Ancient Egyptian Administration

Edited by

Juan Carlos Moreno García

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2013

© 2013 Koninklijke Brill NV ISBN 978-90-04-24952-3

CONTENTS

The Study of Ancient Egyptian Administration	1
<i>Juan Carlos Moreno García</i>	
The Organisation of a Nascent State: Egypt until the Beginning of the 4th Dynasty	19
<i>Eva-Maria Engel</i>	
The Central Administration of the Resources in the Old Kingdom: Departments, Treasuries, Granaries and Work Centers	41
<i>Hratch Papazian</i>	
The Territorial Administration of the Kingdom in the 3rd Millennium	85
<i>Juan Carlos Moreno García</i>	
Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers: Executive Power in the Third Millennium B.C.	153
<i>Miroslav Bárta</i>	
The Administration of the Royal Funerary Complexes	177
<i>Hana Vymazalová</i>	
Balat, a Frontier Town and Its Archive	197
<i>Laure Pantalacci</i>	
Setting a State Anew: The Central Administration from the End of the Old Kingdom to the End of the Middle Kingdom	215
<i>Wolfram Grajetzki</i>	
The Royal Command (<i>wꜥt-nsw</i>): A Basic Deed of Executive Power	259
<i>Pascal Vernus</i>	

Nomarchs and Local Potentates: The Provincial Administration in the Middle Kingdom	341
<i>Harco Willems</i>	
The Organisation of the Pharaonic Army (Old to New Kingdom)	393
<i>Anthony Spalinger</i>	
Categorisation, Classification, and Social Reality: Administrative Control and Interaction with the Population	479
<i>Katalin Anna Kóthay</i>	
Crisis and Restructuring of the State: From the Second Intermediate Period to the Advent of the Ramesses	521
<i>JJ Shirley</i>	
The Rising Power of the House of Amun in the New Kingdom	607
<i>Ben Haring</i>	
Coping with the Army: The Military and the State in the New Kingdom	639
<i>Andrea M. Gnirs</i>	
The Administration of Institutional Agriculture in the New Kingdom	719
<i>Sally L.D. Katary</i>	
A Bureaucratic Challenge? Archaeology and Administration in a Desert Environment (Second Millennium B.C.E.)	785
<i>John Coleman Darnell</i>	
The Ramesside State	831
<i>Pierre Grandet</i>	
Administration of the Deserts and Oases: First Millennium B.C.E.	901
<i>David Klotz</i>	

From Conquered to Conqueror: The Organization of Nubia in the New Kingdom and the Kushite Administration of Egypt	911
<i>Robert Morkot</i>	
The Saite Period: The Emergence of a Mediterranean Power	965
<i>Damien Agut-Labordère</i>	
The 'Other' Administration: Patronage, Factions, and Informal Networks of Power in Ancient Egypt	1029
<i>Juan Carlos Moreno García</i>	
Index	1067
Kings and Queens	1067
Divinities	1070
Individuals	1071
Toponyms	1078
Egyptian Words and Selected Titles	1085
Thematic Index	1090

NOMARCHS AND LOCAL POTENTATES: THE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Harco Willems

INTRODUCTION: THE LOCAL BASIS

The present chapter will deal with the nature of local rule in the Middle Kingdom. It will address much-discussed issues like the administrative structure, the question of how to situate the “nomarchs” among other very high regional officials, and the tasks of these people and their role in Middle Kingdom history. But the administrative level involved at the same time concerns the interface between the organization of the state and Egypt’s rural population. Before embarking on the specific question at hand, it may therefore be useful to first address some general issues that this interactive structure entails. Although this is rarely realized, these are important for all forms of rulership, but on the local level they may be particularly acute.

A degree of authority is prevalent in all forms of human society. In communities based on nomadism, hunting and gathering, the groups will be small and authority will be expressed to a large extent in terms of family relationships and spatial links. As communities expand in terms of numbers and occupied area, such very primary bonds remain in force, but are supplemented by more abstract mechanisms of control: the creation of sometimes extensive social groups, which, because they interact and interbreed, have to adopt strategies to sustain themselves, to create alliances, and to defend group members in times of threat. This may lead to ideas about territorial identity, underpinned by an ideological (religious) framework far transcending the everyday necessities of life. In societies with a viable system of writing, an elite able to read and write will inevitably emerge, using its capacity of storing and organizing information in ways that transform the life of all. And here we are, in the early 21st century, in a global society where information management is everywhere, and where it has become impossible to escape control by others. Yet, even underneath this excessively controlled way of life, myriads of informal structures continue to assert themselves, and they are by no means unimportant.

Families, for instance, or regional or ideological entities that may have no 'official' form of organization but that nevertheless share sets of common ideas that distinguish them from others. Here one may think, for instance, of the widespread phenomenon of peripheral communities that sense a degree of 'own-ness' as opposed to the Centre (for instance Occitania in France or the area of the former German Democratic Republic in Federal Germany). The potential force of such sentiments occasionally becomes manifest in periods of crisis, such as the recent civil wars in former Yugoslavia. But far more common is the situation where tensions do not come to a head. Real though the sense of regional otherness may be, few people may even be consciously aware of its importance.

The reason for stressing this here is that such phenomena, that are often hard to discern even for contemporaries, are virtually invisible to outsiders. And it goes without saying that we, as Egyptologists, are outsiders to an extreme degree. We do know, of course, that regional differences existed, for instance in terms of locally specific art styles. Also, in the Story of Sinuhe, the hero of the tale compares his confused state of mind after having fled from Egypt to Palestine with the sentiments of a man from the Delta who ends up in Elephantine (Sin. R66–67). This remark is only understandable if his feelings of local attachment were very strong, and if the writer of the tale expected his audience to understand such feelings.

That this was the case is not strange. The way in which we imagine ancient Egypt is often tinged by our impressions of modern Egypt. But this mental picture must be warned against, as it may sorely misrepresent the realities of the past. Fast communication was impossible, for instance. When the 26th dynasty divine consort Nitocris I sailed from her Delta residence at Sais (?) to Thebes, it took her no less than sixteen days.¹ The trip, which was after all surrounded with great pomp, may not have proceeded at maximum speed, particularly since it took place at a time when the Nile was low. But then, both at times of low and high Niles, travelling was probably always cumbersome and time-consuming. It has been argued that the river was badly suited for travel for about five months per year,² a picture that is confirmed by

¹ R. Caminos, "The Nitocris Adoption Stela", *JEA* 50 (1964), 71–101; see in particular 98–99.

² J. Degas, "Navigation sur le Nil au Nouvel Empire", in: *Les problèmes institutionnels de l'eau en Egypte ancienne et dans l'Antiquité méditerranéenne*, B. Menu, ed.

the eye-witness account of a member of the Napoleonic campaign to Egypt.³ Moreover it should not be forgotten that the population must still have been very small—an oft-cited estimate for the Middle Kingdom amounts to less than two million⁴—and that large stretches of the Nile Valley may still have been in a wild state. Very different from today, the map of Egypt may have presented itself as a series of occupied niches with larger and smaller settlements surrounded by barren land. Under such conditions, long-distance journeys were probably not frequently undertaken.

The picture created in the preceding paragraph was of course not representative for all Egyptians. The Heqanakhte Papers, according to the new reappraisal by J.P. Allen, portray the main protagonist of the archive as a mortuary priest who, besides his cultic tasks, was clearly an entrepreneur who was economically active in an area extending over much of Upper Egypt.⁵ And Heqanakhte probably was not alone in this. According to D.A. Warburton, Egypt had a market economy and private entrepreneurship, carried out by travelling tradesmen, was probably not exceptional.⁶ Also, state foundations in rural areas produced for the royal court, which must have led to an intensive transport system. And corvée labourers were regularly mobilized for state projects. It is known, for instance, that the work force building the pyramid of Senwosret I at Lisht came from the Memphite region, the Delta, and Middle Egypt.⁷ But still, the agricultural basis of subsistence must have entailed that the vast majority of the population was

(BdE 90; Cairo, 1994), 142. In this article, it is estimated that a trip from Cairo to Luxor, making use of a fast ship, might well require as much as nine days even at times travelling was relatively easy.

³ J.M. Le Père, "Mémoire sur la communication de la mer des Indes à la Méditerranée, par la Mer Rouge et l'isthme de Soueys", in: *Description de l'Égypte ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française* XI (Paris², 1822), 240–241; cited by M. Bietak, "From Where Came the Hyksos and Where Did They Go?", in: *The Second Intermediate Period (Thirteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties). Current Research, Future Prospects*, M. Marée, ed. (OLA 192; Leuven, 2010), 168–169.

⁴ K.W. Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization. A Study in Cultural Ecology* (Chicago-London, 1976), 84. Note that Butzer himself stressed that this figure is not to be considered a reliable estimate.

⁵ J.P. Allen, *The Heqanakht Papyri* (Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition XXVII; New York, 2002), 105–189.

⁶ E.g. D.A. Warburton, "Before the IMF. The Economic Implications of Unintentional Structural Adjustment in Ancient Egypt", *JESHO* 43 (2000), 65–131.

⁷ F. Arnold, *The South Cemeteries of Lisht II. The Control Notes and Team Marks* (MMA Egyptian Expedition 23; New York, 1990), 24, fig. 1.

tied to the fields in the immediate neighbourhood of the settlements where they lived. Many Egyptians probably never traveled far in their entire lives.

During the annual Nile flood, many settlements must have been completely surrounded by fast-flowing water. At such times, which lasted for months, settlements were almost cut off from the outside world. And when the Nile receded, the peasantry had to till the fields. Since Egypt was predominantly an agricultural society, this by itself implies a relatively immobile population.

It has been assumed in the past that the need to organize the irrigation of the fields necessitated a strong central state control, implying an intensive long-distance communication. The idea goes back on the one hand to theorists like K. Wittfogel, who argued that the growth of a strong, centralized irrigation authority is generally a triggering factor in the emergence of early states in areas with hot, humid climates.⁸ Secondly, mostly British civil engineers, working in Egypt at the end of the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century, observed an irrigation system in which long south-north feeder canals were used to inundate chains of basins over many hundreds of kilometers.⁹ Obviously, this system could only work if there was an irrigation authority spanning all of the country. These specialists assumed that what they observed was a very ancient system going back directly to the pharaonic period, and this view has until recently influenced egyptological theories about ancient irrigation.¹⁰ However, Wittfogel's ideas are no longer considered adequate,¹¹ and an irrigation system based on feeder

⁸ K. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism. A Comparative Study of Total Power* (New Haven, 1957).

⁹ See the account by G. Alleaume, "Les systèmes hydrauliques de l'Égypte pré-moderne. Essai d'histoire du paysage", in: *Itinéraires d'Égypte. Mélanges offerts au père Maurice Martin s.j.*, Chr. Décobert, ed. (BdE 107; Cairo, 1992), 301–302.

¹⁰ Thus, e.g. T. Ruf, "Questions sur le droit et les institutions de l'eau dans l'Égypte ancienne", in: *Les problèmes institutionnels de l'eau*, B. Menu, ed., 281–293.

¹¹ Th.E. Downing, McG. Gibson (eds.), *Irrigation's Impact on Society* (Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona 25; Tucson, 1974) contains papers showing that the background of the development of irrigation is less unidirectional than Wittfogel would have it. Meanwhile, strong arguments have been put forward against the hydraulic hypothesis for cultures in various parts of the world, like Mesopotamia (e.g. S. Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia. The Eden that never was* [Cambridge, 1999], 31, with references to further literature). The most detailed refutation of the relevance of Wittfogel's ideas for ancient Egypt has been W. Schenkel, *Die Bewässerungsrevolution im alten Ägypten* (Mainz am Rhein, 1978), pp. 25–36. He argued that, based on textual evidence, it is likely that artificial irrigation did not emerge before the First Intermediate Period, and therefore that Wittfogel's ideas cannot be correct. Although Schenkel's

canals parallel to the Nil is not an age-old practice, but an innovation of the early nineteenth century.¹² Although Butzer refers to large-scale state intervention in irrigation in the Graeco-Roman era, this only concerns the Fayūm.¹³ And here, very specific conditions prevailed. It is easy to see that the vast, deep-lying Fayūm must have tapped away vast amounts of water from the Nile Valley, rendering irrigation there less effective. The construction of dams at the entrance to the Fayūm, which is known to have taken place in the Ptolemaic Period, not only prevented these undesirable effects, but also led to the creation of a reservoir near al-Malā'a at the Fayūm entrance,¹⁴ which could be used long after the inundation was over, making it possible for the first time to introduce perennial agriculture.

According to the Classical authors, irrigation projects in the region were already organized by Amenemhat III, pushing state intervention in the water regime of the Fayūm back in time to the Middle Kingdom. Although it is hard to find specific written or archaeological evidence to support this contention, the pyramid of Senwosret II at al-Lahūn was built at the mouth of the Fayūm. The fact that this place name goes back to ancient Egyptian *R-ḥn.t*, which means "the Mouth of the Canal," is undoubtedly significant. Equally suggestive is the construction place of the pyramid of Amenemhat III at Hawwāra. It lies just opposite the place where the feeder canal of the al-Malā'a basin branches off from the Baḥr Yūsif. Since two colossal statues of the same king, of which the pedestals are still preserved near the modern village of Biahmū, probably stood near the banks the Lake Moeris,¹⁵ an active interest of Amenemhat III in the water regime in the Fayūm seems unmistakable. Even though there is no uncontrovertible archaeological evidence of waterworks dating to the Middle Kingdom, this, and the remarkable location of the pyramids of al-Lahūn and Hawwāra,

argumentation can no longer be fully subscribed to (see below), I see no reason to revive Wittfogel's monocausal way of thinking.

¹² Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization*, 47.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, 41; 91–93; 105.

¹⁴ G. Garbrecht, *Untersuchung antiker Anlagen zur Wasserspeicherung im Fayum/Ägypten* (Braunschweig-Cairo, 1990); G. Garbrecht, H. Jaritz, "Neue Ergebnisse zu altägyptischen Wasserbauten im Fayum", *Antike Welt* 23 (1992), 238–254.

¹⁵ Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization*, 37; D. Arnold, *Die Tempel Ägyptens. Götterwohnungen, Kultstätten, Baudenkmäler* (Zürich, 1992), 187–188 (with bibliography).

which otherwise is hard to explain, suggest that the account of the Classical historians is not entirely groundless.¹⁶

While these considerations prove that the state *could* intervene in irrigation projects, the special case of the Fayūm has little bearing on how irrigation was organized locally in most parts of the country. Butzer, building partly upon an unpublished study by K. Baer, made a strong case for regionally based irrigation systems.¹⁷ His ideas receive support from the maps of the *Description de l'Égypte*, drawn in 1799–1800, which give an impression of what the situation was like before the restructuring of the irrigation system early in the nineteenth century. A study by G. Alleaume shows that at that time, irrigation in southern Upper Egypt did not operate based on feeder canals parallel to the Nile, but on canals more or less perpendicular to the river.¹⁸ Combined with dykes, which also ran from the banks of the Nile to the desert edge, these led to the creation of local irrigation basins linked to one or a few settlements.

In Middle Egypt, where the Nile valley is very wide, such a small-scale system was not possible, because the desert edge might be as far as ten kilometres from the river. Here, the natural relief of the countryside posed a problem. In cross-section, the Nile Valley is convex, the highest points being the levees on active or abandoned river banks. From here, the surface gradually descends towards the desert edge, and the difference in elevation can be in the order of magnitude of several metres. Adopting the same irrigation system as in the south would imply that the floodwaters collected in the deeper areas close to the desert edge. The higher land closer to the river would under natural conditions have less water or none at all. The map of the *Description de l'Égypte* shows that measures were taken to prevent this happening. Making use of natural elevations and dykes, artificial basins were created on higher land to prevent all the water from flowing away to lower areas. Precisely this seems to be described in a text from Assiūt. Inscribed in a nomarch tomb of the First Intermediate Period, this document has a reputation as being one of the earliest to extensively describe the workings of irrigation. In this context it

¹⁶ Based only partly on the same evidence, U. Luft has arrived at similar conclusions ("L'irrigation au Moyen Empire", in: *Les problèmes institutionnels de l'eau*, B. Menu, ed., 249–253).

¹⁷ Butzer, *Early Hydraulic Civilization*, 41–45.

