Chapter 10

Lower Egyptian communities and their interactions with Southern Levant in the 4th millennium BC. Summary

In the 5th millennium BC the Delta saw the emergence of the first communities whose cultural traditions differed from those of Epipaleolithic hunter-gatherers. The said groups settled in rich ecological niches, such as the areas near the Qarun Lake or the boundaries of the Delta (Merimde Beni-Salame and Wadi Hof), and adapted a new economy model based on agriculture and animal breeding. The research held thus far in the Delta area revealed the presence of three such groups: the Faiyumian, the Merimde and the el-Omari cultures. Their most important common feature was the new subsistence strategy (agriculture and animal breeding), as well as semi-permanent or sedentary lifestyle.

Most probably the new economy model and the related lifestyle were introduced to Lower Egypt from the east. The concept of growing plants and breeding animals may have reached the Delta between the 6th and the 5th millennium BC. It resulted either from the influx of a group of immigrants or from economic exchange with the Levant. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the process of adaptation of agriculture and animal breeding has not been explained yet. The diet of Epipaleolithic hunter-gatherer communities was mostly based on semiaquatic animals and fish meat, as well as on grains and roots of wild plants. The availability of those foods depended *inter alia* on the level of the Nile. In the Holocene there were both wet and dry periods. Research in the Delta area has shown that in the 5th millennium BC the Nile level was very low (Wetterström 1993: 225). As a result, Delta communities might have been forced to search for new means of subsistence, less dependent the river. Farming and animal breeding were originally merely an addition to hunting and gathering. They were probably treated as a protective measure to fall back on during draught or famine. The first Neolithic communities from the Delta continued to hunt and gather food for the next 1000 years. The emergence of the first agricultural communities is not the only unexplained issue. Similarly unknown are the relationships between the early agricultural communities. Although absolute datings sometimes indicate temporal coexistence of the three cultural units discovered so far, all of them is treated as a separate entity.

The Lower Egyptian culture is an archeological unit whose reach most probably covered the entire Lower Egypt. Its first groups appeared approximately in the beginning of 4th millennium BC in such places as Maadi and Buto. However, the genesis of this culture

remains unknown (Mączyńska 2011). One may hope that a research project currently held in Sais, where materials of the Merimde and Lower Egyptian cultures have been discovered in adjacent layers, will shed more light on this issue (Wilson *in press*).

Unlike the Faiyumian culture, the Merimde and the el-Omari cultures represented only by findings from eponymic sites, Lower Egyptian settlements and cemeteries are scattered all over the Delta area along water courses. The southernmost Lower Egyptian site is Sedment, located some 500km south of the Mediterranean coast. Even though our knowledge of this culture continues to be based on materials from 24 archeological sites (Tab. 1), it is incomparably greater than our knowledge of early Predynastic cultures from the Lower Egypt.

The vastness of the area occupied by the Lower Egyptian culture contributed to its internal diversity. In some way, each of the sites constitutes a separate unit, some of its features being typical for the entire culture and some being quite unique, possibly as a result of the group's adaptation to local conditions. Such a situation most probably occurred in Buto. The analysis of flint inventories showed that Buto's community used a set of implements that differed from the repertoire of tools found on other Lower Egyptian sites. Backed pieces, truncated blades and retouched blades were useful first of all in exploring aquatic environments. On the other hand, sickle blades, a basic tool used in agriculture well known *e.g.* from Tell el-Farkha, have never been found in Buto.

The diversity of the Lower Egyptian culture is not only geographical, but also chronological. The three phases in the culture's development were identified first of all on the basis of pottery and changes in the social and ideological system (Tab. 3).

