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Machiavellian Masculinities: Historicizing and Contextualizing the “Civilizing Process” in Ancient Egypt

Ellen Morris

Barnard College, Columbia University

emorris@barnard.edu

Abstract

To judge from wisdom literature and artistic production, the ideal man in pharaonic Egypt was as polite and even-tempered as he was well groomed. This article examines the evidence for warrior burials from periods when the state was decentralized or relatively weak and argues that conceptions of manhood in fact oscillated between an irenic ideal and a more violent counterpart. Drawing upon comparative case studies and advice given by Niccolò Machiavelli to his prince, I argue that hegemonic masculinity in Egypt did not simply reflect the character of the times. Rather, rulers actively promoted the type of masculinity that best served their purpose. To an ambitious local ruler engaged in enlarging his core territory, it was beneficial to appeal to and encourage ideals of valor among potential soldiers and supporters. Once peace had been established, however, violent masculinities proved disruptive. Based on internal evidence as well as observations of authoritarian governments that aimed similarly to solidify their power and pacify their realms, I suggest that pharaohs and their advisors likely employed five specific strategies to neutralize potential competitors and transform an honor-bound warrior aristocracy into courtiers and bureaucrats.

Keywords

Egypt – masculinity – warriors – courtiers – scribes – statecraft

1 Introduction

This volume of the *Journal of Egyptian History* aims to demonstrate the value of placing Egyptian social dynamics in dialogue with those observed in other places and times. The topic of masculinity in pharaonic Egypt has yet to be approached from a cross-cultural perspective. Restricting themselves to Egyptian evidence, Egyptologists studying the performance of manhood in Egypt have examined artistic, textual, and archaeological evidence from specific eras¹ and have also produced valuable overviews of evidence drawn from numerous periods.² As they indicate, the cultural ideal of Egyptian manhood appears relatively static from the accession of the first king of Egypt's First Dynasty to the death of the last king of Egypt's Twentieth Dynasty (c. 2900–1077 BCE). Whether depicted as strong and slim in youth or as pleasantly plump in middle age, the man who commanded respect in ancient Egypt evidently took care to dress in white linen, obtain a clean shave, and project a demeanor of benign competence.

In this diachronic and comparativist exploration of Egyptian manhood, I first present evidence—based on chronological patterning in the appearance of weapons as grave goods—that cultural ideals of masculinity varied according to the stability of the state. Daggers, axes, and other weapons appear far more often in mortuary contexts during periods when the pharaonic state was nonexistent or weak than when the state was strong. Such patterning, if viewed from a purely Egyptological perspective, might prompt one of three explanations. Perhaps the comparatively rich burials that took place under powerful pharaohs were differentially targeted by tomb robbers; perhaps the periodic absence of functional weapons in the mortuary record might reflect shifting ideas as to the purpose of burial equipment; or perhaps deceased individuals who had carried weapons might have been more likely to enter the after-life armed. All three explanations undoubtedly contain elements of truth. Yet, given that this burial pattern is consistent over two millennia, the explanatory power of these theories is limited and occasionally problematic.

Placing Egyptian mortuary data in dialogue with the changing conceptions of hegemonic masculinity observed in other long-lived civilizations provides a compelling alternative perspective. Oscillations between a dominant manly ideal of the warrior and a competing ideal—that of the literate and culturally

1 See Robins, "Male Bodies"; Parkinson, "Boasting about Hardness"; Diamond, "Theorizing Masculinities."

2 See Sweeney, "Sex and Gender"; Robins, "Gender and Sexuality"; Matic, "Gender in Ancient Egypt."

sophisticated courtier or bureaucrat—occur in the cultural trajectories of Chinese, Japanese, Indian, and European societies. When weak states in these regions transitioned to autocratic regimes, cultural ideals of manliness transformed in tandem. Drawing on sociopolitical observations of masculinity in these societies, on Niccolò Machiavelli's advice to his prince, and on Norbert Elias's foundational study of the evolution of manners in *The Civilizing Process*, I argue that authoritarian rulers—once their power is consolidated—have a vested interest in promoting an explicitly irenic masculinity. Gentlemen (or, rather, gentle men) are highly advantageous to a stable state.

It is important not to overlook cultural differences when drawing upon parallels from societies that differ widely in size, structure, and ideology. With due caution, I nonetheless intend to demonstrate that the pharaohs of the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms would not have been unique in attempting to defang the very men who helped them attain power. The question of how to achieve dominance over one's rivals is a pressing political problem. Ancient and modern evidence suggests that disarming potential challengers is rarely a sufficient response. Five alternative strategies, I argue, were far more effective: 1) promoting rivals while slyly separating them from their powerbases; 2) eliminating or rendering distasteful opportunities for men to enhance their status through violence; 3) gathering elites at court and refocusing their drive for recognition and honor; 4) encouraging the cultivation of certain "feminine" traits in powerful men; and 5) inculcating in upper-class youth a reverence for hierarchy, deference, and de-escalation. These strategies all involved or benefited from a grand design to reconfigure the public performance of masculinity.

2 In the Archaeological Record Weapons Are Strongly Associated with Periods during Which the State Was Either Nonexistent or Unstable

While depictions of males in art do not change radically over time in Egypt, the prevalence of individuals interred with weapons does. In the absence of a strong state, violent masculinity offers individuals or groups protection. From the perspective of a central government, however, men who negotiate conflicts and settle scores with weapons are dangerous. It is for this reason, I would contend, that in the ancient Nile Valley the prevalence of so-called warrior burials—in which individuals go to the grave with daggers strapped at their side or with weapons at hand—plummets the longer a stable state persists.

What follows is a necessarily brief summary of the culture of weapons in pharaonic Egypt from late prehistory (Nagada IIC) until the end of the New

Kingdom (c. 3600–1077 BCE). To save a few thousand words, the reader is referred to Figures 1–3, in which data harvested from Susanne Petschel's catalogue of daggers (*Den Dolch betreffend: Typologie der Stichwaffen in Ägypten von der prädynastischen Zeit bis zur 3. Zwischenzeit*) and Vivian Davies' study of axes (*Catalogue of Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum VII: Tools and Weapons I. Axes*) has been presented visually.³ Daggers and axes are particularly illuminating when thinking about personal and societal violence because, in addition to using such a weapon in war for close quarter combat, a man might slip it menacingly into his belt in a civilian setting. Like a revolver in its holster, an axe or dagger strapped to one's side serves as a warning to others.

The data visualized on the map in Figure 1 records the evidence for both daggers and axes from times when the state was stable: broadly speaking, the Early Dynastic Period and the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. Certain reigns and dynasties, however, have been visualized in Figures 2 and 3.⁴ Specific dates are provided on the map, but all told the period of stability can be considered—at a minimum—to cover the better part of a millennium.⁵ Weapons were excluded from consideration here and in Figures 2 and 3 if they were models, made of a material other than metal, unexcavated, or could not be dated with reasonable precision. Areas of ambiguity make this task less precise than would be ideal, given that scholars differ as to what they mean by “Middle Kingdom.” For some, this label includes only the Twelfth Dynasty, while other scholars include under its umbrella the late Eleventh and/or early Thirteenth Dynasties. Thus, the five “Middle Kingdom” axes discovered at Dendera—a site that thrived during the First Intermediate Period—may well have been interred with their owners at a time when the late Eleventh Dynasty rulers of Thebes were struggling to

3 Different catalogues provide slightly different information. As these two works aim to be comprehensive in scope, they should provide the reader with a sense of clear patterns. For data about weapons found in Predynastic and Early Dynastic graves, Gilbert, *Weapons*, is particularly useful. Because both catalogues contain material from these periods, however, I have not added Gilbert's data to the information visualized in the maps.

4 Graves with weapons datable specifically to the First Dynasty, the Sixth Dynasty, the “late Middle Kingdom” (which often includes the Thirteenth Dynasty), and the first two reigns of the Eighteenth Dynasty—periods of relative insecurity—are visualized in the maps in Figures 2 and 3. If it were possible to date the Twentieth Dynasty dagger from Abydos after the reign of Ramesses IV, it would have appeared in Figure 2 as well.

5 This calculation includes the Second through the Fifth Dynasty (c. 425 years), the majority of the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 100 years), and the reigns starting with Thutmose I and ending with Ramesses IV (c. 345 years). Decisions as to where to draw the boundaries between stability and instability are subjective. For example, because the First Dynasty was the first central government imposed on the entirety of Egypt and likely involved a steep learning curve for both rulers and subjects, I have chosen to visualize its axes in Figure 3.

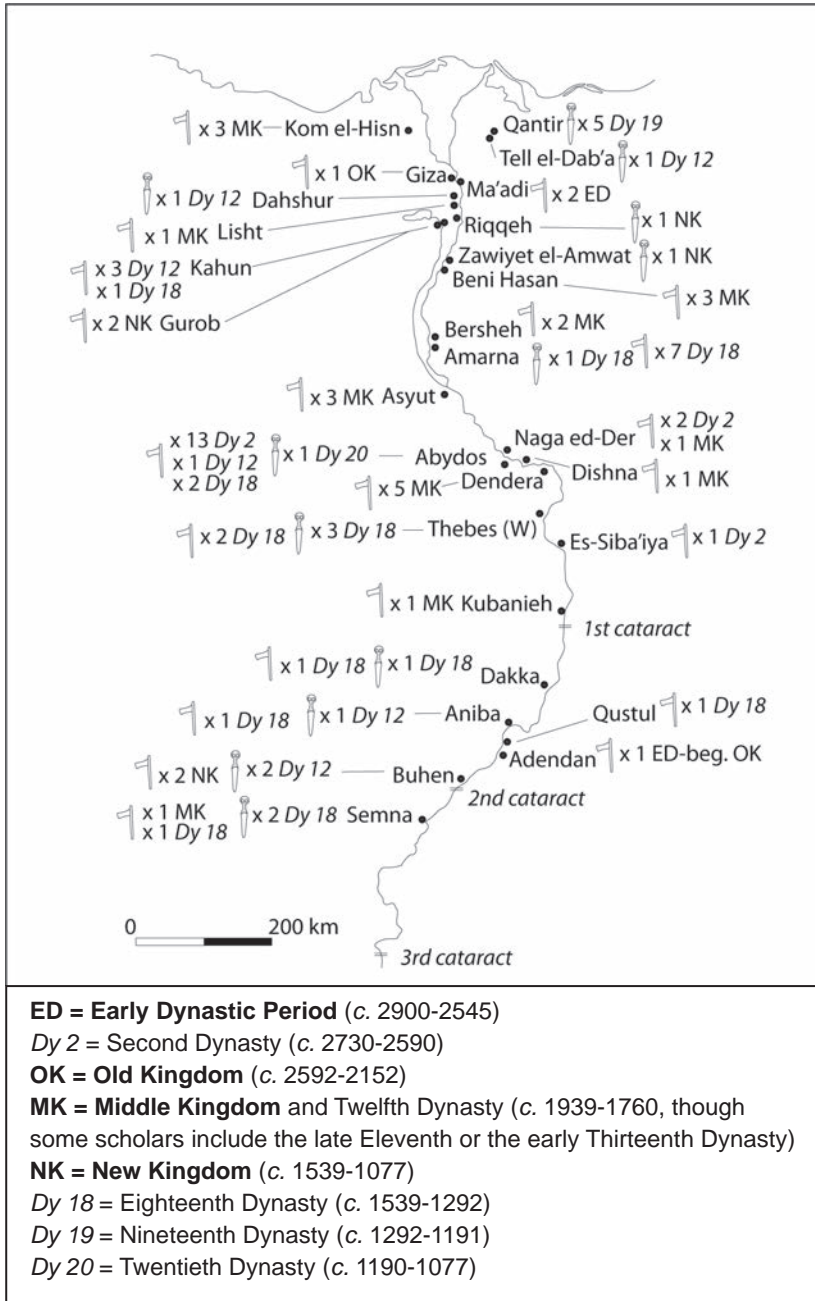


FIGURE 1 Daggers and axes excavated in Egypt that date from periods when the state was strong. The information is obtained from Petschel, *Dolch betreffend* and Davies, *Catalogue*.

subdue the country. Still, it is remarkable that at no site were more than ten weapons recovered. Moreover, two of the five weapons from western Thebes are daggers found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, while the only sites at which more than five daggers or axes were found—Amarna and Qantir—both served as royal centers and hosted a substantial military force.