¹⁸ G. Alleaume, in: *Itinéraires d'Égypte*, Chr. Décobert, ed., 301–322.

includes the statement: “I turn[ed the] high la[nd] (*k3y.t*) in]to marsh-land (*idh.w*).”¹⁹ It stands to reason that the word “high land” here refers to the higher part of the floodplain. The deeper areas will under natural conditions have been the very wet areas on the desert edge, and must have been marsh-like. If, in the cited passage, the high land is compared to such areas, a reasonable explanation in my view is that the nomarch in question built dykes (and perhaps even several sets of them) to parcel up the floodplain into artificial basins at successively lower levels.

Comparing the map of part of Middle Egypt made by the *Description de l'Égypte* (which indicates the location of dykes before the nineteenth century) with modern topographical maps giving elevations,²⁰ it is possible to see that precisely this system was operative then (see fig. 1 for the area around al-Ashmūnayn). Here it can be seen that Nile water can enter through a side channel of the river into basin I. Since a canal leads from here into basin II, this is the likely route of the water. From basin II, the water further flows into basins III, IV, V and VI. The isohypses indicate that, the farther the basins lie from the Nile, the lower their elevation is. The inundation regime was therefore as follows. When the Nile had reached a sufficiently high point to allow the sluices to be opened or the dykes to be broken, the water was first allowed to flow through the entire chain of basins, first flooding basin VI. When the water level here was sufficiently high, the connection between this basin and basin V was blocked, allowing number V to be flooded. Next came basin IV, then III, then II, and finally I.

Two remarks must be made here. First, the chain of basins here discussed roughly lies at an angle of about 45° to the local course of the Nile, not parallel to it as was the case in the new feeder canals dug in the nineteenth century. What is illustrated here for one basin chain is also the case for the neighbouring ones.

Second, an implication of the system is that, as the Nile flood recedes, much water remains trapped in the lowermost basins. The water from

¹⁹ H. Brunner, *Die Texte aus den Gräbern der Herakleopolitenzeit von Siut mit Übersetzung und Erläuterung* (Äg.Fo. 5; Glückstadt, Hamburg, New York, 1937), 65, line 7.

²⁰ I used the 1957 1:100,000 topographic map of “Mallawī” (52/263), sheet 140 published by the Egyptian topographic survey and C.F.L. Pancoucke, *Description de l'Égypte ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française. Atlas géographique* (Paris, 1826), flle. 13–14.

Figure 1. Basin systems in the area around the town of al-Ashmūnayn in the late nineteenth century A.D.

here can impossibly flow back into the Nile after the flood, because the higher basins I, II and III are in between. This means that most water must have been evacuated through the Baḥr Yūsif depression.

This reconstruction is based upon a map made about 3,600 years after the Middle Kingdom. I do not have to stress that the way the floodplain was parceled up around 1,800 B.C. may have been very different from the situation in A.D. 1,800. But the Napoleonic map at any rate shows a pre-modern system that is mainly based on the natural shape of the land plus some dykes, which need not have been very high. It seems not unlikely that a similarly simple system may have been operative in the Middle Kingdom, with the proviso that, different from the late eighteenth century, probably not the entire floodplain was yet under cultivation.

If we assume that such a system existed in the Middle Kingdom, it is immediately clear that this has its effects on the way rural Upper Egypt was organized. In the south, there were small artificial basins, in Middle Egypt, there were larger chains of interdependent artificial basins. There is a difference in scale, but the situation in both parts of the country implies that the land was regionally fragmented at least for agricultural purposes. Within local units a degree of cooperation must have existed to make the system work, and where chains of basins are involved, fairly large groups of persons are likely to have been involved.

Whether this implies that the central administration was involved is another matter. Possibly we should imagine that under certain conditions informally organized groups of local peasants could manage the system to their own benefit. The stela of Merer in Krakow (MNIK-XI-999, lines 7–11), dated to the First Intermediate Period, at least suggests as much. After having boasted of his benefactions for his town in times of famine, Merer points out how he kept alive his “brothers and sisters”. The account continues: “I shut off all their fields and all their kôms in town and in the countryside. I did not allow them²¹ to flood for anyone else, being how an able commoner acts for his family.”²² It is generally agreed that this passage means to say that Merer filled his family’s irrigation basin, not allowing the water to reach fields of

²¹ Probably: “their waters”.

²² J. Černý, “The Stela of Merer in Krakow”, *JEA* 47 (1961), 5–9. For another tomb inscription passage probably rooted in the same atmosphere, see H.G. Fischer, “Marginalia III”, *GM* 185 (2001), 45–47.

others. This is described as socially desirable behavior, because in this way the social group led by Merer can be fed. It is not very clear what the size of this group was. The kinship terms here translated as “brothers and sisters” have in fact a far wider denotative range, and do not even necessarily designate exclusively kin. So the group might well be larger than a nuclear family or a household. Unfortunately the term here rendered as ‘family’ does not help much either. The Egyptian text reads *hw.t*. For this, no exact parallel exists. Černý suggests it to be a form of the word *mhw.t*, which perhaps simply designates an informal network of kin, although its true nature is not fully understood.²³ The introductory passage of the text gives us an idea, however, as to where in the social spectrum Merer should be situated. He holds the fairly low rank title of *smḥr wꜥ.ty*, and his functions are “butler, overseer of the butchers of the entire House of Khuu” (lines 1–2). It stands to reason that the House of Khuu designated the local ruling family, and within the clientèle dependent on these rulers, Merer clearly had a relatively modest rank. This text provides a revealing look into a segment of the social spectrum that is rarely referred to in other texts. But the statement that Merer acts “how an able commoner acts for his family” raises the description to a more general level. If we follow Merer in interpreting the text’s content as a description of a more widespread practice, it seems clear that in his environment basin irrigation was carried out on a relatively informal level.

On the other hand, the inscription from Assiūt tomb V, from which I have already cited, suggests that a local administrator (a nomarch) was responsible for the irrigation in his nome. Perhaps it is not insignificant that the stela of Merer, describing an irrigation policy on the family level, probably describes a situation in the region of Edfu, i.e. in southern Upper Egypt, where the basins were small, whereas the Assiūt text, concerning the involvement of the regional administration, is from Middle Egypt, where the floodplain is wide and the basin system more complex to operate.

In some inscriptions, such realities are apparently referred to as “the waters” of a given territory. Thus, stela Leiden V3,²⁴ dated to year 33

²³ D. Franke, *Altägyptische Verwandtschaftsbezeichnungen im Mittleren Reich* (Bonn, 1983), 179–203; H. Willems, “Family Life in the Hereafter according to Coffin Texts Spells 131–146”, in: R. Nyord (ed.), *Studies Frandsen*, n. 30.

²⁴ P.A.A. Boeser, *Beschrijving van de Egyptische verzameling in het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden. De monumenten van den tijd tusschen het Oude Rijk en het Middelrijk. Eerste afdeeling. Stèles* (Leyde-Gravenhage, 1909), pl. II.

of Senwosret I, was owned by a man called Antef, who was a “field supervisor in the Head of Upper Egypt, southwards as far as Dendera,²⁵ northwards as far as Akhmim” (*im.y-r 3h.wt m tp-rs.y rs.y.w r 'Ikw mh.ty.w r Hnt.y-Mnw*). This man started his career as a “field scribe in the waters of Abydos in the Thinite nome” (*ss 3h.wt m mw.w n.w T3-wr 3bdw*), an office that had been in the family for generations. These titles suggest an administrative link between fields (*3h.t*) and water, and also that the waters belonged to the town of Abydos. Based on what we discussed before, this is likely to represent an irrigation basin, or perhaps rather a chain of basins. A similar situation is described in the autobiography of Khnumhotep II from Banī Ḥasan, lines 30 ff.²⁶ This passage describes how king Amenemhat I reestablished order in the Oryx nome. The text stresses in particular that the territorial borders between neighbouring “towns” (*niw.wt*) were reaffirmed according to what had been laid down in “old writings”. The passage concerns the area surrounding the town of Menat-Khufu, and the “waters” in this area are specifically mentioned. Since the text also exactly defines the area as occupying the part of the Oryx nome on the east of the Nile, nowadays a very narrow strip of land, this is likely to have consisted of only one irrigation basin. A stela found in ‘Izbat Rushdi likewise refers to a domain of king Amenemhat located “in the waters of this town”.²⁷ This document is a border stela, and the Banī Ḥasan passage mentions such stelae also, in a context with explicit hints to conflicts between neighbouring “towns” about rights over water (or perhaps rather the agricultural land connected with this). The same is hinted at in the stela of the vizier Mentuhotep (CG 20539,2) and in the tomb autobiography of the vizier Ahanakht I.²⁸ Both men established boundary stelae between nomes. The latter case is particularly instructive, as Ahanakht was also a nomarch, and he claims in the same breath to have had similar responsibilities within the nome, separating individual fields with boundary stones. All these texts stress the importance

²⁵ H.G. Fischer, *Dendera in the Third Millennium B.C.* (New York, 1968), 3–8.

²⁶ P.E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I* (London, 1893), pl. XXV.

²⁷ See S. Adam, *ASAE* 56 (1959), 216; pl. IX; M. Bietak, J. Dorner, “Der Tempel und die Siedlung des Mittleren Reiches bei ‘Ezbat Ruschdi. Grabungsvorbericht 1996”, *Ä&L* 8 (1998), 17–18 (with literature); H. Goedicke, “The Building Inscription from Tell el-Dab’a of the Time of Sesostriis III”, *Ä&L* 12 (2002), pp. 187–190.

²⁸ P.E. Newberry, *El Bersheh II* (London, 1895), pl. XIII, line 11 and H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā I. The Rock Tombs of Djehutinakht* (No. 17K74/1), *Khnumnakht* (No. 17K74/2), *Iha* (No. 17K74/3) (OLA 155; Leuven, 2007), 102.

for the definition of territorial borders. This seems to be primarily a legal matter linked to property rights, for there is no hint that the central authorities were involved in the practical irrigation management of the territories concerned.²⁹ In the Fayūm, the central state may have literally built dykes and dug canals, but there is no indication of this in Upper Egypt.³⁰

This brings us back to the basic issue of this section. We have seen that the rural population was probably relatively immobile, being “rooted” in the agricultural land it worked. The annual flood must have physically isolated the population, and travel was also difficult when the Nile was low. The in the Middle Kingdom still only partial ‘colonization’ of the Nile Valley must have further contributed to the emergence of regional entities. Finally, the irrigation regime, which lay at the root of the economy, was based on a system with basins or basin chains, i.e. smaller or larger areas within which collaboration is a precondition for successful agriculture. All these forces contribute to the Nile Valley being split up into separate regional units.

LOCAL POTENTATES: A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

The fragmentary nature of written and archaeological evidence should not make us overly confident in the accuracy of our interpretations. My reason for starting this chapter, not with texts giving details about local rulership, but with an environmental perspective, has been deliberate, prompted by a desire to give priority to indications that are not often taken into consideration. The great attention paid to written records is inversely proportionate to their rarity, implying that prominence is usually given to sources that may be not at all representative. These texts occur almost exclusively in tombs, and even here only in

²⁹ In P. Harageh 3, a diary entry of a *sš ȝh.wt*, the task at stake seems also to have concerned only the surveying of land, not the administration of the irrigation (see P. Smither, “A Tax-Assessor’s Journal of the Middle Kingdom”, *JEA* 27 [1941], 74–76). I have found only one example where the central state may have been involved in the construction or upkeep of a canal. In stela Cairo CG 20531, dated to the reign of Amenemhat II, the owner, an overseer of works, states that his lord “selected him in the Two Lands in order to supervise for him the (construction of?) an ‘canal in the Thinite nome.”

³⁰ Against earlier statements to the contrary, U. Luft has even argued that no known administrative title of the Old and Middle Kingdoms refers to irrigation (in: *Les problèmes institutionnels de l’eau*, B. Menu, ed., 255–260).

the tombs of those linked to the highest provincial elite. These people were buried in large cemeteries containing not only the sepulchres of the nomarchs and their direct entourage, but in many cases thousands of others, who were buried in smaller tombs, and sometimes in very small ones. Egyptologists have a tendency to attribute burials of the latter two kinds to the 'ordinary' population, but a note of caution is in order here. In Dayr al-Barshā, for instance, the masses of smaller burials in the plain seem in great majority to date to the very beginning of the Middle Kingdom, a period when the nome capital of al-Ashmūnayn played an important role in national politics.³¹ After that, the amount of burials dropped dramatically, and this is of course unlikely to reflect an equally dramatic demographic trend in the overall population. Perhaps the amount of government officials in nearby al-Ashmūnayn simply decreased, and the size of the elite cemetery at Dayr al-Barshā with it. In this case, those buried here apparently represent only a part of the rural population. Similarly, S.J. Seidlmayer has recently argued that the occupants of the small tombs in Banī Ḥasan belonged to a relatively privileged group.³²

Although cemeteries like these have been rather intensively discussed, it should be stressed that they are usually the only ones to have received such attention in entire nomes. But these burial places, belonging to the nome capitals or occasionally other settlements of comparable importance, were obviously not the only population centres in the nome. This obvious fact is of far greater importance than is usually realized. Of course there must have been many smaller and larger settlements in the nome beside the capital, but in most cases these, or their burial grounds, have never been located. The only region where the situation has been described in relative detail is the area between Qāw and Badārī, a thirty kilometre stretch on the eastern Nile bank south of Assiūt. Here, Brunton and Petrie discovered a whole range of cemeteries, of which some related to the nome capital, but others to differently sized settlements in the surroundings.³³ My own

³¹ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 107–113; Id., *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 87 ff.

³² S.J. Seidlmayer, "People at Beni Hassan. Contributions to a Model of Ancient Egyptian Rural Society", in: *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt. Essays in Honor of David B. O'Connor* II, Z.A. Hawass, J. Richards, ed., (ASAE Supplement 36,2; Cairo, 2007), 351–368.

³³ For an analysis, see S.J. Seidlmayer, *Gräberfelder aus dem Übergang vom Alten zum Mittleren Reich* (SAGA 1; Heidelberg, 1990), 123–210.

research in the Dayr al-Barshā region is at the time of writing developing a strategy to disclose such large-scale spatial patterns. Although it is still far too early to provide details, it is clear that in this area also, there are numerous smaller cemeteries beside Dayr al-Barshā itself. Some are very small, only containing one or two small, undecorated rock tombs and a small scatter of pit tombs in the slopes below. Here we find in miniature what is found in the great nomarch cemeteries: regional big men are buried in relatively impressive, and impressively located tombs, whereas the others were buried in the foothills.

This is very interesting, suggesting as it does that there were ‘big men’ of sorts. Some of them may have been merely the heads of an isolated farmstead, others of a hamlet, a small village, or a smaller or larger town, and then of course there were the provincial administrators. In order to understand what we are looking at, it is crucial to realize that only the latter category is usually visible in terms of published documentation for their tombs. And since usually only these large tombs are inscribed and decorated, another corollary is that for most lower order “big men” we cannot even expect to find written evidence. They may have held titles, but if they did, we do not know which. This being the case, it should not be ruled out that somewhere along the spectrum (and it need not be low on the scale) we have to reckon with systems of local organization that were mostly informal. Undoubtedly, the rural folk culture, which Kemp has dubbed “preformal culture”,³⁴ is linked to this.

I think it reasonable to suppose that the “nomarchs” and other big men on the highest provincial scale should be understood also as part of the rural social fabric. Their role in the Egyptian state at large cannot of course be denied, and will be returned to later on. But, different from the situation in the Old Kingdom, we find no mention of Middle Kingdom governors who started their careers as palace or Residence officials subsequently appointed as heads of provinces. Stated differently, these people were born in the province and grew up there, even though part of their youth may have been spent at the royal court. They formed the apex of a whole network of local social relationships.

