

Lo Stato egiziano nelle fonti scritte del periodo tinita. By Simone Lanna. BAR International Series 1838. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008. Pp. XIII + 160 + 28 tables + 607 figs. + 33 pls. £37 (paperback).

REVIEWED BY JOCHEM KAHL, *Freie Universität Berlin*

The purpose of the present volume is “the development of a theoretical model of land management” (p. III) for early Egypt. The time range covers the formative period of the early Egyptian state from Naqada IIIa2 (according to Kaiser) to King Djoser at the beginning of the Third Dynasty. The body of written sources used for this study encompasses approximately 900–1000 inscriptions, most from this early period, though some (e.g., the Palermo Stone) are later. These sources form only a portion of the more than 4000 written sources currently known.¹ The author

gained access to them via standard publications, and more recent re-studies of some of these sources² and

tinger *Orientalforschungen* IV/29 (Wiesbaden, 1994), 171–417; I. Regulski, *A Palaeographic Study of Early Writing in Egypt*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (OLA) 195 (Leuven, 2010).

² E.g., E.-M. Engel, “Die Siegelabrollungen von Hetepsechemui und Raneb aus Saqqara,” in E. Czerny et al., eds., *Timelines. Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak II*, OLA 149 (Leuven, 2006), 25–33, and “Neue Funde aus alten Grabungen. Gefäßverschlüsse aus Grab P in Umm el-Qa’ab im Ägyptischen Museum Kairo,” in G. Moers et al., eds., *jn.t dr.w. Festschrift für Friedrich Junge* (Göttingen, 2006), 179–88; J. Kahl, “Ein bislang unbeachtetes Beispiel zur Unschädlichmachung von Schriftzeichen aus dem ‘Menesgrab’ in Naqada,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 28 (2000): 125–29;

¹ For an overview of the existing sources, cf. J. Kahl, *Das System der ägyptischen Hieroglyphenschrift in der 0.–3. Dynastie*, Göt-

some recent publications of new inscribed material³ are often not included. The sources are depicted in 607 figures in an appendix (pls. 1–31). Their arrangement is not always conclusive. Several times, sources are depicted twice; e.g., figs. 260 and 287 are identical copies of P. Kaplony, *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen (ÄA) 8/III (Wiesbaden, 1963), fig. 110.⁴ The text of the book sometimes refers to paragraphs, sometimes to figures. The paragraphs provide the reader with references to publications where a figure of the inscription can be found, but not to the figures in the present book itself, although it would have been easy and useful to give references to the figures within the volume.

The developed model distinguishes between land and resources management and is based on three pillars:

- A capital with a royal palace and workshops, and main urban centers (e.g., Memphis, Hierakonpolis, Bubastis, Ombos).
- Estates (i.e., state installations, which were established to supply the royal funerary cult, the royal family and the court. According to the author, the central administration probably withdrew the whole of the production. As confirmation, he quotes the black-ink inscriptions, which, however, have been unreliably interpreted [cf. infra]).
- Rural villages (which, according to the author, are not attested in written sources).

The author wants to recognize the *nomoi*-system already in ink inscriptions from Dynasties 0–1 (pp. 39–40), where three horizontal strokes appear in combination with *šm.w* and *mh.w*. But the exact interpretation of these strokes is highly speculative, since sometimes there is only one stroke. There is, however, other written evidence that gives a serious hint that during Dynasties 1 and 2, the *nomoi* system already

existed: sealings⁵ from Umm el-Qaab/Abydos from Dynasty 2, and some earlier inscriptions⁶ that might include names of regions (or *nomoi*).

The author states that the state economy was founded on the redistribution system. According to him, the departments *pr-nsw*, *nb*, *pr-hd* and *pr-dšr* were supervised by the *hṫm.w-bit* (treasurer of the *bit*-king). During the reign of Ninetjer, the department *is-df* was absorbed or replaced by the above-mentioned departments. Through a comparison with the administration of the Old Kingdom, the author concludes that the *pr-hr.i-wdb* was the redistribution department.

