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Los primeros reyes y la unificación de Egipto

Alejandro Jiménez Serrano

Universidad de Jaén, Jaén, 2007, 430 pp., 40 ill., 9 tables, 14 cartes - ISBN 978-84-8439-357-3.

Los primeros reyes y la unificación de Egipto is a new book by Alejandro Jiménez Serrano, in which the author gathers and develops several topics related to Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods that he has considered for more than a decade. The irony of Spanish Egyptology is that most of these studies are already well known because of his publications in English (see for instance, Jiménez Serrano 2001; 2002; 2003; 2007). These publications in English have had a lower circulation in Spanish, a situation the author tries to rectify with the present volume.

From a formal point of view, the book is organized into five main parts. After a brief preface by Edwin van den Brink and the author himself, Jiménez Serrano first presents the geographical and chronological frameworks of the processes he will consider in the rest of the volume. The second part is centred on the question of the formation and unification of the Egyptian State, in which Jiménez Serrano combines the

analysis of evidence with some theoretical approaches. The third part considers the “features that characterize the first Egyptian kings”, referring to religious aspects that define the Egyptian monarchy, as well as the main material testimonies of early kingship, among which the author highlights architectural evidence (palatine, military, and funerary buildings), writing, iconography, and the names of the first kings. His last section works as an introduction to the fourth part, where Jiménez Serrano offers his interpretation on the origin of the royal *serekhs*. Finally, he presents general conclusions that review the content of the book, emphasizing the problem of political unification of the Nile Valley, and the way in which this process influence the modes of representing power at the threshold of Dynasty I.

These last two questions certainly are ones that provide the main axes of the book. The first is especially considered in the second chapter of the volume. There the author rightly points



out a distinction between the process of the emergence of the State and that of political unification of the Nile Valley. In fact, some historiographical perspectives tend to recognize the existence of the State only from the beginnings of Dynasty I, so both processes seem to belong to the same group of transformations. Starting from the

identification of the State characteristics during the reign of Narmer, Jiménez Serrano goes backwards in time, to recognize many of these characteristics in previous epochs, especially through an analysis of the evidence coming from Abydos' Tomb U-j, which precedes Narmer's time by more than 150 years. It is true, however, that the chapter loses precision because of its internal organization – the linking of theoretical and historical topics is particularly unclear – and because of the equivocal nature of certain expressions: for example, the State formation is defined as “a *parallel* process which is fully developed *before* the unification itself” (p. 93; my translation and emphasis). From a theoretical viewpoint, the author's approach does make some good points, as for instance when he considers the importance of kinship in pre-State times, or when he presents a range of ecological, economic, political, and religious problems that researchers have to take into account when they focus on the issue of State origins. But again, the analysis weakens when the author expresses his personal reflection on this matter, stating that “*the State is a barrier that impedes an individual to treat directly with the one that rules over him, because there are intermediate mechanisms that are in charge of assessing needs and carry out procedures and obligations*” (pp. 100-101, my translation), a reflection that seems to be a value judgment on the contemporary world rather than a historical or anthropological definition on an Ancient society. The second question of high relevance for the book is mainly

considered in the fourth and fifth chapters and it is related to the author's original perspective on the origin of the royal *serekh*. According to Jiménez Serrano, the palace-façade is a symbol representing power that was firstly used in Lower Egypt, while the name of the king and the falcon that complete the “classical” *serekh* would be two modes of representation originated in Upper Egypt. During the epoch of the so-called Dynasty 0, these features would converge, creating a unique symbol, that would represent “the addition of the different features that characterized power in each area: the falcon of Hierakonpolis, the phonogram of Upper Egypt (Abydos?), and the palace-façade of Lower Egypt” (p. 362; my translation). This proposal has already undergone some discussion (see: van den Brink 2001; Hendrickx 2001), and has been severely criticised by Stan Hendrickx (see especially Hendrickx 2007: note 22), who has questioned the suggestion about the northern origin of the palace-façade, since such a suggestion is only based in the rather fanciful interpretation of four potmarks coming from Maadi as palace-façades. If this identification is rejected, the earliest specimens are the ones found in Tomb U-s from Abydos, that is, a completely southern context. Beyond the weakness of the evidence, in the opinion of the present reviewer, the major weakness of Jiménez Serrano's hypothesis lies in the uniqueness of this supposed fusion of features of very diverse origins. There is no easy way to compare this fusion that would have happened within the core

symbol of Egyptian kingship to other procedures of symbolization and iconographic expression in the incorporation of the Nile Delta to the territory controlled by the State that could supply more verisimilitude to the author's proposal. In such conditions, the hypothesis cannot be completely discarded, although the elaboration of interpretations based upon such a proposal will be inevitably precarious.

The surprisingly “high” chronology proposed by Jiménez Serrano in the first part of his book deserves a separate paragraph. According to the author, “the Naqada IIIA Period would be centred between 3360 and 3345 B.C. The reign of Aha – second king of the First Dynasty – would be very near to 3150 B.C., the reign of Den – fifth reign of the First Dynasty – would be around 3075 B.C., and Qaa's reign something less than one hundred years later (between 2921 and 2893 B.C.)” (p. 77; see the tables in pp. 78-79; my translation). This proposal is doubly striking, not just because of the fact that it tends to elevate chronologies currently accepted by specialized scholars by more than one hundred years on average, but mainly because the only source of reference is an article of Jiménez Serrano himself, together with F. Hassan and G. Tassie, whose dates do not coincide with the ones proposed in the present volume (for instance, dates offered in that article for Naqada IIIA1-A2 phase are 3350-3200 B.C., for Aha's reign are 2995-2927 B.C., for Den's reign are 2934-2888 B.C., and for Qaa's reign are 2819-2748 B.C.; see: Hassan,

Jiménez Serrano and Tassie 2006: 707-709). The reasons behind this misunderstanding are impossible to determine. In any case, the reader should take into account that dates mentioned throughout the book do not fit the academic consensus on chronologies of such periods.

Beyond these problems, and returning to the initial comment of this review, the author's main objective for this book has to be adequately pondered, namely to publish in Spanish language, in order to strengthen the Spanish Egyptology. In the frame of such a worthy attitude, Jiménez Serrano says he hopes this book can serve "as a grain of sand in that claim" (p. 32; my translation). And there is no doubt that, in this sense, *Los primeros reyes y la unificación de Egipto* honours the purpose to which it was written.

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Le gisement épipaléolithique de ML1 à 'Ayn-Manâwir. Oasis de Kharga

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In these times, where it has become increasingly more difficult to raise money for detailed and well-illustrated archaeological monographs almost everywhere, it is a great pleasure to have this publication by François Briois, Béatrix Midant-Reynes and Michel Wuttmann. This volume presents the careful excavation of the epipalaeolithic site 'Ayn Manâwir ML1 (Doush/Kharga

Oasis) and its accurate and in-depth analysis of the lithic technology. Such final site-reports with numerous drawings and a detailed compilation of the stone artefact assemblages provide a valuable basis for other researchers. Furthermore, this site inspires scientific discussion about regional epipalaeolithic developments in the Eastern Sahara, about which only little is known at present.