These people surface in the egyptological record because they had monumental, inscribed tombs. We can occasionally tell some of the

³⁴ B.J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt. Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, New York, 1989), 65–83.

main lines of their lives from their funerary autobiographies. These usually inform us on their careers, because great store is laid on their titles, and on how and when they acquired them. We learn that they reached their exalted state because they were appointed by the king; but since they more often than not seem to have followed in their fathers' footsteps, officialdom was to no small extent hereditary. However, the fact that the king was required to appoint them suggests that he could also choose unexpected candidates, something that probably happened every now and then. Local rulership may have been quasi-hereditary, but the line of succession must have started somewhere. And this raises a question that the texts do not help to resolve: what made the king decide to appoint a "nomarch" belonging to a new line? The underlying reasons were probably highly diverse, but in one way or another, the new "nomarch" must, in the period preceding his appointment, have acquired a position in the local hierarchy that made him the most likely candidate. There is no evidence to illustrate such careers in detail. However, there is little room for doubt that we are facing men who, within the local, partly informal social fabric, had become so important that it was hard to bypass them. Perhaps they were successful entrepreneurs of the Heqanakhte type, although not necessarily always on such a geographically wide-ranging scale. The funerary contracts of Djefaihapi I, a local potentate contemporary with Senwosret I, make a clear difference between two types of financial resources that this man could muster. On the one hand he could rely on the *pr ḥ3.ty*-^c ('the estate of the baron'), which was his income as an official. But on the other he financed his funerary cult from the *pr it*, 'the father's estate', i.e. from the capital he had inherited from his father.³⁵ In this particular case it is likely (although uncertain) that the official had succeeded his father in office, and therefore that the father's estate was partly based on income he had received from the state. But there is nothing inherently unlikely in the assumption that some of the family capital was due also to private initiative.³⁶

What I am arguing here is that the "nomarchs", who are known to egyptologists because their tomb inscriptions inform us on their careers as state officials, were probably partly rooted in a world in which the

³⁵ A.J. Spalinger, "A Redistributive Pattern at Assiut", *JAOS* 105 (1985), 7–20.

³⁶ In this account, I subscribe to D. Warburton's idea that Egypt had a market economy (cf. n. 6).

state did not directly interfere: the rural informal folk culture, where their role may have been that of a gentleman farmer. When appointed a “nomarch”, they also became officials.

This having been said, it remains that reaching official status was obviously extremely important for them. Otherwise, their careers in the state would not occupy such a central place in their autobiographies. In fact, as far as I am aware, there are no autobiographies in which the tomb owner does not boast official titles. This suggests that a state career followed almost unavoidably once a person had reached a certain local status.

Unfortunately little is known about Egyptian settlements of the Middle Kingdom that could inform us of the conditions of living of the different social strata, and the cases where we do have archaeological remains are not necessarily representative for the conditions in rural communities. Keeping this reservation in mind, it may nevertheless be useful to cast a glance at some of these instances. A first point that should be stressed is that most Middle Kingdom town sites that have been excavated are planned settlements. Writing about this in 1989 B.J. Kemp came close to suggesting that this was in fact a characteristic of Middle Kingdom towns in general.³⁷ However, research carried out since has shown that organically grown settlements also existed, for instance at Elephantine.³⁸ Although there is still a huge bias in terms of documentation in favour of planned settlements, this suggests to the author that organically grown settlements were probably the norm, whereas planned settlements were created by the authorities to fulfill special needs of the state. In the latter case, one may think of workmen’s settlements such as were built in Tall al-Dab’a³⁹ or Qaşr

³⁷ B.J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt. Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, New York, 1989), 149–166.

³⁸ C. von Pilgrim, *Elephantine XVIII. Untersuchungen in der Stadt des Mittleren Reiches und der Zweiten Zwischenzeit* (AVDAIK 91; Mainz am Rhein, 1996); W. Kaiser, *e.a.*, “Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 25./26./27. Grabungsbericht”, *MDAIK* 55 (1999), 234, fig. 56. Also, the town of Abū Ghālib, which in Kemp’s 1989 publication is still attributed to the type of the planned settlements, is far less regularly built than other representatives of the type. I would be inclined to consider this rather as an organically grown settlement (note that it no longer features in the second edition of Kemp’s book, published in 2006).

³⁹ E. Czerny, *Tell el-Dab’a IX. Eine Plansiedlung des frühen Mittleren Reiches* (ÖAW Denkschr. XVI; Wien, 1999).

al-Sagha,⁴⁰ of the Nubian fortresses, or of pyramid towns, built in order to sustain the funerary cult of the sovereign. The best-known example of a site of the latter kind is the town of al-Lahūn, which belongs to the pyramid of Senwosret II.⁴¹ Recently, a settlement of the same kind was discovered at Abydos, which belonged to the royal tomb or cenotaph of Senwosret III.⁴² The military camps and workmen's barracks probably sheltered a population with only a single purpose, but the pyramid towns had a more varied population structure, and this is reflected in a ranking in terms of size and number of rooms and storage facilities. As Kemp has duly noted, the town at al-Lahūn shows a restricted amount of house models, the settlement being organized in blocks in which only one such model prevailed. It stands to reason that not all inhabitants will have been satisfied by this strictly regulated living environment, and it is clear that they soon began to adapt the dwellings to their personal preference.⁴³ But the model had nevertheless been designed by Egyptian administrators, and thus the settlement patterning gives an idea of what they believed to be the ideal structure of the population. Here it must be pointed out that, besides different kinds of smaller dwellings, the settlement also contained seven very large, walled compounds. These were internally structured as groupings of separate houses of different sizes, probably each housing one nuclear family, or, in the case of the smallest ones, just one or two servants. These compounds were also the only place in the settlement where there were large granaries, and these were so vast that each compound could feed a large part of the rest of the settlement.⁴⁴ If, as seems likely, this settlement was modeled to fulfill the needs of the community, it seems that those in charge of the large living compounds were surrounded by an extensive group of dependants. In the biggest units of the compound lived the family of the owner and that of his eldest, married son, besides that sheltering also an extensive group of lower ranking officials and servants. But the circle of dependants probably

⁴⁰ J. Sliwa, "Die Siedlung des Mittleren Reiches bei Qasr el-Sagha", *MDAIK* 48 (1992), 177–191; extensive discussion B.J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt. Anatomy of a Civilization* (London, New York,² 2006), 227–231.

⁴¹ Very extensively B.J. Kemp, *op. cit.* (n. 40), 211–221.

⁴² J. Wegner, "The Town Wah-sut at South Abydos: 1999 Excavation", *MDAIK* 57 (2001), 281–308.

⁴³ This is also well documented for the workmen's settlement at Tall al-Dab'a (E. Czerny, *Tell el-Dab'a IX*).

⁴⁴ B.J. Kemp, *op. cit.*, 215–217.

extended also into the settlement outside the large compounds, and these people may have received their pay from the granaries there. These compounds were very large, having a built surface in the order of magnitude of 2,500 m².

The main inhabitants of these compounds were no doubt very high officials. But it is instructive to compare their houses to the great Middle Kingdom palace in Tall Bastā,⁴⁵ which was inhabited by a “baron and overseer of priests” (*ḥ3.ty-ꜥ im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*). Unfortunately this vast structure has not been adequately published; and it seems likely that what is visible today represents only a part of the total. But the uncovered part of the building alone covers an area of over one hectare, four times as much as the villas in al-Lahūn. This figure could be larger depending on how great a part of this building goes undocumented. This example gives an impression of the magnitude of the residence of a regional administrator. Interestingly, the palace is surrounded by a cemetery. To the east is the impressive multi-chambered tomb of the family of the high administrators, to the west is a far larger cemetery with smaller tombs, although even these are well-built mud-brick vaults. It is likely that this is not the cemetery of the inhabitants of the town generally, but of the officials attached to the palace.

For Middle Egypt, whence derives most of our information on the “nomarchs”, no comparable evidence exists, but here the cemeteries give an impression of their position within society. Like in Tall Bastā, these cemeteries are split up in different zones for the highest administrators, their closest collaborators, and the lower rank and file. Here also, it seems that the general population was buried elsewhere (see p. 353 above). In Bani Ḥasan, it has been possible to define the administrative ranks buried in the nomarch cemeteries to a degree, and it seems that the provincial rulers were here buried surrounded by their staff (see n. 32). The rock tomb of a high official recently discovered at Assiūt is surrounded by literally dozens of smaller tomb shafts,

⁴⁵ C.C. Van Siclen III, “Remarks on the Middle Kingdom Palace at Tell Basta”, in: *Haus und Palast im alten Ägypten*, M. Bietak, ed. (Unt. d. Zweigstelle Kairo des ÖAI 14; Wien, 1996), 239–246; Id., “The Mayors of Basta in the Middle Kingdom”, in: *Akten des vierten internationalen Ägyptologenkongresses München 1985* IV, S. Schoske, ed. (SAK Beiheft 4; Hamburg, 1991), 187–194. A partly different plan was published by M.I. Bakr, H. Brandl, “The pharaonic cemeteries of Bubastis”, in: *Egyptian Antiquities from Kufur Nigm and Bubastis*, M.I. Bakr, H. Brandl, ed. (Museums in the Nile Delta, 1; Berlin, 2010), 19, fig. 1.

suggesting a similar situation.⁴⁶ And several of the larger rock tombs at Dayr al-Barshā are likewise surrounded by smaller, but still relatively impressive rock tombs of the staff of the nomarch.⁴⁷ While it may be exaggerated to understand these people as members of the master's 'household', they definitely seem to constitute an extensive clientèle dependent upon him. In this regard, the system still resembles that of the regional administrators of the First Intermediate Period, although in the latter case, the funerary architecture expresses the relationship between different social levels even more clearly. As S.J. Seidlmayer has shown, in this period the large mastabas and *Ṣaff*-tombs of the high nobility *included* large numbers of smaller burials, and it stands to reason that these latter belonged to the entourage of the main owner of the tomb.⁴⁸ This has been interpreted as expressing local, socially ranked groupings and their patron. Interestingly, for the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, it has been shown for various sites that most of the occupants of the smaller tombs were males, implying that their wives were buried elsewhere, probably near the settlements where they and their families had resided, to all likelihood with their husbands. But these latter when they died joined their superiors, a clear expression of how strong the bond with the patron was felt.⁴⁹ The information for the Middle Kingdom is less clear in this regard, because here little information on age and sex ratios in cemetery populations has been published. But at least at Dayr al-Barshā,

⁴⁶ J. Kahl, M. el-Khadragy, U. Verhoeven, "The Asyut Project: Fifth Season of Fieldwork", *SAK* 37 (2008), 204–205; J. Kahl, M. el-Khadragy, U. Voerhoeven, A. el-Khatib, "The Asyut Project: Sixth Season of Fieldwork (2008)", *SAK* 38 (2009), 115, fig. 2.

⁴⁷ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I; to the tombs here studied, which belong to the entourage of the nomarch Ahanakht I, one can now add the tomb of Duahor, of which the publication is in preparation. The location of this tomb suggests that burials in the wider surroundings of the tomb of Ahanakht I belong to the entourage of this nomarch. See also the tombs of the entourage of Djehutihotep (most recently H. Willems, M. De Meyer, T. Dupras, D. Depraetere, G. van Loon, A. Delattre, Chr. Peeters, T. Herbich, G. Verstraeten, W. Van Neer, "Preliminary Report of the 2004–2005 Campaigns of the Belgian Mission to Dayr al-Barshā", *MDAIK* 65 [2009], in press).

⁴⁸ S.J. Seidlmayer, *Gräberfelder*, 403–405. The tomb of the "mayors" of Tall Bastā is perhaps of the same kind.

⁴⁹ S.J. Seidlmayer, "Wirtschaftliche Situation und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung im Übergang vom Alten zum Mittleren Reich—ein Beitrag zur Archäologie der Gräberfelder der Region Qau-Matmar in der Ersten Zwischenzeit", in: *Problems and Priorities in Egyptian Archaeology*, J. Assmann, V. Davies, eds., (London, 1987), 175–217; K.J. Seyfried, "Dienstpflicht mit Selbstversorgung. Die Diener des Verstorbenen im Alten Reich", in: H. Guksch, E. Hoffmann, M. Bommas, *Grab und Totenkult im alten Ägypten* (München, 2003), 41–59.

the subordinates buried around the provincial overlords seem to have been predominantly male.⁵⁰

ADMINISTRATIVE ASPECTS

On the preceding pages, I have used a variety of somewhat non-committal terms to refer to the highest provincial elite, designating them not by their titles, but, as in the previous sentence, as 'provincial overlords', or similarly. One reason for this is the 'bottom-up' approach of this chapter, which considers the rural social network as being based to a probably large extent on informal, local bonds *beside* the administrative structure. Another reason is that there are real problems with the way provincial rulers are usually referred to by Egyptologists, who, faced with a heterogeneous set of designations in the sources, have imposed a kind of order upon the evidence that seems to evaporate once things are looked at more closely. In this section I will argue that the inconsistency in the way administrators are referred to in the texts may simultaneously reflect two features of the basic data. The first is that the evidence itself may, owing to its inevitably fragmentary nature, be so lacunous that the patterns that seem to emerge may distort rather than reflect the original state of affairs. This has the important implication that reconstructions are only viable if there is really a substantial amount of source material. We will see that many accepted ideas are based on arguments that do not meet this basic requirement. The second factor is that, by trying to bring order into the somewhat chaotic sources, scholarship may unwittingly have built interpretative models that are more 'systematic' than the reality may have been. It is in the nature of historical or archaeological research that generalizations are based on samples of which it may be near impossible to assess how representative they are. I am not objecting to this inevitable approach as such, but I would recommend an analysis that also leaves room for the possibility that the administrative structure of rural Egypt may to a degree have reflected the regional fragmentation that we have discussed above. This means that the administration may have been more haphazardly organized than is usually admitted.

⁵⁰ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 110–113.

Two terms that can no longer be avoided using now are “nome” and “nomarch”. The former term is usually understood as meaning something that comes close to what we would call a “province”, while the “nomarchs” are those in charge of these realms as provincial governors. These concepts seem clear, but matters become highly confusing when we try to define which people qualified as nomarchs. Looking at the literature, it becomes clear that this term is used rather loosely with reference to people referred to in the texts as, for instance:

hr.y-tp ʿ3 *n* X “great chief of Nome X”;
h3.ty-ʿ (an elusive term meaning literally “foremost of position”; I often translate it as “baron”, in full awareness that this rendering is as unsatisfactory as others that have been proposed. At any rate, for reasons to be explained below, I emphatically wish to avoid the general label “mayor” for this term);
h3.ty-ʿ im.y-r hm.w-ntr “baron, overseer of priests”;
h3.ty-ʿ im.y-r hw.t-ntr “baron, overseer of the temple”;
h3.ty-ʿ n X “baron of town X”. In this case it seems likely that the rendering “mayor” may be appropriate. The idea that this term designates a “nomarch” is also encountered.⁵¹

Moreover, terms with an originally different meaning, like the titles of a vizier, are sometimes believed to be honorific titles that do not “mean” “nomarch”, but that nevertheless can be given to one to bolster his status.

If we call all these people “nomarchs”, then it should be clear that we are not giving priority to the title differentiation made by the Egyptians themselves, but that we are deploying a modern blanket term covering a class of officials with widely varying titles. I think that it is in fact useful to deploy the word “nomarch” in this sense. The difficulty to explicitly link these titles to nomes has, however, also led to a very different reading of the evidence that was introduced by W. Helck, and that still has many adherents.

He enfolded his theories in his *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reichs* (PdÄ 3; Leiden, 1958). Although all aspects of the administration are covered in this work, it, at first somewhat surprisingly, does not contain a chapter on the nomarchs. On looking closer it appears that the officials often thus designated feature in the

⁵¹ M. Pardey, s.v. “Administration: provincial administration”, *OEA* I, 18–19.

chapter on “die Verwaltung der Stadtbezirke”.⁵² This points to a core element in Helck’s reasoning: according to him the “nomes” were in the Middle Kingdom just an anachronism, and in reality the regional centres of administration were the towns. Since this hypothesis is still very widely accepted it is important to investigate in somewhat greater detail what are the arguments underlying it. To follow the drift of the story, a brief glance at Helck’s views on the evolution of the administration since the Old Kingdom is in order. According to him the “nomarchs” would have emerged as early as the 4th dynasty, a difference being made in the texts between “nomarchs” from Lower Egypt (called *‘d mr*) and Upper Egypt (called *sšm t3*).⁵³ The present author has argued, however, that evidence to understand *‘d mr* and *sšm-t3* as designating “nomarchs” is flimsy, at least if this term is meant to designate an official with overall responsibility for an entire nome.⁵⁴ Helck must, however, be given credence when he states that “nomarchs” were in existence as of the late 5th dynasty, for at that time, a new class of officials called *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n sp3.t* (in the southernmost nomes of Upper Egypt) or *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n* NAME OF NOME (in areas further north) emerges (“Great chief of the nome/of nome X”). Being a title that was invented in connection with an administrative reform, it is probably justified to assume that at least at that time a literal translation of the term corresponded to what it meant as an administrative reality. This means that these people were really “great chiefs” of a nome. Accordingly, Egyptologists agree across the board that in the late 5th and 6th dynasties, this title designated a nomarch.⁵⁵ For the

⁵² W. Helck, *Zur Verwaltung des Mittleren und Neuen Reichs* (PdÄ 3; Leiden, 1958), 194–245.