Information concerning the distribution of axes and daggers during times when Egypt's central government was weak or nonexistent is too plentiful to be encoded together in a single map; thus the distribution of axes is visualized in Figure 2 and daggers in Figure 3. Chronologically, Figures 2 and 3 cover the Nagada II Period through the First Dynasty (c. 700 years), the Sixth Dynasty through the Eleventh Dynasty (c. 365 years), and the reign of Senwosret III through the reign of the second king of the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 345 years). While the seven hundred or so years that led up until the end of the First Dynasty is a long stretch of time, it should be kept in mind that the use of metal was relatively rare. Likewise, although the reigns of Senwosret III and Amenemhet III of the Twelfth Dynasty are generally characterized as stable, changes in material culture make it difficult to distinguish late Twelfth Dynasty archaeological contexts from those of the Thirteenth Dynasty. Weapons designated simply as "Late Middle Kingdom," thus, often date to a time when the distribution of power within the country had shifted to the detriment of the central court.

From the data collected in the catalogues, a clear pattern emerges. When the state was weak in Egypt, individuals were far more likely to be buried with functional weapons (see Figure 4 for examples of warrior burials discovered in Egypt and Kerma). In times of generalized peace and prosperity, on the other hand, weapons interred with the dead—if present at all—typically took the form of models, which would have required funerary magic to activate. Prior to a discussion of how rulers in Egypt and elsewhere attempted to demilitarize societies in which individuals relied upon weapons for protection and to project personal power, it is important to quickly characterize the weapons culture during the periods visualized in Figures 1–3.

From the Nagada IIC Period of late prehistory until the advent of the First Dynasty, various centers in Egypt appear to have struggled to maintain their autonomy as well as to expand their authority by virtue of strategic alliances and armed conquest. During this period, it was not unusual to find specialized weapons in graves, with maces coming to the fore both as weapons and as status markers.⁶ Indeed, it is notable that the ivory handles of knives and the bulging sides of large votive maceheads served as some of the most prestigious

6 Gilbert, *Weapons*, 207–09, 214–15, 218–20.

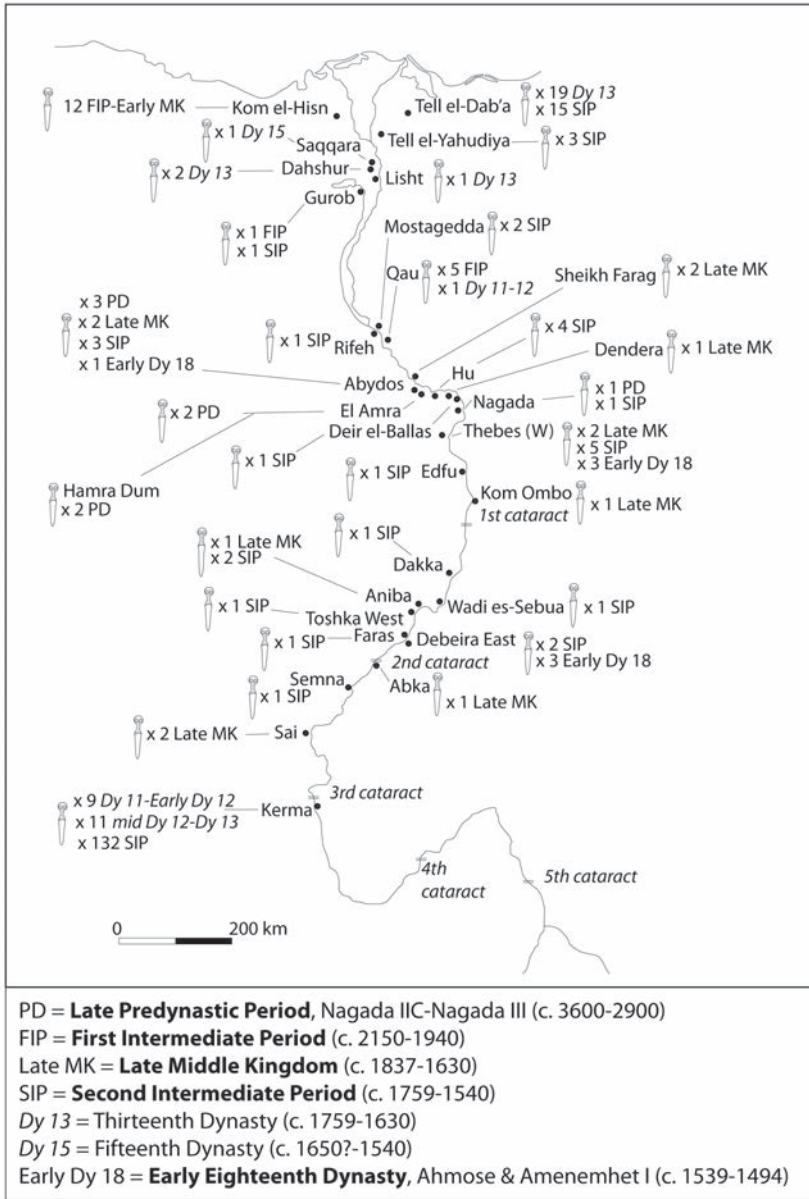
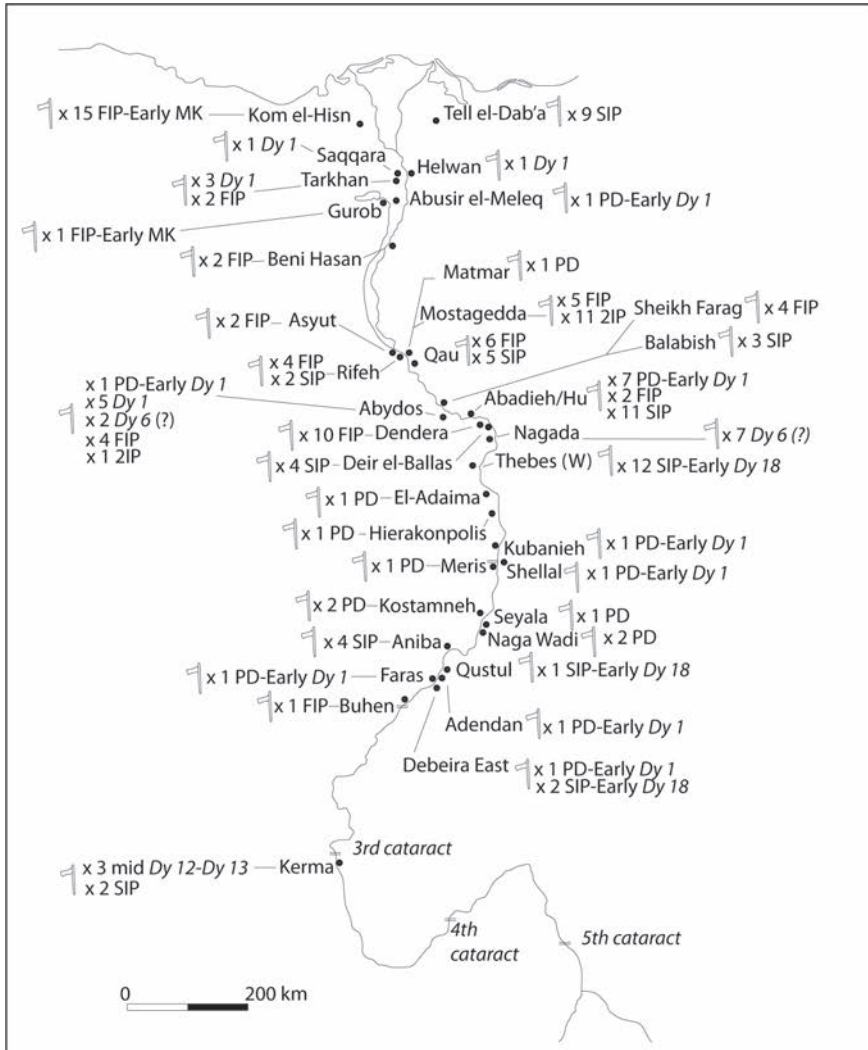


FIGURE 2 Daggers excavated in Egypt that date from periods when the state was nonexistent, unstable, or fragmented. The information is obtained from Petschel, *Dolch betreffend* and includes excavated daggers that could be dated with some precision. (Additional information comes from Brunton, Engelbach, *Gurob*; Brunton, *Qau and Badari I*; Bonnet, “Kerma” and “Fouilles archéologiques” (1988, 1995); Dunham, *Excavations at Kerma*; Reisner, *Excavations at Kerma*).



PD = Late Predynastic Period, Nagada IIC-Nagada III (c. 3600-2900)
 Dy 1 = First Dynasty (c. 2900-2730)
 Dy 6 = Sixth Dynasty (c. 2305-2118)
 FIP = First Intermediate Period (c. 2150-1940)
 Late MK = Late Middle Kingdom (c. 1837-1630)
 SIP = Second Intermediate Period (c. 1759-1540)
 Dy 13 = Thirteenth Dynasty (c. 1759-1630)
 Dy 15 = Fifteenth Dynasty (c. 1650?-1540)
 Early Dy 18 = Early Eighteenth Dynasty, Ahmose & Amenemhet I (c. 1539-1494)

FIGURE 3 Axes excavated in Egypt that date from periods when the state was nonexistent, unstable, or fragmented. Information is obtained from Davies, *Catalogue*.

