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Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha. Excavations in 2006-2007

Tell el-Farkha is located next to the northern outskirts of the modern village of Ghazala, along the southern side of the Ghazala Drain, about 14 km east of El-Simbillawein. The site was discovered by Italian mission and the first excavations was made by them (cf. Chłodnicki, Fattovich, Salvatori 1991). Since 1998 the works are continued by Polish Archaeological Expedition to the Nile Delta (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2002). The site is divided on three koms (Western, Central and Eastern) along the northern edge of gezira and a gentle slope delimited by houses of the village to the south and east.

The works on the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha are organized in two trenches. In the northern one the rests of poor settlement were discovered, in the southern the cemetery dated from dynasty 0 to the beginning of IVth was explored.

In 2006 excavation of the settlement on the north side of the kom was resumed within the confines of trenches E83-84 and E82-84. Levels 26-33 were examined, largely dating to late Phase 3 and Phase 4 of this site (Naqada IID2/IIIA1-Naqada IIIA2/IIIB).

The surface of the trench was covered by a network of walls running in various directions, demarcating more-or-less regular rooms. Some of the walls were curved. At the north-east end of the trench (E83-84) the alignment of the walls deviates slightly from N-S and E-W, hence they probably form a further part of the building excavated in 2003-2005 (cf. Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2004: 63-64). In the remaining part of the trench buildings were raised on a NW-SE axis. These

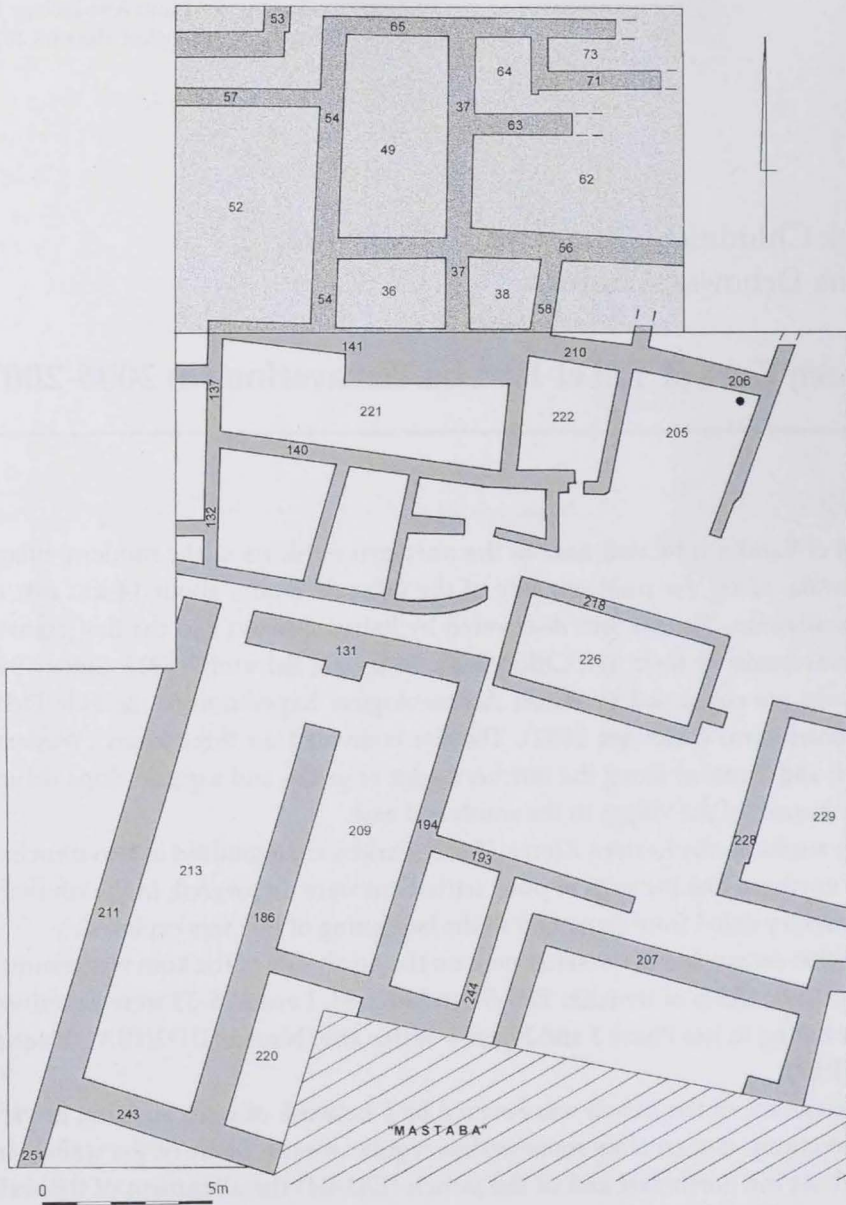


Fig. 1. Northern part of the Western Kom. Mudbrick walls in levels 30-33.
Black dot – place where the golden treasure was found.

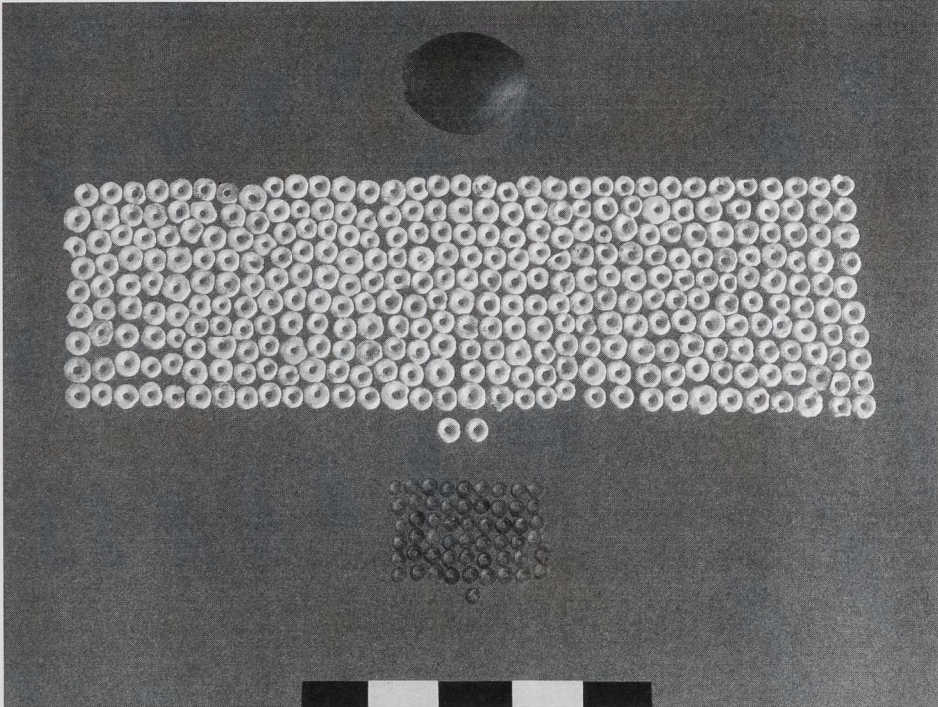


Photo 1. Carnelian and ostrich egg-shell beads found together with golden figures.

were temporary and rather fragile constructions, usually only one brick thick, very rarely two. They contrast sharply with the huge building which stood directly to their south (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2006: 92-94).

