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Tell el-Farkha Necropolis in 2003

The necropolis of Tell el-Farkha has been excavated by the Polish expedition since 2001 (Chłodnicki et al. 2002). The pottery analysis indicates that the part of the cemetery examined in 2001-2003 is to be dated to dynasty 0 and the First Dynasty, what corresponds to the age of flourishing building activity noted at the site. During the first three campaigns (2001, 2002 and 2003) the fieldwork on the cemetery was concentrated on an area of 400 m², resulting in the discovery of a dozen or so graves. Three of these were explored in 2001 (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2001), the succeeding five in 2002 (Abłamowicz et al. 2004), while in the 2003 season the remaining two.

The hitherto recovered burials show considerable structural diversity. There are simple oval pits totally devoid of offering goods; rectangular mudbrick constructions with one-brick-wide walls; relatively rich graves with several chambers and still other large graves with thick mudbrick walls and massive superstructures. Most of the bodies were buried in a constricted position on their left side with the head towards the north-east. The anthropological analysis allows to define their sex and have a general idea about their age but more specified conclusions are difficult to draw because of the poor state of the bones' preservation (Kaczmarek & Skrzypczak in prep.).

Grave no. 4 (Fig. 1), a big two-chamber-tomb (13 x 2 m). It had been constructed for a 30-40 years old man, whose body was found in the bigger southern chamber lying on a kind of mudbrick-catafalque in a contracted position on his left side with the head turned to the north-east. The skeleton was unearthed in a position not entirely anatomical: crushed and dislocated skull, vertebrae in front of the face, phalanges thrown round the body. The deceased was offered a stone bowl and 36 pottery vessels (jars of medium dimension and rather small bowls) mostly concentrated in the smaller, northern chamber. Both rooms had been covered with mats, remains of which were unearthed in form of white fibres.



Fig. 1. Grave no. 4.



Fig. 2. Grave no. 5.



Fig. 3. Grave no. 6.

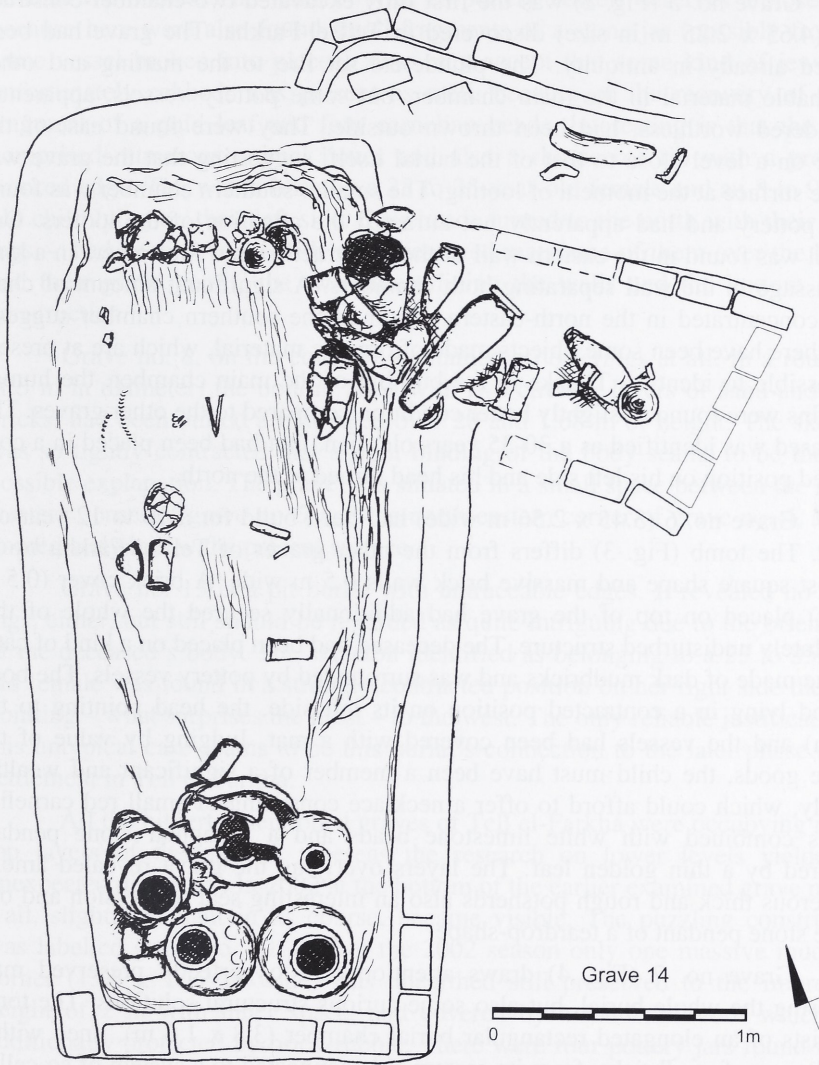


Fig. 4. Grave no. 7.

