



THE ROLE OF *ḥkꜣw*: THE EXPLOITATION OF RESOURCES WITHIN CENTER-PERIPHERY RELATIONS DURING THE OLD KINGDOM

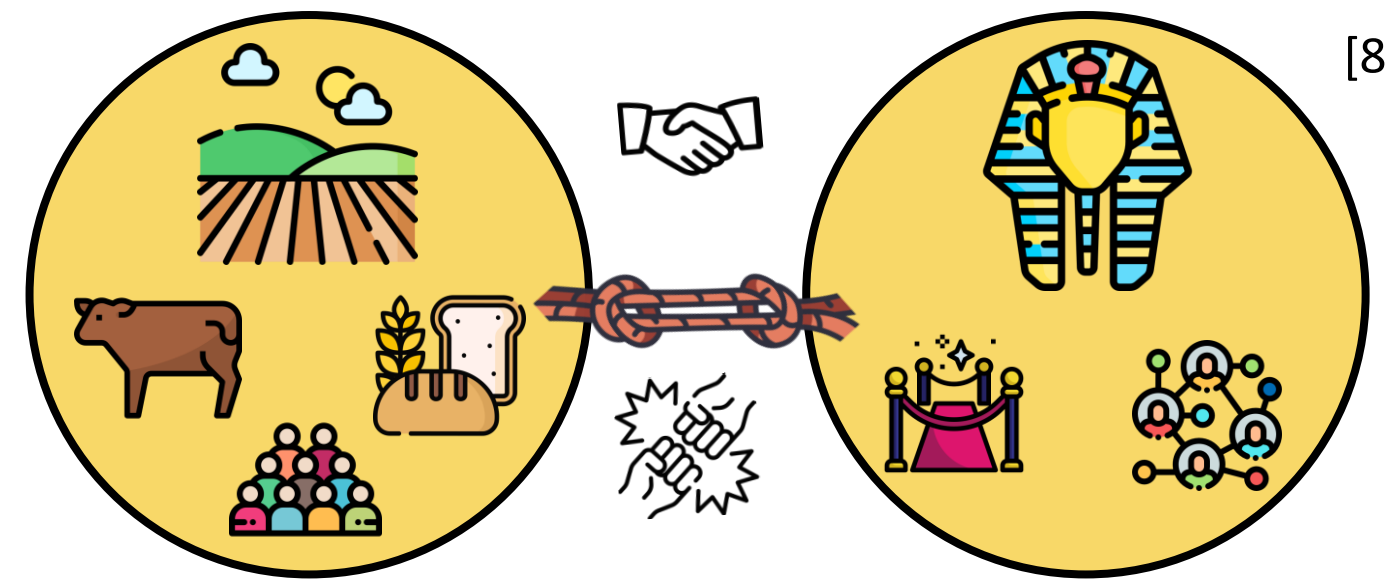
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1 INTRODUCTION

Control over the exploitation of available resources is one of the primary aspects of the consolidation of any state. In studying this phenomenon in Ancient Egypt, research has traditionally focused on the agency of the Court and its administration rather than individuals' one. Fortunately, Egyptology has overcome this biased approach in recent decades, and the agency of local authorities has re-emerged as a prominent factor in the relationship between the Court and the provinces. As a result, the aim of this study —based on the analysis of textual and iconographic sources— is to investigate the figure of *ḥkꜣw* while focusing on individuals rather than institutions.

2 THE COURT VS. LOCAL ELITES

By the beginning of the Old Kingdom, the Court had succeeded in creating a nascent administration that controlled the circulation of wealth and prestige goods.



Nevertheless, early administration was highly centralised, but unable to spread a stable network over Egypt to ensure the control over the territory and local resources needed to prosper as a state. On the other hand, local elites — whose presence can be traced back to the beginning of Naqada period [1]— certainly had the control over the exploitation of their regions but aspire to access to wealth exchange networks under the control of the Court.

Consequently, a socio-economic and political centre-peripheric dynamic emerged. **The Court —the centre— offered wealth and power to local elites** by means of their incorporation to the administration and other informal networks that integrated them into the palatial sphere. **Local elites —the periphery— granted the access to local resources** to the Court in return. The symbol of this alliance was *ḥwwt*, royal estates founded by the Court, but under the supervision of local leaders holding the title *ḥkꜣw ḥwt*.