A significant change was noted in level 29/30 (Fig. 1). These buildings were raised during Phase 3 of this site, and they have not yet been fully excavated. One building in particular was striking, with its fairly massive, one-metre-thick walls (131, 186, 194, 211, 243) delineating three elongated rooms of 3.5 m in width. One of these rooms (213) extended across the entire length of the building and was 15 m long; the other part of the building was divided into two smaller rooms of c. 9 m (209) and 5 m in length respectively. It cannot be precluded that the rooms to the west of wall 194 are linked to this complex (207, 231, 255), as is suggested by the fact that the walls are of the same thickness and are tied into one another in some places. The south-east portion of this complex is covered by the massive wall of mentioned above huge building.

Outlined between walls 194 and 193 is the corner of a courtyard, where a vast, ancient cut of over 5 m in diameter was visible. The section of trench to the north-

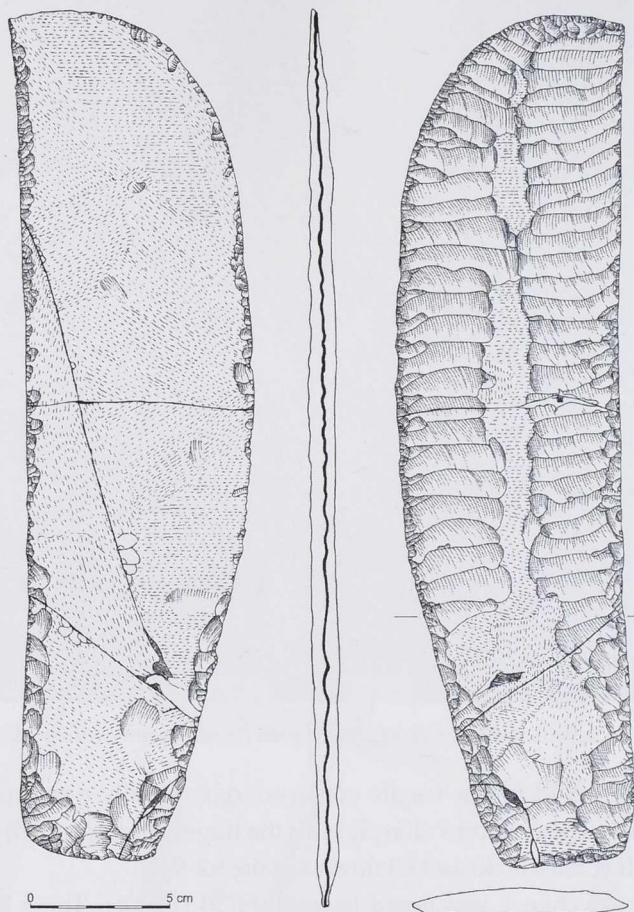


Fig. 2. Ripple flake knife from the treasure.

east of the earlier described building and courtyard mirrors the previously reported situation – the architectural remains were severely damaged, and the large number of later pits truncating the walls made it very difficult to interpret these remains. The walls are narrow, sometimes curved, and their alignment underwent various changes. A large number of hearths and large quantities of ash were present. Ceramic vessels were recovered from some of the hearths. The dense concentration of hearths and their frequent relocation points to intensive human activity in this area, though not of a permanent nature. It was completely surprising that in this context, in the corner of one of the rooms (205) a hoard composed of two golden figures together with a necklace of 382 beads (Photo 1) made of ostrich egg

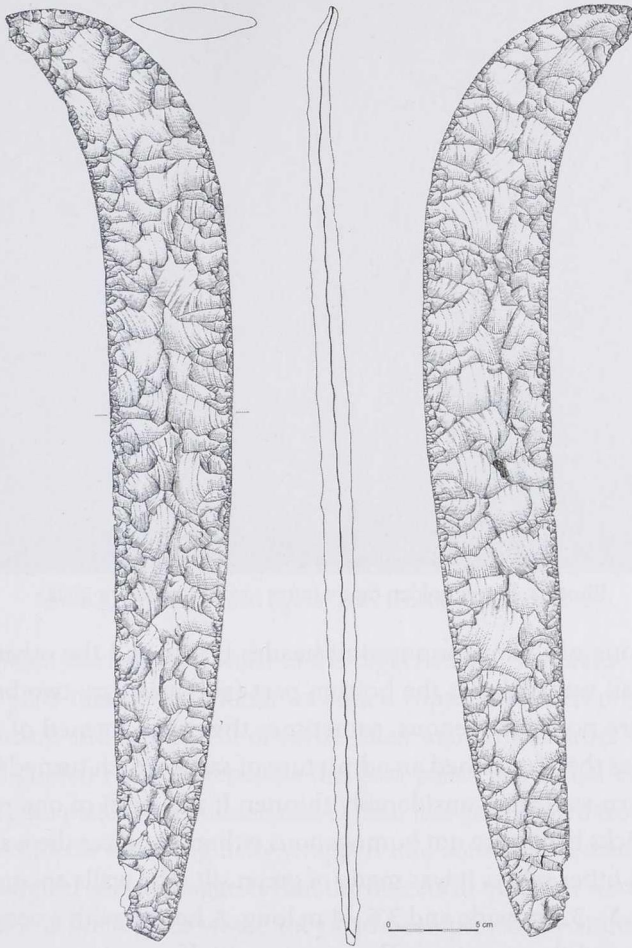


Fig. 3. Bifacial flint knife from the treasure.

shells (326) and carnelian (56) as well as two large flint knives were discovered. First of them, 30 cm long, is typical ripple-flake knife (Fig. 2), especially characteristic for the Naqada IID period (Midant-Reynes 1987), whereas the execution of the second knife (Fig. 3), 51 cm long, may point both to the close of the Gerzean Culture and an early phase of Naqada III.