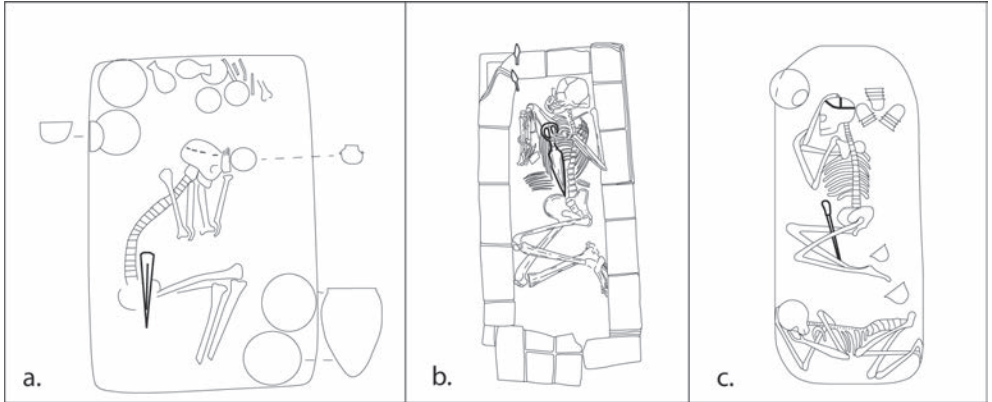


FIGURE 4 Three warrior burials: a. Predynastic (Nagada IIC) burial in grave 836 at Nagada (after Petrie and Quibell, *Nagada*, pl. 83); b. Second Intermediate Period burial F/1-0/20-Grab 17 at Tell el-Dab'a (after Bietak, *Avaris*, 15, fig. 10); c. Classic Kerma burial K 333 at Kerma, dating to the Second Intermediate Period. After Reisner, *Excavations at Kerma*, 169, fig. 46.

platforms for the earliest imagery of the violent struggles that led to the eventual political supremacy of Abydos and the rise of the First Dynasty. Daggers and axes were also on occasion interred with individuals. While neither physical anthropology nor the distribution of weapons suggests a pervasive militarized masculinity, Gregory Gilbert believes that the Early Dynastic state nonetheless moved quickly to redirect the manner in which men achieved prestige. In his book *Weapons, Warriors and Warfare in Early Egypt*, Gilbert writes, “during Predynastic times we have some evidence for a gradual shift towards a warrior elite, however by the start of the Early Dynastic Period we find that the local warrior elite are effectively superseded by military administrators who were probably princely members of the royal household.”⁷ In this light, it is of little surprise that the majority of evidence for First and Second Dynasty axes comes from the royal burial complexes at Abydos.

The quantity of metal daggers interred in Predynastic archaeological contexts, although modest, is impressive when compared to the glaring absence of such weapons throughout the remaining 800 or so years of the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom. It is notable, moreover, that daggers do not disappear from the pictorial record. In the Old Kingdom they are depicted on the persons of kings, foreigners, and (very occasionally) Egyptian soldiers.⁸ Axes

⁷ Gilbert, *Weapons*, 141.

⁸ Petschel, *Dolch betreffend*, 67, 69, 72–75, 77, 90, 100–02, 105, 276–77.

also appear in battle scenes,⁹ and for this reason it is notable that so few have been found in the archaeological record. Old Kingdom Egypt was an authoritarian state in which the court at Memphis closely guarded access to positions of power as well as to pools of labor and valuable natural resources. This situation did not change until the late Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, when economic stress and popular discontent may have occasioned administrative adjustments that allowed the heads of local patronage networks in Middle and Upper Egypt to govern their own polities—in return, of course, for taxes and acts of fealty.

Once the central state began to fail, provinces lessened and then abandoned attachment to Memphis and claimed the right of self-rule. Individual polities fought one another and crafted alliances, as they had in the late Predynastic Period, until two kingdoms formed—one based at Herakleopolis (the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties) and the other at Thebes (the Eleventh Dynasty). While Mentuhotep II of the Theban kingdom reunified Egypt, his dynasty failed shortly thereafter, and the state seems not to have found secure footing until the Twelfth Dynasty. During this period of relative instability, weapons once again are to be found in significant numbers in private graves. In what cannot be a coincidence, soldiers appear for the first time to have created personal monuments for themselves, and men also on occasion chose to represent themselves grasping a weapon rather than a scepter of power or other insignia of office (see Figure 5). This evidence for a martial atmosphere is complemented by an increased nucleation of settlements (perhaps indicating a desire to seek safety in numbers), by battle scenes, and by plentiful references to unsettled conditions in both personal inscriptions and literary retrospectives. Not surprisingly, increased attention to defensive measures also inspired new innovations in weaponry¹⁰ and a heightened incentive for individuals to carry weapons in both life and death.

When Amenemhet I usurped control from the last king of the Eleventh Dynasty, portions of the country required armed persuasion to accept his sovereignty. Thus, in order to gain allies, early Twelfth Dynasty pharaohs honored the rights of regional rulers to maintain their traditional seats of authority and did not move to subvert this state of affairs until the dynasty was well established. The imposition of strong royal oversight, the establishment of peace, and the cessation of periodic conditions of famine—as seem to have plagued the long First Intermediate Period—coincided with material signs of prosperity evident both in the court center and in the provinces. Simultaneously, there is an abrupt change in the weapons culture as expressed in the mortuary realm,

9 Bestock, *Violence and Power*, 226, fig. 8.2; 228, fig. 8.3.

10 Davies, *Catalogue*, 23, 35.



FIGURE 5 Early Eleventh Dynasty stele of a man bearing weapons, from Thebes; Metropolitan Museum of Art 20.2.29. Rogers Fund, 1920.

such that generally speaking the only weapons borne to the grave were simulacra. While elite individuals might be interred with wooden daggers and/or in coffins bearing depictions of axes and daggers, these model weapons represent insignia bestowed upon the deceased in an effort to aid their revivification as the god Osiris.¹¹ Indeed, according to Gianluca Miniaci, who sought to distinguish the grave assemblages of the Second Intermediate Period from their Middle Kingdom equivalents, the relatively sudden appearance of functional weapons is diagnostic.¹² Moreover, it is notable that in the Twelfth Dynasty practically the sole significant attestations of functional weapons occur at garrison posts (namely, at the western Delta site of Kom el-Hisn and in Nubia).

The pendulum seems to have begun its return swing toward a decentralization of power and a militarization of the populace in the very late Twelfth Dynasty, before the state finally failed sometime in the mid-Thirteenth Dynasty. At this time, both axes and daggers reappear in the mortuary record in great numbers, especially at Kerma and Tell el-Dab'a—two centers that emerged as the strongest rivals of the Seventeenth Dynasty kings based at Thebes. Remarkably, despite widespread plundering, the percentage of individuals buried with weapons at both Kerma and Tell el-Dab'a suggests that carrying weapons, for a substantial portion of free men, was a point of pride. In sectors at Tell el-Dab'a, for instance, up to 50 percent of male burials still contained traces of a weapon or a set of weapons, such as a dagger and an axe. Given that no women or children seem to have received such burial gifts, Graham Philip has suggested that these armed interments “point to the existence of the concept of the individual ‘heroic’ warrior, and are thus symbolic of male high status.”¹³ Likewise at Kerma, George Reisner observed that virtually every subsidiary grave of decent preservation in the three royal tumuli contained a central figure with a dagger.¹⁴ Both Elizabeth Minor and Henriette Hafsaas-Tsakos have studied the distribution of such weapons and concluded that daggers at Kerma are associated with elevated status and quite possibly even with a warrior elite that constituted the kingdom’s ruling stratum.¹⁵ Interestingly, in Upper Egypt, a majority of weapons were likewise discovered in graves of men of Nubian heritage—likely Medjay warriors of the semi-nomadic Pan-Grave culture, who frequently served in Theban armies and tended to be buried

11 Grajetzki, *Tomb Treasures*, 150, 152, 157; Petschel, *Dolch betreffend*, 279; Willems, *Chests of Life*, 205–06.

12 Miniaci, “Burial Equipment,” 263.

13 Bietak, *Avaris* 10, 14; Philip, *Tell el-Dab'a* xv, 218–19, 225. For the 34 provenienced daggers and parts of daggers catalogued at Tell el-Dab'a, see Petschel, *Dolch betreffend*, 297–98.

14 Reisner, *Excavations at Kerma*, 79.

15 Minor, *Use of Egyptian*, 159; Hafsaas-Tsakos, “Edges of Bronze,” 84, 89.

together near the northern border of Theban territory (*e.g.*, Mostagedda and Qau) or in its strategic centers (*e.g.*, Balabish and Hu).

When the Theban king Ahmose reconquered the country and established the New Kingdom, Egypt's weapons culture quickly reverted to the norms that characterized the Old and Middle Kingdoms. Thus, functional weapons (as opposed to simulated or ornamental versions) are only rarely attested. Given that young men were regularly drafted into a national army in the New Kingdom, and that many served for their entire careers in the military, this absence of evidence is more anomalous than in earlier periods. As part of their effort at internal pacification, it is likely that Eighteenth Dynasty pharaohs and their successors made a concerted effort to separate soldiers from civilians by limiting their spheres of interaction.

3 Violent Times Beget Violent Masculinities

The patterning with which Egyptians took weapons to the grave strongly suggests that violent masculinities came to the fore during times when the state was weak or nonexistent. Some of the most staggeringly beautiful weapons in pharaonic Egypt belonged to royal women. In general, however, situations in which women owned weapons appear to have been exceptional in Egypt and Nubia.¹⁶ The majority of individuals who owned weapons, and to some extent viewed these weapons as an extension of themselves, were male. States, it has long been recognized, have played an important role in monopolizing violence and channeling it into authorized avenues. In the absence of a strong state, however, adopting a violent persona could be advantageous. Like states writ small, men who radiated an aggressive masculinity utilized their strength to augment their property, retain their autonomy, and expand their authority. Men known to avenge slights against themselves or infringements against what they considered their domain often commanded a grudging respect—or at least submission.

Societies in which the principal locus of power is situated in individuals or extended families are often termed honor cultures and are contrasted with cultures of law. According to Richard Nisbett and Dov Cohen, in their study of white male violence in the American South, such cultures are generally prevalent in conditions in which resources are scarce or unpredictable and in which, due to an absent or weak enforcement of outside authority, there is a perception that the rewards of achieving ends by wielding force outweigh the

¹⁶ Hafsaas-Tsakos, "Edges of Bronze," 88; Morris, "Daggers and Axes."

risks. In such cases, taking the law into one's own hands is also perceived as the most effective method to obtain redress. In such cultures a man willing to resort to violence to defend his interests earns respect. Indeed, this respect (or honor), intangible though it may be, becomes his most prized possession. In such cases, however, violence begets more violence, for honor is fragile and vulnerable to challenge. Thus, if an insult goes unanswered or an injury or infringement unavenged, a man might be perceived as weak and risk losing the reputation upon which his own position in his community has been built.¹⁷ As Thomas Hobbes put it, "Reputation of power, is Power."¹⁸

Because power, if it resides solely in the locus of a single individual or family, is easily unseated—and because there is both safety and increased power in numbers—there is a tendency in such cultures for like-minded men to band together in larger units, such as gangs, clans, secret societies, vigilante posses, or the retinue of a warlord.¹⁹ Moreover, once such groups form alliances for mutual interests or protection, the ramifications for individual infringements of honor multiply exponentially—such that an argument between two men might easily result in the deaths of many or even, depending on their status, escalate into war.²⁰ China during the notoriously fractious Spring and Autumn Period, for example, was a society in which "any perceived slight was answered with force, [and] the segmentation of authority turned appeals to force into wars."²¹ In an amplifying echo chamber, of course, wars create warriors, thereby reinforcing the cultural capital of violent masculinity.