Lower Egyptian communities were the first ones in the Delta to rely on agriculture and animal breeding. Hunting, gathering and fishing played a marginal role in their subsistence strategies. In the 4th millennium BC the Nile Delta offered highly favorable conditions for agriculture and animal breeding. Periodical inundations of the Nile irrigated and fertilized the soil, and warm and humid climate was conducive to vegetation. The growing cycle of the two main crops (wheat and barley) was determined by the inundations. Grains were sown most probably between October and November (when high water receded) and harvest took place in March, before flooding began. High soil salinity in the Delta made barley the crop of choice, due to its resistance to salt. Between October and March, areas not used for growing plants served as pastures for cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. The diet of Lower Egyptian communities was mostly based on products made of wheat and barley (flour, beer), papilionaceous plants (lentils, peas) and flax (oil), as well as on the meat of domesticated animals (mostly pigs) and milk products (cattle, goat and sheep breeding). Despite the fact that the Nile and riverside vegetation in the Delta offered great amounts of fish and fowl, Lower Egyptians used those resources only occasionally. Osteological analyses showed that quality was the decisive factor in selecting foods offered by nature. Out of the high number of fish species available in the Nile, fishermen would only catch catfish (*Synodontis*), due to its great amount of meat tissue. Reliance on agriculture could

have been caused by the fact that food obtained in this way fully satisfied the nutrition needs of Lower Egyptian communities. Meat of domesticated animals must have been highly valued, which is confirmed *inter alia* by the high degree of bone fragmentation, well visible in Tell el-Farkha. Hunting, gathering and fishing may have been treated as a form of supplementing the diet and as a backup solution used in the case of excessively high (or low) inundations of the Nile, affecting the yields from agriculture. The differences in the percentages of remains of various plant species on the one hand, and bones of various animal, fish and clam species on the other on different Lower Egyptian sites may be caused by diverse natural conditions affecting the choice of grown and bred species and/or by individual preferences of a given group.

Agriculture and animal breeding provided not only large amounts of food, but also made it possible to plan future resources and to stay in the same place for a long period of time, without the need to relocate in search for food. Growing of wheat and barley required constant presence of farmers. Sedentary lifestyle affected the settlements' nature and internal organization. In the Delta, the choice of the settlement's location was determined by the river's level. Lower Egyptian settlements were founded on sandy prominences, or geziras, remaining above the water level in all seasons, thus offering protection against flooding. Cemeteries were located near settlements, also on prominences. Residential buildings of the Lower Egyptian culture typically had a light structure made of organic materials. Since furrows are their only remains, one can only assume that houses took the form of rectangular buildings supported by posts, with walls made of mats additionally plastered with mud. Internal walls forming smaller rooms were identified in some cases as well. Numerous animal enclosures and pits used for household purposes were also found inside settlements (Tab. 14).

Important information about settlement structures was obtained during excavation in Tell el-Farkha, where two buildings significantly different from those known previously were discovered. One of them, the so-called Lower Egyptian residence from the Central Kom, was a large building made of organic materials, originally surrounded by a double wooden fence, subsequently replaced with a mudbrick wall (Pls. 6-7). It is the oldest structure of this type discovered so far in Egypt. The structure's size and method of construction as well as items found inside it denote its unusual character, most probably linked to the exchange with neighboring areas (Upper Egypt and Southern Levant). Another remarkably sizeable structure was located in the central part of the Western Kom (Fig. 7). It was built exclusively from organic materials. It is not impossible that this other structure played a special role in the social life of the settlement and its inhabitants.

The Lower Egyptian culture was the first of the Predynastic cultures to bury their dead in enclosed cemeteries. Only infants and young children were buried within settlements, either in pottery vessels or in shallow pits. The dead were laid in pits in embryonic positions. It seems that there were no clear rules regarding body orientation at the time (Tab. 15).

Grave goods were scarce, although their number grows visibly in the younger phases of the culture. The most common grave goods type was pottery, followed by flint implements, stone vessels, palettes and shells. There are clearly more goods in younger graves. The youngest Lower Egyptian graves recorded in Minshat Abu Omar are strongly diversified in terms of the quantity of goods. Although no goods at all were found in some graves (9.02%), over a half of group I graves contained 2 to 5 offerings. Some graves stand out not only for the number of goods, but also for their quality, which seems to denote a particular social status of persons buried in such graves.