⁵³ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, 196–199. This account already offers a splendid example of the eclectic use Helck makes of his sources. In order to reconstruct the *origin* of the role of the *‘d mr* early in the Old Kingdom, when these officials, as we have seen, were characteristic for Lower Egypt, he uses an inscription from the tomb of Djehutihotep in Dayr al-Barshā (in Upper Egypt and dated over half a millennium later). On this peculiar basis, he argues that these officials were originally in charge of “Stapelplätze” where the produce of the royal domains in the regions were collected for shipment to the residence. The basis for Helck’s far-reaching inferences are not only restricted to just a single text from the wrong time and place, but also on a probably incorrect interpretation of this document (see H. Willems, Chr. Peeters, G. Verstraeten, “Where did Djehutihotep Erect his Colossal Statue?”, *ZÄS* 132 [2005], 173–175).

⁵⁴ H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie. Éléments d’une histoire culturelle du Moyen Empire égyptien* (Paris, 2008), 27–28. Note that, in the inscriptions of Metjen, the title *‘d-mr* is associated not only with nomes, but also with towns (*Urk.* I, pp. 3, 9).

⁵⁵ Helck, *Verwaltung*, 199–202; Martin-Pardey, *Untersuchungen zur Provinzialverwaltung bis zum Ende des Alten Reiches* (HÄB 1; Hildesheim, 1976), p. 111 ff.; etc.

same reason, the word is, for the first time in this chapter, not written between inverted commas.

Helck also discusses another class of officials: the “overseers of priests” (*im.y.w-r ḥm.w-ntr*). He argues that these people were originally subordinate to the “great chiefs,” but that their power rapidly increased as the state exempted the temples from certain obligations and payments. As a result, they gradually became players at the same level as the nomarchs, and in some nomes, where no “great chiefs” are attested, the overseers of priests are argued to have usurped the power of the former.⁵⁶ Since the *im.y.w-r ḥm.w-ntr* thus also have power on the provincial level, Helck claims that “die Gaufürsten des ausgehenden Alten Reiches einzuteilen sind in ‘weltliche’ und ‘geistliche’ Herren, je nachdem, ob ihre Macht auf der alten Stellung als ‘Grosses Oberhaupt’ oder der als ‘Prophetenvorsteher’ am Haupttempel der Gaumetropole aufbaut”.⁵⁷ Elements in this account are open to criticism,⁵⁸ but the fact that the two titles referred to officials with a strongly comparable authority within the nome seems consistent with the late Old Kingdom evidence. This is further underscored by the fact that several officials now have the *combined* title string *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n sp3.t im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr*. With Helck, I would therefore argue that all these officials deserve being understood as rulers of a nome.⁵⁹ In the Middle Kingdom, the situation seems to me to be very similar,⁶⁰ as, in that period also, there are *ḥr.y.w-tp ʿ3 n NOME*, *im.yw-r ḥm.w-ntr*, and people with the title combination *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME* + *im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr*. But although Helck

⁵⁶ Helck, *Verwaltung*, 200–201. For a more realistic account of the evolving relationships between temple and state administration, see R. Bussmann, *Die Provinztempel Ägyptens von der 0. bis zur 11. Dynastie. Archäologie und Geschichte einer gesellschaftlichen Institution zwischen Residenz und Provinz* (PdÄ 30; Leiden, Boston, 2010), 503–513.

⁵⁷ Helck, *Verwaltung*, 202.

⁵⁸ Thus, the only source cited by Helck in support of his contention that the overseers of priests originally stood under the authority of a “great chief of a nome” (*Urk. I*, p. 102) states nothing of the kind. Also, the tendency perceived by Helck towards a gradual increase in temple exemptions is far from clear. While there are admittedly more royal decrees referring to exemptions in the late Old Kingdom (8th Dynasty), this is largely the result of a single find: the Koptos decrees.

⁵⁹ Or rather: that this *could* be the case. As Moreno García has argued, there are also cases where the two kinds of officials were simultaneously in function. An instance is the case of the 14th Upper Egyptian nome, where the nomarchs were buried in Mīr, and the priests in Quṣṣayr al-Amārīna (z.B. Martin-Pardey, *Provinzialverwaltung*, 123–125).

⁶⁰ Similarly R. Bussmann, *loc. cit.*

acknowledges this state of affairs in the documentation, he interprets this evidence very differently for the Middle Kingdom.

This has to do with his inclination to assume that, as time went by, officials increasingly claimed titles that did not correspond to their actual tasks. He explains this phenomenon as follows. When a local ruler for instance ‘usurps’ the title string of a vizier, this does not mean he has assumed the *functions* of a vizier, but that he is no longer hierarchically subordinate to one. In this way, a single title can be read at two levels: either it is a functional title, indicating real responsibilities and tasks, or it is merely an honorific rank title. This kind of reasoning characterizes not only Helck’s interpretation of the vizier’s title, but also his views on, for instance, the functional title *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME* which became a kind of rank title, or the title *ḥ3.ty-ʿ*, where Helck in some cases perceives an opposite development from a rank title to a functional title. This reading of the evidence introduces an enormous element of randomness in his analysis.

This becomes clear in his discussion of the provincial administration in the First Intermediate Period, when he rightly observes tendencies towards fragmentation of nomes into smaller entities. For instance, in several cases towns are now led by generals and other big men. From this, Helck deduces that nomes *everywhere* gradually lost their administrative importance to towns. Thus, he argues for example that statements in the autobiography of Ankhtifi, to the effect that he was a “great chief” of the second and third Upper Egyptian nomes, cannot be taken seriously. Rather, Ankhtifi would have been a representative of a new category of leaders of one or more settlements, probably originally ‘generals’, who made themselves independent by usurping the title of *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n sp3.t*,⁶¹ much like others had taken on the style of a vizier. However, there is no clear indication whatsoever in the Ankhtifi texts that this title should no longer be understood as designating a nomarch. The fact that his autobiography mentions his power over several settlements in no way constitutes a counterargument: there is nothing unusual about a nomarch having supremacy over the settlements within his nome.⁶²

⁶¹ Helck, *Verwaltung*, 204–206.

⁶² The remaining indications mustered by Helck are likewise inconclusive. Thus, when a man in stela Cairo 1759 declares to have served *ḥr.y-tp 7* “7 great chiefs”, this is understood by him as referring to overseers of priests. It is not clear why this interpretation, which moreover is uncertain, would imply that the term *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n*

In the remainder of Helck's account, the completely unsubstantiated idea that settlements became the real administrative units *to the detriment* of the nomes is taken as the point of departure for the situation in the Middle Kingdom as well. He asserts that the title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ*, which had been a rank title under the Old Kingdom, is now taken over by "königliche Stadtkommandanten...in der betreffenden Stadt".⁶³ The alleged military background of these officials rests on only a single source in Helck's evidence, which states about a man called Sebeky that "his Majesty gave this town to him as a *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* and as a general."⁶⁴ The fact that a man with the two (textually separate) titles of *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* and general is here related to a town is sufficient for Helck to draw a whole series of mostly implicit conclusions:

1) The title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* is a military title. This is unconvincing, because the link to a military function is made explicit in the text just cited by another title: *im.y-r mšꜥ*. Following the same reasoning, the very many instances where *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* is connected with the priestly title *im.y-r ḥm.w-nꜥr* should be taken as implying that *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* designated a religious office. As far as I know, no-one has ever made this implausible suggestion; but then there is no reason either to assume that *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* designated the commander of a town garrison.⁶⁵

2) The title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ*, when used with regard to a man with authority over a town, is identical with the title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n TOPONYM*, "baron of a town" = "mayor". This latter title does occur with reference to some local rulers in the Banī Ḥasan tombs.⁶⁶ More examples can be found, but as will be shown below the title is not of very common occurrence in the earlier Middle Kingdom. However, it does occur very frequently in the New Kingdom. One of the most impressive sources is the text of the "Duties of the Vizier" in the tomb of Rekhmire and other tombs at Thebes. The known sources date between the reigns of Thuthmosis III and Ramses II, but Helck believes it to be a *verbatim* copy of a text

sp3.t would no longer mean "nomarch". Counterarguments are: 1) the cited text does not refer to a *ḥr.y-tp ꜥ n sp3.t*, but only refers in a classificatory sense to *ḥr.y.w-tp*. It is possible, but by no means certain, that this has the same meaning. 2) If it does, then it would still be possible that the Theban nomarchs followed one after another in rapid succession. 3) The immediate context is damaged.

⁶³ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, p. 208.

⁶⁴ Stela München 22 (Dyroff, Pörtner, *Süddeutsche Sammlungen* II, pl. III, no. 4).

⁶⁵ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, p. 208.

⁶⁶ Loc. cit.

from the 13th dynasty.⁶⁷ By dating the text back to the Middle Kingdom, Helck not only significantly raises the number of attestations of the title in that period, but also adds a document that lists a very large amount of “mayors” in geographical order. This suggests to him that the whole, or at least a major part of Upper Egypt was parceled up in territories led by “mayors” called *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n* TOPONYM. This point is so crucial to Helck’s hypotheses that the issue of the date of the “Duties” must be dealt with in some detail.

Helck’s case has been severely criticized by G.P.F. van den Boorn. Mustering a host of grammatical, lexicographical and historical indications, he argued that Helck’s redating of the ‘Duties’ to the Middle Kingdom is groundless, and that the text is rooted in the period whence the known versions derive: the early New Kingdom.⁶⁸ However, J.M. Kruchten’s review of van den Boorn’s book has shown that several features the latter considered as “NK signatures” should be taken with a grain of salt. He considers the “Duties” rather as a *pot-pourri* of statements dating mostly from the Middle Kingdom, but also from later points in time.⁶⁹ Building upon this criticism, E. Pardey added further indications for a Middle Kingdom origin. Most notably, she argued that the “Duties” use the geographical term *tp-rs.y* with reference to the southernmost nomes of Upper Egypt, as part of the realm of authority of the vizier. Arguing that “Head of the South” in the New Kingdom no longer refers to this part of Egypt, but rather to Lower Nubia, which was ruled by the King’s Son of Kush instead of the vizier, this would mean that the text must have been written in the Middle Kingdom.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, pp. 212–218.

⁶⁸ G.P.F. van den Boorn, “On the Date of the ‘The Duties of the Vizier’”, *Or.* 51 (1982), 369–381; Id., *The Duties of the Vizier. On the Internal Government of Egypt in the Early New Kingdom* (London, New York, 1991), pp. 333–376. Van den Boorn’s account has been accepted by many authors.

⁶⁹ J.-M. Kruchten, *BiOr* 48 (1991), 827–829.

⁷⁰ E. Pardey, “Die Datierung der ‘Dienstweisung für den Wesir’ und die Problematik von *Tp rsj* im Neuen Reich”, in: N. Kloth, K. Martin, E. Pardey (eds.), *Es werde niedergelegt als Schriftstück. Festschrift für Hartwig Altenmüller zum 65. Geburtstag* (BSAK 9; Hamburg, 2003), 323–334. A late Middle Kingdom date of the “Duties” is also taken for granted by S. Quirke (*Titles and Bureaux of Egypt 1850–1700 BC* [GHP Egyptology 1; London, 2004], 18–24; 85) who, however, cites only few arguments, which; moreover, are not all apt; the titles he considers typical for the Middle Kingdom (p. 23) are for the most part still attested on the late Second Intermediate Period “*stèle juridique*” (P. Lacau, *Une stèle juridique de Karnak* [Supplément ASAE 13; Cairo, 1949]).

We agree that van den Boorn's late dating cannot be considered certain, but it should be noted that his stand is in fact more nuanced than most of his critics believe. For he does accept that the text was probably "a conflation of MK written and early NK oral sources". Therefore the occurrence of Middle Kingdom elements in the text do not in themselves discredit his hypothesis. Moreover, Pardey's arguments are not at all compelling. In fact, with one exception from the tomb of Puyemre, all her sources have in the past been interpreted as implying that *Tp-rs.y* in the New Kingdom had the same meaning as in the Middle Kingdom. This reading of the evidence seems preferable to the present author also.⁷¹

Another argument that has been marshaled in support of an attribution of the "Duties" to the Middle Kingdom, and in particular also the list of *ḥ3.ty.w-ʿ* in the text, is that the inscription includes the toponym Wah-sut.⁷² It should be noted that, until Wegner's excavations there began, it was assumed that the site we now know was Wah-sut dates to the New Kingdom, and its excavator has shown it was still functional

⁷¹ Pardey's key source is *Urk.* IV, 79,17–81,4. This is a copy of the letter informing Turoy, a king's son (of Kush?) and overseer of the southern foreign lands, of the royal style of the newly crowned king Thutmose I. Turoy is asked to present offerings in the name of the new king and also bring offerings *n ntr.w Tp-rs.y 3bw*. Pardey understands this as meaning "to the gods of 'the Head of the South' and of Elephantine". This reading would imply that Elephantine lay outside "the Head of the South", and that this latter region, belonging to the area governed by Turoy, can only designate Lower Nubia. The fact that this would have been the case early in the 18th dynasty would rule out the possibility that the "Duties" (which imply a different administrative reality) date to the same period.

However, the text nowhere states that that Turoy ruled "the Head of the South", and the traditional reading of the relevant passage as "to the gods of Elephantine in 'the Head of the South'" is likewise possible. If Turoy is urged to present offerings to these deities this may merely mean that he came *from* his area of jurisdiction to honour them outside it in Elephantine. This might be a ritual way of underscoring how wealth from the Lower Nubian colonies was channeled to Egypt. It would stand to reason that the transfer of such goods (and of the offerings representing them) would take place at the Nubian-Egyptian border, i.e. in Elephantine. Moreover, it is known that the religious festivities for Satet at Elephantine were in the New Kingdom attended by very high officials from different parts of Egypt (witness the graffiti at Hassawanarti; see S.J. Seidlmayer, "Landschaft und Religion—die Region von Aswân", *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 2006, 223–235). Turoy may have joined these festivities, bringing offerings along from Nubia. The fact that he left his own area of jurisdiction in Nubia, entering "the Head of the South" standing under the jurisdiction of the vizier, may explain the explicit wording "Elephantine in 'the Head of the South'" in *Urk.* I, 80,15.

⁷² W. Grajetzki, *Court Officials of the Middle Kingdom* (London, 2009), 16; 109.

then, even though it had been founded earlier. There is no reason to discredit its occurrence in a New Kingdom town list, therefore.⁷³

In this connection, D. Polz's recent study on the late Second Intermediate Period and early New Kingdom must also be considered. He shows that the documentation for the 17th dynasty yields no evidence whatsoever for the presence of a vizier. According to Polz this is a strong indication that the administrative structure in this period underwent a momentous change, the tasks of the vizier being taken over by other officials. This hypothesis suggests that the late Middle Kingdom administrative structure did not survive intact uninterruptedly into the early New Kingdom. However, the vizierate was obviously reinstated in the reign of Thutmosis III. This development may in fact be a reason why the office holders of this period included the "Duties" in their tombs. One might see an argument here in support of the early date of the text, but as Polz already states in his study, this is not compelling.⁷⁴ It is of course equally possible that, when the position of vizier was created anew, it was entirely or to a large extent patterned on the Middle Kingdom function. At any rate, considering that the vizierate of this time was in fact the result of an administrative innovation, it seems likely that the image drawn of this office reflects at least elements of contemporary practice.