In Egypt, Japan, China, India, Europe, and countless other regions not referenced directly in this study, fractious sociopolitical conditions led to the formation of ever-larger coalitions. Over time, and after a great deal of internecine warfare, a single polity succeeded in imposing a monopoly on violence and in creating a society of law.²² Pharaonic governments in the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom (c. 2900–2150 BCE), the Twelfth Dynasty (c. 1939–1760 BCE), and the New Kingdom (c. 1539–1077 BCE) achieved these aims in Egypt. So too did the Tokugawa shogunate in Japan (1603–1868 CE), the Han dynasty in China (202 BCE–220 CE), the Gupta Period rulers in India (350–750 CE), and various governments in Renaissance Europe. Such transitions took time, however. Coaxing order out of chaos—as peacemakers in the present day have come to appreciate—turns out to be exceedingly difficult.

17 Nisbett and Cohen, *Culture of Honor*, xv–xvi; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 76, 198; Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, 31.

18 Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 1.10, 54.

19 Pinker, *Better Angels*, 81–82, 216, 515–16; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 16, 19, 200–01.

20 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 86–87, 202; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 8–9.

21 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 40.

22 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 264, 269; Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 71–75.

4 Disarming Violent Masculinities Involves More Than Disarmament

So, how were men in Egypt disarmed or else convinced under strong governments that weapons were no longer integral to their sense of self? While arguments from silence bear little weight, no government edicts forbidding the private ownership of arms are extant. Likewise, government raids searching for weapons, such as occurred at least once under Ptolemaic and Roman rule respectively,²³ remain unattested. Military records demonstrate that pharaonic armies often collected weapons from defeated foes, so it is not impossible that newly ascendant pharaonic governments confiscated the weapons of their new subjects. Forced disarmament of a civilian population that has no desire to give up its arms is notoriously challenging, however. Even among the Romans, laws forbidding the possession of weapons were rare. As Peter Brunt writes,

disarmament was neither practicable nor necessary as a systematic rule of policy; it was a mere expedient of no more than temporary utility, to be employed against some peoples at the moment of surrender or when there was some particular reason for apprehending disturbances.²⁴

Even in modern peacemaking efforts, such as those undertaken in recent decades in Macedonia and Colombia, divesting a population of its handheld weapons is extremely difficult. Not only are small arms easy to hide, but the motivation to withhold them appears to be irresistible in situations in which an imposed peace is resented and viewed as fragile.²⁵ Because of their realization that forced disarmament is not only ineffective but also generates extreme ill will, the United Nations and NATO have generally relied in post-conflict situations throughout the globe on a strategy that pairs voluntary disarmament with incentives. Even so, results have been disappointing.

Among the most persistent barriers to successful disarmament, analysts have found, is a widespread respect for militarized masculinity. In populations riddled with poverty and other social ills, weapons tend to confer power, respect, and a radically enhanced earning potential on a man.²⁶ Moreover, in such “Kalashnikov cultures,” the surrender of one’s weapon—often acquired at

23 Bevan, *House of Ptolemy*, 297; Capponi, “Roman Period Egypt,” 187.

24 Brunt, “Did Imperial Rome Disarm,” 270.

25 Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 21; Schroeder, Farr, and Schnabel, “Preliminary Report,” 11.

26 Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 16–18, 22–23.

the transition from boyhood to manhood—causes a “crisis of masculinity.”²⁷ In northeastern Uganda, following the seventh attempt to disarm the agropastoralist Karamojong peoples in 2001, it was observed that “men experienced emasculation through the disarmament program, in that the men who gave up weapons were called ‘women.’”²⁸ Not surprisingly, then, international peace-makers have increasingly concluded that any attempt to transform swords into plowshares needs to be at least as invested in disarming cultural ideals of violent masculinity as in divesting men of their weapons.²⁹

Such efforts on the part of peacekeeping missions and states are now often geared toward disentangling the concept of machismo from that of masculinity.³⁰ Thus, in Rio de Janeiro, an organization known as Viva Rio promotes the slogan “only small guys need big guns.”³¹ In an article published in *Human Rights Quarterly*, Kimberly Theidon poses questions that are vital to such a project:

Hegemonic masculinity obscures alternatives—not only the alternative masculinities that exist in any given cultural context, but also within each individual. How might we enrich both theory and practice by exploring the ways in which militarized men are produced and militarized masculinities performed? How might we include strategies designed to actively reconstruct what it means to be a man?³²

Theidon, and other proponents of the idea that changing cultural conceptions of masculine honor is vital to any foundational attempt to pacify a violent society, would no doubt be surprised to be directed for advice to the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli.

Machiavelli similarly recognized that forcible disarmament—while helpful in the short term—would not incline a population to peace. Thus, in 1513, he advised the Medici family, de facto rulers of Florence, that

27 Schroeder, Farr, and Schnabel, “Preliminary Report,” 14, 19; Myrntinen, “Pack Your Heat,” 30.

28 Schroeder, Farr, and Schnabel, “Preliminary Report,” 10.

29 Myrntinen, “Pack Your Heat,” 33; Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 2–3, 5; Cockburn, “World Disarmament?”

30 Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 18.

31 Schroeder, Farr, and Schnabel, “Preliminary Report,” 25. Such slogans, aimed at disarming masculinities harmful to public health, are reminiscent of a multipronged effort in the face of soaring COVID-19 deaths in 2020 to communicate the message that “Real men wear masks” (Hesse, “Making Men Feel Manly”).

32 Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 5.

when a prince acquires a new state that is added as a member to his old one, then it is necessary to disarm that state, except for those who were your partisans in acquiring it. These, too, it is necessary to render soft and effeminate, in time and with opportunity.³³

Machiavelli, however, was not alone in espousing this tactic. Barely two decades prior to the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, for example, Toyotomi Hideyoshi confiscated weapons from the peasantry, allowing only samurai the privilege of carrying swords. Anticipating Tokugawa policies, he proclaimed a monopoly on violence—prohibiting armed disputes not only among villagers but also among warlords.³⁴ It was up to his successors in the Tokugawa shogunate, however, to transform Japan's samurai warriors into cultural aesthetes and bureaucrats. Five foundational strategies, I argue—each Machiavellian in its subtlety—enabled pharaohs, shoguns, and other autocrats to subvert violent masculinities they deemed threatening without provoking those whose authority they undercut.

5 Strategy 1: Insofar as Possible Separate Powerful Men from Regional Powerbases

New rulers typically arise to power with the aid of vassals or allies, political subordinates who, in recompense, require recognition and reward. A first step in remaking manhood, then, even at lower levels of society, was for an autocrat to undercut the authority of powerful provincials.³⁵ Control over both land and labor brought a local leader wealth, the capacity to field troops, and a potentially problematic sovereignty. In an honor culture—which privileged violence, economic independence, and the ability to mobilize personal connections to avenge perceived slights—provincial elites constituted an ever-present threat to royal authority.

Because vassals constituted a ruler's most important asset—as well as his greatest liability—undercutting the authority of provincial elites without angering them required political acumen. One common tactic was to offer the heirs of noble families lucrative positions at court, where they would have

33 Machiavelli, *Prince*, ch. 20, 84. Similarly, Voltaire once wrote approvingly of Louis XIV that he succeeded “in making of a hitherto turbulent nation a peaceful people dangerous only to its enemies. . . . Manners were softened” (quoted in Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 42).

34 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 151–58, 202–03.

35 Weber, “Politics as Vocation,” 83; Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 258.

access to luxury and prestige goods otherwise out of their reach. As advisors to the king, overseers of the palace treasury, or generals, their access to power, renown, and fortune would be enhanced. In reality, however, such a reorientation from a state's periphery to its core removed such men from the nexus of their *own* patronage systems at the same time as it transformed their income into a subsidy. The beauty of such a move from a state's perspective, of course, is that allowances are dependent on good behavior and are easily revoked. Thus, states in fact increased their power to penalize vassals at the same time as they ostensibly paid them honor.

After the Tokugawa shogunate established itself as the supreme authority in Japan, for instance, it moved quickly to subvert the military and economic power of independent vassal samurai houses, which was rooted in their agricultural land holdings. Each local samurai lord ruled as a king writ small over his own domain.³⁶ Thus, the Tokugawa shogunate "invited" powerful vassals to inhabit the samurai quarters of castle towns and, depending on their status, even the royal court at Edo. Like knights of the round table, these men would spend most of their adult life—honor intact—physically removed from their traditional landholdings, subject populace, and readily available military recruits. To ensure their leverage over samurai lords, shoguns encouraged wives to accompany their husbands, confirmed the heirs of vassals in their rightful position, and allotted each son an annual income that reflected the ranked hierarchy of his house.³⁷ This removal of samurai from their hereditary seats of power, Eiko Ikegami asserts, is what initiated their transformation "from that of independent, high-spirited mounted warriors to that of sedate bureaucrats."³⁸

While tracing the evolution of Egypt's administration in the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms is beyond the scope of this paper, it is notable that large provincial tombs tend to disappear within a few generations of the instatement of the central government, just as they often begin to reappear as that government's strength wanes. Thus, while elaborate First Dynasty mastabas are known from formerly powerful polities like Armant, Nagada, and Tarkhan, these quickly disappeared, and for the better part of four centuries elaborate tombs were by and large closely clustered in cemeteries around the capital city of Memphis.³⁹ Moreover, at the height of the Old Kingdom, the country's governance most often divided oversight of various regional sources of revenue

36 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 353–54.

37 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 158–59.

38 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 21; for more on this process of creating an economic dependency, see 40, 160–61, 167, 182–83, 203, 337, 358.

