

BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF DOMESTIC LIFE? NAQADA: ASPECTS OF THE SETTLEMENT IN THE MIDDLE-LATE IV MILLENNIUM BC

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Results of the writer's doctoral research project, conducted at the University of Naples 'L'Orientale' (or UNO) and completed in 2011, are presented in this paper. The project has been aimed at re-evaluating the role of Naqada in the sequence of social, economic, political and cultural development of the late Egyptian prehistory and in the formation process of the ancient Egyptian state, based on the evidence collected at the site by the Italian Archaeological Mission of the 'Istituto Universitario Orientale', Naples (today UNO), between 1977 and 1986 (director: C. Barocas; co-principal investigators: R. Fattovich, M. Tosi), and in light of new discoveries made in other parts of the Nile Valley in the last decades.

While results of this research project will be included in the final report of the Italian Archaeological Mission at Naqada, which is currently in preparation for publication, an overview of them, especially concerning the main phase of development of the site, is outlined here. In particular, the hypothesis that during the phase Naqada IIC-IID - IIIA part of the settlement might have been occupied by a sort of administrative-ritual/ceremonial complex, possibly serving as a place for pooling and distribution of resources (subsistence and wealth goods), amongst other purposes, and involving part of the local and, to some extent, regional population, is suggested and discussed on the basis of architectural and artefactual evidence recovered by the Italian team at ZWE, the largest portion excavated at the site. Further suggestions concerning the first usage of the seal and its socioeconomic context at Naqada are also outlined.

Introduction

Naqada¹ is widely recognised as one of the most significant Predynastic sites in Egypt (*i.a.* Kemp 2006: 78-81). Its discovery, due to W.M. Flinders Petrie at the end of the XIX century (Petrie & Quibell 1896), is intrinsically linked to the discovery of the Egyptian prehistory itself. The cemeteries of Naqada have also provided part of the materials on which the first relative

¹ For the purpose of the present paper the following toponyms will be used: 'Naqada region' will be employed to refer to the wider stretch of the Nile Valley, to which this expression has been related so far (cfr.: Friedman 1994: 461). This is the area corresponding to the historic Fifth Upper Egyptian nome, whose boundaries lay approximately between Deir, in the north, and Khozam and Qamula in the south (Fischer 1964: 5, map of the Coptite nome; Helck 1977: 385, 387). The term 'Naqada' / 'site of Naqada' will be reserved for the area including approximately the strip of low desert slightly to the north of the pyramid of Nubt to the Cemetery B, on the west bank of the Nile, and on which the excavations directed by Petrie in 1894-1895 focussed (see fig. 1). As specified further below, the Italian Expedition adopted another toponym, 'Zawaydah', to refer to the site where it conducted archaeological excavations (Barocas 1986: 17-18) and in this sense it will be used here, although alternative meanings for the same place name exist (De Morgan 1896: 87, 1897 : 36, 38, fig. 19; Fischer 1964: 4, map of the Coptite nome, n. 3).

chronology devised for early Egypt, the Sequence Dating (Petrie 1899), was based. Apart from the cemeteries and various other sites (fig. 1), at Naqada Petrie excavated the settlement known as ‘*South Town*’, which lay on the northern portion of a gravel terrace located at the edge of the floodplain (Petrie & Quibell 1896: 50, 54, pls. IA, LXXXV). Since Petrie’s time, the same terrace has been explored by other archaeologists, including, between 1978 and 1981, an Expedition directed by Fekri A. Hassan (Hassan *et al.* 2014) and, almost in the same years (1977-1986), an Italian Expedition of the ‘*Istituto Universitario Orientale*’, Naples (today University of Naples ‘*L’Orientale*’ or UNO). The latter, under the direction of Claudio Barocas, Rodolfo Fattovich and Maurizio Tosi, conducted nine seasons of fieldwork which included surveys, both on the aforementioned terrace (renamed ‘*Zawaydah*’)² and in the surrounding areas, as well as excavations in some small test trenches and in two larger trenches (ZWW and ZWE), located in the central sector of Zawaydah (Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 47-50 and bibliography).

As part of my doctoral research project, conducted at the University of Naples ‘*L’Orientale*’ and completed in 2011 (Di Pietro 2011a), I have re-examined comprehensively the data produced during the Italian investigations at Naqada.³ Moreover, in the course of three study seasons spent in Egypt, during 2008 and 2009, I documented and re-analysed the ceramic and small finds that were collected by the Italian team, a sample of which were stored at the SCA magazine in Qift (Di Pietro 2009, 2010). While the wider chronological framework and development of Naqada, both in its settlement and cemetery components, have already been outlined (Bard 1994; Fattovich *et al.* 2007), the re-examination of the data and the material under discussion has allowed a closer definition of elements of chronology and, possibly, function of the site, in light of new comparanda available from research conducted in other parts of the Nile Valley in the last decades. Results of this study, especially focusing on what is considered the main phase of development of the site of Naqada (cfr. Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 52-53 and bibliography) and as it is reflected in the archaeological evidence of the wider area exposed by the Italian team (ZWE, c. 550 m²; see fig. 2), are outlined in the present paper.

