1997), which have been uncovered in various places across the site. Layer IV is separated from the previous strata by a change in architectural construction. While the lower strata of Layer III exhibit mud brick walls of an apparent domestic character, the upper strata of Buto III consist of organic post construction, and with Layer IV, construction goes back to mud brick architecture delineating relatively large spaces. The character of construction changes again with Layer V, when a complex series of at times labyrinthine buildings is evident. Although there is a degree of architectural continuity from Layers IV to V in some areas, there is also a thick stratum of fill in certain other areas that was artificially accumulated in order to raise the floor level of Layer V. The buildings of Layer V may have had a sudden end as there is evidence for burning, although not everywhere. Finally, large pits cut deep into the underlying stratification causing significant mixture of materials from different periods. These pits may be the result of *sebbakh* pitting at different times;

after the fertile mud had been dug up and separated from solids, such as ceramics and stone objects, they were then either deliberately backfilled, or filled up gradually with the progress of time. Although these pits have caused significant disturbance of the stratification, some of them (attributed to Layer VI) appear to consist of relatively well-dated fill material that can be isolated as belonging to a phase later than the stratification of Layer V and earlier than the final Layer VII of the Late Period. On the basis of this evidence it was possible to isolate certain ceramic types as diagnostic for different phases. For example, while beer jars in Layer V are exclusively represented by the earlier forms with vertically scraped surface and well-made rim sections (Types 1-3; Köhler & Smythe 2004: Fig. 2), the later pit fill of Layer VI exhibits beer jars of Type 4 with wavy body surface and indistinct rim, a vessel shape that appears to start only towards the end of Naqada IIID.

Due to the relatively clear separation of strata in some places and the very large quantity of ceramics found, a number of diagnostic changes could be observed that, on the one hand could have functional, on the other chronological reasons, or a combination of both. For example, certain ceramic wares either first make their appearance or rapidly increase during Layer IV. These are medium quality white and red slipped Nile silt wares (21211, 21221), red slipped and polished wares (21421), jars with vertically scraped surface (early beer jars of Types 1 and 3, 21101), restricted vessels with well-smoothed surface (mostly so-called wine jars) as well as vessels made of Nile silt fabrics with coarse limestone, calcite or quartz inclusions (21424, 21224 and related wares). This observation could confirm that Layer IV not only signifies a change in construction, but possibly also an entirely new phase, which has been correlated with Dynasty 1 or Naqada IIIC. It appears as though the subsequent phases develop more continuously, at least in ceramic terms. Because much of this material has already been presented in monographic form in recent times, it could serve as a cornerstone for future relative dating of northern sites, even more so as the new excavations by the German Institute of Archaeology in Cairo, under the direction of U. Hartung, have the potential to apply corrections or elaboration on certain aspects of the material development.

### **Tell el-Farkha**

Tell el-Farkha is a very important site for many reasons, especially as it exhibits both well-stratified settlement remains, whose chronological and material culture development generally mirrors that of Buto in the west, as well as mortuary evidence that can be used in tandem for chronological analyses (for full detail see Mączynska & Jucha, this volume). The relevant phases at Tell el-Farkha are the uppermost strata of phase 5, all of phase 6 and possibly also 7; although the latter two have so far only been observed on the central and eastern Kom. The period is represented by various forms of architecture of domestic, industrial, administrative and possibly also cultic character, which will allow for analyses regarding functional and spatial development over time. Due to its size and complexity, Tell el-Farkha will ultimately allow for a detailed differentiation of changes in the material culture that either have functional or chronological causes. Because diagnostic artifacts of the period in question are attested in settlement contexts, i.e. in more fragmentary form, the graves can contribute complementary data and assist in establishing more precise and distinct typologies, as they tend to produce more complete objects, again rendering this site as crucial for relative dating.