Internal diversification of the Lower Egyptian culture is further confirmed by clearly observable areas of specialization. Beer production, manufacturing of certain items (basal bowls, imitations of blacktopped vessels, copper objects, beer), as well as commercial exchange required the presence of specialists possessing knowledge and skills in a given field. It is not impossible that such specialists enjoyed a special social position in their communities. Other important factors could be one's age or social rank within one's clan or lineage. While the earliest Lower Egyptian communities paid little attention to the method of interment, special burial procedures for certain individuals became increasingly important over time, possibly as a result of accumulation of precious items in the hands of certain Lower Egyptians. Since the diversification of grave offerings and the emergence of large, "public" buildings took place in Naqada II, it could have been one of the aspects of the stratification process observed in the Lower Egyptian society, which began in the same period. To some extent the said stratification resulted from the trade exchange with the Southern Levant, which made it possible to import prestige items used to legitimize one's social status.

Specialization in Lower Egypt is observed only with regard to selected areas of manufacturing where particular skills were required, whereas simple objects and implements were made on a household basis. Pottery, flint and bone processing were all based on locally available materials and did not involve any sophisticated techniques. Manufacturing of implements and other objects used on a daily basis could have been one's additional occupation, reflecting the actual needs of the household. As far as pottery is concerned, the shape could be influenced not only by functionality, but also by stylistic preferences and fashions followed by the maker. The form of simple flint implements (scrapers, burins, knives) and stone items (quernstones, grinding stones and hammerstones) reflected their respective functions.

The Lower Egyptian society was well adapted to the conditions prevailing in the Nile Delta in the 4th millennium BC. However, this adaptation was not equivalent to total dependence on the forces of nature, as it allowed humans to choose those solutions that best suited their current needs. Concentration on manufacturing and very limited reliance on the natural potential of the Nile Delta seem to confirm the above assertion.

The Lower Egyptian culture was developing in the Delta area for approximately 600/700 years. Its cultural and social system evolved over that period. The changes might have been caused by a number of underlying cultural and environmental factors which from time to time could have distorted the system's equilibrium. However, no traces of changes in the

economic system of the Lower Egyptian culture have been found. Subsistence strategies and techniques of pottery, flint and stone production did not change from the beginning to the end of the Lower Egyptian culture in most cases. Some minor changes can only be seen in the stylistic aspects of manufactured goods, *e.g.* pottery and in the specialized production of certain items. In Naqada II, older forms (such as T-shaped profile bowls) gradually disappeared and newer forms (*e.g.* lemon shaped jars) and ornamentations (impressed zigzag and crescent motives) emerged. Some of those new elements were adapted from foreign, Levantine pottery traditions (thumb-intended rim, hole-mouthed jars). The pottery inventory of the youngest Lower Egyptian phase also included vessels known from southern Egypt. On the basis of the raw material used, some of them are classified as imports (*e.g.* W-ware vessels), but others could have been manufactured in the north. The similarity of forms between the Upper and Lower Egypt may indicate a parallel development of pottery traditions in both regions, as well as frequent contacts and the ensuing exchange of information (Mączyńska *in press* a; b). At the current stage there is no archeological evidence for the so-called Naqadian expansion, involving the arrival of Naqadians to the north towards the end of Naqada II, or for the absorption and elimination of the local culture. Pottery, flint and stone inventories from Lower Egyptian sites do not show any sudden changes that would surely accompany a cultural change. In Tell el-Farkha and in Buto a steady and uninterrupted development of the local communities is observed.