Settlement development in the region and site of Naqada (IV millennium BC): Zawaydah in context

Human activity in the Naqada region dates back to a distant age, as the Palaeolithic remains recovered here attest (Vermeersch 2000). However, it is approximately from the beginning of the IV millennium BC that the first traces of sedentary (or semi-sedentary) communities relying on a subsistence economy based on, in part at least, animal husbandry and agriculture are witnessed. The site known as El Abadiya 2, near Danfiq (c. 3900-3800/3700 BC; Naqada IA-IB; Vermeersch *et al.* 2004) and the so-called ‘*Khattara sites*’ (c. 3850-3650 BC; early-middle Naqada I; Hassan & Matson 1989; Holmes 1989: 189-283; Friedman 1994: 458-604), scattered

² By the time of the Italian investigations, the terrace of Zawaydah had been greatly disturbed due to natural and anthropic factors (cfr. Barocas *et al.* 1989: 296–297; Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 47–48). As a result of the site’s condition, all of the stratigraphical connections had been lost; nevertheless, it was assumed that the archaeological deposits had maintained the parameters of planimetric distribution (Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 48). This assumption seems to be confirmed *at least* by the fact that a peculiar finds pattern has emerged in a part of the excavated area (cfr. *infra* note 14).

³ The documentation produced by the Italian Archaeological Mission at Zawaydah is currently kept at the Department of African and Arabian Studies (DSRAPA) of the University of Naples ‘*L’Orientale*’, in Italy. Professor Rodolfo Fattovich and Professor Rosanna Pirelli graciously permitted and facilitated me to access this archive. While for my PhD research I have used data collected by the I.U.O. Mission at Naqada and benefitted from the precious advice and fruitful discussions with my teachers, mentioned above, and many other colleagues, the content of this paper reflects my own view, where not differently stated. Any errors remain my sole responsibility as well.

along the low desert edge between the modern villages of Tukh and Danfiq, might have been home to such communities. The site of Naqada was also probably occupied from an early stage of the Predynastic, as the evidence from both the cemeteries (Hendrickx 2006: 74) and the settlement (Barocas *et al.* 1989: 299-300; Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 51, 52. Cfr. also: Hassan & Matson 1989: 310-311; Friedman 1994: 525-527, 544) would suggest. Minor elements of the ceramic sample from the Italian excavations at Zawaydah, examined by the writer,⁴ might be residual from such an early phase and indicate that Naqada was already included in a wide network of regional and extra-regional contacts: with the 'Khattara sites' and, possibly, with regions of the Nile Valley located more to the north (Badari/Abydos) and to the south (Hierakonpolis).

While after the middle of Naqada I most of the settlement in the low desert was abandoned, Naqada and a few other sites (*e.g.* 'North Town') continued to be in use in the region (Hassan 1999). On the terrace of Zawaydah the occupation, from a first core presumably located on the western sector, shifted towards the eastern part (Barocas *et al.* 1989: 298-300; Hassan & Matson 1989). The main area excavated by the Italian team at Zawaydah, the trench labelled ZWE, lies in this portion of the site. Elements of the ceramic assemblage found in it can be ascribed almost to every stage of the Predynastic period and beyond, reflecting the long history of occupation of the site. However, the majority of them seem to fall within the phase between Naqada IIC-IID and Naqada IIIA (Di Pietro *in press*). During this stage at least part of the settlement might have been occupied by a sort of administrative-ritual/ceremonial complex,⁵ possibly serving as a place for the pooling and distribution of resources (subsistence and wealth goods), amongst other purposes, and involving part of the local community and, potentially, of the regional population.⁶ Architectural and artefactual evidence in support of this suggestion is briefly reviewed below.

Objects and practices 'beyond the ordinary sphere of domestic interaction'? The evidence from the trench ZWE at Zawaydah

⁴ Among these elements are some potsherds made of fabrics attested (or recognised) almost exclusively in early Predynastic settlement contexts:

(i) a very fine and homogeneous Nile silt characterised by coarse and irregular voids, left by organic inclusions originally added to the paste (*cfr.* *Fabric/temper class 21, "Coarse organic tempered Nile silt"* of the Hierakonpolis System (Friedman 1994: 150-151). Sherds made of this fabric have been uncovered in the lowest levels at Hemamieh (Friedman 1994: 349, 402-405) and at El-Mahâsna (Naqada Ic-IIab; Anderson 2006: 154-155; table 6.1);

(ii) a fabric analogous to the one described previously with the addition of small pottery fragments (*grog*) (*cfr.* *Fabric/temper class 27, "Grog and organic tempered Nile silt"* of the Hierakonpolis System (Friedman 1994: 153). This fabric is considered typical of the utilitarian pottery of the 'Khattara sites' (Friedman 1994: 491-504);

(iii) a Nile silt clay tempered with mineral chips (*cfr.* *Fabric/temper class 3, "Shale tempered Nile silt"* of the Hierakonpolis System (Friedman 1994: 154-155) and *"Pâte à plaquettes"* (P) of the Adaima System (Buche 2002: 175-176, 233-235). At Hierakonpolis and Adaima this fabric is characteristic of the utilitarian pottery, mainly of the most ancient phase of the Predynastic (Friedman 1994: 475-476, 503-505, 521, 630-633, 735-736; Buche 2004).

⁵ An analogous interpretation of Zawaydah as a ceremonial centre has also been suggested by Rodolfo Fattovich (*pers. comm.*).

⁶ Evidence for the role of Naqada as a 'central place' in a wider, possibly regional, context and for at least a part of the period under discussion is mainly provided by funerary remains (*cfr.* also: Wilkinson 2000). The large and highly differentiated cemeteries surrounding *South Town* contrasts with smaller burial areas, located further to the south and to the north of it and which might have been pertinent to small farming villages and hamlets destroyed by later cultivation (*cfr.* Bard 1994: 97, 115). The borders of this regional entity (?) or area to which Zawaydah/Naqada might have exerted its influence or control and how its maximum extension might have changed over the course of time are more difficult to establish. Whether it should be restricted to the district excavated by Petrie and Quibell (1896: pl. IA), or might correspond to what has been labelled 'Naqada region' to date (the historic Fifth Upper Egyptian nome, see note 1), or can be further extended to include the stretch of the Nile Valley from Dendera to Armant (*cfr.* Kemp 2006: 76, fig. 22) remains to be seen.

