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Egyptian-Southern Levantine Interaction in the 4th and 3rd Millennium B.C. - A View from Tell el-Farkha

Introduction

The problem of Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts in the 4th and 3rd millennium BC has been a hot research subject since 1955 when Y. Yadin (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 EBI and Southern Levantine 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 on (Fig. 1; eg. Anđelcović 1995; van den Brink 1992: 345-476; Levy & van den Brink 2003: 3-38).

The discoveries made during the last few years, especially in the Nile Delta (eg. Tell el-Farkha, Buto, Maadi) and Israel (eg. Lod, Tell es-Sakan, Nahal Tillah) have shown us that the nature of Egyptian-Canaanite¹ contacts from its beginning in 4th millennium was more complex than expected in the beginning (Braun 2003: 174-189; 2004: 507-517; Faltings 2003: 165-170; Hartung 2004: 337-356). 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 Miroshedji 2003: 39-47; Watrin 1998: 1215-1226). 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 Protodynastic Egypt and Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I South Levant; in addi-

¹The South Levant and Canaan will be used interchangeably.

MILITARY CONQUEST	Yadin 1955; Oren 1973; Yevin 1960; 1968)
TRADE	Amirian 1970; 1974; Ben-Tor 1982; 1986; Gophna 1987; 1992)
COLONY	Andelcovic 1995; Brandl 1992; Gophna 1992; Porat 1986/7)
SYMBOLIC ORGANIZATION	Dessel 1991; 2001; Joffe 1991)
DYNAMIC INTERPRETATION	de Miroschedji 2003; Harrison 1993; Watrin 1998; Levy & van den Brink 2003;)

Fig. 1. Different theories explaining Egyptian-Southern Levantine Interactions.

ELI 1	Lower Egyptian Maadi-Buto culture	Chalcolithic Southern Levant	c. 3900 BC
ELI 2	Lower Egyptian Maadi-Buto culture	EB IA Southern Levant (Wadi Gaza Site H; Afridar, Area G)	c. 3650 BC
ELI 3	Upper Egyptian Nagada IIc-d culture	Early EB IB (Azor Burial cave)	c. 3650-3300 BC
ELI 4	Nagada IIIa2 (U-j/MAO)	Middle EB IB Southern Levant (Tel Erani, Str. C)	c. 3300 BC
ELI 5	Nagada IIIb-c1	Late EB IB Southern Levant (post Tel Erani C)	c. 3100 BC
ELI 6	Nagada IIIc2-3	Eb II Southern Levant	> c. 2900 BC

Fig. 2. The phases of Egyptian-Levantine Interaction (ELI) proposed by T. Levy and E. M. C. van den Brink (2003:tab.1.7).

PHASE 1	NAGADA II C - II D1	ELI 2
PHASE 2	beginning NAGADA II D2	ELI 3
PHASE 3	NAGADA II D2 (III A1?)	ELI 4
PHASE 4	NAGADA III A1-III B	ELI 5
PHASE 5	NAGADA III B-III C1	
PHASE 6	DYNASTY 1-2	-
PHASE 7	DYNASTY 3-5 (?)	-

Fig. 3. Chronology of Tell el-Farkha and its correlation to Egyptian-Levantine Interaction phases.

tion, it shows a very wide political, social and economic context of each proposed Egyptian-Levantine Interaction phases. For the purpose of my analyses I co-relate ELI phases with occupational phases at Tell el-Farkha (Fig. 3).

It is based on the cultural dynamics of both regions: Pre- and Protodynastic Egypt and Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I South Levant; in addition, it shows a very wide political, social and economic context of each proposed Egyptian-Levantine Interaction phases. For the purpose of my analyses I co-relate ELI phases with occupational phases at Tell el-Farkha (Fig. 3).

A view from Tell el-Farkha (1998-2003)

Tell el-Farkha is considered as a very important point in the settlement system of the Nile Delta in Pre-, Proto- and Early Dynastic period (Fig. 3). Although we are still going on to understand organization of the site and its chronology, there is no doubt that it took part in Egyptian-Canaanite interactions (Chłodnicki et al. 2003: 663-119; Chłodnicki 2004: 357-370; Ciałowicz 2004: 371-388).

Although the number of Southern Levantine pottery fragments found on the site until 2003² is not great, they were registered among materials of the first five occupational phases. Their lack in layers dated to late Early Predynastic and Old Kingdom periods (phases 6 and 7) could be caused the lost of its significance of the settlement in the Nile Delta settlement system.