Grave no. 5 (Fig. 2) was the first fully excavated two-chamber-construction (4.65 x 2.25 m in size) discovered in Tell el-Farkha. The grave had been robbed already in antiquity. The plunderers set fire to the matting and other perishable material in the main chamber, but some pottery vessels, apparently considered worthless, had been thrown outside. They were found east of the grave on a level close to that of the burial itself, suggesting that the grave was above surface at the moment of looting. The smaller southern chamber was found with pottery and had apparently not attracted the attention of the looters. One vessel was found in the eastern wall of the construction and four others in a kind of passage in the wall separating both chambers. A significant amount of charcoal concentrated in the north-eastern corner of the southern chamber suggests that there have been some objects made of organic material, which are at present impossible to identify. Thanks to the burning of the main chamber, the human remains were found in slightly better condition compared to the other graves. The deceased was identified as a 30-35 years old man, that had been placed in a contracted position on his left side and his head turned to the north.

Grave no. 6 (3.45 x 2.56 m wide) had been build for a 10 to 12-year-old child. The tomb (Fig. 3) differs from the other graves of Tell el-Farkha by its almost square shape and massive brick walls 0.5 m wide. A brick cover (0.5 m thick) placed on top of the grave had additionally secured the whole of this absolutely undisturbed structure. The deceased had been placed on a kind of catafalque made of dark mudbricks and was surrounded by pottery vessels. The body (found lying in a contracted position on its left side, the head pointing to the north) and the vessels had been covered with a mat. Judging by value of the grave goods, the child must have been a member of a significant and wealthy family, which could afford to offer a necklace consisting of small red carnelian beads combined with white limestone beads and a triangular stone pendant covered by a thin golden leaf. The layers overlying the grave revealed among numerous thick and rough potsherds also an interesting seal impression and one more stone pendant of a teardrop-shape.

Grave no. 7 (Fig. 4) draws attention due to perfectly preserved mats covering the whole burial, but also some curious structural solutions. The tomb consists of an elongated rectangular burial chamber (3.8 x 1.6 m), lined with a single row of mudbricks, from its eastern side connected to a system of so-called "annexes" (small mudbrick chambers creating additional space for grave goods). 40 pottery vessels have been found in this grave, despite the fact that it was already robbed in antiquity. This caused a certain disorder which is especially noticeable in the position of crushed pots unearthed in the "annex". The largest jars had been placed in the southern part of the chamber, the smaller vessels in the northern part and in one of the so-called "annexes" as well as around and

beneath the bodies. The “annex” with 16 pottery vessels deserves a closer look because here were also found small fragments of a stone jar (possibly from the same vessel broken into pieces). One may accept that some kind of jewellery, unfortunately robbed, was present as well, because of the recovery of a tiny fragment of a gold leaf and four carnelian beads. Interesting is that the grave comprised numerous animal bones and also a rhinoceros rib with a probably worked edge. The whole burial – a 25 to 35-year-old female and an 8 to 9-year-old child lying on their left side, their heads turned to the north with their offerings – had been covered with well preserved mats, one of them over the bodies and their grave goods, the two others lining the walls and the bottom of the construction.

Grave no. 8, on the contrary, contained no offerings at all. In a round pit (1.3 m in diameter) the bottom lined with two circular layers of sand-and-mud-bricks, had been buried a man aged over 20 and 1.68 m of height. The skeleton was so tightly contracted that a tight binding of the body seams to be the only possible explanation. The grave was situated in a small space between the south-western corner of grave no. 7 and the north-eastern corner of grave no. 4, almost immediately below the present surface.

Grave no. 13 is a pit burial with untraceable edges. It revealed no offerings, either, but still should be regarded as quite intriguing due to the orientation of the deceased's body. The skeleton identified as belonging to a 25 to 35-year-old female was found in a strongly contracted position on her right side the head pointing – what surprises the most – to the west. The only reliable justification of this untypical case seems to be this burial's connection to the later phase of the settlement in Tell el-Farkha.