By way of conclusion, Pardey's view that the "Duties" coherently describes the administrative system of the Middle Kingdom is as uncertain as van den Boorn's early New Kingdom date. Considering that even Pardey has to admit that the introduction of the "Duties" is *not* of Middle Kingdom date, it seems best to us to steer a middle course as was suggested already by Kruchten. In any case, even if the "Duties", or a major part of it, would date back to the Middle Kingdom, there is no certainty that no changes at all were made in the course of its later transmission in the early New Kingdom.⁷⁵ And

⁷³ J. Wegner has thoroughly analyzed the evidence without being able to decide on the time frame of the use of the toponym Wah-sut (*The Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos* [New Haven, Philadelphia, 2007], 29–32).

⁷⁴ For all preceding remarks, see D. Polz, *Der Beginn des Neuen Reiches. Zur Vorgeschichte einer Zeitenwende* (DAI Sonderschrift 31; Berlin, New York, 2007), 306–307 and *passim*.

⁷⁵ This is demonstrated in an impressive way by ostrakon MANT 292600, recently discovered in the tomb of Amenemope (TT29); see P. Tallet, "Un nouveau témoin des 'Devoirs du vizir' dans la tombe d'Aménémopé (Thèbes, TT29)", *CdE* 80 (2005), 66–75. This new source, which was apparently used for the decoration of the version of the "Duties" in the TT29 itself, differs from other known versions of the preserved passages.

it cannot be ruled out that the mayoral titles that are our primary concern are among these later additions. Moreover, even if we would accept Helck's 13th dynasty date of the "Duties", this would place its composition after the administrative reforms carried through at the end of the 12th dynasty.⁷⁶ Therefore it is not so clear that *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n* TOPONYM was really a common title under the 11th and 12th dynasties, which concern us in this chapter. And Helck does not adduce very numerous arguments to the contrary. While it must be admitted that the title occurred in the Middle Kingdom, it was far less widespread than he suggested.

3) While admitting that *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* could also be a rank title, as it had been in the Old Kingdom, Helck also finds cases where it appears immediately in front of the name of the official, "dort, wo im Mittleren und Neuen Reich der wichtigste Amtstitel zu stehen pflegte".⁷⁷ Thus, the title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* was a rank title, but became a functional title when written immediately in front of the name; and the function it then referred to was that of a 'mayor'. Helck presents his case in the form of apodictic statements, but this is clearly not enough. The only way to show that the principle could have been at work would be to carry out a quantitative analysis of the evidence, something that, half a century later, has still not been undertaken. It should moreover be shown that *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* could only be an abbreviation for *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n* TOPONYM, but not for other combinations headed by *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ*. Since HELCK does not even attempt to prove his case, the theory goes without support. The same

⁷⁶ E.g. S. Quirke, *The Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom. The Hieratic Documents* (New Malden, 1990), 2–5. In the same author's *Titles and Bureaux of Egypt 1850–1700 BC* (GHP Egyptology 1; London, 2004), 8–9, it is stressed that the titles attested as of the latter half of the reign of Senwosret III differ from what Quirke terms the 'early Middle Kingdom'. However, he leaves room for the possibility that the same underlying administrative system might already have existed earlier and have persisted after the late Middle Kingdom without leaving many traces in the written record. I have argued the same for some more modest titles in the administrative spectrum (Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, p. 94). In this case a change in decorum is likely (persons of relatively lowly status also erecting inscribed funerary monuments in the late Middle Kingdom). But I find it most implausible that the same would hold true of administrators of high rank. These people mention many titles in their tombs and other documents, and the fact that these differ so markedly from those of the late Middle Kingdom is unlikely to reflect anything but a thorough change in administrative practice. Quite apart from this, it should be noted that the list of mayors in the tomb of Rekhmire is not part of the 'Duties.' Therefore, even acceptance of Helck's proposed dating for this text is irrelevant for the mayor list.

⁷⁷ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, p. 209.

holds true of other analyses, in which, until very recently, the same criterion was used.⁷⁸

4) Based on the arguments discussed under 2) and 3), Helck goes on to argue that another important title string in which the element *ḥ3.ty-ḥ* occurs, *ḥ3.ty-ḥ im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*, also designates a mayor.⁷⁹ Again, the case is presented in the form of categoric statements:

Im allgemeinen tragen aber die Kommandanten der Städte zu Beginn des Mittleren Reiches die Titel *ḥ3.tj-ḥ* und den des Prophetenvorstehers des Stadttempels. Es ist nachdrücklich darauf hinzuweisen, dass die Ähnlichkeit der Titulatur dieser Stadtverwalter in der 12. Dynastie mit der der Stadtverwalter der 1. Zwischenzeit keine Identität bedeutet. Denn in der 1. Zwischenzeit beruht die Macht der Stadtherren, wie wir sahen, auf ihrer Stellung als "Grosses Oberhaupt" oder als Prophetenvorsteher, während der Titel *ḥ3.tj-ḥ* allein ein Rangtitel ist, der fehlen kann oder sich auch in der Zusammenstellung *rpḥ.t ḥ3.tj-ḥ* findet. Jetzt, in der 12. Dynastie ist *ḥ3.tj-ḥ* ein Amtstitel eines königlichen Stadtbeamten, der daneben Amt und Einkünfte eines Prophetenvorstehers besitzt.⁸⁰

Considering the criticism leveled under 2) and 3) this account is far from compelling. Also, it once more introduces a strong element of randomness, for the decision whether to understand the title string *ḥ3.ty-ḥ im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* as designating a nomarch or a mayor rests on acceptance of Helck's intuition, not on clear cut and verifiable criteria in the texts themselves.

5) The considerations discussed before finally lead to a reappraisal of titles of the type *ḥr.y-tp 3 n NOME* in the Middle Kingdom. These officials often also include *ḥ3.ty-ḥ* in their title string. In Helck's perception, this can only mean 'mayor'. That the "great chief"-title is nevertheless retained is 'explained' in the following terms:

⁷⁸ Thus in e.g. A. Gasse, "Amény, un porte-parole sous le règne de Sésotris I^{er}", *BIFAO* 88 (1988), 90; S. Quirke, *Titles and bureaux*, 111–112; D. Franke, "The Career of Khnumhotep III. of Beni Hasan and the So-Called 'Decline of the Nomarchs'", in: *Middle Kingdom Studies*, S. Quirke, ed. (New Malden, 1991), 52–55; W. Grajetzki, *Die höchsten Beamten der ägyptischen Zentralverwaltung zur Zeit des Mittleren Reiches. Prosopographie, Titel und Titelsequenzen* (Achet A2; Berlin, 2003). For a case where the adoption of Helck's criteria evidently leads us astray, see H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā I*, 100–109.

⁷⁹ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, 210–211. Note that *ḥ3.ty-ḥ* in this case does not precede directly the name of the office holder, but is nevertheless interpreted as a functional title, thus violating the 'rule' Helck had just formulated.

⁸⁰ W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, 211.

Sofern diese⁸¹ an die Tradition der ‘Gaufürsten’ anknüpfen konnten, legten sie sich noch den Titel eines ‘Grossen Oberhauptes’ bei, der aber nur eine historisierende Bezeichnung darstellt und kein Amts- oder Rangtitel ist.⁸²

Without offering any justification, a very common title is thus done away with as a piece of snobbery.

It will have become clear that I find the whole story as presented by Helck not in the least convincing. But the matter has not been reinvestigated in detail since 1958, and important elements of his theory are still widely subscribed to. The aspect to be most generally accepted is that the titles *ḥ3.ty-^c*, *ḥ3.ty-^c n TOPONYM*, *ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr* and *ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥw.t-ntr* all refer to mayors.⁸³ Also, many authors still agree that towns in the Middle Kingdom formed the basis of regional administration.⁸⁴ Since no new arguments have been brought forward by the pertinent authors, the above criticism of Helck is directly relevant to current views on the problem.

What is most disturbing in Helck’s account is that (series of) Middle Kingdom titles that are formally identical to Old Kingdom titles and title strings are interpreted completely differently without verifiable arguments. I would propose to follow the more straightforward course of assuming that identical titles should be interpreted in identical fashion unless clear reasons can be mustered for not doing so. It will appear that this still leaves room for chronological and regional variation, but of an altogether different kind. As a starting point I propose to base an analysis on the difference between rank titles and functional titles, which seems to be fairly generally accepted.⁸⁵

⁸¹ I.e. the “mayors”.

⁸² W. Helck, *Verwaltung*, 210; still Id., “Titel und Titulaturen”, *LÄ* VI, 600.

⁸³ It should be noted that Helck does not address the issue of the latter title, but it is found with other authors. Probably the assumption that this also is a mayor rests on the resemblance to the title *ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr*.

⁸⁴ E.g. L. Gestermann, *Kontinuität und Wandel in Politik und Verwaltung des frühen Mittleren Reiches* (GOF IV,18; Wiesbaden, 1987), 135–144; D. Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Heqaib auf Elephantine. Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich* (SAGA 9; Heidelberg, 1994), 11; E. Pardey, in: *OEA I*, 18; Idem, s.v. nome structure, in *EAAE*, 573–574; B. Haring, “Administration and Law: Pharaonic”, in: *A Companion to Ancient Egypt I*, A.B. Lloyd, ed. (Chichester, 2010), p. 225; L. Morenz, *Die Zeit der Regionen im Spiegel der Gebelein-Region. Kulturgeschichtliche Re-Konstruktionen* (PdÄ, 27; Leiden, Boston, 2010), 35, 558”; P. Andrassy, “Ein Archiv von Wirtschaftstesten auf kalottenförmigen Trinknapfen des Mittleren Reiches. Ein Vorbericht”, in: *Forschungen in der Papyrussammlung? Eine Festgabe für das Neue Museum*, V. Lepper, ed. (Berlin, 2012), 35.

⁸⁵ The distinction goes back to K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago,

Rank titles are designations that do not describe a profession, but a rank, and that are to an extent honorific. Thus, people in different branches of the administration can receive similar sets of rank titles to indicate their status. There are many such titles, but we will here confine ourselves to the most characteristic ones. In order of descending rank, they are *ir.y-p^c.t*, *ḥ3.ty-^c*, *ḥtm.ty-bi.ty*, *smḥr-w^c.ty*. These titles are often additive. Hence, when a *smḥr-w^c.ty* acquires the higher rank title *ḥtm.ty-bi.ty*, he becomes a *ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr-w^c.ty*. Higher order title strings are *ḥ3.ty-^c ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr w^c.ty* and *ir.y-p^c.t ḥ3.ty-^c ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr w^c.ty*. Among these titles, *ḥ3.ty-^c* seems to be used also in somewhat more liberal ways. Thus, in the Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor (line 2), it is a polite title of address. Elsewhere the plural *ḥ3.ty.w-^c* is used for the whole class of regional rulers, for instance when a nomarch claims he was “foremost among the *ḥ3.ty.w-^c*”.⁸⁶ Obviously, in such cases referring to all possible titles members of this official class might bear, was undoable, and *ḥ3.ty-^c* was used instead as a blanket term. The same classificatory use is probably at stake when persons characterize themselves as a *s3(.t)-ḥ3.ty-^c*, a designation which in practice always refers to children of provincial rulers.⁸⁷ Here as well the mention of full title strings would be impractical. As Helck has argued, the title *ḥ3.ty-^c* could further be an abbreviation for a longer designation. He only accepts this possibility for the mayoral title *ḥ3.ty-^c n TOPONYM*, however without considering the possibility that it could also be an abbreviation for, for instance, *ḥ3.ty-^c ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr w^c.ty*, *ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*, or *ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥw.t-nṯr*, or other title strings dependent on *ḥ3.ty-^c*. In my view this possibility is, however, very real.

Functional titles are titles that explain what kind of work a person did. Thus there is little reason to doubt that an *im.y-r rḥt.y.w* “overseer of washermen” was in charge of washermen, or that an *im.y-r mš^c* “overseer of the army” was a general. By analogy, it seems quite likely that a person designated as *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* was in charge of temple

1960); see for an recent author adhering to the same distinction W. Grajetzki, *Court Officials of the Middle Kingdom* (London, 2009), 5–7.

⁸⁶ E.g. Hatnub Gr. 16,1 (R. Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub* [AGAÄ 9; Leipzig, 1928], 35).

⁸⁷ On the bibliography concerning this designation, see H. Willems, “The Nomarchs of the Hare Nome and Early Middle Kingdom History”, *JEOL* 28 (1983–1984), 83, n. 27.

staff. A similar case is the nomarch title introduced in the late 6th dynasty: *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n sp3.t*.

It is rare to find persons being designated exclusively by functional titles. More often than not, such people would also have one or more rank titles, for instance *ir.y-pʿ.t ḥ3.ty-ʿ ḥtm.ty-bl.ty smḥr wʿ.ty ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n sp3.t* or *ḥ3.ty-ʿ im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*.

In principle the difference between rank titles and functional titles is clear, but tendencies can also be observed leading to a functional title losing its original meaning, and developing into a rank title. This is very likely for many early dynastic titles, which once probably had a very practical range of application, but that, in the different world of the Middle Kingdom, had fossilized into an honorary epithet. An instance is the title *ir.y-Nḥn*, which, literally translated, means “the one attached to Hierakonpolis”. It seems likely that this title had once designated a person in charge of Hierakonpolis, but that by the Middle Kingdom this significance was no longer relevant. That this possibility exists should not be denied, and therefore it is conceivable that such changes of meaning also occurred with the titles that concern us here. However, it should be demonstrated in each individual case that the principle of ‘title devaluation’ is at work before it can be accepted.

The case of the title *ḥ3.ty-ʿ n* TOPONYM deserves being discussed in greater detail. It is obviously based on the rank title *ḥ3.ty-ʿ*. That does not imply, of course, that *ḥ3.ty-ʿ n* TOPONYM is also a rank title. Here the element *ḥ3.ty-ʿ* is merely an element in a newly created compound term, being placed in a genitive relationship with the name of a town. This creates a new functional title in its own right. Room for confusion only emerges when this title is abbreviated into *ḥ3.ty-ʿ*, for now no formal difference is visible between the rank title and the functional title. This is a pity, but problems of this kind are not unusual. Something similar can happen, for instance, when a simple draughtsman (in Egyptian *sš ḳd*) abbreviates his title into *sš*, leading to possible confusion with the title *sš* “scribe”, which usually designates a person of far higher rank.

Although the last observation introduces an element of ambiguity, in general I think it consistent with the evidence that a *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n* NOME in the Middle Kingdom was primarily responsible for a nome; that an *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* was an overseer of priests, an *im.y-r ḥw.t-nṯr* an overseer of a temple,⁸⁸ and a *ḥ3.ty-ʿ n* TOWN a mayor. If

⁸⁸ The difference with the previous title is not clear to me.

these people chose to indicate their rank titles beside the functional titles mentioned before, elements like *ḥ3.ty-^c* or *ir.y p^c.t ḥ3.ty-^c* could be placed in front. No case of this is known to me of **ḥ3.ty-^c ḥ3.ty-^c n TOWN*, but this may reflect the fact that placement of the same words twice in a row was considered redundant, or that a *ḥ3.ty-^c n TOWN* was automatically considered as belonging to the *ḥ3.ty-^c* class. In fact, the creation of the title type *ḥ3.ty-^c n TOWN* is unlikely to have taken place if the latter situation would not have prevailed.

As Helck had already suggested for the Old Kingdom, this reading of the evidence implies that, in the Middle Kingdom as well, local officials could rise to a locally prominent position either because they were appointed nomarch (*[ir.y-p^c.t] ḥ3.ty-^c ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME*), or because they headed important temples in the region (*ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr; ḥ3.ty-^c im.y-r ḥw.t-ntr*), while in some cases, a kind of fusion could come about, leading to combined titles like *ir.y p^c.t ḥ3.ty-^c ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME im.y-r ḥm.w ntr*.⁸⁹ This suggests a variable situation, in which the titles actually borne by an official probably reflected the local balance of power. Therefore, although nomarchs in the strict sense of the word (*ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME*) existed through much of the Middle Kingdom (see below), this was not the only possible designation of a person who, in practice, functioned as the head of a region.

