

The System of Government and Administration in Ancient Egypt

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Abstract

The system of government and administration in Ancient Egypt was characterized by its centralized and absolute nature. The Pharaoh stood at the apex of the political and social hierarchy and was regarded as a divine ruler who combined religious, temporal, and legislative authority. To ensure the effective administration of the vast territories of the kingdom, the Pharaoh relied on the Vizier, who served as the head of government and the chief supervisor of the state administration, alongside a well-organized bureaucratic system based on provincial governors (nomarchs) and scribes responsible for managing financial affairs, agriculture, and taxation. This highly structured administrative system contributed significantly to the stability of the Ancient Egyptian state for many centuries and enabled the development of one of the world's greatest civilizations.

From this perspective, the present study seeks to shed light on the system of government and administration in Ancient Egypt and its various components. It aims to analyze the structure of political authority as well as the organization of the executive and judicial institutions that governed the country. Furthermore, the study examines the roles played by the ruling elites and the religious and military institutions in consolidating the foundations of this political system, thereby providing a deeper understanding of how this remarkable civilization endured for such an extended period.

Keywords: King, Vizier, Ancient Egypt, Provincial Governors, Administration .

Introduction

Political life in Ancient Egypt constituted one of the fundamental pillars upon which one of the greatest and longest-lasting civilizations in human history was built. The political history of the Nile Valley underwent major transformations, beginning with the Predynastic Period and the unification of the country under King Menes, followed by the eras of strength and prosperity during the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, and eventually the periods of decline and

fragmentation. Throughout this long historical trajectory, the system of government and administration possessed a distinctive character founded upon the concept of sacred kingship, whereby the Pharaoh was regarded as the earthly representative of the gods and the ultimate source of all authority. Assisting him was a highly centralized administrative apparatus headed by the Vizier, together with provincial governors responsible for overseeing the daily affairs of the provinces, maintaining public order, and collecting taxes. In light of this unique political structure, a fundamental question arises: How was the system of government and administration in Ancient Egypt formed, and what institutional structures and administrative mechanisms enabled it to organize the affairs of the state and preserve its stability for many centuries?

First: The Political System in Ancient Egypt

I. The Emergence of the Monarchical System

The political system of ancient Egypt was an absolute monarchy whose fundamental principle was based on the divinity of the king.ⁱ The ancient Egyptians firmly believed in the concept of sacred kingship and regarded their rulers as the legitimate heirs of the gods who had governed Egypt in prehistoric times.ⁱⁱ They also believed that the king was the living embodiment of the god Horus, the last of the divine rulers,ⁱⁱⁱ and the mediator between the worlds of gods and humans.^{iv} Consequently, the king's authority was founded upon his divine nature, which was believed to be transmitted from one ruler to another through the sacred royal bloodline. This belief is confirmed by several royal king lists, including the Turin Papyrus and the Palermo Stone.^v

Before discussing this political system in detail, it is necessary to highlight the major political developments that Egypt experienced prior to the beginning of the Dynastic Period. Historical and archaeological evidence indicates that political life in Egypt dates back to the Predynastic Period, during which numerous cities and regional territories emerged as a result of the unification of totemic tribes that inhabited the banks of the Nile River. Their number reached ^{vi} . twenty nomes in Lower Egypt, while scholars estimate that Upper Egypt consisted of twenty-two nomes.^{vii}

The first signs of political maturity in Egypt appeared during the middle of the fourth millennium BCE and the beginning of the third millennium BCE, when two rival kingdoms emerged: the Kingdom of Upper Egypt and the Kingdom of Lower Egypt.^{viii} The rulers of Lower Egypt adopted the papyrus plant as the symbol of their kingdom and wore the Red Crown, which originally symbolized the goddess Neith, the patron deity of the city of Sais. In contrast, the rulers of Upper Egypt adopted the lotus plant as the emblem of their kingdom and wore the White Crown, known as the Hedjet. Later, however, Horus became the principal deity

of both kingdoms, and in each kingdom the king was regarded as the earthly representative of Horus during his lifetime.^{ix}