In ZWE (fig. 2), several man-made features were detected, including post-holes, notches and grooves, pits, heaps of mud-bricks, hearths, a structure with rectangular rooms (Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 50). Among the most significant ones, were a series of post holes, which were apparently arranged in several rows in E-W direction.⁷ These were probably remains of one or more structures originally made of materials like wooden posts, some of which might have supported a fence wall, composed of reeds, straw or mats and reinforced with a mud covering (cfr. Tristant 2004: 104-108). Among the few potential parallels that might be suggested for this post structure,⁸ there are the so-called ‘colonnade halls’ found in various localities at the site of Hierakonpolis, for example in the ceremonial center at Hk29A (Friedman 2009: 82, 91-92, fig. 8)⁹ or in Locality Hk25 (Hikade 2011: 94-94, fig. 9). Although the remains uncovered at Zawaydah hint at an architecture less monumental than the structures found at Hierakonpolis,¹⁰ a reconstruction of the superstructure pertinent to the aforementioned post-holes as a sort of hypostyle hall fits their distributive pattern well. If this reconstruction is correct, based on the archaeological evidence available today it might be suggested at minimum that this type of architecture signals something different from what is supposed to be an ‘ordinary domestic context’ for the Predynastic (cfr. also Friedman 2008). A ‘non ordinary context’¹¹ seems to also be reflected in the archaeological materials recovered at ZWE.

Among the finds, indeed, apart from a large amount of pottery and lithic remains, there are peculiar artefact classes, including ‘accounting/administrative devices’ and another heterogeneous group of objects (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, model boats, miniature vessels, possible bread models), which have in common the fact that they appear not

⁷ A total of 31 post-holes have been attributed to what is designated as “*Configuration I*” by the Italian archaeologists working at Zawaydah and might have been the remnant of one of more structures made of perishable materials. Considering only the 31 post-holes originally assigned to “*Configuration I*”, its minimum extension would have been *c.* 11 (E-W) x 8,80 m (N-S). With regards to the size of the post-holes assigned to this structure, their diameter ranges from 4-5 to 41 cm, with an average of 26 cm (std. dev.: 6,72); the depth of the pits varies from 5 to 31 cm, with an average of 12,94 cm (std. dev.: 6,25). The information reported above has been drawn from the excavation diaries, preliminary reports and the plans executed by the members of the I.U.O. Mission at Naqada.

⁸ A domestic structure excavated at the site of el-Mahâsna (*Excavation Block I*) to which remnants of at least 58 posts and mats forming walls are attributed (Anderson 2006: 74-80, 89, figs. 5.6-5.9), presents a layout similar, in certain aspects, to that one suggested for the main post structure found at Zawaydah (*i.e.* a series of posts rows crossing orthogonally with other posts alignments). At el-Mahâsna remains of vegetal matter tied to the posts have provided evidence that such posts held walls made of mats. As a result the inner space of the structure was divided into small sectors, approximately rectangular in shape. Yet, at Zawaydah, besides the post-holes themselves, no evidence of fence walls connected to the structure in question has been found. Therefore, an alternative reconstruction is here proposed and considered “[seulement] *plus plausible que d'autres*” (cfr. Tristant 2004: 106).

⁹ It must be remembered that Rosanna Pirelli had already suggested that possible comparisons with the architectural remains retrieved at Zawaydah could have been searched within the structures found in the ceremonial center in Locality 29A at Hierakonpolis (Pirelli 2006: 70-72, 2007a: 41).

¹⁰ The post-holes of the columned structure in Locality 29A measured *c.* 40 cm in diameter and range between 20 and 80 cm in depth (Friedman 2009: 83). The diameter of the post remains of the columned structure in Locality Hk25 ranges between 30 and 40 cm (Hikade 2011: 94-95).

¹¹ Far from suggesting the area of ZWE at Naqada to be an ‘exceptional’ place, a quite generic ‘non ordinary context’ has been tentatively used here for defining it, along with an equally loose ‘administrative-ritual/ceremonial’ area. Apart from the inherent difficulty of assessing the archaeological material retrieved at the site for different reasons (site’s condition, long occupational history, *etc.*), as a matter of fact very few parallels are still available for some of the elements recovered here (also in terms of concentration and association of specific artefact classes), and although a number of Predynastic settlement sites have been excavated and functionally distinct areas identified to date (cfr. Tristant 2004). It is hoped that future archaeological research in other parts of the Nile Valley will help to clarify whether the situation recorded at Zawaydah is an oddity (due to the vagaries of archaeological preservation, sampling and recovery?) or more widespread and ‘ordinary’ than here suggested.

to have had any utilitarian purpose *stricto sensu*. While preliminary descriptions of these artefacts have already been offered by other researchers and by the writer elsewhere (Pirelli 2006, 2007a, 2007b; Di Maria 2007; Di Pietro 2011b), these finds can be now more accurately assessed in light of new comparative data forthcoming from other sites of Egypt. A brief overview of them is presented here.