During pottery analyses I followed the description of EB I pottery made by Eliot Braun³ (2002) and his regional periodization of EB I by ceramic horizons (Fig. 4).

North	South	Date BC	Egypt
Latest Chalcolithic			Nagada I
„Lost Horizon”	Latest Chalcolithic	to ca. 3500	Nagada II
Early EBI	Initial/Early EBI	ca. 3500	Nagada IIIa-b
Developed EBI	Developed EBI	ca. 3300	Nagada IIIc-d/Dyn 0
Late EBI	Late EBI	Ca. 3000	Dynasty 0/1

Fig. 4. Regional periodization of Early Bronze Age I by Ceramic Horizons (Braun 2002).

² All sherds considered as imports from the South Levant found after 2003 are still under analysis.

³ I would like to thank Eliot Braun from Israel Antiquity Authority for offering access to his unpublished manuscript of Early Bronze Age I pottery.

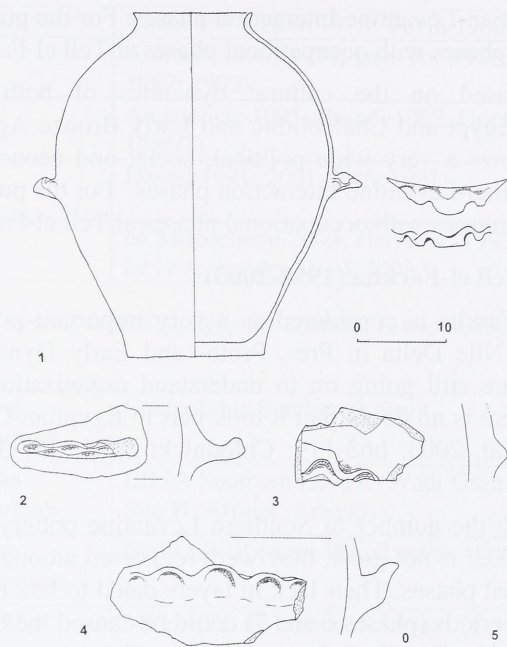


Fig. 5. Southern Levantine pottery at Tell el-Farkha (1, 4 – Kom W, drawings by M. Jucha; 2,3 – Kom C, drawings by A.Mączyńska).

Southern Levantine pottery at Tell el-Farkha

In a group of Southern Levantine pottery the most numerous are thumb indented ledge-handles with piecrust like edge often referred to as “synonymous” with Early Bronze Age in the South Levant (Amiran 1969: 36, pl. 8; Braun 2002). One of them was discovered among materials of phase 1 connected to middle Lower Egyptian Culture⁴ (ELI 2) (Fig. 5.2).

The matrix and color of the clay was different from alluvial Nile or marl clay. It was light yellowish-brown in color and as a temper medium round grains of quartz were added (ca. 20%) (Mączyńska 2003: 220). Analogous ledge handles are known from numerous EB I sites such as Ai (Marquent-Krause 1949:

⁴ According to the division of Lower Egyptian culture proposed by K. Ciałowicz (Chłodnicki et al. 2002:66-67).

pl.XXXVII:1432), Beth Shan (Fitzgerald 1935: pl. II:5), Jericho (Garstang 1935: pl. XX), Lachich (Tufnell 1958: 149, pl.11:28-32). Furthermore, in the transitional layer between Lower Egyptian and Nagada cultures (phase 2 – ELI 3) an almost complete jar with two ledge-handles, typical for secondary phase of Early and Late Southern EBI was found (Fig. 5.1). Analogous vessels are known from many sites in the South Levant, eg. Horvat 'Illin Tahtit (Braun 2002: fig. 18/22, 19/8). Another fragment of pottery found in layers of phase 2 is a bowl made of very soft cream clay with stains of red paint on the outer surface (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6.

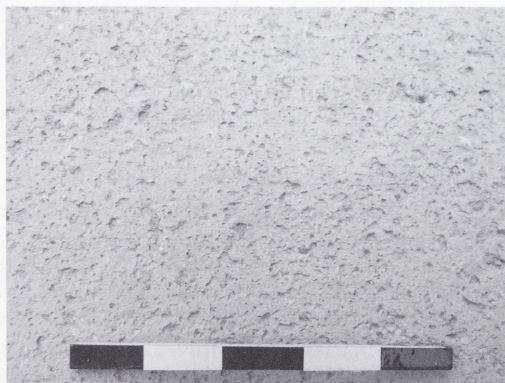


Fig. 7.