The deposit was discovered in the layer 30/31, approximately 3 meters below present ground level (4.50 - 4.40 meters a.s.l.). The structure was formed by three walls - western, northern and eastern, while it was open to the south. The northern and western walls were more solid than their eastern counterpart. They were 50 cm thick with bricks laid either in three rows parallel to the face of the wall or

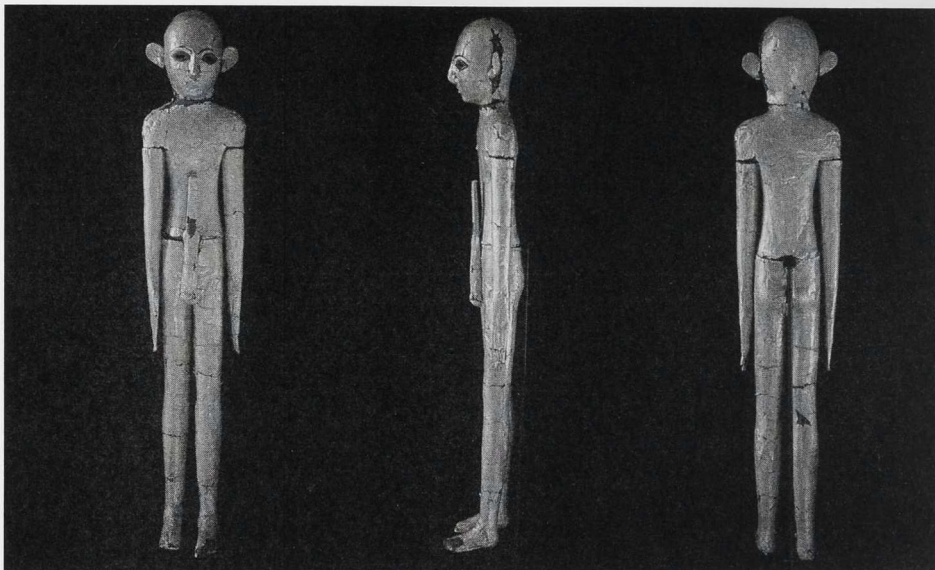


Photo 2. Bigger golden figure (after reconstruction in 2008).

in two rows, one of them composed of header bricks and the other of stretcher bricks. The wall was wider at the bottom part (about 60 cm, two brick lengths). The bricks were not homogenous, sometimes they were formed of grey silt only and other times they contained an admixture of sand, which turned them yellowish. The western wall was considerably thinner. It was built of one row of header bricks. The bricks here were not homogenous either. At places the wall has a light-grey colour, at other places it was made of green silt. The walls encompass an area that is approx. 3 - 3,5 m wide and 3,6 - 4 m long. A hearth with a vessel inside was located in front of the structure. The structure itself constitutes a south-western corner of a larger complex, probably residential.

It is however hard to directly link the time the structure was used and the hearth functioned with the moment the treasure was hidden. Probably during that time the structure had already been ruined. The layer in which the deposit was discovered was composed of brick rubble settled in green and yellow silt (probably from bricks), mixed with traces of burning. A considerable number of white marks from mats were also discovered there. A part of the wall in the NE corner was destroyed by a hearth dug into it a mere 10 cm above the place where the treasure was hidden. The treasure was concealed near that same corner. It was placed alongside the northern wall with all the objects positioned parallel to one another, two of the knives adjacent to the wall and the remains of the figures next to them. The beads were

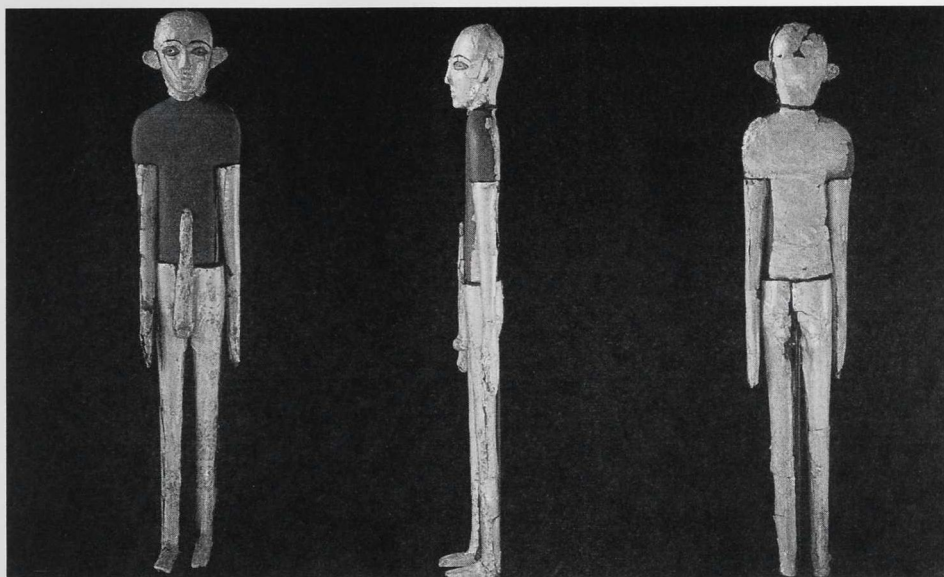


Photo 3. Smaller golden figure (after reconstruction in 2008).

scattered between the neck and waist of the bigger statue. The statues were crushed and the gold plate that covered them was often ruptured, which probably resulted from the pressure and movement of earth. Their anatomical order was preserved, however, and golden rivets fastened to the gold plates prove that entire statuettes covered with gold plates were hidden rather than just gold ripped from them. Probably all of the objects were originally wrapped into something (mat, linen cloth?). Poor archaeological context suggests that the objects in question were hidden in the structure and it is not a place where they had been previously stored or exhibited. Ceramic material discovered in the vicinity of the deposit was very fragmentary and uncharacteristic. Nevertheless, on the basis of pottery encountered directly over the golden statuettes and in adjacent rooms, we may date the time the objects were deposited to the middle of the Naqada IIIB period.

The statuettes depict standing naked males – one of them measuring 57 cm in height (Photo 2); the other 30 cm¹ (Photo 3). Both consisted of a core made of an unpreserved material (probably wood), no traces of which are distinguishable. The core was later covered with sheets of thin gold foil (0,1-0,2 mm.), which was fastened by golden rivets (140 of which are preserved), each measuring 4 mm in length and 1 mm in diameter. The lapis-lazuli eyes of both figures are preserved.

¹ Meticulous reconstruction of both figures was made by W. Weker and A. Longa in 2007 and 2008. Now both statuettes are in the Cairo Museum.

Their eyebrows must have been incrustated with some other unpreserved material. The heads of the figures were bald and their faces bear no signs of facial hair. The face of small figure is much more lean than the face of bigger one. Both have distinctively shaped noses and mouths. Their protruding ears were made of separate pieces of metal. Comparatively short torsos of both figures were shaped together with arms². Their hands fell alongside the body to the length of their shins, ending with large palms with clearly marked fingers and nails. Considerably large phallus protectors were placed sticking upwards between their long legs. The protector of the larger figure is decorated with a carved band running around it. The feet of both figures were fitted with plastically modelled toes and toenails. A necklace adorned the first of the figures, however it is hard to define whether it was wrapped a couple of times around its neck or was hanging from its shoulder, which seems to be indicated by the position of the beads at the time they were discovered.