II. The Unification of Egypt and the Establishment of the Monarchy

The Egyptologist James Henry Breasted states that around the forty-third century BCE, one of the powerful rulers of Upper Egypt succeeded in subjugating the Kingdom of Lower Egypt. Nevertheless, the identity of this ruler remains unknown. He was the first to establish a kingdom uniting northern and southern Egypt. Although the original name of this new kingdom is unknown, modern historians conventionally refer to it as the "First Union." According to Breasted, this unified kingdom endured for several centuries and was ruled by a succession of kings who established Heliopolis, the City of the Sun, as their capital in order to facilitate the administration of the unified state.^x However, this union did not last long, as Egypt eventually fragmented once again into two rival kingdoms.^{xi} Subsequently, the rulers of Hierakonpolis declared war against their northern rivals until a ruler from the Thinite nome, named Narmer (also known as Menes), succeeded in defeating the northern kings and achieving the political unification of Egypt around 3200 BCE.^{xii}

Both archaeological and written sources agree that King Menes was the founder of the First Dynasty.^{xiii} The Turin Papyrus, the Abydos King List, and the history of Manetho all attribute the unification of Egypt to King Menes and state that, following this achievement, he established the First Royal Dynasty. Nevertheless, archaeological evidence from this period has not yielded any direct remains attributable to Menes. Instead, most of the archaeological discoveries indicate that King Narmer was the actual architect of Egypt's political unification. They further demonstrate that he was the first ruler to wear both the White Crown, symbolizing Upper Egypt, and the Red Crown, symbolizing Lower Egypt. This raises an important historical question concerning the identity of the king who unified Upper and Lower Egypt, namely whether Menes and Narmer were one and the same individual or whether these names referred to different rulers.

In truth, the available historical evidence remains insufficient to determine conclusively whether Menes was identical to Narmer or whether these names belonged to a single individual. What is certain, however, is that this ruler succeeded in unifying Upper and Lower Egypt, thereby founding the First Dynasty. He established Memphis as the new capital of his kingdom, organized the administrative system, and laid the foundations of the sacred monarchy, according to which the kings of Egypt became the successors of the gods who had formerly ruled the land.[xiv] To understand the foundations of this political system, it is therefore necessary to examine the sacred nature attributed to the Egyptian kings and their role in governing the civilization of ancient Egypt.

III. The Sacredness of the Kings of Egypt

A study of the political history of ancient Egypt reveals that the rule of the Egyptian kings was founded upon their divine nature, and that their sovereignty was regarded as a continuation of the reign of the gods who had ruled Egypt during the primordial ages. This concept can be inferred from ancient Egyptian mythology. The Pyramid Texts further reinforce these myths, as they contain numerous passages affirming the divinity of the kings of Egypt and their legitimate right to rule. Among these texts are the following:

"...O King's body, do not decay, do not rot, and let not your odor become foul... O King, your limbs shall never be separated from you, for you are one of the gods. Nekhen sails north for you, and the South sails for you; the mourner calls upon you... There is welcome for you, O King, from your father; there is welcome for you from Ra..."^{xiv}

Another indication of the divinity, sanctity, and legitimate authority of the Egyptian kings is found in the sacred royal titulary that each king assumed upon ascending the throne.^{xv} These royal titles were as follows:

1. The Horus Name

This title first appeared during the reign of King Scorpion. It held precedence over all other royal names whenever they were inscribed on monuments. It was written within a rectangular frame representing the façade of the royal palace, surmounted by the image of a falcon. This title affirmed that its bearer belonged to the realm of the gods and established him as the heir of the god Horus^{xvi}.

2. The Nebty (Two Ladies) Name

This title associated the king with the two patron goddesses of Upper and Lower Egypt, who had served as protectors since the First Dynasty. When Egypt was divided into two kingdoms, the goddess Nekhbet, represented as a vulture, protected Upper Egypt from her cult center at El-Kab, while the goddess Wadjet, symbolized by the cobra, protected Lower Egypt. This title signified that the king ruled the united kingdom under the protection and authority of these two goddesses.^{xvii}

3. The Golden Horus Name

This title appeared during the Old Kingdom. Scholars have differed regarding its interpretation. Many believe that it means "Golden Horus" and symbolizes the king's divinity. They associate gold with the sun god Ra, relying on passages from the Pyramid Texts which describe Ra's flesh or skin as being made of gold, as well as references stating that the flesh of the gods was of gold. Other scholars interpret the title as "Horus the Victorious," referring to Horus's triumph over the god Seth.^{xviii}