Its fabric is completely different from Egyptian. It was made of soft, cream-colored clay with coarse crushed pottery added as a temper (Jucha 2001: 232). This form was rather popular in whole EB I and it is difficult to date it back precisely. Additionally, from the same layers a few sherds made of very soft clay tempered with coarse mineral temper (ca. 10-15%), reddish yellow in color were found. Their fabric is similar to that of the jar from phase 2 mentioned above (Fig. 7).

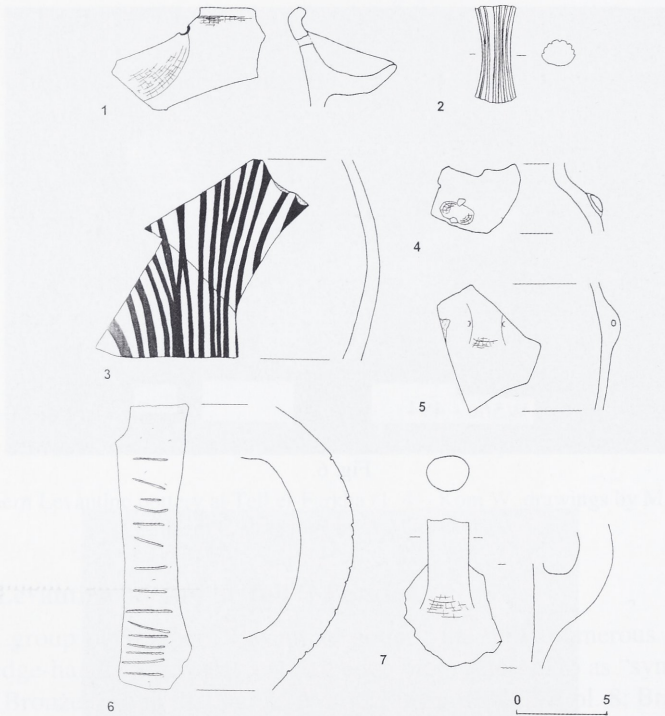


Fig. 8. Southern Levantine pottery at Tell el-Farkha (1, 3-5 – Kom C; 2, 6, 7 – Kom E, drawings by A.Mączyńska)

As far as pottery of phase 3 is concerned, until 2003 only imported ledge handles were registered. However in this period beside Levantine handles there are Egyptian handles as well (Fig. 5.3-4) (Jucha 2001: 232, tab. 106.1-3). It is a result of adaptations of foreign forms to local pottery tradition. Although this

process has not been explained so far, locally made handles confirm a new stage of Egyptian-Southern Levantine interactions (Braun 2005: 141-142).

The most numerous findings of Palestinian ware came from layers dated back to Nagada III period (phase 4-5). Apart from ledge handles well represented in older layers, new forms of vessels were registered. A fragment of a jar with a spout – a bowl-like top, pierced by a narrow hole was discovered (Fig. 8.1). Although in most cases these types of jars were painted with net pattern, on this fragment there are no traces of such decoration. Similar jars are known from Tell el-Fara'ah in the north, Ai and Palmahim Quarry in the south during middle southern EBI (Amiran 1969: pl. 11/25; Marquet-Krause 1949: fig. LXVII:4.932). Another fragment of a jar is decorated with distinctive a type of pattern called "Pajama style" (Fig. 8.3). It became popular in Middle Southern EBI and continued into EB II. The surface of this fragment was coated with bright white lime and then painted with narrow, vertical red stripes. Vessels decorated with this kind of pattern are known from Tel Erani C in Israel (Kempinski & Gilead 1991: fig. 12:16,18) and in the U-j Tomb at Umm el-Qaab in Egypt (Hartung 2001: Taf. 64).

The pottery from Erani C horizon is easily identifiable also by special decoration on handles (Braun 2002). At Tell el-Farkha two such pieces – a small longitudinally segmented handle (Fig. 8.2) and a handle with horizontal slashes (Fig. 8.6) – were registered. The first handle was made of brown clay with small grains of quartz as a temper. The paste of the other one was tempered with straw and mid-sized quartz (both 10%). Similarly decorated handles were found in Nahal Qanah (Gopher & Tusk 1996: fig. 4.31:19) and Hartuv 2 (Mazar & de Miroshedji 1996: fig. 19:19).