The style of the figures and the way some of the details were accented - large protruding ears, unnaturally large phalluses, meticulously carved nails of hands and feet - fit well into the art of Predynastic Egypt. The first example to confirm this rule is statuette of Mahasna carved in ivory, depicting a naked male with small but visibly protruding ears and a big phallus, discovered in a grave dating to the Amratian period (Ayrton and Loat 1911: pl. XI, 1). Other figures of a similar type and probably dating were bought at Ballas by Petrie (1920:6; pl. II).

A number of statuettes depicting males were discovered in a deposit in Hierakonpolis (Quibell and Petrie 1900: pl. V-X). The heads that were preserved depict bald and short haired males, with faces with short or long pointy beards. Their eyes were almond shaped and in most cases were inlaid with other types of materials. Their noses and lips are distinctively modelled and ears are big. The characters are usually naked, wearing only phallus protectors, with hands along the torsos.

Yet another important artefact is a figure, from the former collection of Mac Gregor, currently in the Ashmolean Museum, said to have been found at Naqada (Payne 1993: 12-13). Here provenance and date are uncertain. The basalt sculpture (about 40 cm high) depicts a standing male wearing a penis protector only. He has a pointy beard, reaching almost to his waist. His eyes are almond shaped and large, with bulging eyelids. His ears are large and protruding and his fingernails are carved with great precision.

The most enigmatic is a small figure (approx. 22 cm), that has been bought in the vicinity of Thebes during the years 1907-09. The statuette is currently in the

2 Front part of the torso of smaller figure is not preserved or never existed. Few golden fragments which are left after the reconstruction not allowed to state if they are rests of mentioned torso.

collection of the Royal Ontario Museum, where it is exhibited as probably originating from Syria³. It is made of a partially preserved core covered with sheets of gold plate. The figure was not preserved undamaged and on the basis of a photograph it is hard to define to what degree it has been reconstructed. The carefully crafted head was preserved best. It was formed of one piece of gold plate, together with the ears, which admittedly are large, but not protruding. Visible holes form rivets prove that the plate was fixed, at least in some parts, to the core. The almond shaped eyes were encrusted with some other unpreserved material, just like the eyebrows. The nose and lips are distinctively marked and the face is surrounded by a short beard, emphasised by an undercut. Facial hair is marked by engraving. The hands are long and drop along the body, the fingernails of large palms are made with precision, in a way analogical to the figures from Tell el-Farkha. The character wears a belt suspending a protector, which seems to be modelled in the front of the silhouette. The legs of the character have been visibly repaired. It is hard to judge either whether the length of the legs has been properly reconstructed - they seem visibly too short, or whether both legs were in fact made of one piece of gold plate and joined. The feet, probably original, seem to be joined together. The attribution of the figure to the Sumerian circle or a wider Near Eastern circle - despite it had been bought in Egypt - is also mysterious.

The provenance of the described figure and the previously mentioned statuette from Oxford is unknown and it is hard to precisely define at what time they were created. However, both have some stylistic features characteristic to the Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods. Most of the figures that are certainly dated to that period depicting men are characterized by penis protectors, large, almond shaped, often encrusted eyes, large and protruding ears and carefully modelled fingers and toes together with nails. They are usually depicted standing or walking. A part of those traits (large ears, eyes made from different materials, penis protector) is also characteristic for the plastics of an earlier period. Such a meticulous depiction of fingers as in the case of the above described statues, however, does not appear. Beards as well only became popular during the Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods. They may be both long and pointy (Quibell, Petrie 1900: pl. VI, 2) as well as short, surrounding the chin and cheeks, as known from some of the statuettes from Hierakonpolis (Quibell and Petrie 1900: pl. VI,1) and also ivory figurine of king from Tell el-Farkha (Ciałowicz 2007a: 71). In case of the statue from the Royal

3 Inv. No 910.85.158 (B.987). The authors would like to thank Dr R. Shaw and Dr K. Grzymski for providing access to illustrations and descriptions of the figure in the collection of the Royal Museum of Toronto.

Ontario Museum, the situation is complicated by the fact that it has been assigned to the Sumerian circle and regarded as an import from Syria or Mesopotamia. It seems, however, that both the fact that it was discovered in Egypt and its stylistic traits that fit into the tradition of Predynastic and Early Dynastic art allow to regard it as a work of an Egyptian artist of that period or at least a figure that was created in Egypt. It is worth to remind the reader about the famous knife from Gebel Arak, the creation and connections of which with Egypt are obvious, yet the origin of its creator is still an object of lively discussions (cf. Ciałowicz 1997).

As mentioned above, the eyes of the figures from Tell el-Farkha were made of lapis-lazuli. The material was imported during that period from the area that today is Afghanistan. The eyebrows of our figures were also inlaid with a material different than gold. Because it was not preserved, we may only assume that it may have been bitumen or ebony. Both those materials must have also been imported to Egypt - the first one from the Near East, the second one from Nubia. The beads - or at least the materials used to produce the necklace - also originated outside of the Delta area (perhaps the Eastern Desert and Upper Egypt). The technique used to make flint knives is characteristic for the end of Naqada II and very beginning of Naqada III.

The materials used to manufacture the entire group were thus imported to the Delta from various directions. It is - by the way - yet another proof of how huge a role did trade exchange play for the ruling elite. Flint knives may point to the fact that the treasure discovered in Tell el-Farkha is in truth much older than it was indicated by the archaeological context of the discovery place. It is however doubtless that the treasure was created in the Naqada Culture. Nevertheless, due to the fact that we lack any analogies, it is hard to define whether it had been created in Upper Egypt, from where it was later transported to the Delta, or, on the contrary, it originated in the Delta and was made from imported materials. It is also hard to unambiguously resolve whether the fact that it was discovered in a poor settlement on the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha is a proof that it had been hidden by its inhabitants because of an impending danger or, quite the opposite, it points to a robbery performed by the inhabitants on some other competing city. The fact that the treasure had not been dug out in the past seems to point to the first possibility. Probably those who hid it had never returned to Tell el-Farkha. Otherwise the treasure - and especially the gold - would have been utilised in some way instead of having to wait 5000 years to be discovered. A complicated stratigraphic situation on the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha, that is subsequent phases of the cemetery and settlement overlapping one another, seem to point to a different than usual process of overtaking the Delta by the Naqadians and a ri-

valry between various power centres in Upper Egypt (Ciałowicz 2008). Economical and political troubles and military conflicts concerning the trade routes must have taken place between main centres of power (p. ex. Abydos and Hierakonpolis) until the country was finally unified under the rule of one dynasty. Tell el-Farkha, as indicated by graves and the so called 'mastaba' from the Eastern Kom (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2006: 92-94), but above all buildings on the Western Kom, must have been a tremendously important and high ranking centre in the period between Naqada IIIA and the half of the 1st Dynasty. It is yet difficult to evaluate the role and significance of Tell el-Farkha, mainly due to the lack of sufficient information from other sites. We may assume, however, that it was one of the most important (if not the most important) centre in the eastern Delta. If we assume that the Tell el-Farkha treasure was hidden by the inhabitants of the settlement, we may wonder where its original location had been. The most probable location is the Western Kom, where - according to the excavation results - an administrative area was located at least from the beginning of Naqada IIIA. Later (dynasty 0/I), in the same place, administrative-cultic centre existed. It is verified not only by the buildings that were discovered there, but also two deposits which clearly served a cultic purpose (Ciałowicz 2007: 71). It is therefore possible that the golden statuettes were kept in some early chapel that stood on that spot.