One characteristic feature of the Lower Egyptian culture are its relations with the Southern Levant, resulting in the exchange of goods between the two areas. The said exchange is visible in archeological materials from both regions, in the form of imports and local imitations of foreign items. It seems that the origins of the relationships between the Lower Egypt and the Southern Levant cannot be analyzed solely from the perspective of the conflict between the community's objectives and its capability to pursue them. A glance at the repertoire of goods imported from the east reveals that only some of those goods were not available in the Delta (copper, pigments, cedar wood, turquoise). Other foreign items had their local counterparts (flint and stone implements: tabular scrapers?, sickle blades, stone discs), which means that they were imported because of certain quality features (raw material, shape, *etc.*), rather than for the purpose of satisfying local needs. Items of this kind could have also been brought to Lower Egypt by groups of immigrants comers from the Southern Levant. Other products imported from the east, *i.e.* asphalt, resins, olive, animal skins, domestic animals and other agricultural produce, are known only from later written sources. Imports from the Canaan most probably included olive and wine. There is no evidence of olive trees and grapevine being grown in the Delta in the first half of the 4th millennium BC. From this perspective, the Southern Levant was completely different, since climatic conditions in northern littoral areas were favorable for the above plants, particularly towards the end of the Chalcolithic and in EB I, allowing the region to specialize in their production. EB IA saw a significant growth in olive production as compared to the Chalcolithic (see Chapter 3). It thus seems very likely that both products were exchanged already in that period (see Lovell 2008).

Table 20. Comparison of the Lower Egyptian and Levantine communities in the 4th millennium BC.

		LOWER EGYPT	SOUTHERN LEVANT
social system		low degree of social complexity; first traces of social differentiation	low degree of social complexity; some traces of hierarchical social organization (Shiqmim)
burial custome		separated cemeteries; children buries inside settlements	in some cases graves inside settlements; separated cemeteries;
production of	pottery	household (mostly)	specialization?
	copper items	specialization (?)	specialization
	stone items	specialization (basalt vessels)	specialization
	ivory items	?	specialization
subsistence system		farming and animals breeding	farming and animals breeding; pastoralism
lifestyle		sedentary lifestyle	nomadic to sedentary lifestyle
settlement system		autonomic settlements with cemeteries	large principal settlements with satellite campsites and cemeteries
ideological system		figurines	cult centers, figurines

Assuming that commercial exchange was just one of multiple forms of contacts between Egypt and the Southern Levant, the underlying reasons for those contacts could have been linked to non-material aspects of the two social and cultural systems, which by nature are not preserved in archeological material.

The first contacts between the Nile Delta and Canaan are related to the adaptation of agriculture and animal breeding in Lower Egypt. However, evidence confirming the existence of Egyptian and Levantine link at such an early stage are very scarce. Materials from the Faiyumian culture found at the Qarun Lake include a single turquoise bead that could suggest exchange with the Sinai, where outcrops of this material are located. Other items found in Faiyumian inventories include clam shells and a shark tooth from the Red Sea. In the Merimde culture, the only eastern element is the herringbone motive on pottery, typically used as a decoration by Canaanite potters in the Chalcolithic. As far as the el-Omari culture is concerned, Levantine influences are observed in flint processing and pottery making (the use of two types of clay). Some similarities between el-Omari and Jericho vessels could be mentioned as well.

The Lower Egyptian culture is the first one where imports from Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Levant were found, thus confirming direct contacts between the two regions. Due to the scarcity of source materials, this early stage of Egyptian and Levantine relations is frequ-