Beside materials typical for the southern horizon of EBI some findings from the northern EBI were found too. The most interesting findings include three rims, a fragment of a neck and a fragment of a body belonging to storage jars found in the same trench, all decorated with a grain wash decorative technique (Fig. 9.6-8). All are brown in color and tempered with medium sized grains of sand. This type of vessels was the most popular in the Middle Northern EBI (at En Shadud), but it also continued on into late Northern EBI (Braun 1985: fig. 20:8-9,11,13; 2002: fig. 8:1-4;).

A teapot spout covered with red slip and burnished found in the same layer is also typical for the Late Northern EBI (Fig. 9.5). Teapots with similar spouts are known from Tel Kitan (Braun 2002: fig. 11:9,13). Sometimes the surface of such vessels is decorated with a burnished net pattern, which was very well elaborated in this period. Only one sherd from Tell el-Farkha bears this decoration. It is a fragment of a shallow bowl with almost vertical walls. Its internal and external surfaces are burnished in a net pattern (Fig. 9.4).

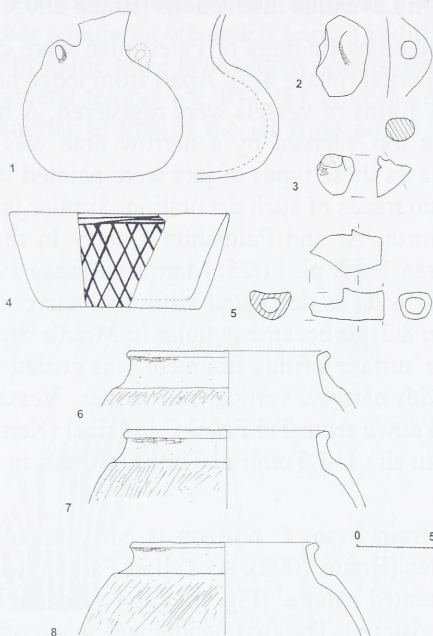


Fig.9. Southern Levantine pottery at Tell el-Farkha (1- Kom W, drawings by M. Jucha; 2-8 – Kom C, drawings by A. Mączyńska).

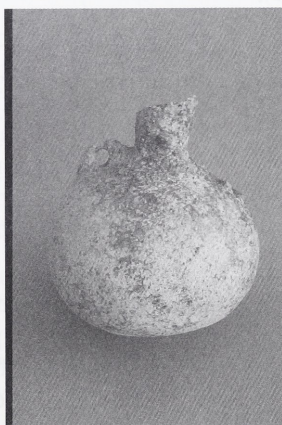


Fig. 10.

During the excavation at Tell el-Farkha some fragments of Palestinian sherds popular during whole EB I period were found too. An almost complete amphoriskos with a long neck, a pear-like body and a flat base and only one preserved lug handle was discovered in the building 115 on Western Kom dated to phase 5 (Fig. 9.1; Fig. 10) (Jucha 2003: 193, fig. 13:8). This form is typical for the Southern EBI horizon, but it is impossible to date it relatively because similar vessels are known mostly from tomb deposits (Ai) (Braun 2002; Marquet-Krause 1949: LXVII.41.986; LXXI.770).

Among other unstratified EB I pottery there are fragments of two loop handles (Fig. 8.7; 9.3), gray in color, made of compact clay tempered with very small amounts of fine and medium sand, a lug handle reddish yellow in color made of very soft paste tempered with calcareous temper (Fig. 9.2), two small lug handles made of compact clay brown in color with very small grains of sand as a temper (Fig. 8.4-5). A few sherds of a holemouth jar tempered with calcite well represented in the Southern Levantine EBI were found too. All these fragments were found among materials of phases 4 and 5.