3 WHEN DID *ḥkꜣw* EMERGED IN THE SOURCES?



Heqa sceptre (Tomb U-j) [7].

Some characteristic staffs and representations of *ḥkꜣw* can be already detected during **Naqada II period**, prior to the emergency of Egyptian state [2].

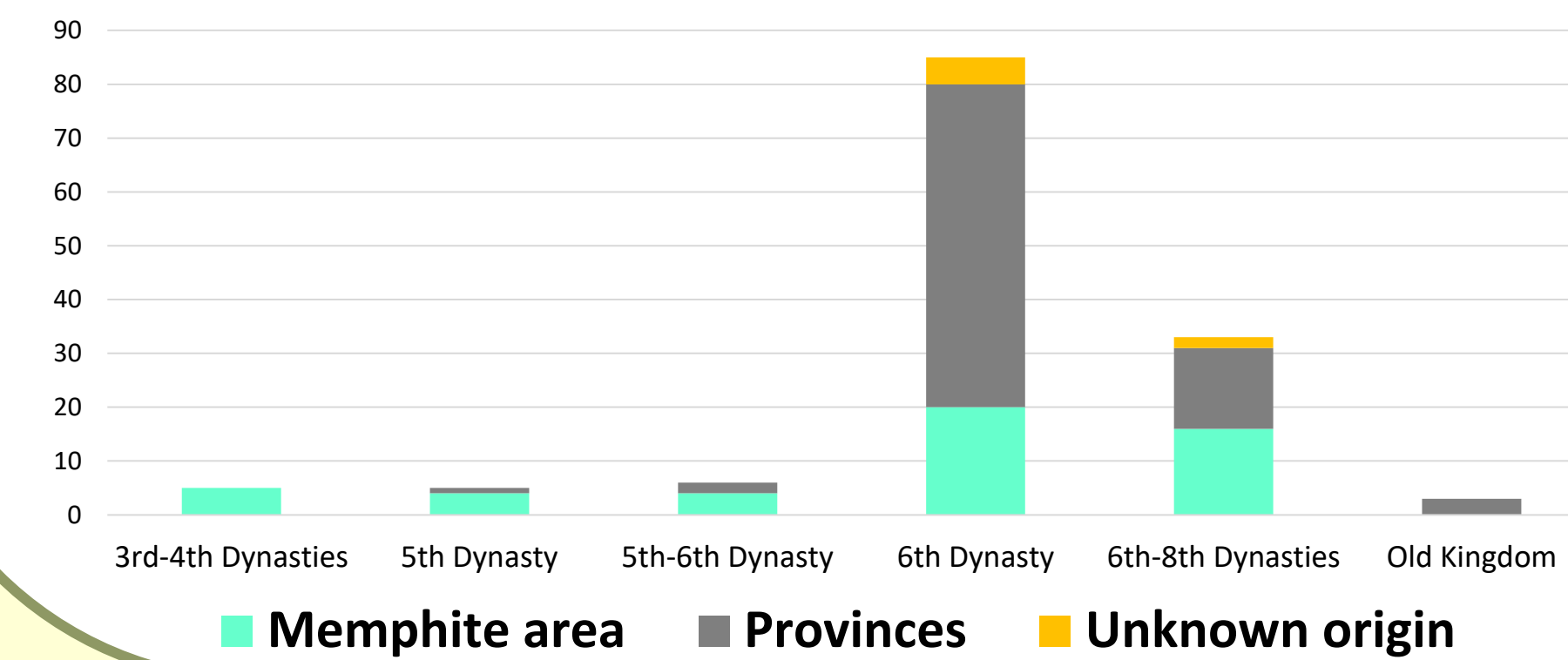
In written sources, *ḥkꜣw* are detected as early as the **First Dynasty, but not related to *ḥwwt* at first** [3]. Then, it seems likely that the word *ḥkꜣ* had originally a **generic meaning as (ancestral) "authority"** in a context where central and peripheric authorities met to negotiate and needed a common word that recognised both authorities.