4. The Nesut-Bity Name

This title means "He of the Sedge and the Bee" and is generally translated as "King of Upper and Lower Egypt." It symbolized the king's sovereignty over the two lands, represented by the sedge plant (Upper Egypt) and the bee (Lower Egypt). This title usually preceded the king's throne name, which was written inside a cartouche and formally assumed upon his accession to the Egyptian throne. It first appeared during the First Dynasty.^{xix}

5. The Sa-Ra (Son of Ra) Name

This title first appeared during the Second Dynasty. It proclaimed the king's divine sonship to the sun god Ra. Egyptian kings bore this title from birth and consequently regarded themselves as the legitimate descendants and heirs of the god Ra^{xx}.

In addition to these five principal royal titles, Egyptian kings also adopted other epithets such as "the Good God" and "the Perfect God."^{xxi} The doctrine of sacred kingship required that the king be immortal. Ancient Egyptians believed that after the king's death his soul ascended to the heavens to join the company of the gods, where the pharaoh lived eternally among them.^{xxii}

This belief is reflected in the Pyramid Texts, which declare:

"...Rise up, O King, lift your head, gather your bones together, assemble your limbs, shake the dust from your body... Offerings have been prepared for you in your great festivals and in the festivals of the half-month, as your father Geb commanded for you. Arise, O King, for you have not died..."^{xxiii}

The Egyptian kings believed that the secret of immortality lay in preserving the human body. This conviction led to the development of mummification and the construction of monumental royal tombs designed to safeguard the king's body for eternity.^{xxiv} The Pyramid Texts also refer to the sacred birth of the king while denying his ordinary human birth. This idea appears in Utterances 374, 412, and 675, which state:

"...For you have no father among men who could have begotten you, nor is there any mother among mankind who could have given birth to you..."^{xxv}

Among the kings who were deified were Khufu, Senusret III, Amenhotep I, Amenhotep III, and Ramesses II. Some of these rulers, particularly Amenhotep III and Ramesses II, established active cults dedicated to themselves during their own lifetimes.^{xxvi}

During the Old Kingdom, the king was worshipped as "the Great God." The purpose of claiming divine status was to compel the population to obey his authority and prevent rebellion. Such authority required that the king himself become an object of worship. However, the decline of central authority during the Seventh and Eighth Dynasties weakened the sanctity of kingship, and royal tombs and palaces became vulnerable to looting and destruction. During the Middle Kingdom, the rulers of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties succeeded in re-establishing centralized power and restoring the sacred status of kingship. The kings of the New Kingdom

likewise preserved their divine status and were regarded as the earthly representatives of the god Amun-Ra.

IV. The Coronation of the King

The traditions of kingship in Ancient Egypt required anyone wishing to be crowned king of Egypt to perform a series of symbolic and religious rituals upon ascending the throne. These coronation ceremonies were held in the city of Memphis.^{xxvii} and their purpose was to confer divine legitimacy upon the king and affirm the unity of Upper and Lower Egypt.^{xxviii} During the ceremony, the king led the royal procession, followed by priests carrying statues of the great rulers who had preceded him, such as Menes, the unifier of the Two Lands; King Mentuhotep, who restored the unity of Egypt; and King Thutmose I, who liberated Egypt from the Hyksos.^{xxix} The king would first wear the White Crown, symbolizing Upper Egypt, and ascend the ceremonial platform in a ritual known as the "Appearance of the King of Upper Egypt." He would then don the Red Crown, symbolizing Lower Egypt, and ascend the platform once more in what was called the "Appearance of the King of Lower Egypt." Throughout these ceremonies, the king wore a garment extending to his knees or feet and carried the royal scepter (Heka) and the flail.^{xxx} He then drove a stake into the ground, around which papyrus and lotus plants—symbols of the kingdoms of Lower and Upper Egypt—were planted to signify the enduring political unity of the Two Lands. Subsequently, two priests wearing the masks of the gods Horus and Seth purified the king and presented him to the other gods, placing upon his head both the White and Red Crowns. This was followed by a ceremonial procession around the White Wall. Finally, the god embraced the new king in his arms and inscribed his name upon the branches of the sacred tree, thereby granting him eternal remembrance.^{xxxi}