Summary

To summarize the above, it is quite certain that the settlement at Tell el-Farkha and its inhabitants were involved in the exchange with the South Levant from its beginning in the Nagada IIC to the end of Nagada III period when the settlement was partly abandoned. At the current state of our research we cannot say how these relationships were organized. The findings do not suffice for saying what goods were exchanged and how. The pottery presented above was imported not because of its fabric, shape or decoration but mostly because of its contents. Additionally, we have to remember that the exchange had to include (included?) not only material items but also ideas and information. These subjects are really difficult or even impossible to study on the basis of material alone remains of human activities in the past. The problems with identifying ethnicity from pottery were presented by E. Braun (2005: 140-154). On the other hand we cannot leave all collected data unexplained. When studying Egyptian-Southern Levantine contacts it is possible to use all interpretation and models proposed so far to "sketch" one of the possible explanations. All findings from Tell el-Farkha seem to be interesting for all who are involved in Egyptian-Southern Levantine interaction studies. But we still do not have enough evidence to make an interpretation satisfying for everyone. The model proposed below is based on the findings from Tell el-Farkha and published data concerning organization of Egyptian-Canaanite contacts (Andelcović 1995; Braun 2003: 173-189; de Miroschedji 2003: 39-57; Levy & van den Brink 2003: 3-38). Further works with new discoveries could confirm, deny or modify it.

At the beginning of the settlement in N IIC-IID1 period (phase 1 - ELI 2) the exchange with the Southern Levant had to be rather a private enterprise of a group of people, without a central place of exchange and without or with only a few intermediaries. Number of imports from this period is very limited, but it could result from only partial excavation of the site. Additionally, at Tell el-Farkha no traces of presence of foreign people as in Buto or Maadi have been found so far (Faltings 2003: 165-170; Hartung 2004: 337-356). Still, we cannot exclude this possibility until excavation works are completed.

When the rise of chiefdoms begun after the "expansion" of Nagadan culture to Lower Egypt, the exchange started to develop towards a wider scale. From the end of NII the exchange had to be getting more and more centralized. In this period Egyptians started to control exchange and a set of exchange networks (phase 3 – ELI 4). Although this process is not well visible based on Southern Levantine findings at Tell el-Farkha, some other features registered on the site indicate important changes connected with political and/or economic organization.

The Nagadan mud-brick complex discovered at the Western Kom in 1999 and 2000 with its, for this period, enormous size, many small findings used for counting purposes (pellets, cons), undecorated seals and a few Palestinian ledge-handles found inside could be connected with commerce. It is interpreted as a place of residence of a great man – the governor or administrator for one of Egypt's early princes or kings, who was responsible for trade with the South Levant and Upper Egypt. Although this theory still requires more evidence, we cannot exclude that Tell el-Farkha was an important commercial center taking part in Egyptian-Canaanite exchange (Chłodnicki & al. 2002: 71-72, Ciałowicz 2004: 379-380).

In phase 4 and 5 (ELI 5) of Tell el-Farkha, numbers of imported items grew. For the first time we registered imports from Northern EBI on the site. It refers to the expansion of Egyptian influences in the South Levant and Egyptian exploitation of this region. In the course of Dynasty 0 the Egyptian colony in Canaan was established. During this period the most intense interaction can be seen, especially in late EBI. It is not only seen at Tell el-Farkha but also on other sites in Lower and Upper Egypt (Buto, Minshat Abu Omar, Hierakonpolis Umm el-Qaab). Moreover, we have to remember that this is the period when the Egyptian State emerged and many important social, political and probably ideological processes took place. At Tell el-Farkha on the same place as the Nagadan residence of phase 3 on the Western Kom, a new building was erected. According to all findings from this area (figures, rattles, miniature vessels, beads) dated to Dynasty 0 and the beginning of the First Dynasty, it is interpreted as an adminis-

trative center connected with a temple or a shrine which had to be involved in exchange with the South Levant (Ciałowicz 2004: 384-385) .

In late Early Dynastic Period (EB II) the organization of Egyptian-Canaanite contacts changed and the maritime trade route probably became prevailing over the Northern Sinai route (de Miroshedji 2003: 45). It is very clearly seen at Tell el-Farkha where the exchange stopped in the middle of the First Dynasty. In the same period the settlement was partially abandoned. Its social, political and economic function was taken over by other settlements in the vicinity (eg. Mendes). This event is still not clear and we hope that during the next couple of seasons it will be explained.

Finally, I would like to state that all my observations should be treated as preliminary. They are still being studied and additionally they depend on the results of our next excavations at Tell el-Farkha. I hope that further works and more advanced analysis of raw materials, especially fabric of imported pottery will help us to answer many questions and confirm hypotheses concerning Egyptian-Levantine interactions.

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