It is harder to unambiguously estimate the period in which the figures may have been created in Tell el-Farkha. Taking into consideration the stylistic traits existing during the Naqada period: emphasis put on the details that have already been mentioned, a lack of facial hair and the period during which flint knives of the ripple flake type are encountered, we may assume that the figures were created even earlier than it is pointed to by the archaeological context they were discovered in. The latter only gives us *terminus ante quem*. The most important examples of art flourishing during the Naqada III period, in relief and sculpture alike, are also dated with little precision. The majority of artefacts known today either come from purchases or were discovered in conditions that hindered a precise chronological definition. A stylistic analysis of such items usually only allowed to date them roughly. We may assume, however, that the figurines from Tell el-Farkha have not been hidden right after they had been made, but rather had been created a few/few dozen years before they have been concealed on the Eastern Kom. The general development of Egyptian art that was going through its first great period at least from the beginning of Naqada IIC/D (the painting from Hierakonpolis) until the 1st Dynasty and a dominant role of depictions of leaders/rulers that from the beginning was clearly distinguishable allow us to make an assumption that the

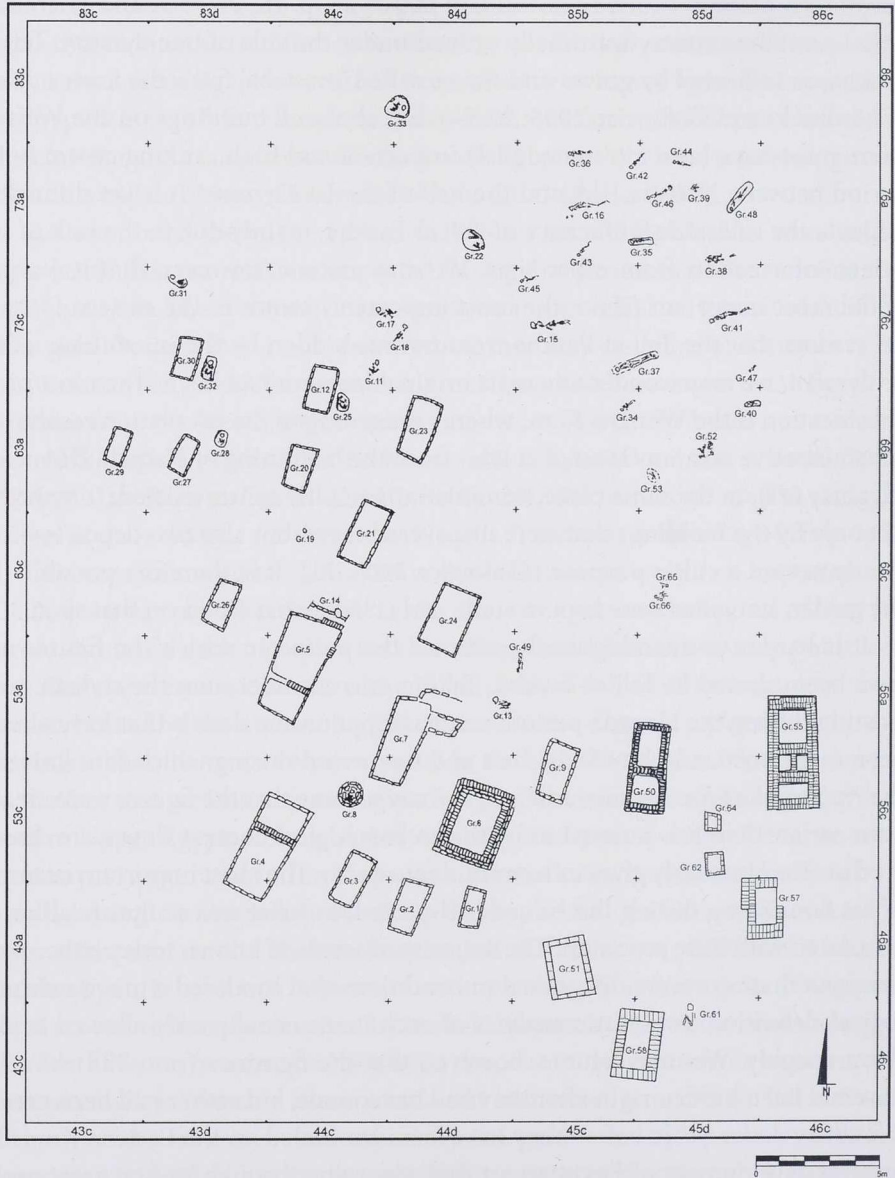


Fig. 4. Plan of the cemetery.

golden figures from Tell el Farkha may even have been created during the Naqada IID/IIIA period. However, due to the fact that we have not gathered - at least until now - irrefutable evidence to back the above hypothesis, it is necessary to assume that our artefacts were created between the very beginning of Naqada IIIA and the half of Naqada IIIB, and certainly earlier than the rule of any of the kings of the 0 Dynasty that we know of today.

Apart from described hoard, the finds assemblage recovered from this part of the settlement was remarkably modest, though several elongated stone pendants (of agate and carnelian) and part of a copper artefact, probably a knife, were found here. As usual, ample quantities of pottery were discovered – including an exceptionally large number of whole vessels, alongside flint tools and stone grinders, pounders and quern fragments.

Of the remaining finds the most notable was the relatively large quantity of clay marbles, measuring c. 25-30 mm in diameter. Over 30 were recovered; they were of variously regular shape, some of them being almost polygonal. A number of the marbles were flattened. Small clay discs of c. 30-50 mm in diameter were also discovered.

Of particular note was a group of clay artefacts which may have served as spindle whorls or large beads. This assemblage, numbering 10 items, was the largest of its kind found at this site. These pieces were of a wide variety of shapes and had different sized hole diameters. The majority were spherical, though some were diamond-shaped. Their diameters ranged from 25 mm to 30 mm. Two examples are disc-shaped with a diameter of 40-50 mm, and were made from rounded pieces of thick-walled vessels with a hole drilled through them. Also worthy of mention are three small, rectangular tiles made from potsherds. One of these was fitted to a round, ceramic item, which had been fired after an impression of the tile had been made in it, the tile itself later being affixed in the impressed space. What purpose these artefacts served remains unclear. Clay was also used to make models of boats; it was probably the prows of these models that were discovered during excavation.