V. The King's Duties and Powers

1. Religious Duties

Religious responsibilities constituted the foremost obligations of the Egyptian king. He was expected to secure the favor of the gods by constructing and restoring their temples and offering them sacrifices. As the supreme priest of all Egyptian deities, the king appointed the priests who acted on his behalf in performing religious rites in the temples throughout the country.^{xxxii} Moreover, the king's religious duties toward his people did not cease with his death but continued in the afterlife. Egyptian belief was founded upon the concept of immortality, according to which the deceased king ascended to the heavens and became an intermediary between the gods and humanity, protecting and watching over his people just as he had done during his earthly life.^{xxxiii}

2. Political and Military Duties

The king was regarded as the supreme commander of the country and bore ultimate responsibility for safeguarding its security and stability. He was also entrusted with defending Egypt against attacks by neighboring peoples and tribes.^{xxxiv} The king actively participated in military campaigns in his capacity as commander-in-chief of the army. This was not merely symbolic but reflected historical reality. For example, both King Thutmose I and King Ramesses II personally led their armies to victory. Nevertheless, Egyptian kings occasionally appointed military commanders to lead campaigns that they did not command in person.^{xxxv}

The king was also responsible for maintaining a strong and permanent army capable of defending the country against foreign invaders. Among his prerogatives was convening a council of advisers at the royal court whenever the kingdom's borders were threatened or to inform them of military victories. Furthermore, he exercised legislative authority by promulgating laws and appointing senior state officials, including the vizier, provincial governors, and judges of good reputation.^{xxxvi}

3. Social Duties

The Egyptian king was expected to ensure the welfare and security of his subjects by promoting irrigation and water-management projects that guaranteed agricultural prosperity. Egyptian kings carefully recorded the annual rise and fall of the Nile in historical records such as the Palermo Stone, attributing the arrival of the inundation and life-giving waters to the king's sacred qualities.

Royal inscriptions also depict the king accompanied by members of his court while inspecting buildings and personally supervising major construction projects. Some kings dispatched expeditions to neighboring lands to obtain materials unavailable in Egypt. As a divine ruler, the king sought the support of the gods to ensure the success of these missions.^{xxxvii}

Although the political system of Ancient Egypt took the form of an absolute monarchy, the king's authority was nevertheless constrained by the principles of Ma'at (truth, justice, and cosmic order). Egyptian kings were obliged to uphold these principles in order to preserve the harmony of the universe.^{xxxviii} This is confirmed by the testimony of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, who observed that Egyptian kings respected the rule of law in all their actions, whether concerning affairs of state or their private lives. He states:

"...The Egyptian kings were unlike the despotic rulers of other countries, who acted according to their own desires without restraint. The laws prescribed the limits of their conduct, not only in public affairs but also in their private lives and daily manner of living..."^{xxxix}

It is believed by the Egyptologist Flinders Petrie that when the powerful kings began unifying the country during the Predynastic Period, the small states scattered throughout the Nile Valley submitted to their authority under binding conditions that the kings were obliged to respect.

From this emerged the concept of limiting the king's authority throughout the historical periods. Thus, the limitations imposed on the king's powers in ancient Egypt resulted, on the one hand, from these ancient traditions inherited through his conquest of the various city-states that had existed in Egypt, and, on the other hand, from his sacred status as the symbol of Egypt's life.^{x1} Although the king represented the highest judicial authority in the country, the kings of Egypt established the general principles of law and made them binding upon everyone, including themselves. The king required judges to take an oath and instructed them not to obey his commands if they were contrary to the laws of the country.^{xli}

Secondly: The Administrative System in Ancient Egypt

Absolute monarchy was the form of government adopted in ancient Egypt throughout the Pharaonic era. This system was based on concentrating all powers in the hands of the king. However, since it was impossible for the king to exercise all these powers personally, it was only natural for him to delegate some of them to others and to rely on a number of officials in administering the affairs of the state. These officials were regarded as his servants and subordinates. The necessity of employing officials led to the establishment of administrative and governmental institutions, headed by the vizier, provincial governors, and senior officials.

