**THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE RESOURCES IN THE OLD KINGDOM: DEPARTMENTS, TREASURIES, GRANARIES AND WORK CENTERS**

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**Introductory Remarks**

Old Kingdom Egypt, within its conventionally accepted chronological boundaries that span from the Third Dynasty to the end of the Sixth, has been portrayed as a complex society, a status that it most certainly inherited from the half millennium-long Early Dynastic period that preceded it. It appears that by the beginning of the First Dynasty, most of the components that characterized the Egyptian state were either already in place or were undergoing a phase of advanced gestation, the results of an economic and administrative structure that began to take shape in the late Naqada II, and in more accelerated fashion during the Naqada III period. This effort was led by an entity that consolidated and managed resources and in turn engendered the various tools of governance, above all hierarchical bureaucracy and writing. It remains highly likely that the institution-building initiatives undertaken by the early Upper Egyptian rulers, along with the pivotal

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3 I. Regulski, “Scribes in Early Dynastic Egypt”, *Fs. Dreyer*, 581–611. For the Thinite era, some forty scribes are attested, a significant number given the paucity of the evidence from those periods (P. Piacentini, “Les scribes: trois mille ans de logistique et de gestion des ressources humaines dans l’Égypte ancienne”, in: *L’organisation du travail en Égypte ancienne et en Mésopotamie*, B. Menu, ed. [Cairo: BdÉ 151, 2010], 109–110). Over the course of the Old Kingdom, the scribal occupation appears to have become more specialized and acquired an internal hierarchy akin to other administrative groupings, a fact that the diversification in the titles bears out (P. Piacentini, *BdÉ* 151, 110 and note 15).
development of written forms, were to a great degree the result of the imperatives of the emergent, yet seemingly already extensive domestic and regional trade networks.

The awareness of the geographical extent of Egypt also played an important role in devising the administrative system. Governing that territory required various state departments to operate in conjunction with, and as an additional layer to their local counterparts. As early as the First Dynasty, some evidence would appear to suggest that the division of the country into districts was already a reality of government, presumably elaborated for the purposes of a more manageable administration. This would, of course, imply the existence of an administrative and bureaucratic system that would be in charge of the affairs of each district. This model of territorial division would eventually develop into the nome system, around which provincial administration was to be structured as a complement to, but later in competition with the central pharaonic government. Whether a variant of the nome-based system of provincial management was in effect prior to unification as a local phenomenon in some regions of Egypt, and was subsequently absorbed as an organizational standard of the unified state, might be difficult to establish. As with a number of concepts in early Egypt such a development either followed an amalgamation trend from local-to-national, or an imposed one from national-to-local. In any event, it appears that the principles required for a functional government were contributing factors to the process itself of state formation and were not notions that were devised and instituted exclusively during the evolution of unified Egypt in the Old Kingdom.

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5 References to “districts (spwt) of the East/West” of the Delta may allude to such an arrangement (P. Kaplon, Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit [Wiesbaden, 1963], vol. 3, pl. 67, nos. 238–239).

6 The term “nome” is used here with full acknowledgment of the pitfalls associated with applying that concept to the earlier periods of Egyptian history; see the pertinent comments on that matter and on the designation of “nomarch” by H. Willems, Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie, (Paris, 2008), 5–65.

7 Similar debates exist with respect to the origin of deities and their cults, in particular whether they were native to their respective towns, or were assigned to them by the state (E. Hornung, Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many, J. Baines, trans. [Ithaca, 1982], 70–73).