4 HOW WERE *ḥkꜣw* DISTRIBUTED DURING THE OLD KINGDOM?

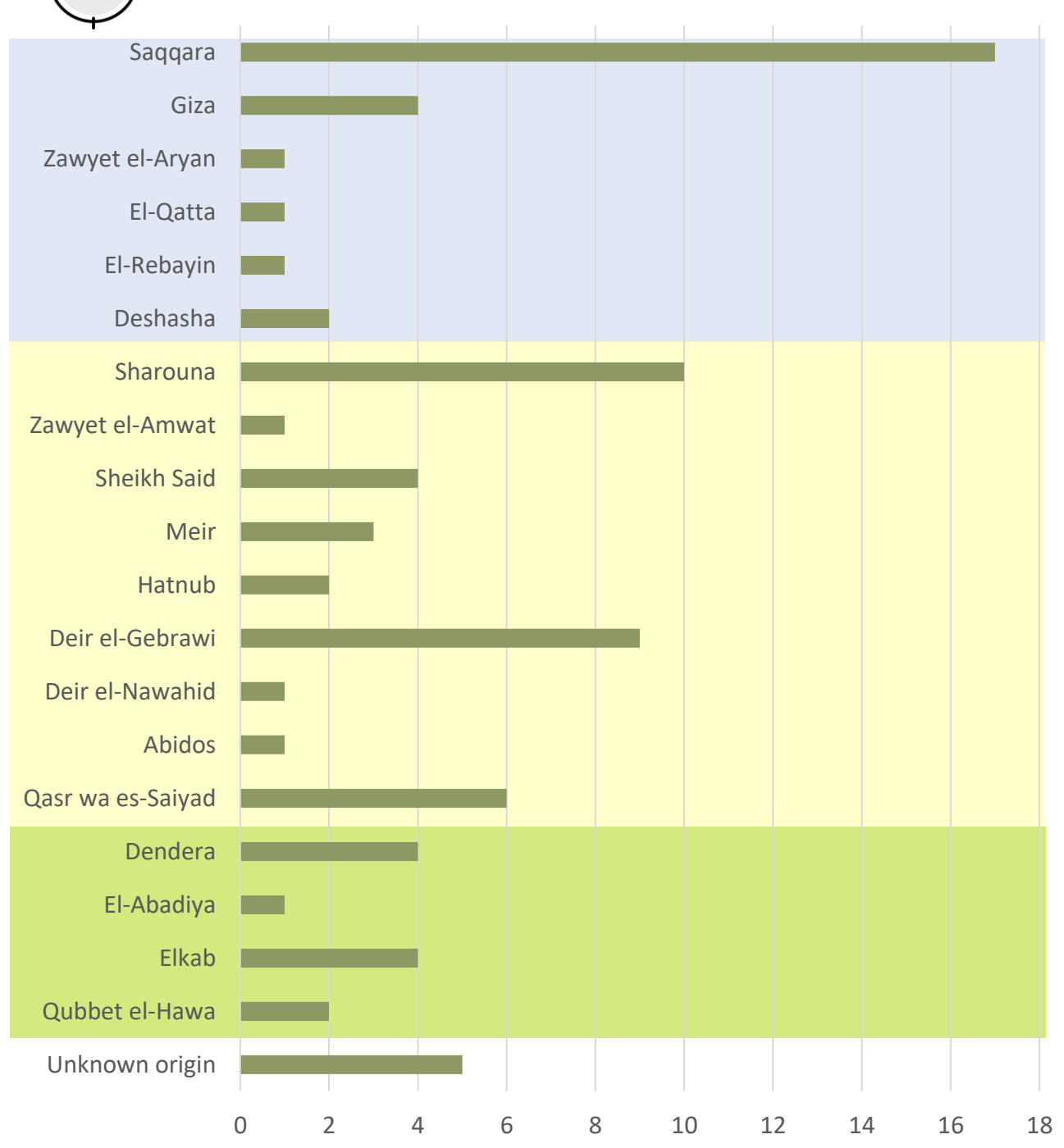
From the 3rd Dynasty onwards, local elites' collaboration with **the Court intensified to develop a network of *ḥwwt*** [4]. Therefore, the title *ḥkꜣ ḥwt* is the most frequent reference to *ḥkꜣw* through the Old Kingdom and the best hint to follow the course of these individuals.