I. The Vizier

In ancient Egypt, the vizier was the highest-ranking official in the state and the head of all the administrative bodies through which the Pharaoh governed the country. Scholars have differed regarding the existence of the office of vizier during the Early Dynastic Period. Some researchers, such as Eduard Meyer, maintain that the office already existed during that era, whereas Pierre Montet Drioton argues that the first person to hold this office was Hemaka during the reign of King Den, the sixth ruler of the First Dynasty.^{xlii}

In truth, the available historical evidence is insufficient to determine precisely when the office of vizier first appeared. Nevertheless, some scholars suggest that its emergence resulted from the increasing governmental responsibilities placed upon the king following the political unification of the country. This development necessitated the appointment of an individual to act on the king's behalf in performing certain duties and to serve as the intermediary between the king and his officials.^{xliii} The vizier is believed to have been depicted on the reverse side of the Narmer Palette, where he appears preceding the king, distinguished from the rest of the subjects by his attire and wig. It is possible that he occupied the office of vizier because he bore the title "Tjt" (Tt), which may have been the origin of the word signifying "second" or "vizier."^{xliv}

Initially, during the Early Dynastic Period, the office of vizier was reserved exclusively for members of the royal family. Later, however, it passed to the high nobility and eventually

became a hereditary office.^{xlv} Most of our knowledge concerning the office of vizier is derived from the inscriptions and texts carved on the walls of the tomb of Rekhmire, who served as vizier under King Thutmose III and during the early reign of Amenhotep II. These inscriptions indicate that the king possessed the exclusive authority to appoint and dismiss the vizier.^{xlvi}

In view of the pivotal role played by the vizier in managing the affairs of the kingdom, the Egyptian kings greatly appreciated his services. This is reflected in a papyrus dating to the New Kingdom, which records a speech delivered by the king upon appointing a vizier. Among its statements is the following:

"...Keep your eyes upon the office of the vizier, observe everything that takes place within it, and know that it is the pillar upon which the entire land depends...."^{xlvii}

Beginning in the New Kingdom, the vizierate was divided into two offices, with two viziers overseeing the administration of the state: one residing in Thebes and the other in Memphis.^{xlviii}

The Vizier of the South supervised the territories ruled by the early Theban kings as far north as Al-Qusiyyah, located north of Asyut. The Vizier of the North was responsible for administering the remainder of Upper Egypt, with his jurisdiction extending from Middle Egypt to Lower Egypt.^{xlix} Our knowledge of the Northern Vizier remains extremely limited; however, this does not imply that his position was inferior to that of his southern counterpart. On the contrary, his responsibilities may well have been greater owing to the vast geographical area under his authority. The greater fame of the Southern Viziers is likely attributable to the magnificent monuments they left behind.¹

1. Duties of the Vizier

In Ancient Egypt, the vizier was regarded as one of the principal pillars of government. He was responsible for organizing the affairs of the state and was entrusted with numerous duties, including reviewing reports on the condition of the country, supervising the conduct of governmental affairs, and presiding over the Great Council, which consisted of the leading dignitaries of the state.^{li} He also supervised the Double Treasury, monitored taxes, determined their amounts and collection dates, and coordinated financial affairs with the Superintendent of the Treasury. Furthermore, he was informed of the annual flood level of the Nile River so that he could determine the amount of irrigated land available for cultivation, which consequently served as the basis for assessing taxes and fixing the dates of their collection.^{lii}

Among the other responsibilities entrusted to the vizier was the supervision of the Royal Household.^{liii} He was also responsible for overseeing the six supreme courts, maintaining daily records of judicial proceedings and the activities of judges. Egyptian kings consistently instructed their viziers to uphold justice. One of the principles emphasized by the king to every newly appointed vizier was that he bore full responsibility for his office, should not leave his

officials without accountability, and should recognize that the obedience shown by his subordinates reflected respect for the office and the proper performance of their public duties rather than personal servitude.^{liv}

The vizier's responsibilities were not confined to civil administration. He also supervised the security apparatus and was entrusted with protecting citizens, maintaining public order, and ensuring the personal security of the king.^{lv} In addition, he oversaw the military garrisons stationed throughout the territories under Egyptian control, through which the king's orders were transmitted.^{lvi} Beyond supervising these institutions, the vizier directed the preparation of royal tombs, monitored the progress of major royal construction projects, and organized religious and royal ceremonies.^{lvii} He was also responsible for dispatching the king's envoys to foreign lands and provinces connected with the royal court, receiving foreign ambassadors, and collecting tribute from foreign countries.^{lviii} Moreover, he supervised the dispatch of engineers throughout the country for the construction of bridges and the excavation of irrigation canals.^{lix}