39 Wilkinson, *State Formation*, 73, 86.

and potential social power among numerous officials who were both based in and buried at Memphis.⁴⁰

Due to the necessity for Amenemhet I to enlist the support of local leaders in Middle Egypt, provincial elites retained power in the Twelfth Dynasty for longer than is typical. There is evidence, however, that perhaps as early as the reign of the third king of the dynasty (Amenemhet II), the government had adopted a gradual strategy of attrition—awaiting the death of a regional ruler and then assigning his heir to a lucrative position in the local temple hierarchy or in the administration. A large-scale reorganization of the bureaucracy, in which regional authority was ceded to mayors rather than to governors and overseen by officials, accompanied this strategic reassignment.⁴¹ Finally, upon reuniting Egypt, the Eighteenth Dynasty again adopted a system that relied upon mayors and concentrated the most powerful government officials at Memphis, Thebes, and—later—also at the current political capital. Moreover, although lavish tombs at sites like El Kab in Upper Egypt and Fadrus in Nubia suggest that early Eighteenth Dynasty kings honored powerful provincial leaders, it is clear that such men had even then been incorporated into the central government. The conversion of “kings” into “mayors” in Egypt’s northern empire and of Nubian leaders into bureaucrats is well attested.⁴²

6 Strategy 2: Eliminate (or Render Distasteful) Opportunities for Men to Enhance Honor through Violence

In the absence of a strong state, the ability to settle scores and avenge wrongs enhances the reputation of an individual or a group.⁴³ In reference to the long period of internecine fighting that preceded the Tokugawa government, Ikegami writes of samurai warriors,

the effective use of violence and the ability to take conflict resolution into their own hands were important, not simply because violence was the sole legitimate expression of honor, but because it was an essential means of maintaining the samurai’s sovereign power.⁴⁴

40 Moreno García, “Territorial Administration,” 94–107.

41 Callender, “Middle Kingdom Renaissance,” 163–64; Willems, “Nomarchs and Local Potentates,” 385–92.

42 Morris, *Ancient Egyptian Imperialism*, 6–7, 102–03, 108–09, 158–60.

43 Theidon, “Reconstructing Masculinities,” 19–20; Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, 32.

44 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 34.

If the ultimate goal of the state is to monopolize authority and create a law-abiding society, newly established states must move quickly to reduce the opportunity for men to gain prestige via disruptive acts of vengeance. The first step, of course, is to prohibit unauthorized violence, such that anyone who presumes to take the law into his own hands will find himself punished, instead of punishing. In order to settle disputes between individuals, lineages, or other collectives before they escalate, states typically establish venues at which impartial officials mediate between litigants in order to avoid violence, provide it with state sanction, or else delegate responsibility for dispensing it to state authorities.⁴⁵ It is not surprising, then, that throughout Egyptian history, high officials frequently bore titles indicating that they had served as a member of an ad hoc or a more permanent judicial body.⁴⁶

Even if a state successfully monopolized violence internally, foreign conquest still offered men a potential to utilize their strength and ferocity to gain a reputation for valor. States wishing to subvert such opportunities might adopt a variety of tactics. One was to pursue an isolationist policy, utilizing the prerogative to mobilize manpower in order to pursue impressive building projects, which might or might not contribute to the physical safety of the realm.⁴⁷ Shortly after the advent of the First Dynasty, when potential rivals in Nubia were neutralized and trading colonies in the southern Levant were abandoned, the Pharaonic government turned its focus inward and kept it there for several centuries. The reorientation of its attention inward led to remarkably ambitious building projects, resulting most famously in the Great Pyramids and the large-scale quarrying of granite and gold. As a result, quite conveniently, no one gained glory—save the pharaoh.

In many cases, however, isolationist policies were neither feasible nor desirable, due to the ruler's own inclination to take advantage of the prestige and riches that victory would afford. An autocrat looking to make sure that he maintained a monopoly on glory had at least five incentives to amass a substantial infantry army.⁴⁸ First, such armies, if disciplined, were difficult to defeat. Second, in order for such armies to emerge victorious, soldiers had to act with discipline, such that they moved in a coordinated fashion according to a preconceived plan. The infantry model, thus, devalued individual heroism in favor of the sublimation of self into a corporate whole.⁴⁹ Third, when infantry troops won battles, the victory belonged to a faceless group of mostly

45 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 202–03, 220, 241–42, 248–51.

46 Lippert, "Law Courts," 2–5.

47 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 158.

48 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 139–40; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 9, 244.

49 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 113.

lower-class men, rather than to an assemblage of landed aristocrats and their dependents.⁵⁰ Fourth, even where generals were concerned, victory could be attributed to stratagem rather than to prowess on the battlefield.⁵¹ Fifth, both infantry and general could conveniently be subsumed into the person of the king, as under strong autocratic regimes every victory is laid at the feet of the ruler. Indeed, it is no accident that in Rome the hallowed tradition of a victorious general driving four white horses at a triumph given in his honor did not long survive the death of the Republic.⁵²

It is remarkable how little is known about the achievements in battle of anyone save the pharaoh. Given the number of battles fought in the Middle and New Kingdoms, personal narratives from military men are few and far between. Indeed, one of the very few texts that sheds light on the individual experience of a chariot warrior in Egypt's army is a satirical letter, in which the writer teases his correspondent for his "heroic" ambitions to serve as an elite soldier-scribe. Rather than achieving renown, the writer predicts that his correspondent will spend his tour of duty robbed blind, scared out of his wits, exhausted, and in pain.⁵³ In the admittedly tendentious scribal literature, the professional soldier, too, was derided as living a life akin to an ass. Beaten since youth, subject to innumerable orders, overburdened to the point of breaking, and suffering from dysentery—the infantry man found his reward for services rendered to be the exact opposite of glory.⁵⁴

A similar campaign to devalue the societal importance of military men took place during the Warring States Period in China, when governments were attempting to consolidate their power. Mark Lewis writes,

the disappearance of the fighting man as an actor on the field of battle, his absorption by the commander, and his transformation into an inanimate object, an animal, a child, or a woman all implied the denial of the ideal of the heroic, individual warrior that had animated the Zhou nobility.⁵⁵

It is little wonder that Ramesses II could have claimed to have achieved victory at the battle of Kadesh "through my strong arm, I being alone, no high officer

50 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 94, 97; Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 193–94; Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 99.

51 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 98, 104–06, 111, 133.

52 Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 100.

53 Wentz, *Letters*, 106–09.

54 Caminos, *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, 91–92, 168–69, 235, 304, 400–02, 477.

55 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 112.

following me, no charioteer, no soldier of the army, no captain";⁵⁶ or that in Han China it was said, "good iron is not beaten into nails; good men are not made into soldiers."⁵⁷ For governments of stable states, the position of the soldier seems increasingly to have been seen as akin to that of the merchant—a necessary evil. Because both occupational categories were useful, their practitioners should be remunerated. To bestow honor upon individual soldiers, however, risked upsetting cultural ideas that increasingly privileged an irenic hereditary aristocracy.

The evolution of military rewards in Egypt illuminates this process of pacification. The battle scenes depicted on the ivory handles of some late Predynastic flint knives suggest the possibility that they may have served as military rewards for highly valued warriors fighting to expand Upper Egyptian power.⁵⁸ If so, this practice was evidently allowed to lapse following the unification of the country. Nearly a millennium and a half later, General Khuusobek boasted that Senwosret III rewarded him after a successful campaign in the Levant with a dagger wrought with electrum.⁵⁹ Within a generation, when the state began to fail, daggers and axes that bore royal names and/or were made of precious metals begin to appear in private burials, which is perhaps not surprising at a time when weak rulers were particularly in need of valiant men. By the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, however, such outwardly martial rewards are difficult to identify in either textual or archaeological records.

Early Eighteenth Dynasty soldiers boasted that they had earned rewards for the number of prisoners, horses, and chariots they captured in battle as well as for the numbers of right hands they had hacked off of men they had killed. After the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, such boasts are radically reduced, despite the fact that battle scenes routinely depict soldiers approaching scribes with severed hands—sometimes skewered on their spear like a bloody kabob. Moreover, from the Nineteenth Dynasty on, soldiers are depicted delivering to military recorders the phalli of uncircumcised foes along with the hands of their circumcised counterparts.⁶⁰ Severing phalli during the heat of battle, one imagines, would have been virtually impossible. Thus, if military rewards increasingly accrued to those who harvested the largest number of body parts from indiscriminate cadavers, it is little wonder that military rewards failed to bring honor in addition to economic gain.

56 Gardiner, *Kadesh Inscriptions*, 11.

57 Yu, "Confucian Gentlemen," 47.

58 John Baines, personal communication.

59 Focke, "His Majesty Saw," 11–12.

60 Schulman, *Ceremonial Execution*, 89–91.

An additional aspect of military rewards in the New Kingdom is that they seem to have become increasingly and intentionally feminized. Archaeological evidence for the bestowal of weapons fashioned from precious metals and “flies of valor” stems primarily from Second Intermediate Period burials, often belonging to individuals of Pan-Grave or Kerman heritage.⁶¹ By the early Eighteenth Dynasty, however, inscriptions suggest that precious daggers and flies were complemented with—and, indeed, progressively replaced by—rewards consisting of gold jewelry. As the New Kingdom wore on, golden flies ornamented the necks of queens and their courtiers, while military men and bureaucrats alike received golden *shebiu*-collars from grateful pharaohs.⁶² Ambitious and martially-minded Egyptians would, one suspects, have shared the complaints of Julio-Claudian aristocrats that under increasingly autocratic rule not only did they have far fewer opportunities to exercise independent military commands but that military honors “were cheapened by being dispensed prodigally and to the undeserving.”⁶³

7 Strategy 3: Gather Elite Men at Court, Place Them on Stipend, and Refocus Their Drive for Recognition and Honor

One particularly effective way to defang a warrior aristocracy, as noted above, was to publicly acknowledge the prestige of such men by drawing them close to the king, thereby separating them from their regional powerbases and independent income streams. This strategy limited the arenas in which potential rivals might exercise autonomy and win acclaim. Writing about an analogous trend in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Europe, Norbert Elias writes,

These are processes acting in the same direction over centuries: loss of military and economic self-sufficiency by all warriors, and the conversion of a part of them into courtiers. . . . It was the pull of this trend that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries drew more and more warriors to the court and thus into direct dependence on the king, while conversely the kings’ tax revenues grew to such an extent that they could maintain an ever-larger number of people at their court.⁶⁴

61 Morris, “Daggers and Axes.” For overviews of weapons likely to have served as military rewards, see Focke, “His Majesty Saw,” 6–12. For flies, see Gestoso Singer, “Queen Ahhotep,” 79–84; Minor, *Use of Egyptian*, 146–47.

62 Gestoso Singer, “Queen Ahhotep,” 82–84.

63 Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 101.

64 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 392–93.

Such a strategy, however, was not without risk, as the honor culture that such men adhered to encouraged aggressive competitiveness with each other and potentially also with the king. For aspiring autocratic rulers who sought to transform warriors into courtiers, then, the vital challenge was to refocus how such men competed, with whom, and for what.

One strategy for cultivating “gentle” men is to significantly lessen the pressure to *achieve* honor. If a state establishes and polices social boundaries, the scions of a lineage that arose to prominence by acts of valor are absolved of the necessity to defend their rights to the honor they inherited. Once reputation is tied to birthright, it is far less easily threatened.⁶⁵ In Egypt the cessation of widespread competitive display at funerals, once Upper Egypt had been unified by the kings of Abydos, suggests that attempts by families to raise their status had either been discouraged or else abandoned as not worth the expense.⁶⁶ Certainly, by the time the pharaohs of the First Dynasty ascended the throne, the social gulf that separated Egypt’s high nobility from its commoners appears to have been unbridgeable.