For a number of small objects, in a different array of shapes and materials, retrieved by the Italian team at ZWE, a function associated with keeping accounts has been suggested, mainly by analogy with finds, known as ‘tokens’,¹² from Asian sites in the Near East (Pirelli 2006, 2007a, 2007b). The basis for this hypothesis was not only the formal resemblance between some of the objects found at Zawaydah and specific types of ‘tokens’ described by Schmandt-Besserat (1992), but also an analogy with the composition of assemblages, with which ‘tokens’ were often found associated in Near Eastern sites, and which provided a close and striking parallel for the finds pattern observed at Zawaydah (see *infra*). Although their existence has long been postulated (*i.a.* Wilkinson 2004: 244), only in the last few years clear evidence that objects, that should have had a function in part analogous to that assumed for the Near Eastern ‘tokens’, were in use during the IV millennium BC in Egypt, has been identified, in particular at the site of Tell el-Farkha (Kołodziejczyk 2012) and Hierakonpolis, Locality HK11C (Baba 2014). This new evidence would lend further support to the hypothesis of the presence of counters at Naqada and their use “*as a back-up to a more developed administration*” (Pirelli 2007a: 44, 2007b: 61), even if the attribution of some specific artefacts to the category of ‘counting/accounting devices’ can only remain tentative and/or such an use for some of them might have not been exclusive (*cfr. ibid.*).

As mentioned, at Zawaydah, objects such as figurines (at least nos. 31),¹³ model boats (nos. 43; fig. 3a) and miniature vessels (nos. 65; fig. 3b), have also been retrieved (Di Pietro 2011b, 2011c). A high concentration of them, in particular, was found in correspondence with the foundation of a structure composed at least by two rectangular rooms, in the south-western sector of ZWE (fig. 2). In the same location, associated materials, but with a more dispersed spatial pattern, were items of personal ornament and small tools, counters, seals and clay sealings.¹⁴ The co-occurrence of figurines and various types of miniatures with accounting and administrative devices has been reported from a number of other sites, especially in the Near East,¹⁵ and has been defined as a “*meaningful assemblage*” (Green 1993: 21). The exact meaning of this pattern is less obvious though. A shared trait that all the items like miniature boats and vessels, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines,¹⁶ have is that they are fictitious imitations of real things or beings (Di Pietro 2011c). As far as their use is concerned, if we consider overall the Egyptian tradition of votive practices and that analogous objects are found as votive offerings in shrines of all periods (Pinch and Waraksa 2009), they might be interpreted as *ex-votos*. And indeed the suggestion that at Zawaydah there might have existed “*a place of*

¹² ‘Tokens’ are defined as “*small counters of many shapes, which served for counting and the accounting of goods in the prehistoric cultures of the Near East*” by Denise Schmandt-Besserat (1992: 1).

¹³ This number includes only fragments for which at least a type attribution, if only tentative, can be suggested based on their shape or potential parallels with published examples.

¹⁴ Given the lack of stratigraphic data (*cfr. note 2*), it is impossible to establish whether these small finds were actually connected with the structure here mentioned. The fact that the observed association of specific artefact classes is a recurring pattern (*i.e.* it is known from a number of other contexts) might suggest at least that this is “*not a fortuitous collection of items*” and that archaeological materials did not move too far from the place where they were originally used and/or discarded.

¹⁵ The same finds pattern is starting to emerge in some Predynastic – Early Dynastic sites in Egypt as well: a notable example is the administrative-cultic centre at Tell el-Farkha (Ciałowicz 2009). Furthermore, at el-Amra, in a specific area of the site interpreted as the entrance to the settlement or a large building (‘*South Wall Area*’), a concentration of sealings has been found, along with fragments of votive figurines (Hill 2010: 217, 246).

¹⁶ To this list a number of clay slabs, which have usually been interpreted as bread models, might be added (Di Pietro 2011c: 45-48 with further references).

worship” alongside “a sort of archive”, the latter correlated with the accounting/administrative material, has already been proposed (Pirelli 2006: 79; 2007a: 45; 2007b: 61). However, ritual usage of these objects might have been related not necessarily to religious devotion towards a deity or other entities, evidence of which is hardly recognised in any of the earliest temples in Egypt (cfr. Kemp 2006: 111-135; Friedman 2009), but to the range of ‘transactions’ taking place at the site (cfr. *infra*) and into which people, animals, boats, vessels, processed food, *etc.*, that is the same objects/beings reproduced in clay, were involved (cfr. Wengrow 1998: 784-785).

While the exact meaning and function of the objects dealt with above, at least within the context of Naqada, is doomed to remain somewhat a subject of speculation, the way other artefacts recovered at the same site were employed is more certain to some extent. The seals and clay sealings retrieved at Zawaydah have long been recognised as the first clear evidence, ever uncovered in a Predynastic context, that a form of administration existed in Egypt, before the existence of a unified state (Barocas 1989: 301-302; Barocas *et al.* 1989: 301). Clay sealings that can be attributed to the Naqada period (nos. 10)¹⁷ bear impression of a range of objects to which they were originally applied: strings (that presumably tied sacks, packages or jar mouths); wooden knobs (of doors or wooden boxes); straw lids (or baskets); vessel mouths covered with cloth or leather (cfr. Di Maria 2007: 69-71). To this list two cylinder seals and two clay tables with an impression left presumably from a cylinder seal must be added (cfr. Di Maria 2007: 75-76, fig. 6). A detailed description of this material is beyond the scope of the present paper, yet at least three key questions, concerning: (i) the period when was administrative devices were first in use at Naqada; (ii) who was in control of them and (iii) to what, in particular, administrative practices were related, will be briefly addressed below.