II. Provincial Governors

The administration of the provinces constituted one of the fundamental pillars of the administrative system in Ancient Egypt because provincial governors played a crucial role in consolidating political authority and administrative organization. Since the Predynastic Period, Egypt had been divided into forty-two provinces (nomes), as previously noted.^{lx} Each province was governed by a governor appointed by the king, who was directly accountable to him, received his orders, and was responsible for implementing and proclaiming them throughout the province. The governor was assisted by a large body of officials attached to the various provincial departments. These officials were royal appointees, and this administrative system contributed significantly to the establishment of a politically unified and administratively well-organized kingdom.^{lxi}

In every city and village there were officials known as "Guardians of the Cities and Villages," who were subordinate to the provincial governor. They carried out his directives, supervised the administration of their local communities, and were assisted by prominent local notables descended from the leaders of the ancient tribes. These notables formed councils known as "Zazat," whose responsibilities included examining agricultural, administrative, and judicial matters and enforcing regulations. Each province also possessed administrative departments^{lxii} corresponding to those in the capital, functioning as smaller-scale institutions that implemented the same laws and regulations applied by the central administration. Government offices were likewise established to administer provincial affairs.^{lxiii}

1. Duties of Provincial Governors

In principle, provincial governors were public officials appointed by the central authority like other state officials. In some instances, a single governor was entrusted with the administration of more than one province, either by governmental decree or as a consequence of feudal ambitions. Depending on the policy adopted by the central government, a province was either placed under strict governmental control or allowed to retain a degree of autonomy.^{lxiv} Consequently, the powers exercised by provincial governors varied according to these political circumstances. Their responsibilities included supervising the intensive exploitation of agricultural lands, safeguarding the established boundaries of the province, overseeing royal estates and their dependent populations, and administering fortresses and cities.^{lxv}

Provincial governors were also responsible for collecting taxes, increasing state revenues, and fulfilling the financial obligations owed to the Royal Treasury. They were expected to improve agricultural conditions within their provinces. In addition, they headed the various branches of the local governmental administration, supervised religious affairs, organized the recruitment of individuals for military service, and dispatched troops on campaigns to defend the country's frontiers against external threats.^{lxvi}

2. The Evolution of the Role of Provincial Governors

During the first half of the Old Kingdom, provincial governors were officials subject to the authority of the king. They could be transferred from one province to another according to the king's wishes. Each governor hoped eventually to obtain a position within the central government in the capital, such as the head of one of the principal administrative departments. Their ambitions might even extend to becoming a member of the Supreme Court of Six, a Privy Councillor, the Pharaoh's deputy, vizier, or holding other high-ranking offices within the state.^{lxvii}

During the second half of the Old Kingdom, although the king theoretically retained the right to appoint, transfer, and dismiss provincial governors, he no longer exercised these powers. Consequently, the office became hereditary. Provincial governors strengthened their ties with their own provinces while reducing their dependence on and allegiance to the king. They increasingly relied on their hereditary right to govern their territories. The weakness of the kings contributed to this development by enhancing the governors' influence and increasing their wealth. Over time, this led to the emergence of an aristocratic class of provincial governors who sought to establish greater independence within their respective provinces.^{lxviii}

Following the dominance of the priesthood over the affairs of government during the Fifth Dynasty, the influence of provincial governors increased further, and their offices became hereditary as senior priests assumed control of these positions. The authority of these governors eventually rivaled that of the monarchy itself. Their influence reached its peak during the Sixth

Dynasty, when they succeeded in weakening the central government and administering their provinces independently. During this period, each province effectively became a miniature state within the Egyptian kingdom.^{lxix}

During the Middle Kingdom, however, the kings succeeded in reasserting complete control over the provincial governors. They dismissed those who opposed royal authority and appointed loyal governors in their place. The same policy continued throughout the New Kingdom. Nevertheless, toward the end of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, weak rulers ascended the throne, allowing some provincial governors to declare their independence from the central authority. During periods of political weakness and foreign occupation, some governors even proclaimed themselves kings and established their own ruling dynasties.^{lxx}

