ARCHAEOLOGY, POTTERY, AND ECONOMY

Archaeology provides a wealthy data set ripe for analysis. Archaeological lines of evidence lend themselves to the ‘big picture’ of the workings of the Egyptian economy, limited not to one institution but rather illustrating patterns of interaction among many. The ceramic record specifically provides a tremendous corpus of material that covers the expanse of the country and comes from both capital and province. Ceramics were fundamental to all manners of activity and key in economic exchange and wage payments within the third millennium’s in-kind economy. Data from utilitarian objects may be applied to analyses of non-elite economy and investigation of how much (if any) production and exchange occurred outside of the oversight of the palace. Models may be developed to understand the relationship of specialization of production, exchange, and social complexity.1 Archaeology often compliments the textual evidence and allows us to look at materials outside of the domain of the royal house and the elite involved in the pharaonic administration.

Archaeology can also clarify the presence or absence of state or regionally scaled economic organization through investigation of large scale distribution networks attested by archaeological remains. Data can also be scaled much larger, relating to issues such as the organization of power, the political and economic relationships between the elite and non-elite, and the lifestyles and economic interactions with the non-elite sphere. Fine grained evidence detailing specific exchanges and values are more difficult to attain from archaeology than from text, but text does not provide the interclass and interregional perspective that is encoded in the archaeological record. Instead, the study of ‘archaeological political economy’ encompasses “global perspective on economies as open systems; attention to the economic dimensions and implications of political behavior and institutions; a concern with inequality and social classes; and a focus on processes of local historical change rather than broad processes

of cultural evolution.” Archaeology does not just compliment the historic record; it allows us to engage with the ancient society in completely different ways and ask new questions.

**Archaeological Data, Distribution, and Production**

The role of central or local authorities in the production of goods as well as the exchange of goods via wages is directly linked to their influence on the country’s economic structure. In order to fully assess the role of the royal house or the elite in the economy, one must analyze administrative influence on both processes of production and distribution. One should not simply assume systems of control at either the beginning or end of a product’s life.

**Egyptian Archaeology and Economy: Case Studies**

Egyptian ceramics have been rarely applied to macroeconomic questions. However, two case studies showcase the ability of archaeological materials to shed light on economic networks. The first comes from the botanical and faunal material from Kom el-Hisn, an Old Kingdom settlement in the eastern Nile Delta. Broadly speaking, the textual record indicates that this part of the delta was home to several royal domains which focused on cattle rearing. Analysis of the faunal material recovered from excavations at the site confirm this activity, yielding very little cattle bone but a disproportionate amount of cattle dung. The floral content of the dung suggests that the cattle were raised in stables rather than in a pasture, a practice that would have been in keeping with large-scale cattle raising and force-fattening animals. These conclusions are in accord with the interpretation of the site as part of a royal cattle domain. The conspicuous absence of cattle bone in the archaeological record illustrates a lack of correlation at the site between intensive cattle raising and high beef

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