(i) Unfortunately the archaeological material found at ZWE covers quite a long chronological range (see *supra*). The designs attested on the seals and sealings as well as the clay sealing functional types are heterogeneous¹⁸ and also might represent different stages of the Naqada period.¹⁹ Nevertheless, at least one of the seals and one of the clay sealings found in the settlement at Zawaydah show a certain similarity in their design and / or size with seals found at the nearby cemeteries by Petrie (inv. n. UC5374, Petrie Museum; Boehmer 1974: 497, 500, 508, Abb. 1; former inv. n. ÄA12848, Ägyptisches Museum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin; Boehmer 1974: 497, 500, 508, Abb. 2); (see fig. 4). Relative chronology suggested for the seals from the cemeteries ranges between Naqada IIB-c and Naqada IIC-d1 (Honoré 2007: 38 and bibliography), so that we might suggest that administrative practices involving the use of seals were performed at Naqada already at this stage (*c.* middle of the IV millennium BC; cfr. Dee *et al.*: 8, fig. 4).

¹⁷ This number refers only to the clay fragments bearing a seal impression that can be tentatively ascribed to the Naqada period, based on stylistic and typological grounds, and within the sample that was available to me for re-analysis during my 2008-2009 study seasons in Egypt. The total amount of clay sealings, most of which without seal impression, collected at Zawaydah by the I.U.O. Mission is by far greater (see: Di Maria 2007: 66-69; Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 50).

¹⁸ From an iconographic point of view, four main groupings have been tentatively distinguished within the restricted *corpus* under discussion: (i) one evoking a glyptic tradition of the Greater Mesopotamia area (fig. 4); (ii) one characterised by the repetition of a simple geometrical motif; (iii) one with crosshatching decoration; (iv) one depicting animal rows (Di Pietro 2011a: 191-192). The main functional types concerning the clay sealings are mentioned above.

¹⁹ The lack of observable stratigraphic units to which the archaeological deposit at Zawaydah could be assigned has already been mentioned above (cfr note 2). Therefore, besides a re-assessment of the pottery context, an attempt for a closer definition of the chronology of the sealing material has been based on potential parallels between the glyptic imagery preserved and the glyptic repertoire published from early Egypt and neighbouring regions. In the present paper only two of the (less problematic) *comparanda* found are mentioned, along with their possible implications for chronology and seal usage at Naqada.

(ii) The answer to the second question is by no means obvious, since it has been stressed that clay sealings are a neutral administrative item, whose use is attested within Neolithic egalitarian societies as well as in more complex state societies (Frangipane 2006: 39). However, at Naqada funerary evidence reflects the existence of a complex social hierarchy and, in particular, the emergence of a “*group with power and authority over other groups*”, already at the beginning of Naqada II (Bard 1994: 101-105). Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that this system of management of goods was under control by the local elites and since the period mentioned above (approximately middle of the IV millennium BC).²⁰

(iii) Finally, what was this elaborated system of control related and intended to? For clay sealings found in other Predynastic contexts, namely in the cemetery at Abydos there is evidence that sealing operations were connected to the control of traded goods (Hartung 1998b). For Zawaydah, it has been suggested that administrative practices were not necessarily connected with trade, but with internal control of storage facilities (Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 51). Part, at least, of the goods being secured and controlled might have been luxury goods (*wealth items*). On the other hand, (a) the scarce evidence of such commodities within the material found at Zawaydah, with few exceptions (cfr. Fattovich *et al.* 2007: 52); (b) the composition of the ceramic assemblage at Zawaydah, which seems to be related mainly to food processing, mid-term storage and distribution (Di Pietro in press); (c) the considerable concentration of cereal remains, detected by the expedition lead by F. Hassan, at the same site (Moens & Wetterstrom 1988: 164-166, fig. 2; Friedman 1994: 545), would suggest mainly a control over subsistence goods (*staple items*; cfr D’Altroy, Earle 1985: 188).²¹

Conclusion (and open questions)

The archaeological materials collected by the Italian team at Zawaydah, re-examined and re-assessed in light of new data available today, allow at least to suggest an hypothesis on the possible function of part of the site during a specific stage of the Naqada period (IIC-IID - IIIA). Along with factual evidence, this hypothesis is based on a series of assumptions and speculations, as already noted.

Since it is commonly accepted that sealing as a practice is connected with “*control over the storage and the distribution of commodities*” (Frangipane 2007: 15), at minimum it can be suggested that part of the settlement of Naqada, where the administrative devices discussed

²⁰ The two seals found in the cemeteries at Naqada (cfr. fig. 4) derive from two tombs whose funerary equipment has been defined ‘medium’ (*i.e.* not particularly rich) and whose owners are not considered to belong to any elite group (Guyot 2004: 86). However, the same evidence can also be explained by the existence of “*officials [who] belonged to different social groups and were sometimes buried close to the chiefs (e.g. tomb T29)*” (Fattovich 2006: 628). The existence of ‘functionaries’ by Naqada IIc times would not be surprising considering the level of complexity that the Predynastic administrative system had already reached at a slightly later stage (Naqada IID), according to the sealing evidence from the cemetery U at Abydos (Hartung 1998a).

²¹ Certainly, many other crucial aspects concerning these goods being under administrative control remain obscure or cannot be discussed exhaustively in the present paper: for example, it would have been even more interesting to know who their producers or owners were. In one of the simplest scenarios, it might be envisaged that sealing was used to mark and protect the private property of certain individuals or certain groups of people (*e.g.* households). Nonetheless, even this basic use of sealing would have implied somehow a “supra-individual” or, more likely, a “supra-household” setting, in which defining and preserving this property would have had a meaning. Cfr. *i.a.* Akkermans & Duistermaat (1997: 24): “*Basically, sealings serve two aims, both very often linked: on the one hand they define the property of a person or group of persons, on the other hand they explicitly deny outsiders access to this property. Sealings thus imply the unequal distribution of goods, with the various sealed products not simply accessible to all members of the society but to their owners only; the sealings serve as control devices assuring this restricted access. In this respect, sealings can hardly have served within small social units or at the household level, where the control over products can proceed much more efficiently through mechanisms other than the formal application of sealings [...]. Therefore, it seems that the sealing of goods is necessary only if the handling or circulation of these goods involves persons beyond the own domestic unit*”.