Seasons 2006 and 2007 were the 7th and 8th in the history of excavation on the cemetery situated in the southern part of Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha. The fieldworks were carried out in newly opened trenches labelled with respective are numbers: 45, 55, 65 and 75, all arranged in a row one after another along the N-S axis. As a result 30 burials were excavated subsequently numbered: 9, 16, 34-53, 55, 57, 58, 61, 62, 64-66 (Fig. 4). On the ground of pottery analysis, architectural or stratigraphical data and represented burial custom all graves in Tell el-Farkha were divided into 3 main chronological groups. It means that the preliminary pro-



Photo 4. Grave no. 9.

posed 4 categories of burials were reconsidered and – in the light of new discoveries – replaced with the chronological groups. They are presented below in greater detail using graves excavated in 2006 and 2007 as their illustration.

The group of so-called Protodynastic burials is represented by a single grave unearthed in 2006, although numerous examples are known from previous seasons. Basing on pottery analysis this group of burials should be dated from the Naquada IIIB period to Naquada IIIC1-2. These graves in their majority belonged to the middle class society of Tell el-Farkha, however, they reveal examples of both wealthy and pauper representatives. Economic status of the tombs owners is confirmed by differentiation in offerings assemblage. Most of these structures was built of mud bricks and what is more, they were apparently erected employing significant effort, carefully lined with mats and often secured with a massive superstructure. A small number of graves assigned to the group is represented also by simple pit burials devoid of offerings but usually lined with mats.

Grave no. 9 (Photo 4). This burial deserves attention because of its undisturbed condition, in which it was discovered, its interesting architecture and diverse offerings. Mats that inlayed walls of a very deep burial chamber (measuring 2.04 m long, 0.96 m wide and 1.29 m of maximum depth) were also perfectly preserved. Its massive mud brick superstructure (4.13 m long, 2.18 m wide) was built over visible rests of a mound of earth that filled the burial chamber in. The superstructure itself was oriented along the N-S axis with a small declination to the east. It was preserved to the height of over 1m and was nearly touching another neighbouring tomb's superstructure. Ca. 0.5 m beneath the superstructure's top and on its eastern side an external wall was built ca. 0.7 m wide and ca. 0.5 m high. The outer face of the wall had a wavy outline, while the whole wall was clearly separated from the superstructure with a light joint. It seems possible that the complete structure was thoroughly plastered in this way.

The burial chamber was trapezoid in its section, visibly narrowing to the bottom, walls were lined with mud bricks. An interesting set of offerings was deposited in the grave. 18 pottery vessels were grouped by the chamber's shorter walls – on one wine jar the *serekh* with the simplified royal name, probably of Narmer, was engraved. 9 cylindrical jars and 2 geometric greywacke palettes were placed on the body. Some carnelian beads were registered on the deceased right forearm – probably composing a bracelet. Among the most interesting findings from the tomb are also 2 stone bowls and a bone spoon found near the head of the 40-50 years old grave's resident⁴. Although the burial was undisturbed, the skeleton was

4 All skeletons were investigated by M. Kaczmarek

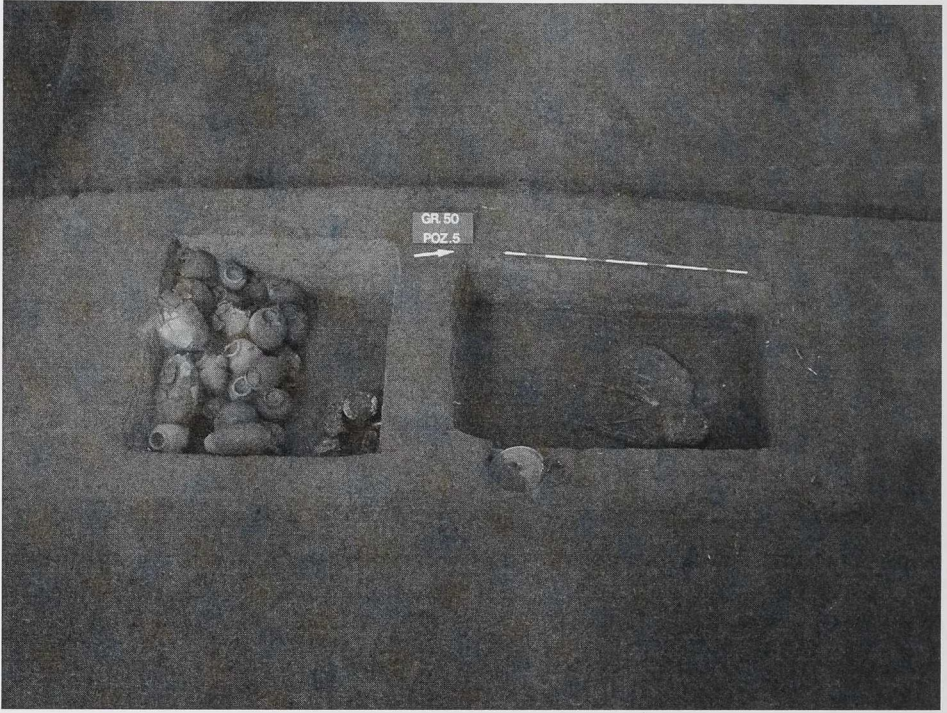


Photo 5. Grave no. 50.

badly preserved, legs in particular. The deceased was lying contracted on his left side, the head to the north. The body was resting on a mat on which in the back area a layer of most probably ochre was found.

The group of so-called Early Dynastic graves is represented by 13 examples excavated in 2006 and 2007. And again, it is pottery that enabled dating of this part of burials from Tell el-Farkha, that is from (late Dynasty I or even to early Dynasty II). Tombs assigned to this group are quite elaborated in their architectural form. Most of them preserved massive and probably freestanding superstructures of mud bricks. Their substructures in many cases were relatively deep and also divided into several chambers. The main difference in comparison to the previous group is the typical set of offerings – composed of numerous items but often repeating almost identical shape. As for today, it seems a rule that burials dated to this group concentrate in the south-eastern sector of the so-far excavated cemetery part.

