A Review of Köhler, E. *Theories of State Formation*

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Within this chapter Köhler is seeking to address the subject of complex state formation in Egypt during the Pre-dynastic and early Dynastic periods. The author within this chapter is not going to “reiterate, criticize, or test existing theories of state formation in Egypt,” (Pg. 37) rather Köhler is going to focus on the archaeological evidence and how “it can be contextualized and interpreted based on *archaeological theory*.” (Pg. 37 emphasis added). Therefore, the author at the outset has placed a difficult constraint on the analysis, whereby she is not going to address theories of state formation, but *is* going to look at archaeological theory. This rather suggests that she is trying to ‘have her cake and eat it’, by both rejecting and accepting different bodies of theoretical arguments without really telling us how they are distinct from each other, as we saw with the Baines and Bard articles, archaeological theory is heavily predicated on larger ideas of state formation, it is indeed a largely recursive relationship, and thus to say they are distinct bodies of thought is difficult, if not impossible.

Köhler sets out a large range of archaeological evidence roughly starting the Naqada I period and going through to the end of the 1st Dynasty. Yet, her analysis feels somewhat superficial and her statements seem somewhat causal; I suspect because of her attempt consciously disengage with large parts of the theory that binds the archaeological data together into larger scale conclusions. In some ways this article appears to be the opposite of Baines, in that while we are sometimes frustrated by the level of detail in Baines analysis, this piece seems to be insubstantial in comparison. I was also disappointed that she did not really follow-up with what I thought was her most interesting observation about the ancient Egyptian *idea* of state

“Unwittingly, many Egyptologists therefore also failed to see that the formation of the state in Egypt preceded the time when this ideology was created and that state formation in Egypt needs to be clearly separated from the concept of the “unification of the two lands” and its associated ideologies.” (Pg. 37)

However, this was also the case in Baines where he also took up this idea “One vital premise for the unification is the appearance of the idea of unity.” (Pg. 102) Yet, he too did not really seem to address this interesting point once he’d raised it.

Baines and to a lesser extent Köhler do a good job of really trying to mine a wide range of archaeological data, but also point the reader to its significant problems. Specifically, that we have very large gaps in chronological coverage and that the data is skewed due to disciplinary, and geomorphological, processes towards funerary data. With regard to Bard’s article my main problem was that it seemed too heavily reliant on an analysis based out of the funerary data, where the driving force behind the evolution of the state is due to the ‘cult of death’, stating “Pre-dynastic and early Dynastic Egyptians clearly put their greatest material effort into cemeteries, which reinforced the evolving ideologies of legitimacy and control.” (Pg. 17)

Within Köhler’s article I could understand the desire not to fall into the theory ‘black box’ and become tied down in what are basically historiographic discussions, “they say they want history, but really all they want is historiography.” (Boehm 2011 *Pers. Comms.)* Yet, I feel that this approach did not work, I was unclear how she was articulating her data to her larger statements concerning the development of the Egyptian state, giving her chapter the appearance of a magic trick, where suddenly the rabbit gets pulled out of the hat, the problem being no-one knows how it got there.