above have been found, might have been an area where a range of products were collected and distributed. This activity was presumably under the control of the Naqadian elite and might have involved other members of the local community and, to some extent, of the regional population,²² considering that the sealing system would have operated at a 'supra-household level'.²³ Furthermore, at this place other activities seem to have been carried out, such as rituals and/or ceremonies, whose exact meaning escapes our understanding. The locution 'administrative/ritual-ceremonial complex' might be tentatively used with reference to this area where, in addition to the artefacts mentioned previously, architectural features occur which have no close parallels in other Predynastic domestic contexts so far.

In addition to discussing these aspects of the settlement at Naqada, in the present paper further suggestions have also been made about the first possible use of the seal in its sealing function at the site and its socioeconomic context (*e.g.* connection with the elite; purpose of the sealing system; nature of the sealed products), but the number of questions that this administrative material poses is by far larger than the questions that can be addressed, if not answered.²⁴ Some of these can only be mentioned cursorily and offered here as a stimulus for further research. For example, if it would be accepted that the sealing system was not merely a matter of protection of private property at the household level, as argued above, and that it implied an acquisition and distribution of goods, as it is generally agreed, was only a sector or the whole community at Naqada involved in it? Was the supposed pooling of resources voluntary (*e.g.* Hassan 1988: 168-169) or imposed as a tax? Which form could any distribution of these goods have taken, *e.g.* one in which the whole or only a fraction of the collected goods were put back into circulation (*cfr.* Frangipane 2000: 217-221)? More importantly, was this early form of local (and regional?) administration, which is attested in other Predynastic sites as well (*cfr.* Hartung 1998a; Hill 2010), integrated into a wider administrative system at a later stage, or, by the same token, to what extent did these administrative 'structures', already in place by the middle of the IV millennium BC, facilitate the more complex administrative apparatus of the early Egyptian state to be established and to operate on a local level?

Acknowledgments

²² Cfr. note 6.

²³ Cfr. note 21.

²⁴ The way other elements of the material remains at Naqada, not discussed above, might have been related to the administrative activities is currently being further investigated. As an example, the ceramic assemblage from the site is characterized by a high frequency of coarse mould-made bowls, very standardized in size, surface treatment and shape. This is strikingly suggestive of a pattern known from several administrative and temple contexts of the Mesopotamian area and beyond (Middle-Late Uruk, c. IV mill. BC), where huge amounts of so called 'bevelled-rim bowls' are supposed to have been employed to distribute alimentary rations or meals to workers dependent from a centralized institution (Johnson 1973). May the aforementioned vessels at Naqada be the Egyptian counterparts of the Near Eastern 'bevelled rim bowls' and be evidence that administration at the site was related to some kind of redistribution of subsistence goods to the local community? This hypothesis is currently being tested by comparing the ceramic assemblage from Naqada with other, contemporary, and potentially functionally distinct, assemblages from other sites, among which several settlement localities at Hierakonpolis. This is part of a larger research project I am conducting at the UCL Institute of Archaeology, London, UK, under the supervision of Professor David Wengrow. The project, titled 'CASEPS' has received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under REA Grant Agreement No 329601. Preliminary results of this investigation confirm that the proportion of these peculiar bowls in the ceramic assemblage of Zawaydah is higher than the proportion of the same type of vessels in assemblages of other sites (*e.g.* Nekhen 10N5W, Hk25, Hk29A floor deposit). This difference has also resulted to be statistically significant.

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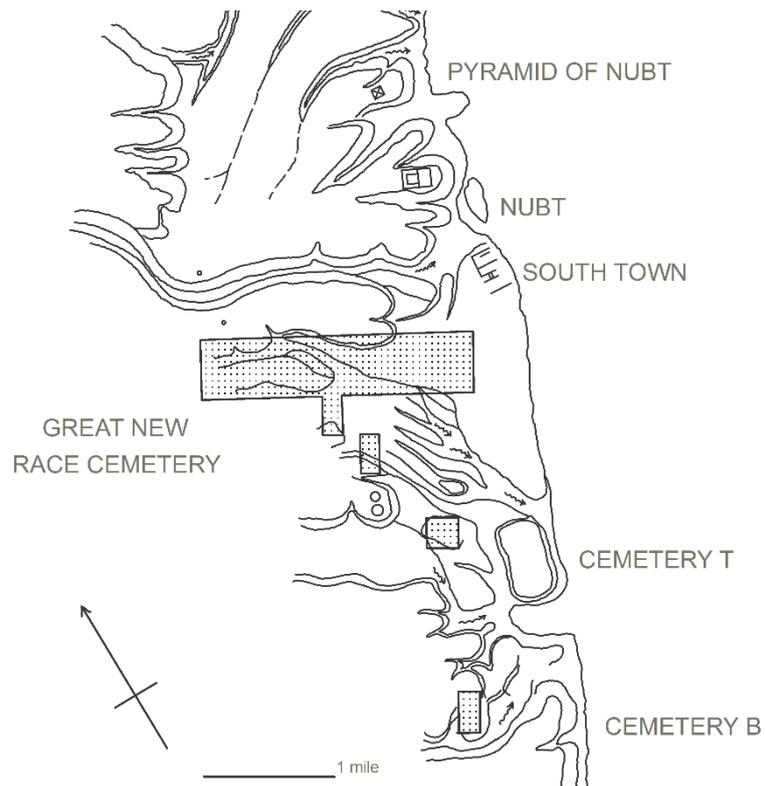


Fig. 1

Sketch map of Naqada with indication of the main sites explored by Petrie and mentioned in the text. Burial areas are stippled (from: Petrie & Quibell 1896: pl. IA with modifications; digitised by the writer).