Since these titles reflect the roots of power of the official in question (temple administrator or state official), it also seems possible that people with the same titles could wield different amounts of power. While a “great chief of a nome” is likely to have always been a very high official appointed by the king and entrusted with regional responsibilities, “overseers of priests”⁹⁰ are likely to have been in office not only in large temples with large holdings, but also in far smaller temples. In the latter case, the title of the person in charge may still have been (*ḥ3.*

⁸⁹ The latter was the case, for instance, for some of the nomarchs buried at Dayr al-Barshā (P.E. Newberry, *El Bersheh I* [London, 1895], pl. VI and passim; F. Ll. Griffith, P.E. Newberry, *El Bersheh II* [London, 1895], pl. VI; XIII; R. Anthes, *Die Felseninschriften von Hatnub* [UGAÄ 9; Leipzig, 1928], Gr. 11; 12; 14; 15; 16; 19; 20; 21; 22; 25; 28; note that, in some cases [e.g. Gr. 26 and 32], this long title string is abbreviated into *ḥ3.ty-^c*).

⁹⁰ Although I do not feel certain on this point, it seems possible that the “overseer of priests” derived his power from an important local office which might not be due to royal appointment, whereas a ‘great chief of a nome’ might always be a royal appointee.

ty-^c) *im.y-r hm.w-ntr*, but his effective power may have been relatively small.⁹¹ This implies that the title may have covered an identical *kind of function*, but one resulting in practice in very different degrees of power. Stated differently, the titles tell us something about the administrative structure, but not necessarily about the effective power division on a local level.

Since the titles tell us only part of the story, and since the living environment of the provincial administrators is usually unknown, the major source of information is their tombs. It needs not be stressed that these can offer only indirect indications, but the picture is nevertheless suggestive. Through the Middle Kingdom, very large rock tombs were built for local officials in Middle Egypt and occasionally elsewhere. For the Old Kingdom, it has been statistically shown that the highest provincial administrators also had the largest tombs in rural areas.⁹² For the Middle Kingdom, such a list could also be drawn up. It would contain the large rock-cut tombs in the Qubbat al-Hawā',⁹³ some in Qāw al-Kabīr,⁹⁴ Dayr Rifa,⁹⁵

⁹¹ Note that occasional examples show that an *im.y-r hm.w-ntr* did not always rise to the rank of a *h3.ty-^c*, thus in the case of the [*smr*] *w^c.ty im.y-r hm.w-ntr n 'Inpw Hnwt* Qāw al-Kabīr (E.M. Ciampini, *La sepoltura di Henib (Camera funeraria CGT 7001; pareti di sarcofago CGT 10201–10202)* [Catalogo del Museo Egizio di Torino. Serie prima—Monumenti e testi XI; Turin, 2003], 17 and Tav. 11).

⁹² N. Alexanian, "Social Dimensions of Old Kingdom Mastaba Architecture", in: L.P. Brock (ed.), *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-first Dynasty. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists Cairo, 2000 II* (Cairo, New York, 2003), 88–96.

⁹³ H.W. Müller, *Die Felsengräber der Fürsten von Elephantine* (Äg.Fo. 9: Glückstadt, Hamburg, Berlin, 1940); see also the inscriptions pertaining to these people in the Heqaib sanctuary at Elephantine: L. Habachi, *Elephantine IV. The Sanctuary of Heqaib* (AVDAIK 33; Mainz am Rhein, 1985) and D. Franke, *Heqaib*, 34–49. According to the lists on p. 48–49, officials are attested for the period between Amenemhat I and Neferhotep I. Most bore the title string *h3.ty-^c im.y-r hm.w-ntr*, but two were at the same time also designated as *hr.y-tp 3 n T3-Sty*. For the early history of this line of rulers, see also H. Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata (Cairo JdE 36418). A Case Study of Egyptian Funerary Culture of the Early Middle Kingdom* (OLA 70; Leuven, 1996), 18–20.

⁹⁴ H. Steckeweh, *Die Fürstengräber von Qāw* (Leipzig, 1936); F. Petrie, *Antaeopolis. The Tombs of Qau* (BSAE 51; London, 1930). For their titles, see W. Grajetzki, "Bemerkungen zu den Bürgermeistern (*h3.tj-^c*) von Qāw al-Kebir im Mittleren Reich", *GM* 156 (1997), 55–62; E.M. Ciampini, *loc. cit.* has expressed some doubts against part of Grajetzki's analysis of tomb no. 8. The officials buried in Qāw bore the titles *h3.ty-^c* and *h3.ty-^c im.y-r hm.w-ntr*.

⁹⁵ W.M.F. Petrie, *Gizah and Rifeh* (BSE 13; London, 1907), 11; F. Ll. Griffith, *The Inscriptions of Siût and Dêr Rifeh* (London, 1889), pl. 16–17; P. Montet, "Les tombeaux de Siout et de Deir Rifeh", *Kémi* 3 (1930–1935), 45–111; M.A. Murray, *The Tomb of*

Assiūt,⁹⁶ Mīr,⁹⁷ Dayr al-Barshā,⁹⁸ Banī Ḥasan,⁹⁹ Tihnā al-Jabal,¹⁰⁰ and Kawm al-Khalwa (Fayum).¹⁰¹ There are further some scant remains of what is likely to have been a monumental nomarchal tomb from Heliopolis.¹⁰² In all these cases these tombs constitute the very largest

Two Brothers (Manchester, 1910). In these tombs one encounters the titles *ir.y-p^c.t h3.ty-^c htm.ty-bi.ty smr w^c.ty hry.tp 3 n Ndft im.y-r hm.w-ntr*.

⁹⁶ For recent reconstructions of the line of rulers from Assiūt, see J. Kahl, *Ancient Asyut. The First Synthesis after 300 Years of Research* (Wiesbaden, 2007), 17 and *passim*; but most fundamentally M. Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut. A Case Study of Local Egyptian Funerary Culture from the Old Kingdom to the End of the Middle Kingdom I* (OLA 180; Leuven, 2010), 11–43 and *passim*. In the First Intermediate Period the rulers buried here bore the title string *ir.y p^c.t h3.ty-^c htm.ty-bi.ty smhr w^c.ty im.y-r hm.w-ntr* and occasionally *hr.y.tp 3 n Ndfy.t*. In the Middle Kingdom the same situation prevails (the latter title being attested in tombs I and II). Occasionally tomb owners only had the title *h3.ty-^c*. Note that this is primarily the case in tombs which are poorly preserved.

⁹⁷ For the reconstruction of the line of rulers buried at Mīr, see H. Willems, *Chests of Life. A Study of the Typology and Conceptual Development of Middle Kingdom Standard Class Coffins* (MVEOL 25; Leiden, 1988), 82–86. Most of the persons buried here bore the titles *h3.ty-^c im.y-r hm.w-ntr*, but Ukhhotep son of Senbi, the owner of tomb B No. 2 is also designated as *hr.y.tp 3* (A.M. Blackman, *Meir II*, pl. XII).

⁹⁸ This line of rulers consistently has the titles (*ir.y-p^c.t*) *h3.ty-^c htm.ty bi.ty smhr w^c.ty im.y-r hm.w-ntr hr.y.tp 3 n Wnw*. Frequently they were also designated as viziers. These rulers have been intensively studied by H. Willems, *JEOL* 28 (1983–1984) [1985], 80–102; Id., *Chests of Life*, 68–81; Id., *Dayr al-Barsha I*, 83–113; Id., *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie. Éléments d'une histoire culturelle du Moyen Empire égyptien. Quatre conférences présentées à l'Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes. Section des Sciences religieuses. mai 2006* (Paris, 2008), 67–129 and 184–189. For the date of the early rulers see now L. Gestermann, “Die Datierung der Nomarchen von Hermopolis aus dem frühen Mittleren Reich—eine Phantomdebatte?”, *ZÄS* 135 (2008), 1–15.

⁹⁹ For the dating of the rulers of the XVIth Upper Egyptian nome, see H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 49–52, with literature.

¹⁰⁰ Akoris. Report of the Excavations at Akoris in Middle Egypt 1981–1992. The Palaeological Association of Japan, Inc. Egyptian Committee (Kyoto, 1995), 27–33; plan on p. 44. Very restricted information exists on the titles of the persons buried here, but the grandeur of their tombs suggests these are nomarch tombs. A nomarch of the seventeenth Upper Egyptian nome is referred to as the father-in-law of Khnumhotep II of Banī Ḥasan, the latter's son succeeding the former as ruler of the seventeenth nome (see p. ... below). Although no title is used in the pertinent passage except *ir.y p^c.t h3.ty-^c*, the verbal expression *hk3 'Inpw.t* “ruling the seventeenth Upper Egyptian nome” suggests that the administration of the nome is being referred to.

¹⁰¹ E. Bresciani, “L'attività archeologica dell'Università di Pisa in Egitto (1981): Fayum, Gurna, Saqqara”, *EVO* 4 (1981), 1–20; Id., “Khelua, l'indagine e le scoperte”, *EVO* 20–21 (1997–1998), 9–48. These rulers are entitled *h3.ty-^c im.y-r hm.w-ntr* and, on one occasion, *hr.y.tp sh.t*, probably a variant of the nomarch title *hr.y.tp 3 n NOME* (see already H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 53–54).

¹⁰² False door and architrave from the tomb of Khety-ankh/Heny at Heliopolis; see W.K. Simpson, “Studies in the Twelfth Dynasty IV: The Early Twelfth Dynasty False Door/Stela of Khety-ankh/Heny from Matariya/Ain Shams (Heliopolis)”, *JARCE* 38 (2001), 9–20; H. Willems, “The First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom”,

complexes in large cemeteries in which lower ranking persons were also buried. Clearly, therefore, the large tombs reflect the apex of the local social pyramid. And in all cases, the owners of these tombs bore titles of the type *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME*, *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr*, or *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr*, or *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr*, or *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr* but, with one exception, never the title *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr n TOWN*.

The exception is Banī Ḥasan. Here quite a number of officials are known who bore the title *ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr n Mn.t-ḥwi=f-wi* “Mayor of (the town) Menat-Khufu”, and this already since early in the Middle Kingdom.¹⁰³ The tomb of the last of these officials, the famous Khnumhotep II, is large and beautifully decorated. It can easily compete with the nomarchal tombs of the Middle Kingdom, and it is no doubt for this reason that he is frequently considered a nomarch. Closer inspection reveals, however, that the situation in Banī Ḥasan is more complex than in most other regions. On the one hand, quite a number of local rulers are designated in their own tombs or in Khnumhotep’s lengthy biography as nomarchs of the (entire) Oryx nome (*ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n M3-ḥd [mi-ḥd=f]*), while others bore the title “Mayor of Menat Khufu”. Possibly Khnumhotep I held both titles, and in this particular case it is likely that he first was a mayor of Menat Khufu only, later to become a nomarch of the entire nome, as was the case with a later official by the name of Nakht.¹⁰⁴ It should however be avoided to equate the mayoralship of Menat-Khufu with the office of nomarch.

The Oryx nome covered the entire east and west banks of the Nile between the Hare nome and the Anubis nome. It was cross-cut from south to north by the Nile. On its west, the floodplain in this part of Egypt is up to some 10 km wide, in the east, the width nowadays rarely reaches more than a couple of hundred metres. Obviously, the centre

in: *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, A.B. Lloyd, ed. (Chichester, 2010), 90. M. Zaki, “Une architrave ‘anonyme’ d’Héliopolis”, *DE* 63 (2005), 85–94 dates the documents to the Second Intermediate Period, but this clearly disregards the art-historical characteristics of the architrave and the false door. The owner of the tomb bore many titles including *ir.y-p.t ḥ3.ty-ḥw.t-nṯr ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr w.ty ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n ḥk3-ḥnd* and *im.y-r ḥw.t-nṯr*. The tomb owner was also an “overseer of the Delta” (*im.y-r T3-mḥ.w*).

¹⁰³ L. Gestermann, *Kontinuität und Wandel in Politik und Verwaltung des frühen Mittleren Reiches in Ägypten* (GOF IV,18; Wiesbaden, 1987), 180–189 offers a good overview of the available evidence, although I would interpret the chronology of the some of the early rulers differently; see H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 49–52.

¹⁰⁴ Interpreted thus by H. Willems, *JEOL* 28 (1983–1984), 100–101; L. Gestermann, *Kontinuität und Wandel*, 187.

of gravity of the nome must have lain in the west, where the capital of Hor-wer was located.¹⁰⁵ It stands to reason that the nomarchs of the nome lived here.

Menat Khufu lay on the eastern bank of the Nile. The autobiography of Khnumhotep repeatedly details which territory belonged to this city, making clear beyond doubt that it only concerned the narrow strip of land east of the Nile.¹⁰⁶ In a territorial sense, the mayors of Menat Khufu were therefore in charge of only a relatively minor part of the nome.¹⁰⁷ Despite the splendour of Khnumhotep's tomb, the mayors of Menat Khufu clearly played a minor role in provincial administration as compared to the nomarch.¹⁰⁸

This assumption that mayors held a relatively minor position as compared to nomarchs receives support from two other observations. Firstly, with the exception of some of the mayors buried in Banī Ḥasan, tombs of the size and style discussed on the preceding pages are *never* attested for persons only carrying the title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n TOWN*. Secondly, in a few cases it is possible to relate the title *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n TOWN* to specific archaeologically known settlements. Several instances are known of *ḥ3.ty.w-ꜥ* of pyramid towns: the mayors of the pyramid towns of

¹⁰⁵ D. Kessler; *Historische Topographie der Region zwischen Mallawi und Samalut* (TAVO B, 30; Wiesbaden, 1981), 129–131.

¹⁰⁶ D. Kessler, *Historische Topographie*, 126–127.

¹⁰⁷ L. Gestermann (*Kontinuität und Wandel*, 180–189) also accepts that the nomarch title is distinct from the title of mayor of Menat Khufu. She believes that it concerns two entirely separate administrative realms. While it is impossible to prove that this is wrong, it is more likely that the nome was a more encompassing entity within which the town of Menat Khufu had its own mayor. This would also explain why some nomarchs held both titles. In one case (that of the nomarch Nakht) it is clear that the mayorship of Menat Khufu was the first step in a career leading to rulership over the entire nome. The same may have been the case with Khnumhotep I, who also had both titles, although here, the chronological sequence is unclear. The fact that some nomarchs stress suzerainty over the nome “in its entirety”, and were buried east of the Nile in Bani Hasan, also explains itself from the assumption that these rulers followed a career in which they first administered only part of the nome (Menat Khufu) and then the entire nome.

¹⁰⁸ The obvious wealth of some of the mayors may have had other causes than their role in regional administration. A close distance north of Banī Ḥasan, there is the mouth of a large Eastern Desert wadi. There are indications that the leaders of Menat Khufu played a prominent part in Eastern Desert trade (witness the mention of troops from Menat Khufu in Wadi Hammamat graffito M1, the important scene depicting Bedouin traders from the Eastern Desert in the tomb of Khnumhotep II, and the fact that Khnumhotep II's son Khnumhotep III was promoted away in the reign of Senwosret III to the residence, whence he played an important role in expeditions to the Levantine coast).

Senwosret II (al-Lahūn) and Senwosret III (Dahshūr), or of the town attached to the funerary monument of Senwosret III at Abydos.¹⁰⁹ The pyramid town of Senwosret III in Dahshūr has not been found, but those in al-Lahūn and Abydos are known. Abydene seals mention a “house” (*pr*) of the mayor, and this is no doubt the large estate found there by J. Wegner. The house of the mayor of the pyramid town of Senwosret II must be one of the seven large house compounds there (see pp. 356–358). Here, the fact that seven complexes of very large, but equal size exist, militates against the idea that any of them belonged to a person with overall responsibility of the site as a whole. The house of the mayor of Wah-sut in Abydos closely resembles the large houses in al-Lahūn both in size and shape. This house is the largest of its kind in the settlement, but in size it is closely comparable to those at al-Lahūn.

These large complexes have been briefly discussed before, and they are clearly the residences of high officials. However, they are not even remotely comparable in size to the residence of the *ḥ3.ty-ḥm.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* at Tall Bastā (cf. n. 45). The official residing there clearly belonged to a quite different league from the mayors.