ḥkꜣw ḥwt spatial and chronological distribution shows a process of negotiation between the Court and local elites over resources. *ḥkꜣw ḥwt* were absent of Lower Egypt, as this area was controlled from the Memphite area. They were also almost lacking in Upper Egyptian provinces that were geographically and politically closer to Memphis or where the power of regional leaders and the scarcity of agricultural land avoid the presence of royal estates [5]. This way, **the presence of *ḥkꜣw ḥwt* implies a higher relevance of local leadership where they are attested.**

Evolution of the spatial distribution of *ḥkꜣw ḥwt*



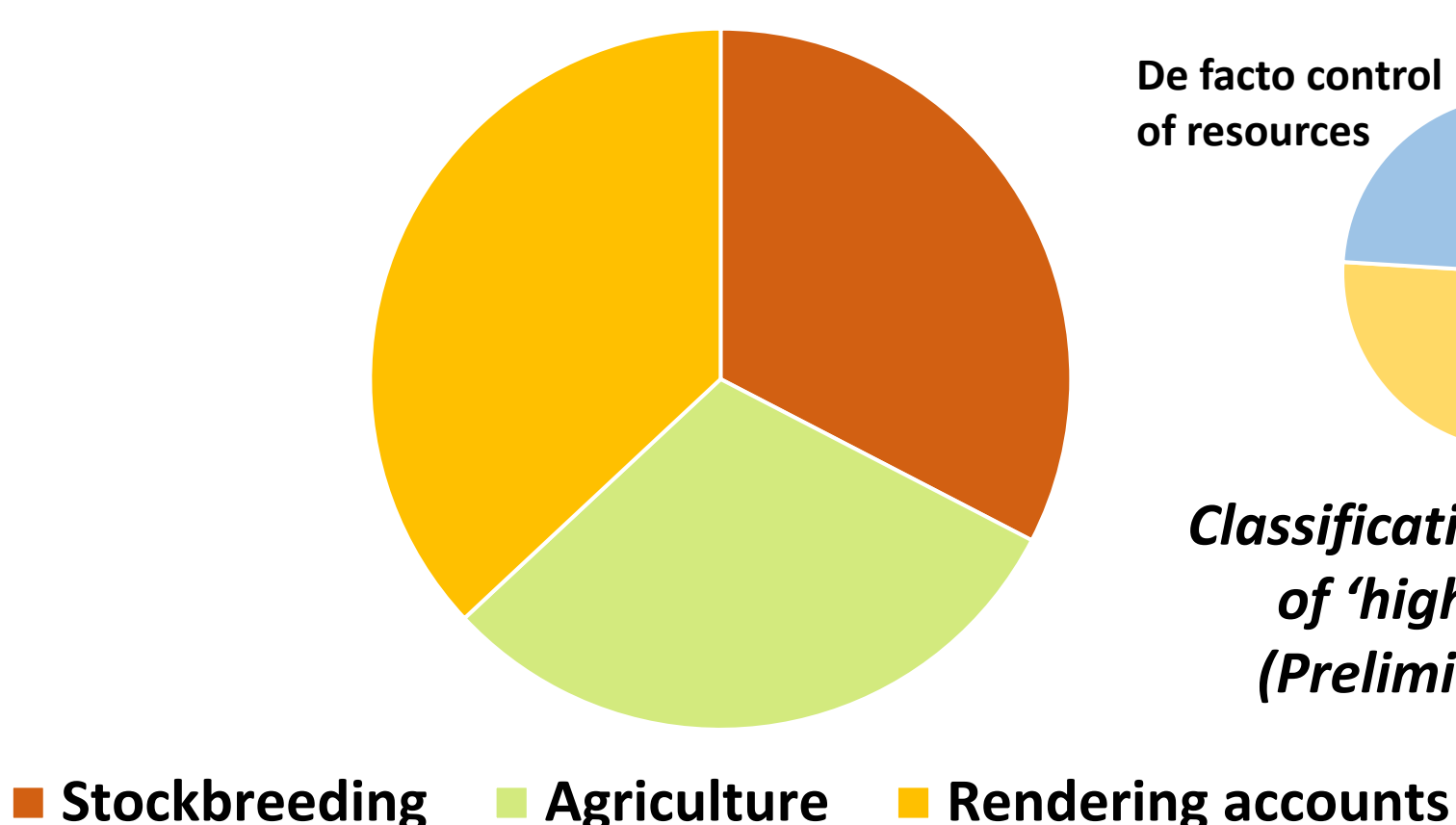
Spatial distribution of *ḥkꜣw ḥwt*



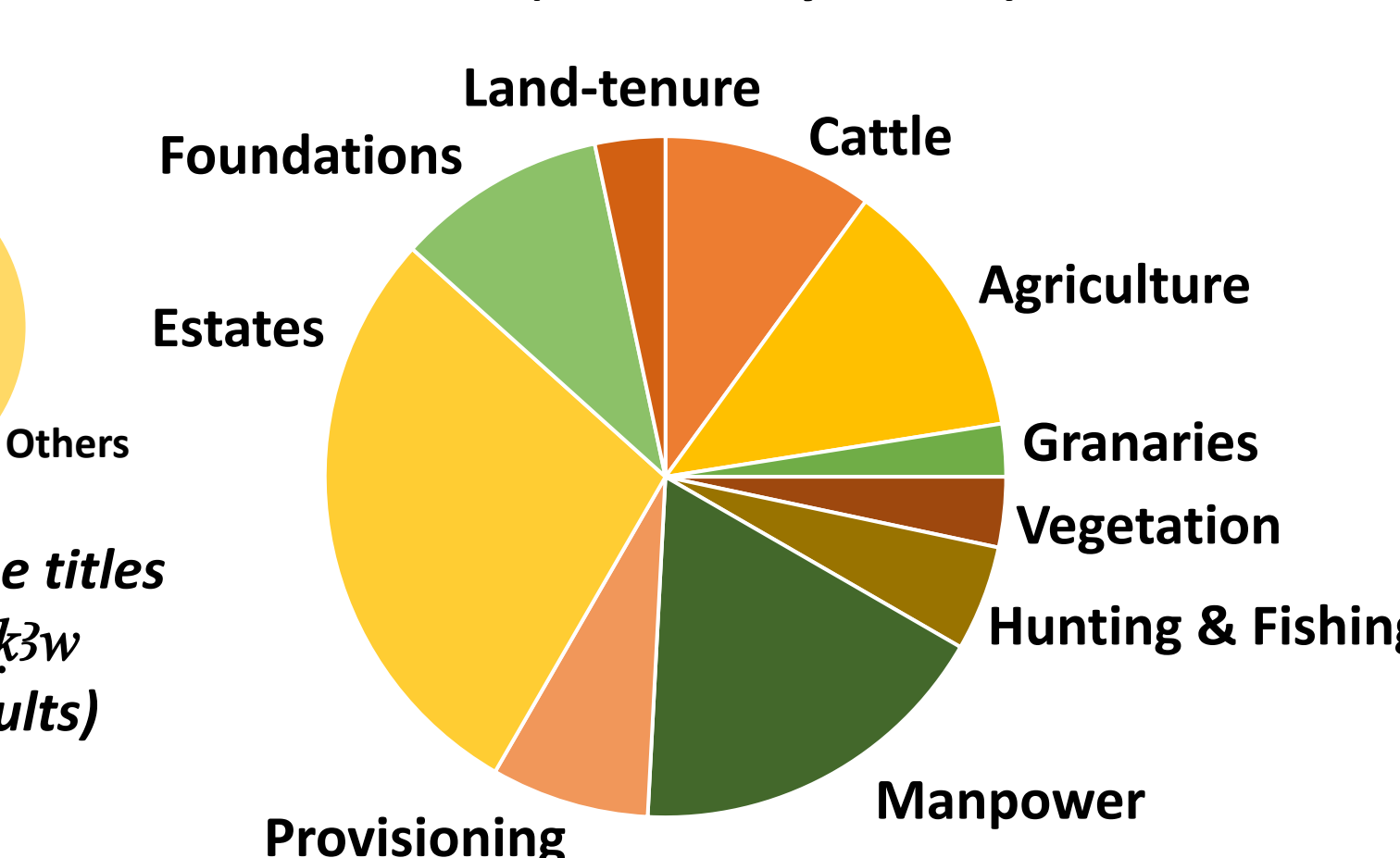
5 WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF *ḥkꜣw* DURING THE OLD KINGDOM?