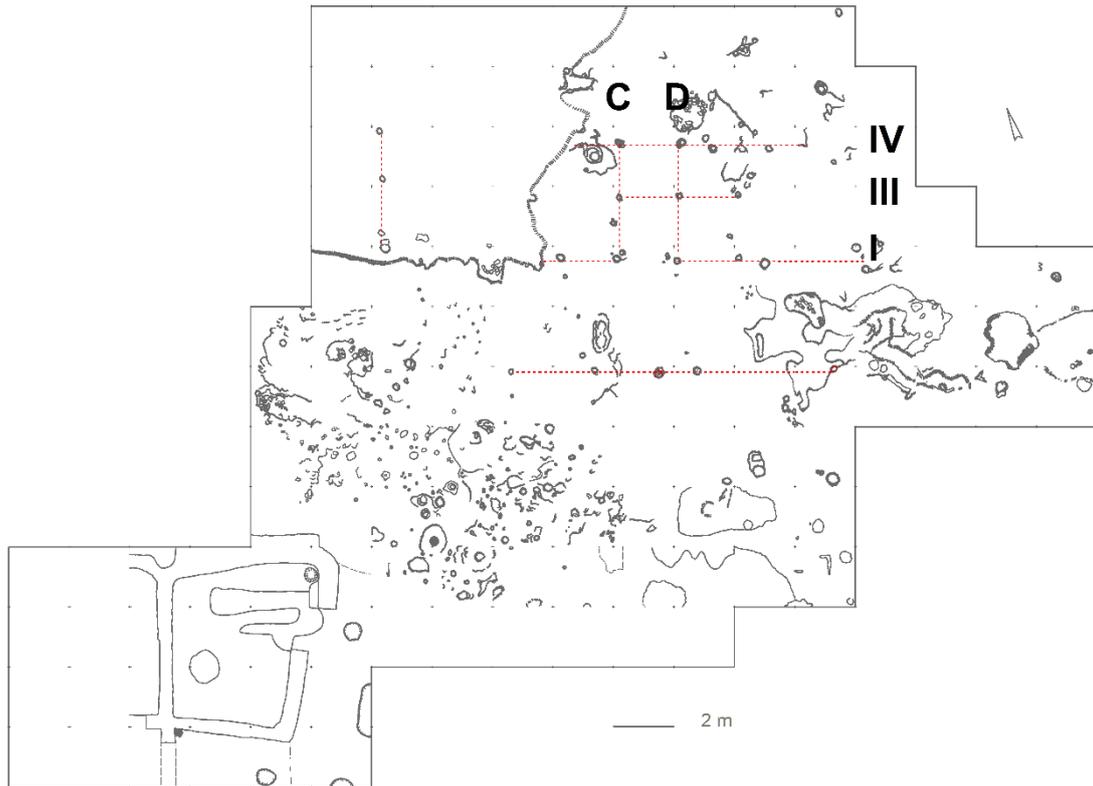
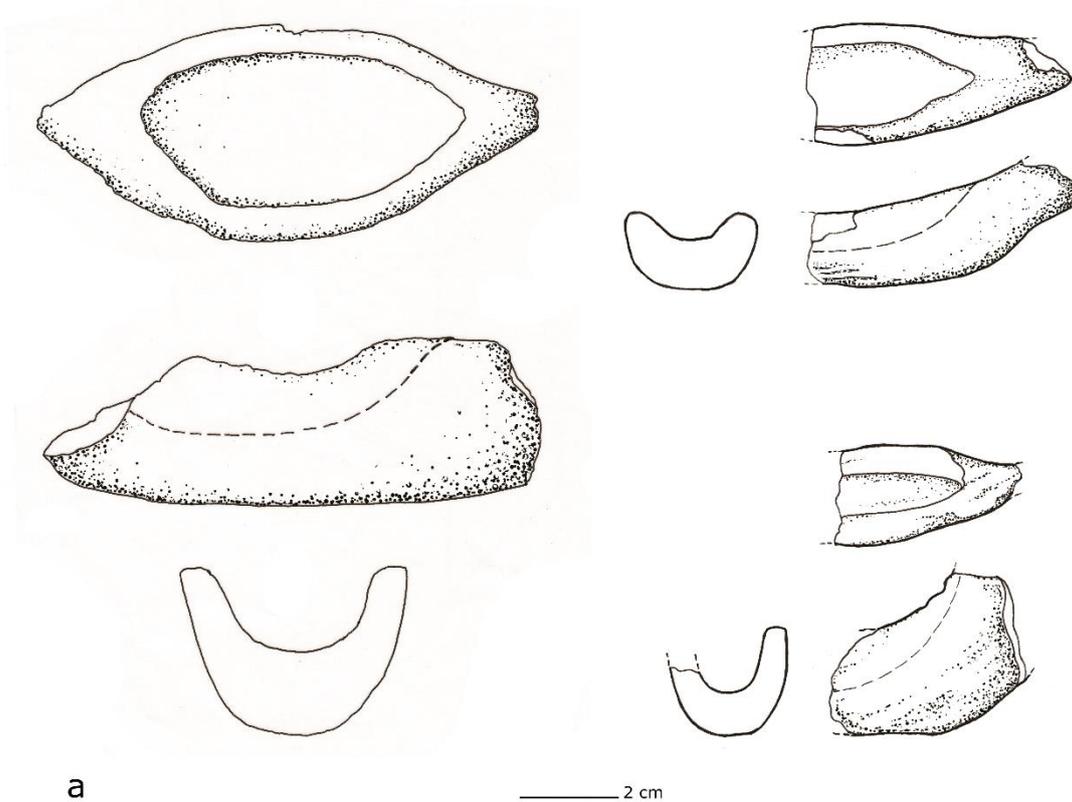