In pharaonic Egypt and Tokugawa Japan, a son was encouraged to achieve the rank of his father—not necessarily to surpass it.⁶⁷ At court, however, attractive opportunities for low-stakes competition still existed. Status rivalry focused primarily on proximity to the ruler, who was ideologically framed as the uncontested center of the political universe. Courtiers thus strove to raise their status through the delivery of flattering speeches, the exemplary performance of their official duties, or the cultivation of other qualities that were advantageous to an autocrat.⁶⁸ The leverage a ruler possessed to enhance a courtier’s status with respect to his peers or to irreparably harm it through expulsion from court became a key tool of statecraft.⁶⁹

At courts in Egypt, Tokugawa Japan, or Gupta India, changes in personal status could be closely tracked, because a person’s figurative standing was rendered starkly visible by where he stood—quite literally—with respect to the ruler.⁷⁰ In one of Egypt’s most famous examples of wisdom literature, set in the Old Kingdom but likely written in the Middle Kingdom, a vizier named Ptahhotep advises his son,

65 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 395; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 345; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 62–65; Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 23.

66 Morris, “Nobles Lament,” 63–65.

67 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 161, 184, 269–70.

68 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 264–65.

69 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 396.

70 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 159; Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 114–16.

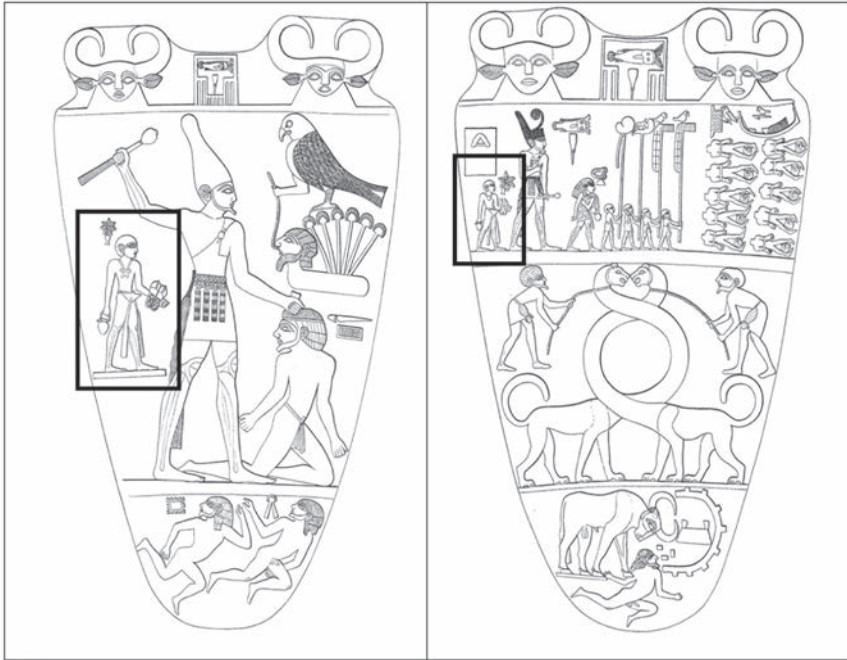


FIGURE 6 Narmer's sandal bearer on the verso (left) and recto (right) of his ceremonial palette. After Quibell, "Slate Palette," pl. 12–13.

If you are in the audience chamber, stand and sit in accordance with your position which was given to you on the first day. . . . The audience chamber tends toward strict etiquette, and all its affairs follow (specific) rules of conduct. It is God who promotes one's position, and that men should force their way is not done.⁷¹

In such circumstances, however, it never hurt to know the right people. In the reign of Senwosret I, for example, a palace official named Intef son of Sent boasted that he ushered in the great ones of Upper Egypt and placed them on their bellies. Officials, he claimed, "stood or sat according to my good will."⁷²

In court cultures where proximity to power brought honor, even abasement could be elevating. Thus, in Egypt as in other court contexts, the highest nobles not infrequently performed menial tasks related to the king's body. On the Narmer Palette, which depicts the idealized unification of Egypt just prior to the First Dynasty, one of the most prominent figures next to the king (literally and figuratively) on both sides of the palette is Narmer's sandal-bearer—a

71 Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 136.

72 Leprohon, "Self-Presentation," 110.

man whose accoutrements and hieroglyphic label strongly suggest that in daily life he held more taxing responsibilities (see Figure 6). So too in the Fifth Dynasty the owner of the largest private tomb in Egypt bore the title of royal hairdresser, while New Kingdom generals were charged with holding the pharaoh's fan—and the list of honorific debasements goes on.⁷³

According to Elias, elites undergoing what he terms “the civilizing process” vacillate between complex emotions—“resistance to the compulsion to which they are subjected, hatred of their dependence and unfreedom, nostalgia for free knightly rivalry, on the one hand, and pride in the self-control they have acquired, or delight in the new possibilities of pleasure that it opens, on the other.”⁷⁴ Tacitus explores a similar ambivalence among the senatorial elite who served under Domitian by comparing their mindset to that of the Celtic population that his father-in-law, Agricola, administered in Britain. According to Tacitus, the Celts gradually gave up their warlike ways following their conquest, becoming accustomed to repose and luxury. Agricola educated the sons of Celtic leaders at court (just as the sons of pharaonic vassals and prominent provincial families were educated at Egypt's court). So too he built halls of justice (the better for Celts to settle their disputes nonviolently) and rewarded behaviors he approved of, such that competition for state-sanctioned honor “made compulsion unnecessary.” As a result, Tacitus continues, “little by little they strayed to the seductions of vice—porticoes, paths and the refinements of dining. In their ignorance they called this culture, when it was part of their enslavement.”⁷⁵

8 Strategy 4: Encourage the Cultivation of Certain “Feminine” Traits in Powerful Men

Seductive trappings of power, savvy governments made certain, were not difficult to discover in court settings. Elias compares European court culture to a stock exchange, in which a courtier's honor rose and fell according to his ability to impress his prince.⁷⁶ The situation at court in Takugawa Japan was much the same. According to Ikegami,

instead of competing on the battlefield, the [samurai lord] courtiers strove to improve their comparative standing in the honor ranking of the

73 Morris, “Pharaoh and Pharaonic Office,” 209–10.

74 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 274–75.

75 Quoted in Lavan, “Slavishness,” 301.

76 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 398.

shogunate court. They competed for even the most apparently insignificant symbols of honor ranking from the shogun.⁷⁷

In the late Eighteenth Dynasty, one of Amenhotep III's officials, who helped organize the king's jubilee, boasted that he had enjoyed the responsibility of dispensing just such "insignificant" symbols to the assembled courtiers. At this ceremony, he remembered, "Rewards were given out in the form of 'Gold of Praise', and ducks and fish of gold, and they received ribbons of green linen, each person being made to stand according to his rank."⁷⁸ The idea of grown men vying for green ribbons and golden fish suggests that the pharaonic government was, as Machiavelli would later recommend, working "to render soft and effeminate" men whose power might otherwise prove threatening. Certainly, in Egyptian literature, art, and archaeology, fish ornaments are closely associated with girls and young women.⁷⁹

It was not unusual for courtiers to be implicitly encouraged to explore their feminine side. Xun Shuang (128–190 CE), a Han scholar, wrote that "husbands and wives are the beginning of human relations, the origin of the king's transformation [of his subjects]."⁸⁰ In China, obedience and compliance were a key part of assuming the role of the wife, but the *wen*—or feminine element—possessed additional positive associations extolled by Confucius and the Han government alike: scholarship, benevolence, filial piety, respect, loyalty, and a knack for diplomacy.⁸¹ Thus, by inculcating typically feminine traits into the characteristics of the ideal man, the government served its purpose and simultaneously opened up space for men to explore a far richer array of possibilities for enacting maleness than would have been feasible during the Spring and Autumn Period, when men and women were defined in strictly oppositional terms.⁸²

In Tokugawa Japan such state-sponsored efforts to remake gender norms did not escape notice. In 1717, an eighty-year-old samurai, who remembered the old ways well, penned an essay complaining about a softening of manners he observed in his younger colleagues:

In the old days, at parties, both upper and lower samurai talked only about warfare ... now, on social occasions, they discuss good food, games, and profit and loss; those with some intelligence are talking about strategies

77 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 159.

78 Quoted in Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 272.

79 Grajetzki, *Harageh*, 29–30; Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 17.

80 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 75.

81 Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 104, 111; Yu, "Confucian Gentlemen," 41–42.

82 The masculine *wu*-element symbolized brute strength, bravery, and martial vigor. Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 43; Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, 13–18.

for promotion, games of *go* and *shogi* [a kind of Japanese chess], tea ceremonies, and [the composition of] *haiku*. The young bloods chatter about *yoruri* [a type of music usually played at puppet theaters], the *shamisen* [a three-stringed instrument], and the reputation of the actors at Sakai, but they never discuss martial arts.⁸³

As Ikegami notes, honor for a samurai no longer lay in physical strength. Rather, like the ideal courtier of sixteenth century Italy as described in Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, or indeed like his counterpart in Gupta India, eighteenth century samurai found their social capital augmented according to their ability to converse knowledgeably about high culture, polite accomplishments, and frivolous entertainment.⁸⁴ Thus, among the warrior class, a contentious culture—rife with quarrels and single combat—had given way:

[to a] competition for alterations in one's style of dress or the seating arrangement in the castles. The institutionalization of a status-oriented honor ranking system was the process through which the Tokugawa state gradually monopolized the determination of criteria of honor... The relation among men had become a relation among objects of honor symbols such as seating, dress, and the amount of *koku* (income in rice units) that displayed a person's attributes of honor to the outside world.⁸⁵

In the world of the courtier, there was nothing metaphoric about badges of honor.

The feminized passivity that court life demanded of those it honored in New Kingdom Egypt is showcased in Figure 7, a reward scene that Mery-re II, a high official who served the Eighteenth Dynasty king Akhenaten, depicted in his tomb at Amarna. Here, too, the mixed attraction and repulsion of court life, as described by Elias and Tacitus, is also apparent. In the scene, the king and queen shower golden *shebiu*-collars on Mery-re. The bestowal of this precious jewelry is witnessed by a crowd that includes assembled representatives from foreign lands as well as Mery-re's esteemed peers. Such a situation is made all the sweeter by the fact that others at court are *not* under the window

83 Quoted in Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 261.

84 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 143; Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 41, 52, 81, 93.

85 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 276.