The term *ḥ3.ty-ḥm.y-r* n TOWN is further used with reference to the ‘mayor’ of the Nubian fortress of Mirgissa.¹¹⁰ Although here it is less easy to determine where the person in question lived, the well-preserved fortress simply does not contain residences that could compete in size with that in Tall Bastā.¹¹¹ The “mayor” of Byblos, for whom evidence appears in the record in the time of Amenemhat III, after the takeover in the Levant by king Senwosret III, is likely to have been similar in design to that residence of the commanders of the Nubian fortresses.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Senwosret II (*ḥ3.ty-ḥm.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* S-n-Wsr.t m3-ḥrw: G.T. Martin, *Egyptian Administrative and Private-Name Seals Principally of the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period* [Oxford, 1971], n° 1544; 1544a); Senwosret III (*ḥ3.ty-ḥm.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* S-n-Wsr.t [Martin, *op. cit.*, n° 442; 732 also entitled *im.y-r ḥw.t-nṯr*]; 1254–1256; 1618); Senwosret III—Abydos (*ḥ3.ty-ḥm.y-r W3ḥ-s.wt-K3l-k3.w-Rḥ-m3-ḥrw m 3bdw*: see J. Wegner, “Excavations at the Town of Enduring-are-the-Places-of-Kakaure-maa-kheru-in-Abydos. A Preliminary Report on the 1994 and 1997 Seasons”, *JARCE* 35 [1998], 41–43; Id., *The Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos* [Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale-Institute of Fine Arts/NYU Expedition to Egypt 8; New Haven, Philadelphia, 2007], 26 ff.

¹¹⁰ G.T. Martin, *Egyptian and Private-Name Seals*, no. 1856.

¹¹¹ The fortress has not been fully excavated. For a plan, see J. Vercoutter, *Mirgissa I* (Paris, 1970), fig. 38.

¹¹² J.P. Allen, “L’inscription historique de Khnoumhotep à Dahchour”, *BSFE* 173 (2009), 30; G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 105; 261–263; 810; 1689 (Byblos).

Other chiefs of northern Levantine towns had the same title.¹¹³ Some “mayors” ruled towns within Egypt with rather obscure names, which are unlikely to have been very large.¹¹⁴

Yet other mayors led very important towns like Heliopolis¹¹⁵ or Memphis,¹¹⁶ or towns like al-Ashmūnayn¹¹⁷ or Qāw¹¹⁸ that were real provincial capitals. Most of them are attested on scarab seals, a type of object that only became common towards the end of the 12th dynasty.¹¹⁹ At that time, however, nomarchs are no longer in evidence (see below). Although these people are clearly high regional administrators, the administrative context in which they worked seems not to have been the same as that dealt with in this chapter.

Summing up the results obtained thus far, it seems clear that Helck’s view must be abandoned, according to which nomarchs had by the Middle Kingdom been replaced by mayors bearing the title *ḥ3.ty-ḥ*. Contrary to him we believe that nomarchs were a reality until late in the 12th dynasty. They constituted a class of persons sometimes entitled *ḥr.y-tp 3 n NOME*; in this case their administrative powers may have rested primarily on tasks in civil administration. In other provinces the highest official was the director of the main temple there, who bore the title *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*. From their power over the temple, these persons derived their supremacy over the nome, although this does not necessarily imply that all *im.yw-r ḥm.w-nṯr* were nomarchs. In several cases, the two offices of *ḥr.y-tp 3 n NOME* and *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* were combined, as had in fact been the case since the late Old Kingdom. All these officials could bear rank titles. Frequently, the texts precede the functional titles by the rank title *ḥ3.ty-ḥ*, often, they could also bear the most prestigious title string *ir.y-pḥ.t ḥ3.ty-ḥ ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr wḥ.ty* or similar.

¹¹³ M. Bietak, in: *The Second Intermediate Period (Thirteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties)*, M. Marée, ed., 163.

¹¹⁴ G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 70 (town named Ršww).

¹¹⁵ G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 637.

¹¹⁶ G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 182. In this case the owner of the seal was also an *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*.

¹¹⁷ G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 406.

¹¹⁸ G.T. Martin, *op. cit.*, no. 394 (the owner was also an *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*. Named Wah-ka; he may have been the owners of one of the nomarchal tombs at Qāw); 1159; 1163 (the owner was also an *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*).

¹¹⁹ S. Quirke, *Titles and Bureaux*, p. 8 notes that scarab seals are only rarely attested before the reign of Amenemhat III.

The “mayors” (*ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n TOWN*) began to emerge in the Middle Kingdom as well, although (as will be shown below) not to the same degree in all parts of Egypt. In most attested cases they headed settlements that were not identical with traditional nome capitals, in cases where their houses survive, these are significantly smaller than the “nomarch’s” residence in Tall Bastā, and in the case of Banī Ḥasan their authority extended over only a small part of a nome. This, coupled with the fact that ‘mayors’ were never buried in tombs of nomarchal size (except in Banī Ḥasan) suggests that the mayors were officials of a much lower rank than the nomarchs.

The situation is not so clear as regards the office holders of the type *im.y-r ḥw.t-nṯr*. The distinction between this title and *im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* requires further study. To the present author it seems that the former of the two titles has a tendency to be associated with ‘mayors’ rather than nomarchs, which could indicate that it likewise designates a person of somewhat lesser stature.

HISTORICAL ASPECTS

It was argued in the preceding section that the titles or title strings borne by “nomarchs” (in the broad sense of the word) did not change fundamentally between the late Old Kingdom and the end of the nomarchal period in the late 12th dynasty. This means that a title string like *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr* in the latter period still had the same general meaning as in the 6th dynasty. Nevertheless this does not imply that the underlying administrative system was completely resistant to change. Rather, it seems that the geographical spread of certain kinds of titles or title strings underwent many changes, and that these reflect major historical events.

Different from what might be expected, there never existed a system in which pharaonic Egypt as a whole was parceled up in provincial units headed by nomarchs bearing the same set of titles. In the late 5th and in the 6th dynasty, the introduction of the new class of *ḥr.y-tp 3 n sp3.t/NOME* led to a considerably more homogeneous administration,¹²⁰

¹²⁰ K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago, 1960), 274–284; N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom* (London, 1985), 337–346; J.C. Moreno García, *Ḥwt et le milieu rural égyptien du IIIe millénaire. Économie, administration et*

but still, officials of this kind were not appointed everywhere. In the First Upper Egyptian nome, their part seems to have been played by officials whose titles emphasize their role in trade expeditions to Nubia rather than in local administration.¹²¹ In the Dākhlā Oasis, an area that never was designated as a nome, and that for that reason alone could not have a “nomarch”, there were “Chiefs of the Oasis” (*ḥqꜣ Wḥꜣ.t*) who similarly had tasks both in the local administration and in directing expeditions. In the remainder of Upper Egypt (for Lower Egypt there is hardly any evidence) *ḥr.y.w-tp ꜣ n.w spꜣ.t/NOME* appear in many places, but there are also provinces where a *ḥꜣ.ty-ꜣ im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr* is the highest regional official. In the Third, Fifth and Ninth Upper Egyptian nomes, the local importance of these people may have been so great that the appointment of a *ḥr.y-tp ꜣ n spꜣ.t/NOME* was impossible.¹²² In yet other provinces the local ruler combined the titles of nomarch and overseer of priests. And finally, no provincial governors are known from the northernmost nomes of Middle Egypt. These areas may have been governed directly from Memphis.¹²³ The form the local administration could take thus differed greatly from one place to another. This probably reflects the impact of regional factors such as were discussed earlier in this chapter.

It stands to reason that such factors persisted in the First Intermediate Period—an era dubbed “Zeit der Regionen” by L. Morenz¹²⁴—and as was shown above there is nothing inherently unlikely in the assumption that they continued to manifest themselves in the Middle Kingdom.

One possible pointer to regional diversity might arguably be detected in case the capitals of regional chiefs would change places, as this might reflect changes in the regional balance of power. Unfortunately, as has been shown above, the actual settlements where these people lived are only rarely known. It is however remarkable how often nomarchal

organisation territoriale (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études. Sciences historiques et philologiques 337; Paris, 1999), 242–248.

¹²¹ One text has been argued to contain an Old Kingdom reference to a nomarch, but this is incorrect (M.S. Müller, “Zum Beleg des Gaufürstentitels im späten Alten Reich auf der Qubbet el-Hawa”, *GM* 194 [2003], 51–57).

¹²² J.C. Moreno García, *Hwt et le milieu rural égyptien*, 252–265; H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 33–35.

¹²³ J.C. Moreno García, *Hwt et le milieu rural égyptien*, 242–248.

¹²⁴ L. Morenz, *Die Zeit der Regionen im Spiegel der Gebelein-Region. Kulturgeschichtliche Rekonstruktionen* (PdÄ 27; Leiden, 2009).

cemeteries were relocated sometime between the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom. Instances are the fourteenth and fifteenth Upper Egyptian nomes. In the former, the Old Kingdom nomarch cemetery lay in al-Shaykh Sa'īd, while the Middle Kingdom cemetery (and probably its First Intermediate Period ancestor) lies in Dayr al-Barshā. Although it has always been assumed that the occupants of the tombs in both cemeteries had lived in the town of al-Ashmūnayn, there are now indications that the Old Kingdom nomarchs may have resided not far from al-Shaykh Sa'īd.¹²⁵ In the fifteenth nome, the capital originally seems to have been Zawīyat al-Amwāt, but in the Middle Kingdom it lay further south, west of the new cemetery at Banī Ḥasan.¹²⁶

A second effect might be recognized in local differences in the administrative titles borne by local administrators. Earlier in this chapter we have already shown that this is in fact the case, pointing to the fact that in some provinces we find administrators of the type *hr.y-tp ꜥꜣ n NOME*, in others of the type *im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr*, and in yet other cases rulers who combine the two kinds of titles. To this should be added the cases where local rulers might bear the title *ḥꜣ.ty-ꜥ n TOWN*.

Above I have argued that titles of the latter type designate local rulers of a lower class than the former three, which might all be considered 'nomarchs' in the broad sense of the word. But there is more to the problem than just a hierarchical difference.

In the early First Intermediate Period several nomarchs are attested in the region between Aswān and Abydos. However, when the Theban rulers of the Eleventh Dynasty began to assert themselves as kings after having conquered the southern part of Upper Egypt, evidence for such regional rulers, and for provincial elite cemeteries, suddenly ceases. Simultaneously, the vast Theban residence cemetery at al-Tārif emerges. Here were buried the monarchs of the emergent Theban state, but also its high elite.¹²⁷ The simultaneous disappearance of nomarchs in southern Egypt and the appearance of a vast elite cemetery in Thebes seems to be unmistakable testimony of a conscious policy of the Theban rulers with the intention of imposing a strongly centralized

¹²⁵ H. Willems, S. Vereecken, L. Kuijper *e.a.*, "An Industrial Site at al-Shaykh Sa'īd/Wādī Zabayda", *Ä&L* 19 (2009), 326.

¹²⁶ D. Kessler, *Historische Topographie*, 129 ff.

¹²⁷ For this cemetery, see D. Arnold, *Gräber des Alten und Mittleren Reiches in El Tarif* (AVDAIK 23; Mainz am Rhein, 1981).

state structure on a region that had been, early in the First Intermediate Period, in a state of deep chaos.

By contrast, nomarchs seem to have remained in position through the First Intermediate Period in the northern part of the country, which was then ruled by the Heracleopolitan Ninth and Tenth Dynasties. Different from the Thebans, these rulers probably did not impose themselves by force, but perpetuated the administrative system that had emerged in the late Old Kingdom.

We here describe only the broad outlines of the development, as the details have been set forth at length elsewhere.¹²⁸ The crucial point is that the Unification of Egypt early in the reign of the Theban king Mentuhotep II¹²⁹ did not lead to a greater administrative homogeneity in the country.¹³⁰ A quantitative comparison of the number of Middle Kingdom *ḥr.y.w-tp ʿ3 n NOME* in southern and northern Egypt suggests that the administrative regimes established under the First Intermediate Period remained in force after the Unification. On the whole nomarchs are of frequent occurrence in what had formerly been the Heracleopolitan kingdom, but they are exceptional in the former Theban realm.¹³¹ It is now clear that nomarch families probably remained in charge in Assiūt, the Hare nome and the Oryx nome. Evidence in other nomes within the former Heracleopolitan territory is more patchy, but nomarchs are known from several other provinces. While it is uncertain whether real nomarchal dynastic lines prevailed everywhere in this region, it is clear that some families remained uninterruptedly in power even after the the Heracleopolitans had disappeared.

In southern Upper Egypt the situation is very different. Apart from the rather obscure case of a person from Hierakonpolis boasting the

¹²⁸ L. Gestermann, *Kontinuität und Wandel*, 135–144; H. Willems, *Chests of Life*, 60; D. Franke, *Heqaib*, 11; H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 38–43.

¹²⁹ It is now clear that the Unification of Egypt must have taken place before Mentuhotep's year 13 (L. Gestermann, *ZÄS* 135 [2008], 10–11).

¹³⁰ For what follows I refer the reader to H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 48–59.

¹³¹ Note that what is at stake is only the disappearance of a class of nome governors, not the disappearance of the nomes proper. There are several texts from the southern part of Egypt that still refer to nomes as administrative resorts, even though no nomarchs are in evidence here; see H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 41–48.

title of nomarch,¹³² the only known nomarchs of the former Theban region are two governors of Elephantine (Sarenput I and II).¹³³

My reading of the evidence is that, in many places in what had been the Heracleopolitan Kingdom, the nomarch system continued to exist. In some cases, exemplified by the ruling families buried in Assiūt, Dayr al-Barshā and Banī Ḥasan, no break in the line of nomarchs seems to occur after the Unification of Egypt.¹³⁴ Here, the tradition simply persists. In places like Elephantine there is no evidence that the Middle Kingdom nomarchs constitute the continuation of an ancient line of rulers. Rather, we seem to be witnessing a dynamic policy in which certain specific rulers were individually awarded the prestigious title of nomarch. The same may occasionally have happened in the former Heracleopolitan realm as well. For instance, in Mīr a 'new' nomarch seems to appear in the reign of Amenemhat I.¹³⁵ The stress laid by some early Middle Kingdom nomarchs from Dayr al-Barshā on their roots in very ancient nobility (*ḳrḥ.t*) may reflect the difference in status they sensed between themselves and other, 'new' nomarchs.¹³⁶

If it is correct that the rural administration of the former Heracleopolitan kingdom remained to a large extent in the hands of the nomarchs, the question must be asked who were the local rulers in the south. Here, hardly any persons with the style of a nomarch are attested, and cemeteries with elite tombs of the kind elsewhere built for nomarchs are also of rare occurrence. Now one of the main sources mustered by W. Helck in support of his theory that Middle Kingdom local rulers generally were of the class of the "mayors", Hammamat graffito 87, in fact concerns precisely this area. In a listing of the

¹³² Statue Cairo CG 404 (L. Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum zu Kairo II* [Berlin, 1925], 17 and pl. 66).

¹³³ *Urk.* VII, p. 6,5; 6,17; L. Habachi, *Elephantine IV*, 42, fig. 4; II, pl. 37b.

¹³⁴ Until recently it was widely assumed that a break in fact did occur, but evidence to the contrary has been presented by H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 48–50; M. Zitzman, *The Necropolis of Assiut I*, 11–43. In Assiūt, the case for a break of the nomarchal line has long been considered very strong, and this was linked to the role of the nomarchy there in defending the town against the northward advance of the Theban troops. The recent discovery of the tomb of It-ib-iqer seems to fill the gap between the last First Intermediate Period nomarch Kheti II and the early Middle Kingdom ruler Mesehti. Since it is clear that It-ib-iqer was Kheti's son, it is likely that this ruling family remained in charge despite the Theban conquest.

¹³⁵ H. Willems, *Chests of Life*, 82–87 for the chronology of the governors at Mīr. Only one of these rulers, Senbi II, actually mentions the title 'great chief' in his tomb (A.M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir II* [ASE 23; London, 1915], pl. XII).

¹³⁶ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā I*, 86, n. 17, with a survey of the literature.

personnel of an expedition to the Wādī Hammāmāt undertaken in the reign of Senwosret I, the first persons to be mentioned are “the mayor of Edfu Isi and his town, and the mayors of the Head of the South...” (*ḥ3.ty-^c n db3 ʾIsi ḥn^c niw.t=f ḥ3.ty.w-^c n.w Tp-rs.y*).¹³⁷ This suggests that the campaign was directed by the mayor of Edfu seconded by the mayors of the other towns in the seven southernmost nomes of Egypt. While nomarchs are conspicuous by their near absence in this region, this text makes clear that ‘mayors’ were around all across southern Upper Egypt. The fact, discussed above, that people of this class were clearly of a rank far inferior to that of a nomarch may explain why the local rulers in southern Egypt have left behind so few tangible traces as compared to the nomarchs of Middle Egypt.