All the hitherto mentioned graves of Tell el-Farkha were occupying nearly top layers of the mound, whereas the research on lower levels yielded an unexpected discovery. In 2002 at the bottom of the earlier examined grave no. 2 a wall, slightly deviant in its course, became visible. The puzzling construction was labelled grave no. 10. During the 2002 season only one massive mudbrick corner (1.06 x 1.17 m wide) was unearthed still preserved to the impressive height of 2 m with inner space, and covered by a mudbrick roof which was additionally protected by brick-rubble. There were four pottery jars found inside the structure in a so-called “chamber”. During the following field campaign the so-called roof level on the surface of the previously delimited trench was exposed revealing a construction of monumental size erected with great precision and splendidly preserved – most likely – for funeral use. There is no doubt that there has been discovered the biggest edifice of this kind related to the Early Dynastic period known from the Nile Delta. The presently unearthed part of the structure is 7 m wide and 8 m long, the entire size of the building is still hard to estimate.

The stratigraphy of the kom indicates that the above-mentioned graves had damaged the big structure, having been dug into its upper layers. Small walls – hardly perceptible at the beginning of the exploration process – were becoming clearer and thicker with every succeeding layer. The enclosing rooms filled up with brick-rubble became more distinct they, until they all transformed into an arrangement equal to the hitherto recovered corner. The eastern edge of the construction deserves particular attention, as it consists of an amazingly regular wavy outline. Structural details of the edifice (solid, thick walls build of regular, one-sized bricks with spaces in between filled with rubble) are clearly visible on a cross-sections. In the northern trench from season 2003 the rubble filling by the big construction's walls is marked with a distinct bright patch, where the younger, Early Dynastic graves were found. The form of the edifices' exterior wall is noteworthy. It consists of an inner and outer part, clearly separated by a joint, tightly fitting, forming the already mentioned wavy outline. A few fire-places sunk into the walls of the building should be regarded as of a younger date.

Finding the answers to the many questions concerning this interesting structures must wait for future field seasons. Judging by the unearthed corner there are still 2 m left to the level of the big construction's foundations, unfortunately, it is difficult to say how large the area really is.

Hypothesis are not be easy to verify because of the thickness of the layers concentrated over the ceiling of the construction, frequently packed with smaller, but also interesting burials. A good picture of this situation is the, only in part excavated, grave no. 14, which revealed two pottery vessels and a human skull inside one of them. So the composition as a whole creates a complicated, though intriguing mosaic.

And finally it is worth to mention some of small find recovered in the cemetery: an owl-shaped piece of clay, a small stone pendant surmounted by the representation of a hawk and the handle of a ceremonial knife of hippopotamus bone beautifully carved. It should also be noted that the layers overlying the uppermost burial structures are full of potsherds, mainly bread moulds and so-called "cornets", as well as fragments of grinding stones, grinders, amulets, pendants and seal impressions, which may indicate some kind of funerary cult practised at Tell el-Farkha.

References

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Introduction

The problem of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts in the 4th and 3rd millennium BC has been a hot research subject since 1955 when K. Bruhn (1955: 1-16) published his controversial paper on 'The Earliest Record of Egypt's Military Penetration into Asia'. Since then the number of Egyptian artifacts on Southern Levantine sites dated to Chalcolithic and Early and Southern Bronze Age artifacts on Egyptian sites dated to Pre- and Protodynastic period has been constantly growing. The new discoveries cause fierce discussions among scientists and make them revise or put new interpretations of the nature of these interactions (for the Lev. Andelovic 1995, van den Brink 1997: 343-416; Levy & van den Brink 2003: 1-8).

The discoveries made during the last few years, especially in the Nile Delta (e.g. Tell el-Farkha, Bahariya, Maadi) and Israel (e.g. Tel-el-Yahud, Nahal Tillah) have shown us that the nature of Egyptian-Canaanite contacts from its beginning in 4th millennium was more complex than expected in the beginning (Cham 2000: 14-19; 2004: 307-317; Furlong 2003: 165-170; Hartung 2004: 112-150). New studies on this subject propose dynamic interpretations and introduce a division into different phases of development of Egyptian-Southern Levantine relationships (Levy & van den Brink 2003: 18-21; de Miroskowi 2004: 35-47; Wain 1999: 1213-1231). In my opinion the most accurate division was proposed by T. Levy and E. van den Brink (2003: 18-21; fig. 2).

It is based on the cultural dynamics of both regions: Pre- and Proto-Dynastic Egypt and Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I South Levant; in addition