III. Officials

In examining the governmental system of ancient Egypt, we rely primarily on the texts left behind from that period, as well as the numerous official titles borne by state officials and inscribed on the walls of their tombs, specifying their functions and responsibilities. These sources provide a clear picture of the administrative and governmental organization of the state. As previously noted, the Vizier exercised supreme authority over governmental affairs and supervised all branches of the state administration. Assisting him was a hierarchy of officials who differed in rank, scope of work, responsibilities, and jurisdiction, yet all operated within a clearly defined administrative system. Throughout their careers, administrative officials frequently held different positions, moving from one department to another. Talented young men, particularly the sons of trusted officials, were educated at the royal court, where they acquired administrative experience by serving successively in various offices under the guidance of skilled scribes.^{lxxi}

Among the senior officials who played a significant role in supervising the administrative institutions and governmental organization were the following:

1. Chief of the Royal Palace

Also known as the "Fan-Bearer on the Right of the King," this official was one of the king's closest associates. In addition to serving as one of the king's advisers, he was responsible for supervising all matters relating to the monarch's personal affairs. He also maintained security and order within the royal palace and possessed the authority to prevent anyone he deemed unsuitable from appearing before the king.^{lxxii}

2. Bearer of the King's Seals

This office is attested as early as the First Dynasty. Over time, it gradually evolved into an honorary title and became known as the "Bearer of the Seal of the God," with the term "god" referring to the king himself. Beginning in the Fourth Dynasty, the holder of this office assumed

important responsibilities, including organizing and leading expeditions to mines and quarries, as well as commercial expeditions. He also commanded military detachments and, on occasion, the fleet, and could bear the title of military commander or admiral.^{lxxiii}

3. Councillor of the King of Lower Egypt

This title first appeared during the Thinite Period. Its holder occupied an important and influential position because he exercised authority over the northern, wealthier part of the country. No evidence has been found, however, of an equivalent office for Upper Egypt. This senior official supervised a number of subordinate officials who bore the title Chiefs of Works.^{lxxiv}

4. Supervisor of All the King's Works

Initially, this office was reserved exclusively for members of the royal family. However, by the end of the Fourth Dynasty, the title began to be granted to senior state officials, particularly viziers. The duties of the Supervisor of All the King's Works included overseeing the construction of royal palaces and tombs, dispatching expeditions to the quarries, supervising the labor force, and managing various other state projects.

5. Director of the Double Treasury

The office of the Director of the Double Treasury first appeared during the Fourth Dynasty. It seems to have disappeared until the middle of the Fifth Dynasty, when it became one of the responsibilities entrusted to the viziers. It was not granted again to non-viziers until the Sixth Dynasty. It is noteworthy that the title *imy-r pr-wy ḥd* ("Director of the Double Treasury") appeared before the previous title. Unlike the earlier office, viziers did not usually bear this title, suggesting that it designated the officials who were directly responsible for managing the treasury under the authority of the vizier. These officials disappeared at the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, when non-viziers were once again appointed as Directors of the Double Treasury.^{lxxv}

6. Chief Justice

The Chief Justice was considered one of the most important officials in the state after the vizier whenever the two offices were held separately. He bore the title *Sab* ("Judge") of the Court of Justice (*Zadw*). It remains unclear whether the term *Tjati* referred to a chief in the absolute sense or specifically to the head of the judiciary. For example, the inscriptions in the tomb of Rekhmire indicate that he did not merely sit with the council of judges in the Court of Justice to hear legal cases, but also to receive tribute. The inscriptions further confirm that he held two titles: *Sab Imy-r Nekhen* and *Tjati Imy-r Nekhen*. If the latter title did not represent a separate office, then *Tjati* would have been synonymous with *Sab*.^{lxxvi}

7. Director of the Royal Archives

The Director of the Royal Archives occupied a prominent position within the central administration during the Old Kingdom. Nevertheless, this title has not been attested before the reign of King Neferirkare. Although it was not restricted to the viziers of Memphis or the provincial administrations, it frequently appeared among their official titles, particularly from the Sixth Dynasty onward. The number of individuals who held this office during the Fifth Dynasty suggests that more than one person could occupy the position simultaneously, with one serving as vizier and another without the title of vizier. The responsibilities of this office were extensive, as it supervised and recorded the activities of all other administrative departments.^{lxxvii}