Grave no. 50: its superstructure measured 4.92 m x 2.36 m and was preserved to the height of ca. 0.9m. It was a massive, very compact cover of light sand and

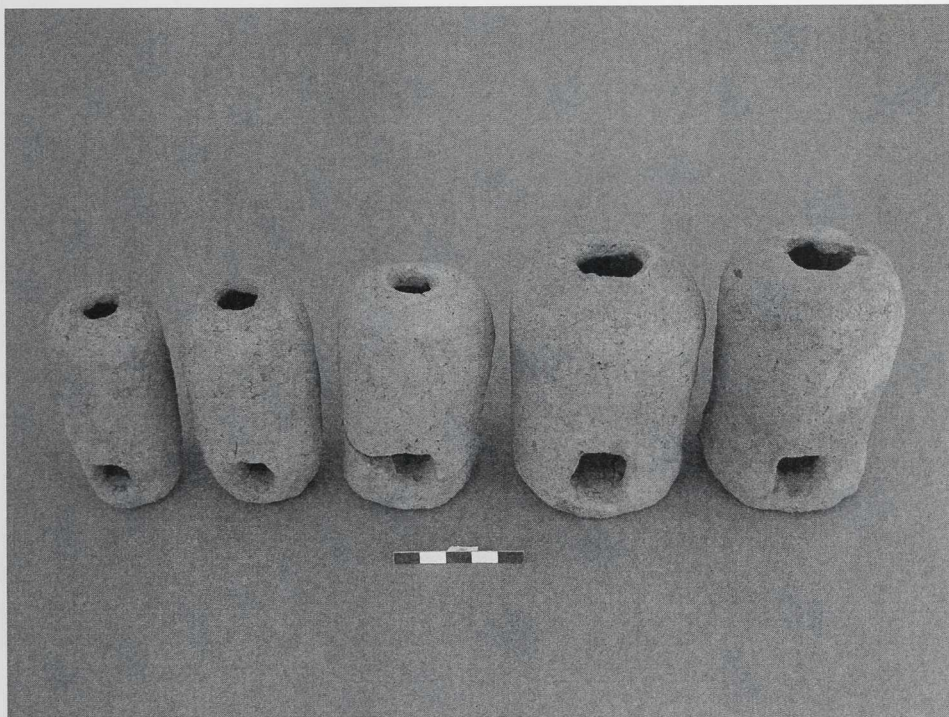


Photo 6. Granary models from the grave no 50.

mud bricks in a very regular rectangular shape, oriented almost ideal along the N-S axis. A clear break between the superstructure and the top of the substructure walls measuring ca. 0.4m of height was registered. The substructure composed of 2 mud brick-lined-chambers (1.5m x 0.86m wide x 0.79m of maximum depth and 1.25 m x 1.2 m x 0.92 m of maximum depth) and was slightly dislocated to the east (Photo 5). Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these both parts create the same structure. There was a deposit of 5 pottery objects found in the middle of the layer between the super- and substructure. Presently, these objects are interpreted as granary models (Photo 6).

The offerings were grouped along the southern wall of the smaller southern chamber – three layers of pottery jars in a very similar shape (35 when counted all together) as well as a deposit of 11 stone vessels concentrated in the chamber's north-eastern corner. One bowl was found on the top of the substructure walls, while a plate of alabaster, 1 jar and a pottery bowl in a niche in the eastern wall of the northern chamber. Directly by the body there were no objects registered. Both chambers were covered with some poorly preserved mats, also inlaid with



Photo 7. Grave no. 51.

the same material – parts found in the corners where mats were turned up on the walls belong to the best preserved.

The burial belonged to an adult man, who was resting tightly contracted on his left side, the head pointing to the north. Unfortunately, the state of bones' preservation was very weak.

Grave no. 51 is a puzzling structure (Photo 7). It is a rather small-sized burial in a pit (1.26 x 0.56m) lined with mud bricks oriented along the N-S axis with a small declination to the west. The deceased had been placed in a tightly contracted position on the left side, the head turned to the north. Offerings consisted of 8 pottery vessels, a deposit of 6 miniature stone vessels and a couple of beads of agate, faïence and pottery – 11 of them found inside pottery vessel 7. The stone objects were gathered close to the deceased face, while the pottery ones were lying by his/her feet and outside the burial chamber on the top of the substructure walls. Adjacent to the western wall of the subterranean part of the tomb, there was a puzzling structure of mud bricks and similar size to the actual burial chamber. There nothing but mud and a single hippopotamus tooth with processing traces was unearthed. The burial was covered with a mud-bricked superstructure. However, this part of the tomb has different orientation – still the N-S axis but with

visible declination to the east. What is more, the superstructure was erected above the actual burial chamber only and the side annex was left unprotected.

Grave no. 52 is a multiple burial, bones in a weak state of preservation deposited in an unclear position. The best preserved was skeleton no. 2 belonging to an adult woman (?) – a visibly anatomical contracted position on the left side, the head to the south, the left hand slightly moved from its original place. Over deceased no. 2 there was skeleton no. 1 (an adult woman?) – poorly preserved in an unclear position, her head was placed on a piece of a large pottery bowl. A fragment of pelvis and one leg most probably should also be attributed to the skeleton. Then, the worst preserved was skeleton no. 3 – only the skull and some very grated teeth of an adult man (?). The pit's outline was untraceable. A few offerings were found by the bodies: pottery fragments, a bead of faïence and, finally, a quern stone close to the second body's head. The burial (its total measurements are estimated as 0.86m long, 0.7m wide, 0.29m deep) was registered beneath narrow walls of structure no. 70 of a typically utility function. The scarce chronological data allow only tentatively attach the grave to the Early Dynastic group.

Grave no. 53 is an incomplete burial probably of an adult woman in contracted position, on her left side, the head to the north – only a fragment of pelvis and one leg was preserved. The inhumation was probably disturbed as a result of later building activity above the pit (walls of structure no. 70), it is even possible that originally the burial was not thoroughly anatomical. The pit itself (0.5m long; 0.36m wide; 0.09m deep) was nearly untraceable and its bottom was – as it seems – plastered with a thin layer of mud. The few pottery fragments found over the bones do not have to consist the grave offerings. Nevertheless, the poor state of the grave preservation disables any further opinions in the field, so only very tentative dating of the burial is possible.

Grave no. 55 is the only, fully excavated burial complex found in Tell el-Farkha. It comprised of a four-chamber-tomb with a brick superstructure surrounded by a perimeter wall, all measuring 9.16 m x 6.74 m (Photo 8). The superstructure was preserved to the impressive height of over 1.5m. It was constructed of dark mud bricks arranged in regular layers, that created the core of the structure, covered with an extra adjusting wall of sand-and-mud-bricks. Every third layer of bricks was interleaved with matting, most probably stabilizing the construction, similarly as the combination of walls built of two different types of bricks. Additionally, the eastern façade of the superstructure was decorated with two niches, one close to the northern corner, the second – to the southern one. The extremely high amount of rough pottery (mostly bread moulds) concentrated by the niches but

