Old Kingdom Egypt is commonly assumed to have functioned as a state-controlled economy, in part as the crown had evident economic activities in both the capital and the provinces. The ceramic industry, a dominate player in the movement and measurement of wages, shows rather that the royal house was not in control of the economy, nor was the economy locally managed nome-by-nome. Instead, diversity and complexity throughout the economic structure was evident throughout wage payment networks, the structuring of the ceramic industry, and the relationships of the ceramic, baking, and brewing industries. However, given the scale and political influence of the Old Kingdom bureaucracy, the state would nonetheless have had some impact on the economy.\(^1\) Though the bureaucracy included a host of administrators from the beginning of the Old Kingdom, the strength, expanse, and unity of the central government appears to have varied over the period. This is particularly true of the crown’s administrative relationship with the provinces, which seems to have been characterized by constantly changing degrees of involvement and ever-new approaches to provincial management. This fluidity illustrates the manner in which the state was connected to the provinces and the type of power held by the Old Kingdom crown across the country.

\textit{Royal Administration and the Provinces}

Evidence of provincial administration at the dawn of the Old Kingdom, in the Third Dynasty, is sparse, existing only on vessels from the Step Pyramid complex. The titles employed for nomarchs at that time were the

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same as seen in the Fourth Dynasty. From the Fourth Dynasty through the early Fifth Dynasty, the evidence is more robust and it is apparent that the management of the provinces was entrusted to officials bearing titles such as, but not limited to, \textit{im\textit{i}-r \textit{wp}t} (Overseer of Commissions/ Apportionments), \textit{\textls{720}}\textls{-}\textls{760} \textit{ssm ts} (Leader of the Land), and/or \textit{hk\textls{-}s sp\textls{-}t} (Ruler of the Nome). These individuals supervised at least two nomes at any given time, which meant that their attentions would have been divided between differing populations and large expanses of land. The administrators of Lower and Upper Egypt bore many of the same titles, particularly \textit{hk\textls{-}s \textls{-}hwt\textls{-}\textls{-}st} (Ruler of the Great Estate) and \textit{im\textls{-}i-r \textls{-}wp\textls{-}wt}. Yet even at this early period there were some distinctions, for example Lower Egyptian provincial officials also being \textit{\textls{-}d-mr} (District Official) while Upper Egyptian officials bore \textit{ssm ts}, implying different handling and conceptions of the two regions.

All officials were buried in the capital; they lived their lives there and not in any of the provinces which they managed, many of which were hundreds of miles distant. The nomarchs were more closely tied to the royal house than they were to the nomes they managed.

In the third millennium BC, a distant administrator equated to a distant and ephemeral authority figure with no on-the-ground knowledge of his nomes or their populations. Issues like personal wealth, land ownership, and land use appear to have been quite complex at the local level. It seems likely that provincial land holdings would have been dispersed in multiple locations as a safeguard against unpredictable Nile floods.