### **Saqqara**

The elite cemetery at North Saqqara is important because of the tomb owners who served at the royal court of Dynasties 1 and 2, which means that, due to the occurrence of royal names, their rich tomb assemblages are relatively well-dated (Emery 1949-1961). There are over 300 private tombs in total with mastaba superstructures and complex substructures, many of them very large in size, as well as numerous subsidiary and other small burials covering the entirety of the period in question. Furthermore, there are also at least two known royal tombs further south, whose content may assist in the synchronization of historical and relative chronology. On the other hand, most of these tombs were excavated and published early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and access to reliable information is made difficult by the general and summary character of the publications. For example, where pottery is published, many of the ceramic vessels are shown in the form of line drawings that do not represent actual vessels, but rather templates representing a certain type of vessel. As typological studies have become far more detailed over the past 50 years, such published material can no longer be utilized for modern analysis. Nevertheless, it is often the observation if a certain artifact is present or absent in a specific context that can assist in archaeological dating and thus Saqqara remains a chronologically important site. A re-analysis of the North Saqqara elite tombs would be necessary in order to record precisely what types of artifacts were found in association with what form of architecture and historical evidence. For example, what is currently not entirely clear is the question as to when exactly the type of tomb with subterranean chamber and lateral access was introduced (Köhler 2008; in press). The correct dating of its first appearance could be important for architectural typologies, and thus for relative chronology. Furthermore, the recent German and Dutch excavations to the south of Djoser's pyramid promise to yield new material that will certainly be of great value for chronological purposes (Regulski, Lacher & Hood 2010; Lacher 2008; Dreyer & Lacher in press).

### **Helwan**

The large cemetery at Helwan not only covers the entire period in question, but also had its densest occupation during this time. Because the majority of tombs (more than 10 000) were published last century (Saad 1947-1969), they present the same problem as the Saqqara tombs. Thousands of artifacts, especially pottery vessels, from the old excavations have been located and recorded, and over 200 archaeologically intact tombs have been excavated in recent times. These provide probably the most extensive amount of reliable archaeological data currently available for this region. Due to its modern investigation, certain problems in archaeological dating have been identified that are particularly relevant to the objectives of this study and that may have implications also for other sites. For example, although cylindrical vessels are well represented in the old assemblages (about 230 individual pieces of various typological stages), they hardly feature in the new excavations as only very few fragments were found in disturbed contexts. The question that arises is why there are only so few cylindrical vessels from those recently excavated tombs? One possible explanation is that the tombs belong to a period when cylindrical vessels were not in use, i.e. much earlier or later. Both can possibly be excluded because other artifacts, such as rectangular siltstone palettes or other ceramic types, suggest a date near Naqada IIIC. Furthermore, the architecture of at least some



of the tombs would support this. There is also no obvious pre-selection factor that could be identified as a cause for the lack of cylindrical vessels and one has to conclude that its reason may well be due to seemingly random pre-selection, ritual or personal preference. It clearly illustrates that the heavy reliance on one index fossil for relative dating should no longer be considered appropriate. A perfect illustration for the questions under consideration here are the results from the analysis of tombs Op. 4/1 - 50, which were excavated between 1998 and 2004 and whose contents have now been fully catalogued, classified and quantified (Köhler & Marshall in preparation). Although the vast majority of tombs were severely plundered and disturbed in ancient times, they still yielded large quantities of artifacts. For example, single tomb structures sometimes produced more than 20 000 pottery fragments and comparatively few complete ceramic vessels. For the final chronological analyses, by means of seriation and correspondence analysis, it will be important to decide if these ceramics represent integral parts of the funerary assemblage of the tombs or if they are intrusive as a result of the disturbance. Chiefly for relative chronological purposes, the following issues also need to be taken into consideration. In total, the 50 graves analyzed so far produced several thousand diagnostic artifacts of which a sample of more than 1200 representative objects, including ceramics, lithics, stone vessels, jewellery etc., have been fully recorded and included in the catalogue. Of these some 700 can be attributed to individual tombs with some probability, thus likely counting as remaining parts of their original funerary assemblages. The majority of these, however, derive from secondary contexts, at best, and only a very small percentage originates from primary, i.e. secure contexts. What is of course unknown is to what extent these objects embody a representative sample of the original assemblages. The rest of the recorded diagnostic artifacts derive from the surface and debris above the tombs or fill deposits within the tombs and may therefore be intrusive. On the other hand, there is evidence for a post-funeral mortuary cult that involved the deposition of votive offerings, such as ceramic vessels, for as long as the cult lasted. It would therefore be necessary to separate the evidence of later use from the original assemblages; a task made difficult due to the state of disturbance and mixture of contexts. Furthermore, some of the graves did not contain any artifacts, or only one piece, and thus will need to be excluded from further statistical analysis, whereas others exhibit such a degree of disturbance, either through multiple plundering or reuse, that they likewise have to be excluded. In addition, the majority of objects analyzed are in a fragmentary state of preservation. Where possible, they were reconstructed in order to obtain complete sections, although this was not always possible. Many types are only present in the form of rim or base fragments and, considering the morphological variation among them, a definite type identification was often difficult. Nevertheless, after having excluded as many problem factors as possible, it was possible to compute 26 tombs against 20 ceramic types and arrive at a relatively satisfactory result that, considering the small sample size, will need to be treated with caution. A preliminary presence/absence seriation and correspondence analysis have been conducted; they roughly confirm previous sequences and datings based on typology, architecture, horizontal stratigraphy and comparison with other sites. The preliminary seriation produced a matrix with two well defined ends: the earliest tombs are those whose assemblages show close affinities with material normally dated Naqada IIIC, including wine jars, small barrel shaped jars, polished bowls and ovoid, well-made Type 2 beer