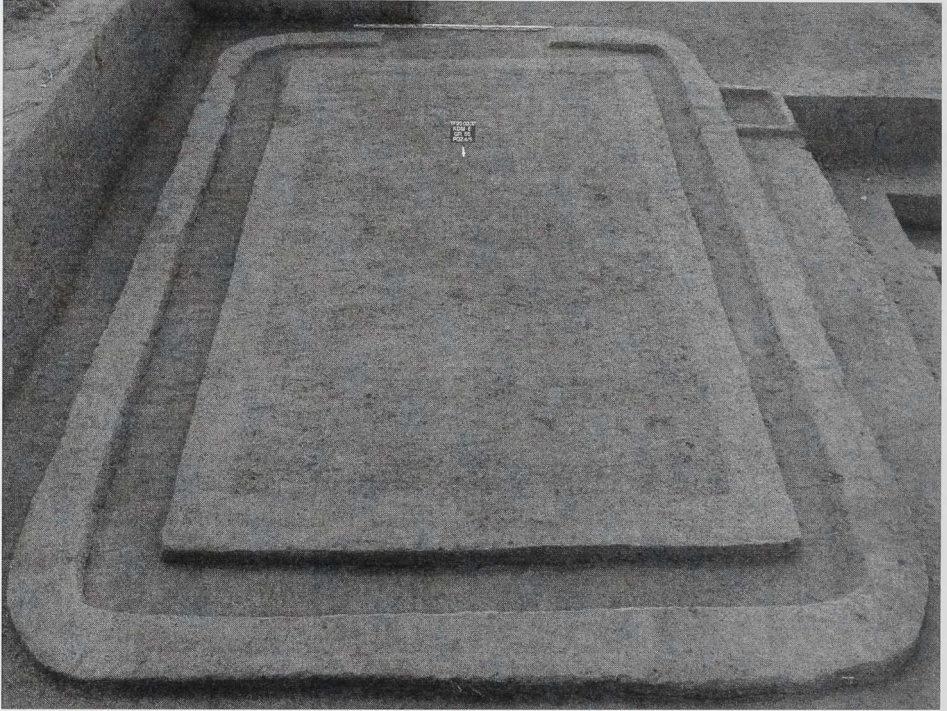


Photo 8. Superstructure of grave no.55.

within the perimeter wall suggests their significance probably to the cult of dead. The perimeter wall was ca. 0.30 m thick and much lower than the main structure. Its corners were clearly rounded and on the south a kind of entrance leading to the whole enclosure was visible. In addition, the extra wall was distant from the main façade for ca. 0.30 m, while by the eastern side for ca. 0.40m. The main body of the superstructure (ca. 8 m x 5.5 m) as well as the perimeter wall were perfectly shaped, carefully built and plastered. All these features point to the statement that this part of the burial was planned to be visible above the cemetery level. Beneath this part of the structure there was again a ca. 0.40 m layer of plain earth that covered the substructure. The subterranean part is also interesting: four chambers, beautifully preserved mats and over a hundred of items deposited as offerings: 51 pottery vessels, 20 vessels of stone (Photo 9), 2 copper harpoons and some ochre. The deceased was resting in a tightly contracted position on left side, the head pointing to the north. The burial chamber was the biggest in the substructure, the majority of grave goods were deposited in two side chambers and partially on the top of the subterranean walls in the southern part of the structure.



Photo 9. Grave no. 55. Stone vessels *in situ*.

Grave no. 64 is a small in size single-chamber-brick-structure (0.48 m x 0.37 m and 0.54 m of preserved height) comprising a simple child burial with no offerings but a single bead of carnelian. The body was covered with a mat. However, the interesting fact is that the small and poor structure was adjacent to the perimeter wall of large grave no. 55, so it is very likely that the burial in question should be regarded as an subsidiary one. And together graves nos 55 and 64 belong to one funeral enclosure.

The so-called Old Kingdom group of graves counts 16 simple pit burials registered in 2006. It is also the most homogenous in the cemetery. Dating of these graves is difficult as they usually reveal nothing but small fragments of pottery. However, in this case, their pottery date to the beginning of the Old Kingdom (Dynasties III-IV ?) can be confirmed by their high stratigraphic position – just beneath the surface and their range limited to the very top of the tell. Another novelty is a very simple burial custom characteristic of these inhumations – all bodies (many of them are babies and children) were found resting in straight position mostly on their right side, the head consequently pointing to the west. The localization, relatively good state of bones preservation and especially burial custom, so different from the earlier one, presented by these graves correspond to the



Photo 10. Grave no. 16.

final stage of the Tell el-Farkha settlement attested on the central tell.

Grave no. 16 (Photo 10) measured 1.7m long, 0.6m wide, 0.2 m of maximum depth and was oriented along the W-E axis. Its outline was only partially visible. The poor offerings (sickle blades, a grain (?), 2 pottery counters, a seal impression, a bead of faience) and the straighten position of the 30-35 years old man together confirm the Old Kingdom date of the burial.

Grave no. 35 is a 2-3 years old child burial, its regular outline was shaped as an oblong rectangular with a rounded western edge. The grave measured 0.98m x 0.30m and 0.18 m of maximum depth. The deceased was lying in a straight position on its right side, the head to the west and was devoid of any goods.

Grave no. 37 belonged to a 35-45 years old man resting in a straight position on his stomach and partially on his right side, his head was pointing to the west. The pit's outline was clearly visible, particularly in its eastern part – an oblong rectangular with rounded shorter walls. The pit measured 2 m long, 0.48 m wide, 0.17 m deep and was V-shaped on its section. The single piece of offering was a bead of limestone which was found close to the deceased feet.

Grave no. 47 is a 9 months old infant burial with clearly visible pit's edges measuring 0.4 m long x 0.2 m and 0.16 m of maximum depth. Bones were partially disorganized, probably even primarily it was not a burial in the fully anatomical position. The skull was turned to the south, while the whole grave was oriented along the NE-SW axis. The baby had no offerings of any type.

Grave no. 48 consists an interesting case. First, fieldworks revealed a loose scapula and a rib without any traceable outline of the grave or of any other bones. Then, 10 cm below, exactly beneath the scapula a skull was found and a level deeper an outline of the grave pit (1.54 m long; 0.4 m wide; 0.27 m deep). The head had been divided from the rest of the body just after the third cervical vertebra but without its damage. The skeleton was incomplete – one hand and the chest are missing. Since some parts of the body were found outside the grave pit, it seems possible that the burial was primarily in anatomical position, then disturbed not long after the funeral (the hand bones together with phalanges were found in their proper position). The body was oriented along the W-E axis and probably meant to rest in a straight position on its right side (found slightly turned on the stomach), the head pointing to the west. The 17-20 years old owner of the grave was devoid of any offerings.

Graves registered in the necropolis in Tell el-Farkha reflect early Dynastic history of the settlement. As far as it is possible to presently state the oldest burial represent the greatest variety in terms of their architectural form and offering assemblages, they also seem to be concentrated in the western part of the excavated area. The Early Dynastic group of graves comprises the biggest structures equipped with numerous pottery vessels and stone objects but also poor and very simple burials. Inhumations assigned to this group cluster in the south-eastern part of the cemetery as it is recognized today. Moreover, most of these graves cuts the older ones, so we probably deal with a distinct group of people, although of the same cultural origin. The youngest group of burials occupies the very top of the tell and is obviously different from the previous groups because of their homogenous and very simple burial custom and stratigraphical position. The overall situation on the cemetery is quite complicated, that is why we look forward further discoveries.

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