Traditionally, two types of *ḥkꜣw* have been distinguished: those belonging to the local upper elites and those of lower rank that belonged to households of officials [6]. Nevertheless, with all due caution, the analysis of data suggests that, in both cases, their functions were **strongly linked to the exploitation of local resources**. On the one hand, the prosopography of 'higher' *ḥkꜣw* shows a significant percentage of titles related to agriculture, cattle, manpower and estates. On the other hand, 'lower' *ḥkꜣw* are consistently represented in agricultural and livestock contexts.

Distribution of the funerary scenes' themes depicting 'low' rank *ḥkꜣw*



Distribution of titles related to de facto control of resources (Preliminary results)

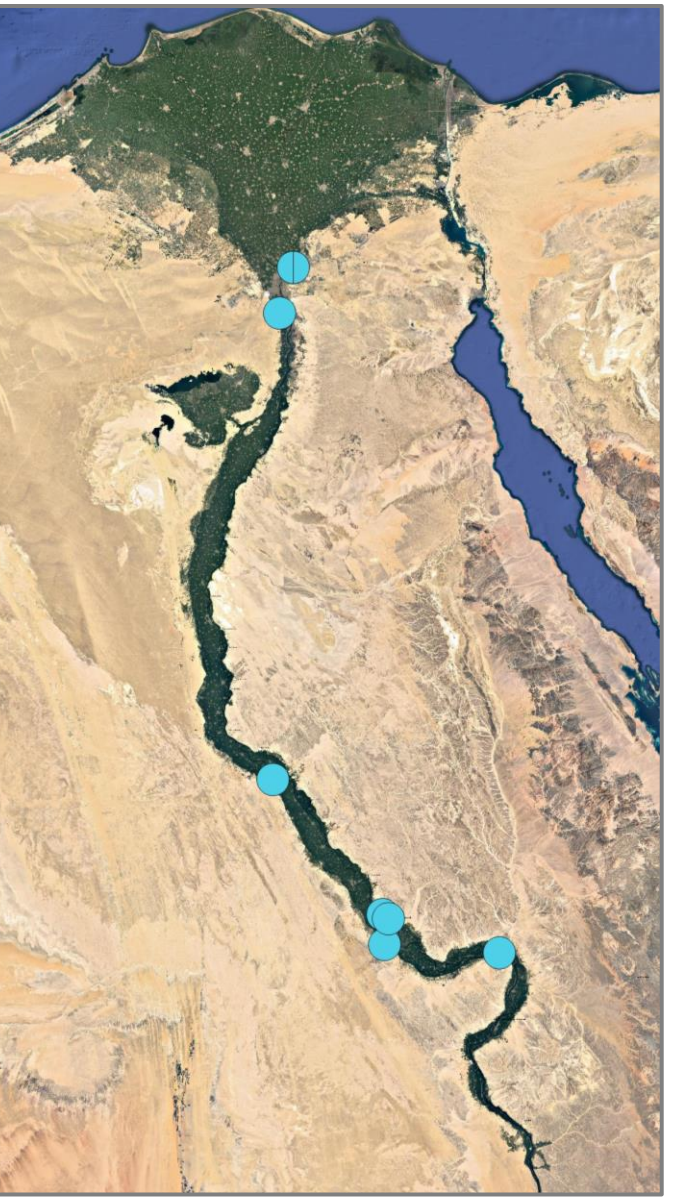


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6 THE AFTERWARDS

By the end of the Old Kingdom, the Crown was struggling with difficulties and finally collapsed. However, *ḥkꜣw* did not disappeared during the First Intermediate Period. Thus, while titles only related to the Court support during the Old Kingdom disappeared —such as the title *ḥri-tp ʿ3-*, **the title *ḥkꜣ* remained because of its ancestral meaning.**



Spatial distribution of *ḥkꜣw ḥwt* during the Old Kingdom

7 WHO WERE THE *ḥkꜣw*? (CONCLUSIONS)

- *ḥkꜣw* were **local leaders** whose authority primarily lied in their ancestral central position in their communities. As a result, they remained even after the collapse of the monarchy by the end of the Old Kingdom.
- *ḥkꜣw* were **de facto controllers of local resources** —be they men, livestock or grain. This fact became their main bargaining chip with the monarchy.
- *ḥkꜣw* were **mediators within their communities and the administration**. Although local elites and the Crown had their own strategies, they converged in a centre-periphery dynamic based on *ḥkꜣw*'s authority within their communities to exploit resources.

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[5] Ibid.: 266.

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[8] Icons from Flaticon.com.