The author distinguishes five social categories of Egyptian society: decision-making elite, administrative officials, priesthood, craftsmen (who worked in the workshops) and farmers (who spent their life in their villages). According to the author, the farmers and craftsmen are totally absent in the written sources (p. X), but cf. the occurrence of some titles/designations which refer to the occupation of people (e.g., *rṫh* “baker” or *hṫm.w.ti* “craftsman”).⁷

Due to the restricted availability of written sources, the author’s picture of the early Egyptian state is fragmentary. Shortcuts in the reading and interpretation of the written sources further diminish the reliability of the results, and some chapters are mere collections of sources without new interpretation; e.g., chapter 8, about royal ideology, offers very well-known material and the interpretation lacks any new ideas. On the other hand, substantial contributions to Egyptology are ignored (e.g., when a Sed-festival is postulated for King Semerkhet based on a sherd, which Lacau and Lauer could already show refers to King Adjib⁸). Concerning the chronology of the Early Dynastic period, one misses the summary given in the Handbook of Chronology from 2006.⁹ Also, the author’s new interpretation (pp. 30–37, 87) of the black-ink inscriptions on cylindrical jars and year-labels of Dynasties

J. Kahl, *Vergraben, verbrannt, verkannt und vergessen: Funde aus dem “Menesgrab”* (Münster, 2001).

³ E.g., E.-M. Engel, “Die Entwicklung des Systems der ägyptischen Nomoi in der Frühzeit,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo (MDAIK)* 62 (2006): 151–60; G. Dreyer et al., “Umm el-Qaab, Nachuntersuchungen im frühzeitlichen Königsfriedhof. 11./12. Vorbericht,” *MDAIK* 56 (2000): 122–27.

⁴ Figs. 27–28 and 285–86 are also identical (Kaplony, *Inschriften*, III, figs. 306A–B), as well as figs. 50 and 210, figs. 105 and 213, figs. 207–208 and 240–41.

⁵ Engel, “Entwicklung des Systems der ägyptischen Nomoi.”

⁶ J. Kahl, “Die frühen Schriftzeugnisse aus dem Grab U-j in Umm el-Qaab,” *Chronique d’Égypte* 78 (2003): 112–35.

⁷ J. Kahl, *Frühägyptisches Wörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 2002–2004), 276, 308.

⁸ P. Lacau and J.-Ph. Lauer, *La Pyramide à degrés. IV. Inscriptions gravées sur les vases*, Fouilles à Saqqarah 4 (Le Caire, 1959), 4, pl. III.6.

⁹ J. Kahl, “Inscriptional Evidence for the Relative Chronology of Dyns. 0–2,” in *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, ed. E. Hornung, R. Krauss and D. A. Warburton, HbOr 1:83, (Leiden, 2006), 94–115.

0–1, which is given in chapter 3, has to be rejected. The author reads the combination of *i* and *p* as *i(r)p* “wine” instead of *ip(w.t)* “count.” In doing so, one cannot explain why additional information as, for example, *ḥḥ.t mrw* “the best of *mr*-oil” is sometimes added.¹⁰ The obviously lying animal, a bubalus (*iw*), is interpreted as standing she-ass; therefore the author reads *Ḥ.t* “Cheese made of female donkey milk” instead of *iw.t* “income.” But the latter reading is confirmed by seal impressions, which write *iw.t mḥ.w* with a compound sign using the walking legs for *iw*.¹¹ Also, the new interpretation of *nḥb.t* as “liquid contents”

¹⁰ W. Kaiser, “Einige Bemerkungen zur ägyptischen Frühzeit III. Die Reichseinigung,” *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 91 (1964), 102–103; P. Kaplony, *Kleine Beiträge zu den Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit*, ÄA 15 (Wiesbaden, 1966), p. 19; pl. 10.1112.

¹¹ Kaplony, *Inschriften*, III, fig. 160.

instead of “tax” is not convincing and has to be rejected. These examples demonstrate that sometimes the careful reader gets the impression of doing a step backwards instead of forwards in the interpretation of early inscriptions.

To summarize, the task of establishing a model of land management (including its resources and inhabitants) in the Early Dynastic Period is difficult because of the paucity of sources. In the present book, however, the task became more difficult due to some of the author’s “new” but not convincing interpretations of several written sources. These unacceptable readings diminish the reliability of the already scarce general results, which are presented in pls. XXXII–XXXIII. The presented model is nothing more than a reconstruction of a segment of the Thinite state based on inscriptions from a funerary context, which are not always reliably presented.