ently ignored by authors investigating the issue. However, it seems reasonable to include that stage in further deliberations. One can assume that the first encounter between the inhabitants of both regions took place in the 5th millennium BC or even earlier (*cf.* Shirai 2010), but the contacts initiated in that period did not involve commercial exchange. Materials unearthed thus far show only certain cultural influences on the Delta's local tradition, which could have resulted from the exchange of ideas (such as adaptation of agriculture and animal breeding). Commercial exchange is but one aspect of relations between different communities. The appearance of a larger number of eastern imports on Lower Egyptian sites may suggest that the relation in question gained a new dimension. Since the material needs of the Lower Egyptian society were satisfied by resources available locally, it is rather unlikely that the origins of the trade exchange between the Delta and the Southern Levant could be explained by the gap between social objectives and the capability to pursue them. The soil, the climate and the periodical inundations of the Nile were all conducive to agriculture and animal breeding and provided food that supplemented the diet of farmers and breeders. For the most part, raw materials used for manufacturing pottery, implements and other items were available locally (Nile clay, flint, stone, *Aspatharia rubens* shells). Items made from imported materials (stone and pottery vessels, basalt discs, Red Sea shells) were rare and did not play an important functional role. The presence of Levantine pottery in Lower Egyptian sites was due to the fact that they were used as containers for imported products (olive, wine or other agricultural products). Considering well developed local production of pottery in Lower Egypt, importing such items for functional purposes alone was economically unreasonable. Despite simple techniques, Lower Egyptian potters manufactured a wide variety of forms (bowls and jars) that probably satisfied most of the local needs (see Chapter 6).

Copper was a special type of import, as it is not available as ore in the Delta area. The material was highly valuable and thus recycled, which is confirmed by the small number of copper artefacts on Lower Egyptian sites (see Chapter 7). In the 5th and early 4th millennium BC copper was still unknown to Lower Egyptian communities. Their first encounter with this material must have taken place after the emergence of Lower Egyptian culture in the Delta. Possibly, incomers from east arrived to the Delta in the beginning of the 4th millennium BC and brought their own copper implements. The new material with its unusual physical properties is likely to have aroused interest for (and then the need to possess) it, which eventually led to its import from the Sinai via the Southern Levant which back then still controlled the copper mines in Feinan and Timna in Wadi Araba. The role of the eastern incomers could have been limited to importing copper and explaining the principles of its processing. The forms of copper items had a local character and were rooted in the Lower Egyptian cultural tradition. The presence of Levantines in the Delta area in the early 4th millennium BC seems to be confirmed by some of the vessels found in Buto, whose form and ornamentation imitated Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Levantine pottery. This author follows the hypothesis proposed by E.Ch. Köhler (1993) and D. Faltings (2002: 166-169), assuming that a group of Levantine immigrants arrived to Buto towards the end of the Chalcolithic (layer Ia) and

settled among the local community. Originally they cultivated their own separate identity and traditions, but over time (layer Ib) the "strangers" assimilated with the locals and adopted Lower Egyptian cultural traditions. The assimilation process was so powerful that materials dated to phase II show no traces indicating the presence of foreign settlers in Buto. The discontinuation of their own cultural tradition by foreigners in Buto resulted in a peculiar social situation in the Delta, particularly visible in abandoning of the sophisticated turning technique originally used by Levantine potters, making mass production possible. The underlying reason could be Lower Egypt's typically household mode of pottery production. Another significant factor could be the humid climate which made production of high quality vessels more difficult and season-dependent. Furthermore, agriculture was a laborious livelihood, possibly reducing the amount of time available for other occupations (see Chapter 6).

The presence of Canaanite migrants was also confirmed in Maadi, where semi-subterranean dwellings were discovered. On the basis of their similarity to Chalcolithic and/or Early Bronze structures in Southern Levantine settlements they are interpreted as home for a small group of eastern settlers. The cluster of those dwellings in the northern part of the settlement could suggest their isolation, possibly intended to preserve cultural identity. It is probable that – as proposed by I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 80) – the presence of eastern migrants was seasonal and was caused by transportation difficulties caused by Nile floodings.

