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# Prehistoric Upper Egyptian social structure in the first half of the 4th Millennium BCE: An investigation to revisit social status seen from mortuary evidence

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## Abstract

This paper aims to reconsider society and the nature of social status in the first half of the Upper Egyptian Naqada Period (Naqada I and IIA-B Periods) in the 4th Millennium BCE which corresponds to the Chalcolithic. The Naqada Period has the crucial historical significance of social development towards the emergence of an early state which appeared in ca. 3050 BCE. Previous research for mortuary evidence reveals the social status of individuals connected to vertical dimensions including the social stratum played an important role in the state formation process, particularly after the Naqada IIC Period in ca. 3450 BCE. However, the society and social status in the Naqada I and IIA-B Periods is open to further comprehension due to relatively scarce archaeological evidence or relative chronological difficulty except for some recent discoveries such as Localities HK6 or HK43 at Hierakonpolis or Cemetery U at Abydos. Given this situation, legacy data can have renewed importance by integrating it to the recent knowledge for further understanding of this time frame. In this paper, I focus on the legacy data from the excavations at large cemeteries such as Naqada where a regional centre during the Naqada I and II Periods lay, together with recent discoveries. The discussion is particularly focused on the graves with a large number of funerary goods or a variety of types and disposal areas, which all these aspects are effective to consider social status. This paper argues that the society of the Naqada I and IIA-B Periods still partially possesses kin or lineage basis inherited from the Neolithic. I consider that the mortuary evidence of this timeframe can offer various commingled aspects of social status not only the initial hierarchical but also the non-hierarchical nature. In other words, mortuary archaeological evidence of the Naqada Period does not always reflect vertical social status difference and it may also embrace societal roles which are not directly relevant to hierarchy. I suppose that such multi-aspects of social status were gradually replaced into the hierarchy-oriented frame in several large communities of regional centres. The process towards the state formation was still not straightforward in the early 4th Millennium BCE, and aspects of social status seen from archaeological evidence from this timeframe were not necessarily connected to the later early state.

**Keywords:** Upper Egypt, Naqada Period, Mortuary Evidence, Social Status

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