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Tell el-Farkha – stratigraphy of the Eastern Kom (N)

Excavations in the north-western part of the Eastern Kom started in 2001. Trench E94d was located in an area where the upper layers were destroyed by sebakhin. We hoped that we would very quickly reach the gezira sand and clarify the stratigraphy of that part of the site. But very soon we were stopped by the remains of a mud-brick construction (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2003: 86). In 2002 and 2003 the trench was extended to an area of 150 m² (trench E93 and E94ad; Fig. 1) and in 2004 the gezira sand was reached over the whole surface. This part of the kom differs from the southern one in that here there were no traces of a cemetery.

The excavations permit us to reconstruct the settlement and architectural phases in that part of the site. The lowermost settlement remains consisted of pits and post-holes and a series of furrows ranging in width from 20 cm to nearly 50 cm, demarcating a number of rooms. These linear features cover virtually the whole surface of the trench. The largest of the rooms outlined measures ca. 3 x 4 m, while the smallest has a surface area of barely more than 1 m² (Fig. 2). These structures, like those found in the Central and Western Kom (Chłodnicki 2005: 359; Ciałowicz 2005: 375) are contemporary with Naqada IIC-IID1).

The layer of silt over the gezira sand has a depth of 50 cm. A few small pits filled with lumps of pug and sometimes large amounts of pottery, as well as single layers of mud-bricks making up indistinct formations were discovered whilst excavating a silt deposit. Most of the trench was, however, occupied by layers of alluvium and backfill. Besides potsherds a miniature clay figurine of a hawk was found (Fig. 3). A shallow pit (10 cm deep) measuring 1.5 m in diameter was particularly interesting on account of its fill, which consisted of a brown soil intermixed with silt. This pit contained hundreds of flint and agate debitage. The number of agate fragments is quite unusual as, thus far, relatively few instances of it have been noted at this site. The pit was also found to contain



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.

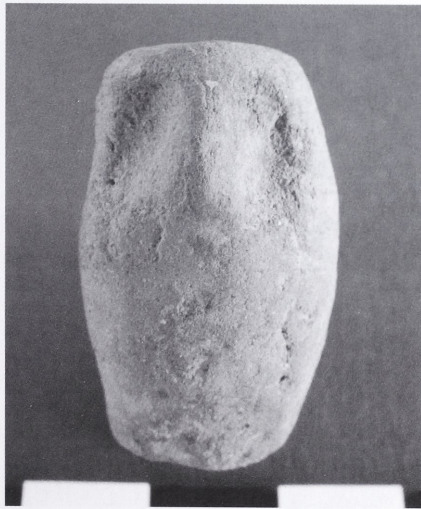


Fig. 3.

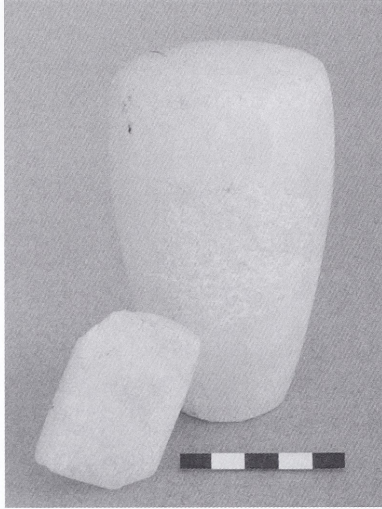


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

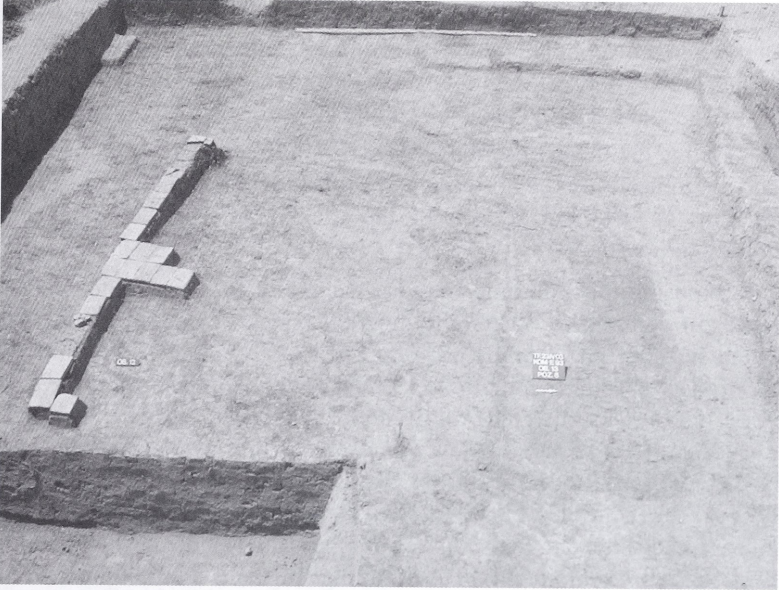


Fig. 6.