jars. Although the architecture would also support this date and while one of the tombs produced the fragment of a Naqada IIIC3 cylindrical vessel derivative, they may well be later. Only two tombs in the earliest group yielded complete wine jars whose proportional indices range between 3.48-4.26 and 4.00-4.38 respectively, thus clearly pushing them into Naqada IIID or early Dynasty 2 (Smythe 2008). The other end of the matrix is characterized by ceramic types that are typical for the early Old Kingdom, including well developed Mejdum bowls, bowls with advanced internal lip and collared beer jars. Furthermore, the architecture of the tombs in this latest group, constructed as rectangular mudbrick mastabas with cult chapels and vertical shafts, supports this date. Interestingly, many of the ceramic types within the seriation matrix occur continuously, nevertheless some types do stand out as possible markers for internal phases; through correspondence analysis it was possible to define at least four phases. Considering the small sample size, these four phases should be considered preliminary and we have therefore desisted from elaborating here. Once a larger sample size has been analyzed, it may be possible to better delineate phases, but this will take time. However, there are two important points that arise out of this preliminary seriation, in spite of its relatively small sample. First, it covers a time span between the end of Dynasty 1 and before the beginning of Dynasty 5, i.e. about 400 years in absolute terms, where four phases could easily be accommodated. Second, it demonstrates a high degree of continuity across the phases with many types overlapping. The latter is crucial, as it now forces us to deal with the sequence within the Naqada terminology. It is understood that Naqada IIID roughly corresponds with Dynasty 2, ending therefore with our 3rd phase. This means that the first three phases could be accommodated as sub-phases of Naqada IIID, but what are we to call the fourth phase if the Naqada terminology is to continue? Considering that there is also a high degree of material continuity within the Old Kingdom, what should we consequently name the material that follows that 4<sup>th</sup> phase? Would it be wise to continue the Naqada chronology - the material would clearly support this -, or will it be necessary to find a new terminology that allows us to bridge the material culture of the Early Dynastic Period with that of the Old Kingdom and beyond?

Finally, although this material on the whole will greatly contribute to relative dating and sequencing, its applicability for analyses involving the synchronization of absolute and relative dates of Naqada IIIC and D is limited, yet not impossible. Considering the various transformation processes having caused disturbance of contexts as noted above, the number of primary deposits in these tombs is still small at this stage, as is the number of samples extracted for scientific analysis.