Fig. 2

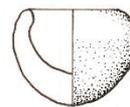
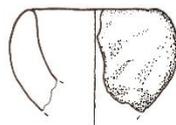
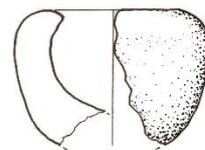
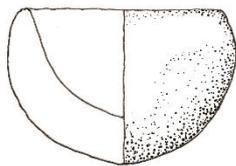
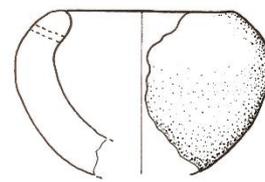
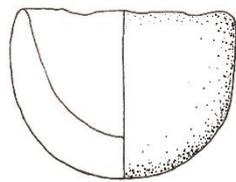
Plan of ZWE (from the Archive of the IUO Italian Archaeological Mission at Zawaydah; digitised by the writer).

The main rows of post-holes, possibly pertaining to a colonnade (?) structure are indicated by dotted lines (I, III and IV along the E-W axis; C and D along the N-S axis). Two further series of aligned pits, one located to the south, the other one to the west of the main structure, are also highlighted.



a

2 cm



b

2 cm

Fig. 3a-b

Selection of miniature boats (a) and miniature vessels (b) found at Zawaydah (drawings executed by the writer and refined by Ms. E.J. Parker)

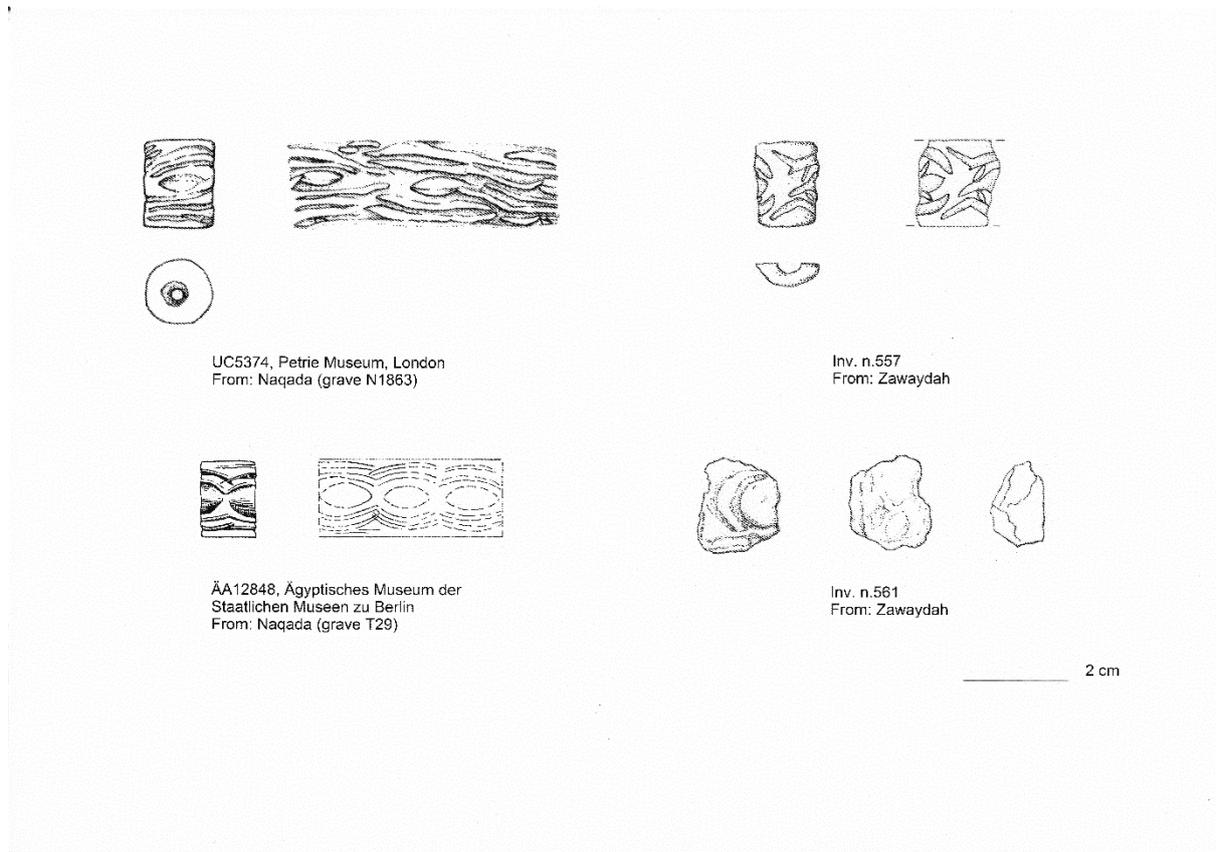


Fig. 4

Left: seals found in graves of the Naqada cemeteries (upper drawing: executed by Ms. E.J. Parker; lower drawing from: Boehmer 1974: 500, Abb. 2)

Right: seal and clay sealing from the settlement area at Zawaydah, Naqada (drawings executed by the writer and inked by Ms. E.J. Parker)

Left and right drawings are in scale.