8. Necropolis Scribe

The Necropolis Scribe was primarily responsible for drafting correspondence addressed to the vizier, the king, or the provincial authorities. He also recorded official reports and documents. When laborers revolted due to the repeated suspension of their payments in kind, the scribe assumed responsibility for negotiating with government officials. Later, when armed bands spread throughout the countryside and the central government became incapable of confronting them, the Necropolis Scribe initially took over this responsibility at the local level. His authority gradually expanded to encompass entire regions, and his duties eventually included tax collection and the payment of government employees' salaries.^{lxxviii}

9. Scribes

The kings of Egypt and the provincial governors relied heavily on scribes to maintain order and administer the internal affairs of the kingdom. Ancient inscriptions depict priests conducting censuses and calculating the revenues collected from taxes deposited into the treasury. They also used Nilometers, which recorded the annual rise of the Nile waters, to predict the forthcoming harvest season and thereby estimate the government's expected revenue for the following year..^{lxxix}

IV. Administration of the Royal Institutions

The central administrative apparatus of the state comprised a number of major departments entrusted with carrying out all administrative functions of the kingdom. Among the most important were the following:

1. The King's House (Royal Household):

The central administration of the country was headquartered adjacent to the royal residence; therefore, it was known as the King's House. It also maintained regional branches in every province (nome). As one of the principal administrative institutions of the state, it was responsible for the government's administrative services and included several important departments, such as the Royal Correspondence Office. It served as the principal link between

the various government departments, ensuring the transmission of royal decrees and orders. It also supervised the archives responsible for preserving official records, in addition to a special department in charge of the royal seals.^{lxxx}

2. Registration and Documentation Departments:

These departments were responsible for registering documents relating to property ownership, sales, purchases, and wills. Such records were preserved in specialized offices that maintained the original documents, detailing the circumstances surrounding purchase and sale transactions, the conditions of wills, and the names of witnesses who signed these documents. These records were consulted whenever disputes arose concerning the ownership of property.

3. Department of Public Works:

This department was responsible for the construction of temples, royal pyramids, and certain tombs of high-ranking officials. It also oversaw public works projects such as the construction of dams, canals, fortresses, and government buildings. A single glance at the surviving royal pyramids and officials' tombs is sufficient to demonstrate the remarkable scale of activity undertaken by this department and the tremendous efforts exerted by its engineers, officials, and laborers.^{lxxxi}

4. Expeditions, Military Campaigns, and the Department of Arms:

Expeditions and military campaigns constituted an important aspect of governmental activity. Egypt, as the fertile Green Valley, was continually coveted by desert tribes and other invaders who sought opportunities to raid its territories. Consequently, military campaigns were organized to confront such threats, suppress hostile forces, and expel them from the country. Likewise, the expeditions dispatched by the Treasury to extract gold and other minerals required constant protection; therefore, military detachments accompanied them to secure the routes leading to the mines.^{lxxxii}

5. Department of Taxation:

The importance of this department increased during the Sixth Dynasty, when taxes began to be assessed on income. Both immovable and movable property became subject to taxation based on the general wealth census conducted every two years in conjunction with the nationwide population census.

6. Department of the Royal Cult:

Also known as the Red House, this department was responsible for the royal cult, including its revenues and expenditures, in addition to overseeing matters relating to royal funerary ceremonies.

7. Department of Water Management:

This department was responsible for supervising the waters of the Nile, canals, and lakes. It closely monitored and accurately measured the annual Nile inundation, recording its levels each year on the famous Palermo Stone from one regnal year to the next.^{lxxxiii}

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that the political system of Ancient Egypt was fundamentally religious in nature. The kings of Egypt were regarded as the legitimate heirs of the gods who were believed to have ruled the land of Egypt in ancient times. Since they were considered intermediaries between the divine and the human worlds, the Egyptian kings exercised absolute authority. In governing the country, they relied on a number of officials and scribes to assist them in managing the affairs of the state.

At the head of these officials stood the Vizier, who was the chief administrator of all governmental institutions through which the Pharaoh ruled the country. As Ancient Egypt was divided into several provinces (nomes), the Egyptian kings appointed governors to administer these provinces on their behalf. However, over time, the authority of these governors gradually increased as a result of the weakening of the central government. Their offices eventually became hereditary, and the provincial governors sought to strengthen their ties with their own provinces while reducing their dependence on the king. Consequently, an aristocratic class of provincial rulers gradually emerged, striving for greater autonomy within their territories. This development ultimately contributed to the weakening and decline of the Egyptian state.

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