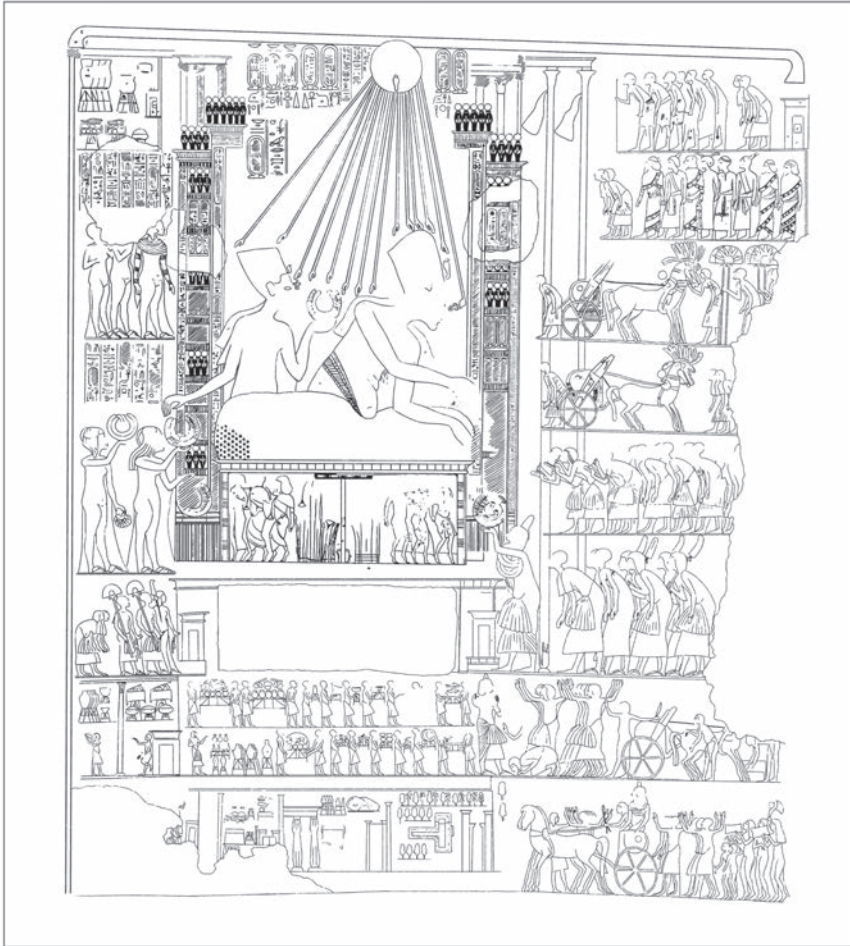


FIGURE 7 Mery-re II being rewarded at the window of appearance, being greeted, and returning to his villa. After Davies, *Rock Tombs II*, pl. 33; redrawn by Riva Weinstein.

of appearance but rather bent low before the king. Scribes, too, are depicted carefully keeping records of all these honors. After the ceremony the glow continues as an admiring crowd surrounds Mery-re, gazing with wonder at his new adornments and kissing his feet.

Mery-re's honorific abasement with respect to the royal family is likewise clear. The noble, for instance, is the grateful recipient in the gift-giving ceremony—a position of less prestige. He is physically lower and smaller than the king and queen, and the gifts he accepts are handed to the royal couple by little princesses. Yet, like the golden fish just discussed, the “wearable” tokens

of favor bestowed upon Mery-re in this ceremony possessed the power to enhance his standing at court.⁸⁶

Bedecked with gold collars, clad in an elaborately pleated linen outfit, and wearing a cone of scented fat on his head, Mery-re must have looked, felt, and smelled luxurious. Cross-culturally, courtiers have often cultivated a markedly androgenous aesthetic, likely because the soft, sensual, and artfully adorned body suggests material prosperity and a life led in leisure.⁸⁷ Concerning Gupta India, Daud Ali writes:

Personal ornamentation in the eyes of people at court entailed not only jewellery and flowers, but an entire gamut of ‘body culture’, including body oils, pastes, cosmetics, fragrances, dress and hair coiffure. Anything applied to the body—garments, perfumes, ornaments or garlands—was considered to ‘adorn’ it, and a large number of the skills or ‘arts’ to be mastered by the [urban elite man] entailed expertise at various aspects of this elaborate regimen of self-beautification.⁸⁸

This widespread obsession with, silk, foam baths, depilation, and other fastidious aspects of personal grooming and luxurious adornment for men is amply reflected in the archaeological record in finds of vials, hairpins, makeup palettes, and the like.⁸⁹ Judging from the numerous cosmetic items discovered in tombs of men and/or marked with male names, the body culture indulged in by Egyptian men of means seems likewise to have been both elaborate and time consuming.⁹⁰

The power of tweezers, oils, and the like to alter a man’s performance of his own masculinity lies at the heart of one of Egypt’s most beloved stories. The tale follows the fate of a hereditary noble—a “truly beloved royal acquaintance” and “a follower who followed his lord”—named Sinuhe.⁹¹ In essence, it

86 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 118–20; Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 62; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 159.

87 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 147. In Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*, 27, courtiers themselves discuss the degree to which an adoption of feminized aesthetics is proper for well-bred men. All agree that a courtier should possess grace, though they point out that many courtiers take this too far and “not only curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows, but preen themselves in all those ways that the most wanton and dissolute women in the world adopt; and in walking, in posture, and in every act, appear so tender and languid that their limbs seem to be on the verge of falling apart.” See similarly Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 89.

88 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 167.

89 Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 63–65.

90 Robins, “Gender and Sexuality,” 124–25, 133; Dubiel, “Dude looks like a lady,” 64–72.

91 See Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 54–66.

is a tale of transformation in which an Egyptian courtier (who had fled Egypt after the assassination of Amenemhet I) marries into the family of a Bedouin chief, becomes a patriarch in his own right, achieves honor in a foreign land, and even defends this honor in single combat. In the end, however, because this was a story written by and for Egyptians, Sinuhe found life as a respected and successful warrior unsatisfying, and he longed to return to Egypt. The pharaoh granted his wish to be reinstated as a courtier and outfitted him lavishly with a house fit for a prince, a country villa, numerous servants, three meals a day delivered straight from the palace, fine things from the treasury, and an impressive tomb together with its equipment.

As Sinuhe's circumstances were transformed, so too was his body. Sinuhe narrates that upon arriving at court, he received myrrh normally reserved for the royal courtiers. "I was depilated, and my hair was combed out. . . . I was outfitted with fine linen and rubbed with the finest oil." Emerging from this makeover, Sinuhe the Bedouin chief transitioned back to Sinuhe the mild-mannered bureaucrat, who trembled on the ground before his king and who, once bid to rise, was gratified to be "placed in the midst of the courtiers" and granted the status of "a companion among the nobles." This event, in which Sinuhe passively and publicly received largess at the hands of the pharaoh, became—as it had for Mery-re II—the proudest moment of his life.

9 Strategy 5: Inculcate a Reverence for Hierarchy, Deference, and De-escalation

The fact that the story of Sinuhe became a canonical teaching text in Egypt's Middle and New Kingdoms is significant, for the narrative provided the boys who copied it with two models of masculinity—one martial and the other irenic. Sinuhe's choice, the text implied, was clearly preferable. While skill with weapons might elevate a young man's status in other less desirable milieus, at court violence was discouraged. Thus, he would have to rely on subtler arts of persuasion. By focusing on his education, a noble youth might hope to be successful in courts of law, to be pleasant and entertaining at elite social gatherings, and—of special importance—to be relied upon by his pharaoh.

Nobles in pharaonic Egypt, as in Tokugawa Japan, often simultaneously fulfilled the role of courtier and bureaucrat, with the prestige of their posts closely tied to the level they had reached in the court hierarchy.⁹² This system was somewhat different in Han China, as a civil service exam—based largely

92 Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 267–68, 273–74, 277.

on Confucian ideals—determined the heights to which one could ascend. In all three systems, however, education served as a crucial gateway to power and respect. As one literate Egyptian advised his students, “Be a scribe, that your limbs may become sleek and your hands soft, that you may go out dressed in white, finding yourself promoted to higher status, that courtiers might greet you.”⁹³

A prestigious position in the administration in Egypt, as in these other societies, meant recognition in the highest circles and access to a secure and impressive income. Moreover, while a scribe’s sleek limbs and soft hands would not strike fear into the hearts of his adversaries, scribal teaching texts counseled that living well was the best revenge:

You go down to your ship of fir-wood manned from bow to stern. You reach your beautiful villa, the one you have built for yourself. Your mouth is full of wine and beer, of bread, meat and cakes. Oxen are slaughtered and wine is opened, and melodious singing is before you. Your chief anointer anoints (you) with ointment of gum. Your manager of cultivated lands bears garlands. Your chief fowler brings ducks, your fisherman brings fish. Your ship has returned from Syria laden with all manner of good things. Your byre is full of calves, your weavers flourish. You are established whilst (your) enemy is fallen, and the one who spoke against you is no more.⁹⁴

Teaching texts such as these offer unparalleled access to conversations among elite men about honor, masculinity, and the proper way to raise a youth so that he would flourish at court.

Long-lived, stable state societies rely on a literate managerial class to ensure that taxes are collected, labor is managed, and ambitious projects are overseen. The training necessary to produce simple bureaucratic records, however, let alone the sophisticated mathematical calculations necessary to raise obelisks or build pyramids, requires the type of intense self-discipline and deference to authority that the state was already eager to instill in its most privileged members.⁹⁵ Students sitting for the Chinese civil service exam, for example, were responsible for memorizing 400,000 discrete Chinese characters, not to mention the main tracts of Confucian scholarship.⁹⁶ In Egypt, scribal train-

93 Quoted in Vernus, *Affairs and Scandals*, 130.

94 Quoted in Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 355.

95 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 380–81.

96 Yu, “Confucian Gentlemen,” 48–49.

ing was also arduous. In hieroglyphic script, the verb “to teach,” for example, was determined with the figure of a man raising a stick above his head—the same sign utilized in the word “to beat.” Between schooling and apprenticeship, a boy could spend sixteen years in training before achieving a position of authority, ensuring that he would have spent his formative years learning patient humility as well as proper grammar.⁹⁷

How a student learned was complemented by *what* he learned. For the Han government as well as the Tokugawa shogunate—both of which aspired to safeguard their monopoly on violence—Confucianism offered an ideology that specifically privileged the virtues of patience, respect, and discipline.⁹⁸ Thus, students in Han schools were set to rote memorization of Confucian tenets, while skills such as archery and chariot-driving (which used to be part of the curriculum) were dropped. Through intensive study of these texts, potential bureaucrats absorbed a deep respect for hierarchy—a hierarchy that, conveniently for both students and state, placed literate men above all others.⁹⁹

That honor lay in literacy was a message driven home by Egypt’s scribal curriculum. One much-copied text recorded the wisdom supposedly imparted by an official named Khety to his son as the two traveled to court to enroll the latter in “the school of writings among the children of the magistrates, the most eminent men of the Residence.”¹⁰⁰ In the text, Khety advises his son to stay in school for two reasons. First, a boy who wielded a stylus “was greeted (respectfully). When he was sent to carry out a task, before he returned he was [dressed in adult garments].”¹⁰¹ Second, should his son complete his studies, he would be spared from painful menial labor. Then, to drive home his point, the scribe proceeded to satirize the fate of those who were not so lucky. The tone of this text and others of its genre is humorous, but the contempt for the laboring classes was real and resembled the attitude of the educated elite in Han China.¹⁰² Significantly, in both countries special scorn was reserved for soldiers. Such men were presented as uncouth, slow-witted, and miserable due to the hardship of their profession.¹⁰³ Thus, for an irenic masculinity to supplant its alternative, it seems that martial men had to be actively denigrated.