### **Abydos**

The royal cemetery at Abydos has produced most valuable information on the typology of architecture and artifacts and their possible correlation with the historical sequence of early Egyptian kings. Although significant correlations have been successfully established, it needs to be remembered that the royal tombs at Abydos have been repeatedly robbed and excavated throughout antiquity and modernity. Archaeologists working there are currently concerned with the reconstruction of original assemblages whose fragmentary remains are still largely accumulated in substantial spoil heaps around the tombs. What has helped in this process is the observation that

some ceramic vessels carry royal names making a historical correlation possible, although to a lesser degree in Naqada IIIC-D than in the period directly preceding. Of particular interest are the latest developmental stages of cylindrical vessels as well as the so-called wine jars, both of which become more elongated and narrow over time. The cylindrical jar shows gradual and steady progression until its demise in Naqada IIID. It is during the latter part of the Naqada IIIC, however, that this form undergoes its most rapid changes. During Naqada IIIA to B the cylindrical jar is characterized by fine density, well-constructed and highly fired marl clay fabrics and most notably, with the net-painted design, incised decoration under the rim and the occasional royal name. From this point, the jar is well represented as its decoration, and later overall quality, progresses towards its most degraded form in the assemblages of tombs of late Dynasty 0 rulers and their successors. From the Naqada IIIB stage, well represented in Cemetery B, we start to see the introduction of fine alluvial silt used in constructing these jars. By the Naqada IIIC stages, however, they are fully replaced by alluvial silt indicating considerably less preparation; the fabric density is increasingly rough and transverse strength is usually low. Hendrickx (1996; 1999)<sup>1</sup> suggested that the cylindrical jar disappeared after his Naqada IIIC2 stage, i.e. after the middle of Dynasty 1. By this point it has evolved into a beaker made from alluvial silt, usually no higher than 18cm with a rim diameter not exceeding 7cm. However, after more typological analysis by the authors, it seems as if the cylindrical jar's sequence finally concludes in the Naqada IIIC3 stage, as a small, conical beaker that only vaguely recalls the earlier types (Smythe 2004: 333, fig. 15a-k). These final types are attested in the tombs of the last two kings of Dynasty 1, but it is currently unknown how long this stage lasted. Wine jars continue well until the end of the sequence corresponding to late Dynasty 2 as represented by the tomb of king Khasekhemwi. It has been possible to observe subtle changes in the proportional index over time (Köhler & Smythe 2004). Indexes taken from royal tomb assemblages at Abydos have provided us with a base line from which to compare well provenanced types from other cemeteries (Smythe 2004: 154-157). As with their cylindrical jar 'cousins', the wine jars from Abydos were occasionally used as a canvas for royal names and furthermore show an evolution in clay fabric and form that can be measured through time. Wine jars dated to the Naqada IIIB/C1 stages display only slight variability in index value. By the Naqada IIIC2 stage, there are not only greater numbers of jars present within the sample, but the date ranges are relatively stable within three relative chronological divisions (Naqada IIIC2, Naqada IIIC3 & Naqada IIID1; the latter is not attested at Abydos due to the relocation of the royal cemetery to Saqqara). Wine jars belonging to the early Naqada III stages are predominantly made from fine Nile and marl clay fabrics. The balance is tipped by Naqada IIIC2, when these jars are almost always made from fine alluvial silt. By the Naqada IIIC3/D stages we see a return to the use of marl clay for many of the very developed, elongated vessels.

1. It has been noted at Abydos, however, that outside the contexts of the royal tombs themselves, where the historical sequence of early rulers provides a convenient framework to separate one phase from another, the dating of contexts with the help of cylindrical jars is far more difficult. For example in the area of the funerary enclosures, where a direct association with a particular king is not certain, there are assemblages without cylindrical vessels and hence a decision for dating stage IIIB or early IIIC cannot necessarily be made. Personal communication Christian Knoblauch.