It has long been assumed that the Theban takeover in northern Egypt was the result of a military victory. The description of fights in the late First Intermediate Period tombs of It-ib and Kheti II at Assiūt and, subsequently, in the Hatnub graffiti dated to the time of Nehri I, seemed to offer graphic descriptions of how the Thebans were first challenged by the nomarchs of Assiūt and then by those of al-Ashmūnayn. However, the former group of texts describes conditions *before* the Theban takeover, while it is now generally accepted that the Nehri texts date several decades *later*,¹³⁸ and thus have nothing to do with the problem. One might add that the depictions of besieged towns in the tomb of Mentuhotep’s general Antef do not depict an inner-Egyptian war, but one against Asiatics, and that it is hard to securely relate other war scenes in Antef’s tomb with certainty to a war in Middle Egypt.¹³⁹ Finally, the bodies of sixty “slain soldiers” of Montuhotep II, who according to Winlock had fallen during the siege of Heracleopolis, are rather more likely to have been killed during a much later event in Thebes itself.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ *Hamm.*, pl. XX.

¹³⁸ L. Gestermann, *ZÄS* 135 (2008), pp. 1–14.

¹³⁹ H. Willems, *BiOr* 46 (1989), pp. 598–599.

¹⁴⁰ H.E. Winlock, *The Slain Soldiers of Neb-Hepet-Rē Mentu-Hotpe* (PMMA Eg. Exp. XVI; New York, 1945), 1–23; C. Vogel, “Fallen Heroes?—Winlock’s ‘Slain Soldiers’ Reconsidered”, *JEA* 89 (2003), 239–245. Although Vogel does not indicate in which context these soldiers fell, I think it is not impossible that it happened in the reign of Senwosret I, when the famous Tūd inscription and stela Louvre C1 relate of civil strife in the Theban region (cf. C. Obsomer, “La date de Nésou-Khonsou [Louvre C1]”, *RdÉ* 44 [1993], 103–140; C. Barbotin, “II. Guerre civile et guerre étrangère d’après la stèle de Nysoumontou [Louvre C1]”, *RdÉ* 56 [2005], 193–194, with further bibliography).

The upshot is that there remains no clear evidence that the Unification of Egypt was really the outcome of a war. The fact that nomarchs in Middle Egypt remained in charge may rather point to a different sequence of events. Without being able to prove this, I find it more likely that the mounting military pressure exerted by the Thebans may have induced the provincial chiefs to change their allegiance to them. This might explain the smooth integration of the nomarchs in the “new order”.

It seems that a nomarch of the Hare nome named Ahanakht I played a key role in the process. The texts and decoration of his monumental tomb at Dayr al-Barshā—the first decorated rock tomb on the Middle Kingdom plateau there—show that he was not only a nomarch, but that the new Theban king also engaged him as a vizier. The strong ties between the new monarch and the rulers of the Hare nome is also apparent from the fact that one of Ahanakht’s subordinates, a man called Iha, who was responsible for the local temple scriptorium (the House of Life), was appointed as a teacher of the princes in Thebes.¹⁴¹

From Thebes, two men called Bebi and Dagi are also known to have been viziers under Mentuhotep II.¹⁴² According to Allen, Ahanakht was the first vizier to rule in Egypt after the unification.¹⁴³ However, this hypothesis is weakened by the consideration that he would then have been the only known very high court official not buried in Thebes. It is therefore more likely that he acted as a second vizier beside the Theban one(s), having the specific task integrating the nomes of the former Heracleopolitan kingdom in the reunited country.¹⁴⁴ The occurrence of a provincial vizier beside a residential one is also known from the late Old Kingdom, and the specific historical conditions in the early Middle Kingdom may have made the re-creation of this institution an attractive proposition.

The growth in political significance of the Hare nome in this key period is reflected in a sudden, explosive expansion of the cemetery

¹⁴¹ For the publication of the texts of the tomb of Iha and the interpretation of the texts of all tombs of this period in Dayr al-Barshā, see H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā I*, 64–73; 83–113.

¹⁴² J.P. Allen, “Some Theban Officials of the Early Middle Kingdom”, in: *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson I*, P.D. Manuelian, ed. (Boston, 1996), 12–23.

¹⁴³ J.P. Allen, “The High Officials of the Early Middle Kingdom”, in: *The Theban Necropolis. Past, Present and Future*, N. Strudwick, J.H. Taylor, ed. (London, 2003), 21–26.

¹⁴⁴ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā I*, 109–110.

in the low desert of Dayr al-Barshā, at the foot of the hill where Ahanakht's tomb is located. This area, covering zones 8, 9 and perhaps 10 of the site, covers a vast surface densely occupied by tombs, and these almost all date to the early Middle Kingdom. It is hard to avoid the impression that Ahanakht's rise to political prominence entailed a growth in the number of officials stationed in al-Ashmūnayn.

Later in the Middle Kingdom, the density of the Dayr al-Barshā necropolis seems to subside, but several of the nomarchs buried there still boast the title of vizier. It thus seems as though al-Ashmūnayn remained the seat of a line of provincial viziers, who are likely to have seconded the vizier in the capital.¹⁴⁵

Unfortunately the information we have on the nomarchs is for the rest somewhat patchy. The coincidental preservation of (groups of) texts in some periods now and then allows us a glimpse. For instance, the texts from the tombs of Dayr al-Barshā and in the calcite alabaster quarry at Hatnub offer an intriguing picture of civil-war like conditions in Middle Egypt in the early years of king Amenemhat I, when Nehri I and his sons were in charge in al-Ashmūnayn. The none too clear descriptions may indicate how they assisted the new king in asserting his power.¹⁴⁶

In roughly the same period, the tomb inscriptions of Khnumhotep I in Banī Ḥasan describe that he, too, was supporting Amenemhat I, being rewarded with the office of *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ* in Menat Khufu.¹⁴⁷ Later on he must have become nomarch of the entire Oryx nome, although the text unfortunately does not specify under which conditions this happened. A somewhat similar account appears in the tomb of Amenemhat at Banī Hasan, who claims to have acted as a substitute for his father when he accompanied king Senwosret I to the south to defeat "the four desert-dwellers".¹⁴⁸ Accounts like this make clear that the mobilisation of troops to secure the stability of the state was among their recurrent tasks.

Besides that, we know they had cadastral responsibilities,¹⁴⁹ and sometimes perhaps, as remarked above, tasks in the organization of

¹⁴⁵ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 104–107.

¹⁴⁶ On the interpretation of these texts, see now L. Gestermann, *ZÄS* 135 (2008), 1–14.

¹⁴⁷ P.E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan* I (London, 1893), pl. XLIV.

¹⁴⁸ P.E. Newberry, *op. cit.*, pl. VIII, columns 6–13.

¹⁴⁹ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 88–89.

irrigation. The not infrequent appearance of the title of overseer of priests indicates that some nomarchs also directed local temples, and they were undoubtedly involved in various economic activities, like the exploitation of quarries,¹⁵⁰ trading,¹⁵¹ and directing their undoubtedly extensive agricultural holdings.

Unsurprisingly, they seem to have entertained intensive contacts with their peers in other nomes. Thus, the autobiography of Khnumhotep II at Banī Ḥasan includes the remark:

Another favour that was granted to me: One appointed my eldest son Nakht, whom Khety had conceived, as ruler of the Anubis nome as a successor to the father of his mother.¹⁵²

The Anubis nome was the one directly north of the Oryx nome, where Banī Ḥasan lies. We can infer that Khnumhotep's father-in-law had been nomarch of the Anubis nome; that he gave his daughter Khety in marriage to Khnumhotep, and that the latter's son later became a nomarch of the Anubis nome. Although the text does not state as much, there is nothing unlikely in the assumption that Nakht, like his father, married a girl from the ruling line in the Anubis nome.¹⁵³ The phenomenon strongly recalls the system of wife exchange that was common until not so long ago amongst European nobility.

It cannot be the purpose of this chapter to describe in detail the fate of the other nomarchs in the course of the Middle Kingdom. In many cases we know their names or the sequence in which they held office, but there is rarely information on specific events. But exception must be made for the disappearance of this ruling class.

Long ago, E. Meyer argued that they lost their position in the later 12th dynasty due to a conscious political move of the central

¹⁵⁰ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 89–91.

¹⁵¹ H. Willems, *Dayr al-Barshā* I, 91.

¹⁵² *Beni Hasan* I, pl. XXVI, cols. 121–125.

¹⁵³ A similar indication of close ties between the nomarch families of Upper Egypt is a wooden cylinder found in or near the tomb of Djehutihotep at Dayr al-Barshā, mentioning a person by the name of Wahka. It has been suggested that this object may have been a gift to Djehutihotep by a member of the ruling line of the Tenth Upper Egyptian nome, who were buried in Qāw al-Kabīr, and many of whose members bore the name Wahka. This name is otherwise unattested in the Hare nome (see H. Willems, M. De Meyer, D. Depraetere, *e.a.*, "Preliminary Report of the 2002 Campaign of the Belgian Mission to Deir al-Barsha", *MDAIK* 60 (2004), 251. The name Wah-ka in this context may also be explained by assuming interbreeding between the nomarch families of the Tenth and Fourteenth nomes, producing a child in the fourteenth nome bearing a name otherwise common only in the Tenth.

administration.¹⁵⁴ Over the last decades, this hypothesis has been criticized because the preserved evidence for nomarchs in various parts of Egypt would suggest that their disappearance was a long drawn-out process rather than a punctual event.¹⁵⁵ This observation is certainly correct. However, as fresh evidence becomes available, it appears that the phase in which the nomarchs disappeared lasted less long than has been asserted, perhaps only covering the latter years of Senwosret III and the earlier part of the reign of Amenemhat III. The time range cannot be very accurately fixed, but a second process requires consideration as well. Throughout Egypt, it seems that none of the last representatives of the “nomarch” class still bore the title *ḥr.y-tp ʿ3 n NOME*. It is far from clear what the background of this may have been, but in view of the later development of regional administration, it stands to reason that this may have been a step in curtailing the regional administrators somewhat. At least they no longer bore a title expressing their role as *state* administrators. In many cases, however, they still were temple administrators (*ḥ3.ty-ʿ im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr*), a function which in many a case may in fact have been the real basis of their power. Later, in the reign of Amenemhat III, the evidence from the nomarchal cemeteries then breaks off entirely.

It is important to reflect on what this meant. Surely not that the category of the *ḥ3.ty-ʿ im.y-r ḥm.w-ntr* as such disappeared. The fact that such titles remained in use (in fact, all through Egyptian history) cannot be ignored. However, suddenly these people seem to have lost a) the capacity or b) the interest to build monumental tombs. The first factor would imply that the economic means of the local rulers had dwindled, or their power to deploy regional work-forces in their own interest. A not unlikely explanation of this might be that the central government effectively curbed their power to a major extent. In any case it is manifest that the disappearance of the nomarch cemeteries coincides chronologically with the appearance in the sources of different administrative entities like the “Southern District” (*wʿr.t rs.y.t*), probably covering most of Upper Egypt; different kinds of administrators; and different administrative practices (the sudden and vast

¹⁵⁴ E. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums* I,2 (Stuttgart, Berlin,² 1913), 252–253.

¹⁵⁵ The most fundamental publication that can be cited here is D. Franke, in: *Middle Kingdom Studies*, S. Quirke, ed., 51–67.

increase of sealing can hardly be read otherwise).¹⁵⁶ At this time also there seems to be a rapid increase in the number of attestations for “mayors” (*ḥ3.ty-^c n TOWN*).¹⁵⁷ Two points merit being considered here. First, although some of these *ḥ3.ty.w-^c* were in charge of towns that had formerly been nome capitals, others directed towns that had not. Therefore, the *ḥ3.ty.w-^c* are unlikely to have been simply the successors of the nomarchs under a different title. Rather they functioned within a differently arranged administrative network. While clearly being important local officials, it seems that they had a somewhat lower status than the nomarchs. We have already argued this based on the size of their dwellings. The fact that the ‘mayors’ apparently did not generally follow the example of the ‘nomarchs’ of building monumental tombs, may point in the same direction.

I would argue that we are witnessing a systemic change here. Until the late 12th dynasty, nomarchs may not have existed everywhere in Egypt, but they were an integral part of the country’s administration. In the late 12th dynasty this changed radically. It is true that, even after this time, regional administrators are occasionally in evidence whose funerary display strongly recalls that of the earlier nomarchs, but examples are very hard to find. I only know of the 16th dynasty tombs of Renseneb and Sobknakht at al-Kāb, one of whom was an *ir.y-p^c.t ḥ3.ty-^c ḥtm.ty-bi.ty smḥr w^c.ty im.y-r ḥm.w-nṯr*.¹⁵⁸ In view of the combination of the monumental kind of tomb and the kind of office borne by the tomb owner, I would, had they dated to the 12th dynasty, assign these persons to the class of the nomarchs. And it seems inherently likely, not only that they had tombs resembling nomarch tombs, but also that they wielded an amount of regional power similar to that of a nomarch. What differentiates this case from the nomarchs of the 12th dynasty is that we are, on a national level, looking at a very isolated case. The owners of the al-Kāb tombs were, probably

¹⁵⁶ S. Quirke, *The Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*; Id., *Titles and Bureaux*.

¹⁵⁷ Almost all examples of such mayors are from the later reign of Senwosret III or later. We have seen however that, in the absence of nomarchs in southern Upper Egypt, this class of officials already occurred there from the early Middle Kingdom onwards. At Banī Ḥasan they are also in evidence. Although they are otherwise rarely if ever attested in more northerly parts of Upper Egypt, this case suggests that they may have existed, even if they left only few traces in the documentation. It remains very difficult to determine, how common they were.

¹⁵⁸ On these tombs see now W.V. Davies, “Renseneb and Sobeknakht of Elkab: the Genealogical Data”, in: *The Second Intermediate Period*, M. Marée, ed., 223–240.

very consciously, copying the funerary environment that the earlier nomarchs had surrounded themselves with. They were thus from certain perspectives in the same league. Different from the nomarchs, however, they did not function in an administrative system in which the nomarchy was a usual component. Instead, historical conditions specific to these rulers led to their acquiring a degree of prominence that other contemporary regional administrators did not have. Undoubtedly this has to do with the close links between the ruling line in al-Kāb and the royal court at Thebes.

The above explanation works from the assumption that the nomarch class as such disappeared, and that the 'mayors' who succeeded them as regional leaders held a less prominent position. The disappearance of monumental tombs could be explained from this cause alone, but it should be stressed that historical developments are rarely ever the result of a single cause. More or less at the time provincial monumental tombs disappear, royal pyramid complexes also rapidly decrease in size. Moreover, the funerary equipment of royals of the late 12th and 13th dynasties becomes gradually more and more simple. Even royal sarcophagi are now almost devoid of decoration. Funerary culture as a whole is marked by a profound change in the kind of objects buried with the deceased. A chapter on Egyptian administration is not the right place to discuss these phenomena.¹⁵⁹ The reason why I briefly mention them here is that it may be too simple to regard the disappearance of monumental tombs in rural areas too strictly as a reflection of the changed economic and administrative powers of the administrators. In part the changed kind of data at our disposal may also reflect a changed mental outlook, in which costly, symbol-laden tombs and funerary equipment were no longer *en vogue*. If so, local patrons may have survived also after the nomarchal era, but in a form that is less easy to recognize in the sources.

¹⁵⁹ The issue will be discussed more profoundly in H. Willems, "Die Frage der sogenannten 'Demokratisierung des Jenseitsglaubens' vom späten Alten Reich bis zur Zweiten Zwischenzeit", in: *Handbuch der altägyptischen Religion*, J. Assmann, H. Roeder, ed. (Handbuch der Orientalistik; Leiden, in press). In the present chapter I will also refrain from discussing the religious role of the nomarchs within their communities. For this, see H. Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages et la démocratie*, 103–129; 220–228.