Khety did not stop with satire, however. Before delivering his son to court, he had important advice to impart. His son must at all times observe the

97 Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 444; Williams, “Scribal Training,” 216, 218.

98 Yu, “Confucian Gentlemen,” 49–50.

99 Hardy and Kinney, *Establishment of the Han*, 74–75; Yu, “Confucian Gentlemen,” 43.

100 Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 432.

101 Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 433.

102 Yu, “Confucian Gentlemen,” 40, 46.

103 Yu, “Confucian Gentlemen,” 48.

court hierarchy and show respect to those who ranked above him. He should never presume to walk directly behind officials or to make a request of a great man. Instead, it was wisest to obey orders and perform requested tasks in a straightforward manner.¹⁰⁴ Other teaching texts offered the same counsel, together with the injunctions to remain silent unless spoken to, think carefully before speaking, and make one's subservience clear through body language.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, the distastefulness of this practice is tacitly acknowledged with reassurances that "the back is not broken when one bends it" and, similarly, that "the arm bared to salute him will not break."¹⁰⁶

A core thesis of Elias's *The Civilizing Process* is that manners arose at court in part because—as a gathering place for social strivers, many of whom had been accustomed to settling scores with weapons—avoiding conflict or even the shadow of conflict (evident perhaps in how one might pass a knife) became particularly important.¹⁰⁷ Manners had to be taught, and thus writers in Renaissance Europe produced numerous books that offered instruction on how to behave in polite society. In Egypt as well, scribal texts often combined wisdom with etiquette. Compendiums of advice in both cultures devoted significant attention to how one should behave when invited to dinner in elite settings—a situation that appears to have been so fraught with potential pitfalls that Khety had warned his son: "Beware of approaching the table!"¹⁰⁸

Because a banquet can serve as a high-stakes testing ground for entrance into a more circumscribed social circle, the profound anxiety that invitations to dine often provoked seems to transcend cultural boundaries.¹⁰⁹ As Matthew Roller states with respect to dining practices in Rome, "the convivium is not generally a socially egalitarian event: it tends to function as an arena in which status distinctions and power relations are established, confirmed, or

¹⁰⁴ Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 436.

¹⁰⁵ Advice concerning the necessity of monitoring one's speech is stressed in the roughly contemporary Maxims of Ptahhotep (see Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 140, 145, 148) and in etiquette books for courtiers and other well-bred people (Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 71–72, 81; Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 131). Instructions on bodily practice in Egypt are given in the Maxims of Ptahhotep (Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 131), while in Tokugawa Japan, samurai who made improper bows to their lord faced legal sanction (Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 273).

¹⁰⁶ Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 143, 242.

¹⁰⁷ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 68–69, 103–07. See also Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 259, 272; Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 103.

¹⁰⁸ Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 436.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence*, 41; Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 5; Confucius, *Analects*, ch. 10.18.

challenged."¹¹⁰ In order to avoid offense and to ingratiate themselves to their hosts, young Egyptian men were counseled in such settings to practice self-restraint: never eating without first being invited to start, never exhibiting any behavior that could appear gluttonous, and never being perceived to have violated proper hierarchy.¹¹¹ Avoiding even a hint of threatening or aggressive behavior in elite social circles was evidently of utmost importance.

In essence, wisdom literature in Egypt encouraged young men of means to cultivate a masculinity that was emphatically irenic. The ideal man should maintain self-discipline, be stoic in the face of an insult, refrain from consorting with hot-heads, and, crucially, avoid or de-escalate conflict. As Khety put it:

Do not come close to where there is a dispute. If a man reproves you, and you do not know how to oppose his anger, make your reply cautiously in the presence of listeners. . . . For he who hides his innermost thoughts is one who makes a shield for himself. Do not utter thoughtless words when you sit down with an angry man.¹¹²

In weak or failed states, in which a man's honor was his most prized possession, failure to avenge a public slight would result in a catastrophic blow to his reputation. For an elite man in a stable state, however, it was his dignity that he strove to safeguard. Egyptian teaching texts, Confucian commentaries promoted by the Han, and Seneca's treatise *On Anger*, for example, all maintain that well-bred men should eschew violence, even in the face of insult, as unbecoming to their rank. Instead of sinking to the level of an angry adversary, an elite man should rely on rules of decorum that would judge any individual who would dare insult another in public to be so ill-bred that his aggressiveness would be his own undoing.¹¹³ One Japanese writer in the late seventeenth century endorsed such changing mores, stating that "giving up one's life for the sake of private affairs such as quarrels and fights is not the true way of the samurai. Devoting one's life to *giri* [duty, obligation, or responsibility] is the

110 Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 135.

111 Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 58, 76, 79; Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 133, 150, 240. Suppressing impulses and desires in such a situation was important to the Egyptians (Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 147; Leprohon, "Self-Presentation," 108).

112 Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 435–36. See similarly elsewhere in the instructions of Ptahhotep and Amenemope (Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 134, 140–41, 143, 226–27, 231, 240).

113 Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 131–32; Hinsch, *Masculinities in Chinese History*, 42–43; Roller, *Constructing Autocracy*, 280–81; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 145–46, 241; Ali, *Courtly Culture*, 94–95.

way of the samurai.”¹¹⁴ Self-control in the face of provocation, thus, became a new point of pride.¹¹⁵

Once a ruler obtained leverage over potential competitors, indoctrinated and educated their children, and trained this new generation to love luxury, respect hierarchy, denigrate violence, and safeguard their dignity at all costs, his or her project of internal pacification could be considered complete.

10 Tales of Two Archetypes

Every form of hegemonic masculinity tacitly acknowledges the existence of other ways of being a man. A New Kingdom book of dream interpretation suggests that the archetype of the perfect man might be classed under the heading “Follower of Horus”—as opposed to “Follower of Seth.” The description of the Sethian man, designated by the name of the most uncouth and disruptive deity in the Egyptian pantheon, suggests his routine violation of all the ideals enshrined in wisdom literature. Violent, decadent, debauched, and a womanizer, the Sethian man drinks often and to excess, is misanthropic, and makes sexual conquests of married women so as to enhance strife and enmity. And while he might be a member of the elite, even so his “tastes and manners are unrefined, unrestrained and earthy, like those of a commoner.”¹¹⁶ In the struggle between the archetypes of the violent Follower of Seth and the irenic Follower of Horus, the winner would be determined by the prevailing ideal of performative masculinity.

If only the first half of the story of Sinuhe had been discovered, one might assume that it had ended with the craven courtier having finally found his honor: leaving Egypt behind, ruling his own piece of a foreign land, and defeating a formidable challenger in heroic single combat. But this would not be a tale penned by a Middle Kingdom scribe. Sinuhe’s adventure required an epilogue, making it clear that no honor, in fact, could exceed the exquisite joy of following one’s pharaoh, the earthly avatar of Horus. Considering the struggle in Sinuhe’s own person between violent and irenic aspects of his sense of self, I end this exploration with a different story.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 239–40.

¹¹⁵ Elias, *Civilizing Process*, 368–73; Ikegami, *Taming of the Samurai*, 207–08, 211, 258; Castiglione’s courtiers agree that “he who rushes into [quarrels or a fight] precipitately and without urgent cause deserves greatly to be censured, even though he should meet with success” (Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, 28).

¹¹⁶ Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 73.

The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre Tao is frustratingly but compellingly incomplete, a state that would have been remedied had it entered the scribal curriculum. The story is set at the tail end of the Second Intermediate Period, when “the land of Egypt was in misery” given that the Fifteenth Dynasty king Apophis, a foreign adherent of the cult of Seth, ruled Egypt from the city of Avaris. As appears to have been the case in reality, the Seventeenth Dynasty king Seqenenre administered Upper Egypt from Thebes as Apophis’s vassal.

When the story opens, Apophis desires to render the treaty that stipulated the nature of relations between the two kingdoms void, without being perceived to violate the terms of the treaty. His strategy is one of provocation—to offend the honor of his vassal by uttering patently absurd and impossible demands. Thus, he dispatches his messenger to Thebes with a request that Seqenenre should slaughter the hippopotami in Theban pools because they disturb Apophis’s sleep. His plan, however, is thwarted by the patience of the king, who acts as if he had anticipated the counsel of the sage Amenemope: “Do not get into a quarrel with the argumentative man nor incite him with words; proceed cautiously before an opponent, and give way to an adversary.”¹¹⁷

What is interesting about this fragment of a story is its ambiguity. Apophis is clearly cast as the villain, so Seqenenre should occupy the archetype of the hero—but by whose definition? Given his self-control, he acts in accordance with the behavior expected of the ideal man in the Old, Middle, or New Kingdoms. Yet if Seqenenre intended by savvy stratagem to subvert Apophis’s orders, his move is not foreshadowed. The fragment ends with Apophis composing a second letter, presumably even more inflammatory than the first. If we knew nothing of Egyptian history, one would predict that Seqenenre, admirably slow to anger, would ultimately obtain his revenge and pave the way for the genesis of the New Kingdom. Yet archaeology informs us that nothing of the sort occurred.

Seqenenre did apparently surge north as Apophis hoped, yet medical examination of his mummy demonstrates that he did *not* succeed in his quest. While opinions differ as to whether he was killed in battle, was assassinated in its aftermath, or was ceremonially executed, it is clear that he died a gruesome death due to multiple wounds inflicted by two different types of axes, a spear, and a mace.¹¹⁸ Thus, it was not Seqenenre who would live to fight another day; it was Apophis. If warfare was the ultimate trial of honor in a time of weak states, such as in the Second Intermediate Period, Seqenenre had lost.

¹¹⁷ Simpson, *Literature of Ancient Egypt*, 227.

¹¹⁸ Shaw, “Death of King Seqenenre Tao,” 164–65, 175–76.

So how, then, did this particular tale end? And what did it mean? Was the moral of the story—presumably composed in the New Kingdom under a stable state—that Seqenenre should have followed the advice of the sages and remained unprovoked? Was there a different hero waiting in the wings—the king's widow Ahhotep, perhaps? Or, as in the tale of the capture of Joppa, did a clever general end up saving the day with a ruse, thereby proving, once and for all, the superiority of brain over brawn and of forethought over fierceness? If so, this story—composed, like that of Sinuhe, by scribes writing under a strong authoritarian regime—could truly be said to be of its time. Political authorities, it must be remembered, play a strong role in promoting the type of “hero” most serviceable to their state.

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