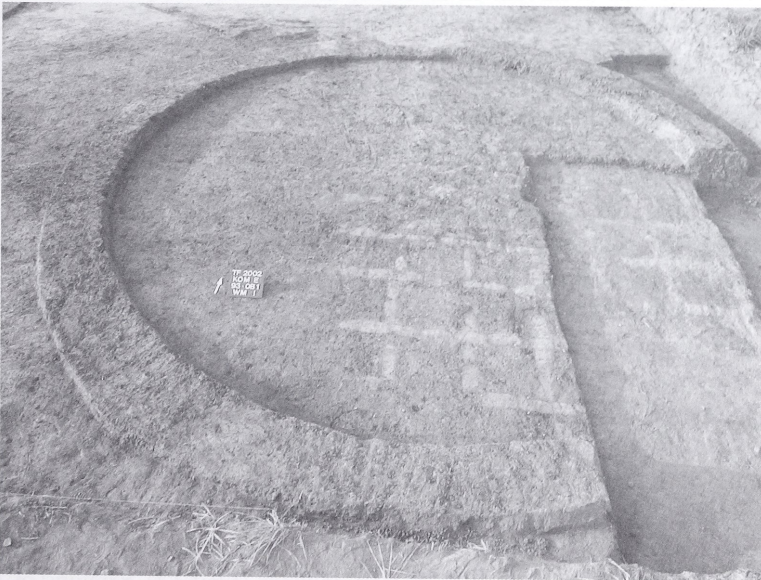


Fig. 7.

a flint knife and two unique quartz objects: a very well worked artefact in the shape of a truncated cone, which served as a hammer, and an elongated (broken) hexagonal object (Fig. 4). Judging by the pottery recovered from the pit it is probably associated with Naqada IID2 times.

Above that level described above, a solid mud-brick building was erected. Inside the trench only the northern part of the construction was preserved. A wall visible in the southern section of the trench indicated that the construction continues to the south.

Exposing this building was very important for the architectural history of the site. In contrast to other buildings excavated on the site, whose walls are oriented NE-SW, these walls are oriented exactly along a N-S and E-W axes. Most of the walls are two mud-bricks thick, although some walls have a width of 1.5 or 1 mud-bricks only. The rooms are of different sizes. The biggest is about 7 by, at least 5 m (we don't know yet the extension of the building to the west, Unit 52); the other rooms are from 6 x 3 m (Unit 49) to 3 x 2 m (Unit 49) and only 2 x 2 m (Unit 38). Inside the larger rooms the remains of ovens with pots inside were discovered. All pots are of the same kind, the bottom broken and preserved to different heights. This building (Fig 5) is the best preserved in levels 20-22 (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2005: fig 12). From level 19 upward destruction of the building was observed. In level 18, the northern walls closing rooms 49 and 64 are no longer existing. In level 16 the northern wall closing room 52 has disappeared. In level 15 only room no. 36 with its surrounding walls is still preserved as well as remains of the northern wall no. 54. In level 13 the last remains of the building disappear. In the southern section of the trench a wall is visible up to level 8, its height there being more than 1.5 m. The material recovered here does not differ significantly from that found anywhere else in the settlement and the pottery is typical for Phase 4 of Tell el-Farkha. It shows that the building was erected in Nagada IIIA1. At present it is difficult to interpret this complex of rooms. The solution to the problem may lie in the part of the building to the south of this trench (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2005: 63-66).

Above this building another construction was built (level 12-8). Its orientation NE-SW is similar to other buildings in Tell el-Farkha. It consists of several irregular rooms, surrounded by walls, mostly 1.5 bricks wide. The best outline of the building is visible in level 9. In a wall of the building (Unit 16) fragments of rectangular graywacke palettes were discovered (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2005: fig. 14).

In levels 7-8 the walls of the building are cut by two parallel rectangular features, measuring about 5 x 2 m. In one of them (Unit 12), remains of a floor made of red-brick tiles was discovered (Fig. 6). The tiles measured roughly 20 x 34 cm and were about 4 cm thick. They have been made specifically as floor

tiles, as is evidenced by their smoothed upper surfaces and rough undersides. An almost complete row of tiles at the south end of the room and some in the middle have survived. The rest of the room was filled with rubble of crushed tiles; a thin red stratum indicates that tiles have been removed there. The second one Unit (Nr. 13) was framed by thin mud-bricks and filled inside with red rubble; it may originally also have had a floor of red-brick tiles. The function of the floor is unknown. The interpretation is difficult, because the surrounding walls were demolished and the ground levelled. Red bricks do not occur either on the site of Tell el-Farkha itself nor on other Early Dynastic sites in the Nile Delta.

Directly above the features another unique building was established (Unit 1). It is roughly circular, and measures around 8 m in diameter. It consists of a wall two brick thick; the brick courses were variously arranged in different wall levels. The best preserved wall is in the eastern portion of the trench and survives to a height of about 50 cm, in contrast to the western end where it remains to a height of 20 cm only. Originally, the entire floor of the building was probably made up of panels whose sides measured approximately 60 cm. The western part of the floor is not preserved, whilst the eastern section survives to a depth of 1-10 cm (Fig. 7). The pottery recovered from inside the building was fairly non-diagnostic, consisting mostly of bread moulds datable to Naqada IIIc-d. The finds do not appear to bear any relation to the function of the building, and probably represent a backfill layer dating from the later phase of the tell's use. Similar ceramic material was also found outside the building. The building has no parallels in Egypt so its interpretation is difficult. Geophysical research on the Central Kom shows us a rounded structure of similar dimensions, located on the north-western edge of the kom. Maybe future excavations can help us to solve the problem of interpretation.

The surviving upper layers (A-C,1-4) comprise backfill deposits containing loose pottery dating to the Early Dynastic and the beginning of Old Kingdom times. No clear mudbrick constructions, only remains of some bricks, pits and fireplaces were discovered. Particularly noteworthy among the material of the upper layers are sealings with hieroglyphic inscriptions, dating to the First to Second Dynasty, and a complete copper bracelet (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2005: fig. 14, pl. XVII.2-3). In the trench we found stone beads, upper and lower grinding stones, flint sickleblades as well as fragments of flint knives and animal bones.

The pottery finds indicate that this area was settled by members of the Lower Egyptian culture and, after the short break in Nagada IID2 times, was intensively settled after the Nagada IIIA period. On the surface, some relics which may be of early Old Kingdom date, were found.

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