There are two diagnostic lithic implements from the royal tombs that similarly allow for relevant observations. Although bifacial knives of various types can be traced back into earlier prehistoric stages, the irregularly retouched bifacial knife with separate handle ('Griffplatte') is characteristic for the period under discussion and it would seem that this distinct handle disappears with Naqada IIID. It is interesting to note that, whereas their backs are curved in parallel to the convex line of the cutting edge during Naqada IIIC, they tend to become straighter towards the end of this phase, although this may also be due to continuous re-working of the knife. Furthermore, while the type of the so-called razor blades, or regular, bi-truncated blade tools, has relatively rounded and convex ends in the assemblages of Dynasty 1 (Naqada IIIC) royal tombs, they seem to assume a more angular outline in Naqada IIID (Hikade 1997; 2002).<sup>2</sup>

### Elephantine

The archaeology of Elephantine has chronological and typological implications for the latest stages of the Naqada III Culture. The end of the Naqada Period is particularly well documented in the archaeological record at Elephantine of recent times, with an almost continuous stratigraphic sequence spanning Dynasty 1 and into the Old Kingdom. It provides a well-documented narrative for the material culture's transition into the Old Kingdom. Further typological refinement of the Elephantine dataset has the potential to change our understanding of the chronology of this presently ill-defined transition. One particularly diagnostic late Naqada III ceramic type, already discussed, is the so-called beer jar. Elephantine has produced further evidence for the evolution of the Type 4 beer jar into a collared beer jar. This collared vessel transcends period boundaries, appearing from late Dynasty 2 and extending well into Dynasty 4 (Köhler & Smythe 2004; Raue 1999). Elephantine also illustrates developments in the type of internal rim bowl: the internal rim becomes more pronounced in the Old Kingdom when compared to its original form in Dynasty 2 (Raue 1999). These observations are echoed also in the north (i.e. at Buto and Helwan). Meydum bowls are present in the Elephantine assemblage and demonstrate a development from the deeper, earlier form of the bowl into a form more closely linked to the classical Meydum shape (Raue 1999; Op de Beeck 2004).

In addition to illustrating the chronological and typological development of standard late Naqada III ceramic assemblages, Elephantine also displays a wealth of innovative ceramic culture that shows clear regional variation and a distinct ceramic tradition. One of the most interesting observations is that 'wine jars', so typical in the Abydene and Memphite regions, are rare at Elephantine and seem to be substituted by large ovoid marl storage jars with restricted neck and thick external rim. Fragments of these vessels are present in excavated assemblages spanning the late Naqada and early Old Kingdom phases (Raue 1999). This phenomenon may either indicate regional ceramic preference or be attributable to the fact that Elephantine is a settlement site, with 'wine jars' perhaps being more typical of cemetery contexts or simply surviving better in graves than when recovered from settlement remains. However, the evidence from northern settlement sites such as Buto, where 'wine jars' are attested in the settlement, would not support this notion. The relation between these two distinct storage jars requires further examination.

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2. We are grateful to Thomas Hikade for his helpful comments on these tools.

Other ceramic types that appear on Elephantine, yet differ from the Lower Egyptian and Memphite assemblages, are the exterior and/or interior burnished deep hemispherical bowls with external rim (occurring early in the late Naqada phases (Kopp 2006; Raue 1999)) and the very fine ovoid marl vessels with thin, often elongated restricted necks. Both types are unknown in the literature for late Naqada III assemblages outside this region and necessitate further chronological examination. Chronological analysis of the commencement of the model vessel and the flat-based restricted neck vessel with high maximum diameter can also be examined further in the Elephantine assemblage.

## Conclusion

This brief survey of late Naqada III assemblages clearly highlights a number of important points crucial for modern studies into the relative chronology of the Early Dynastic Period. Firstly, before any statistical analyses are undertaken, the sample needs to be tested for its viability in terms of the quality of the archaeological context, especially when analyzing mortuary data. Secondly, only modern data, or at the very least data derived from modern day first-hand recording of old excavation sites, should be utilized in order to arrive at valid chronological assemblage separators. Thirdly, functionally variegated, regionally distributed and stratified settlement assemblages have much greater value for relative chronology than cemetery sites. Fourthly, multiple index fossils and chronological markers need to be defined and employed in order to establish relative chronological assemblage sequences. Finally, the terminology currently in use needs to be critically reviewed in order to allow for the repeatedly observed continuity from Naqada III into the Old Kingdom to be accommodated.

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