Apart from Levantine pottery imported from the source or made locally in the Delta area, inventories from Lower Egyptian sites contain a number of hybrid vessels, combining the features of both traditions. In Maadi and in graves from Heliopolis and Wadi Digla II Lower Egyptian vessels with Levantine ledge handles, lug handles and plastic knobs were found. Buto's hybrid vessels include hole-mouthed jars and V-shaped bowls. The ceramic paste of some vessels from Buto contained intentional additions of phosphorite, giving the vessel a light color after burning. As a result, the vessels were reminiscent of Levantine pottery also in terms of surface coloration. The reason for manufacturing hybrid vessels could be the assimilation of foreign settlers, but also the borrowing of foreign pottery techniques in appreciation of their functional or aesthetic features.

The arrival of Canaanite settlers to the Nile Delta in the middle of the 4th millennium BC could have been caused by the cultural and political situation in the contemporary Canaan. Possibly the migration was linked to economic recession. The first Levantine findings in the Delta are dated to the end of the Chalcolithic, when Southern Levantine cultural systems became unstable. The period in question saw a profound change in the settlement and economic systems. The underlying reasons are believed to include natural disasters (draughts, epidemics, earthquakes) and cultural factors (waves of migrants, economic changes) (see Chapter 3). Some Chalcolithic settlements were deserted and their inhabitants moved to higher regions. Human migrations were further intensified, and certain groups could have reached as far as to the Delta. Migration routes went through the northern Sinai, culturally linked to the Southern Levant at the time (Fig. 4). The distance between the Delta and the Southern Levant is approximately 200km, which was not prohibitively great considering

the use of donkeys as means of transportation and the presence of pastoral campsites in the Sinai, serving as stop-over sites for caravans. It took a caravan 3 to 4 days to travel a distance equal to 100km. Additionally, natural canals in the Nile's catchment area could be used for transportation purposes as well. Another possible connection between the Delta and the Canaan could be the naval route along the Mediterranean coast, allegedly connecting Egypt and Lebanon, from where such goods as cedar wood were imported via Levant. Small ports for ships are believed to have existed along the coast, *e.g.* in Atlit. Restocking stopovers offered a good opportunity for contacts and trade exchange with the inhabitants of adjacent settlements.

In the beginning of EB I the presence of Lower Egyptian culture in the Southern Levant (most probably in En Besor H) became probably permanent. Although there is no conclusive evidence, their presence can be interpreted from the perspective of trade exchange between the two regions. The existence of such a center was confirmed only in EB IB, but already in EB IA the demand for Levantine goods in Egypt could be so great that it could have given rise to the establishment of a "trade agency" in the Canaan, which subsequently evolved into the center of Egyptian administration.

Thus far, the majority of scholarly publications on Egyptian and Levantine contacts proposed the core-periphery model, thus assuming an unequal social, political and economic status of both communities (Levy & van den Brink 2002: 5-6; Czarnowicz 2011). In accordance with this model, the Southern Levantine culture is believed to have been less developed when compared to the contemporary Delta culture. However, if one takes a closer look at the social and cultural relations between both regions towards the end of the Chalcolithic, one will realize that the use of the core-periphery may be questionable (Tab. 20). The social structures of both communities were very similar. In both cases internal divisions based on family lineage or social functions were possible. While in the Lower Egyptian culture the remains of ideology or cult are very scarce (incense burners, traces of funeral rituals, animal graves in cemeteries, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines), the pastoral communities of the Chalcolithic Canaan had a sophisticated ideological system in the so-called shrine in En Gedi and showed certain symbolic behaviors resulting *inter alia* in unusual murals from Teleilat Ghassul. As regards manufacturing, the Chalcolithic culture was superior to the Lower Egyptian culture, which is exemplified *e.g.* by the high degree of specialization in pottery production (turning, variety of forms and ornaments, burning), well developed metallurgy and production of bone implements of high artistic value. Significant differences in system organization could have resulted from the respective economic models and their effect on lifestyles and settlement systems. It seems however that the said differences were caused by the adaptation of both societies to their local natural conditions, *i.e.* Lower Egypt's fertile Delta and Southern Levant's semiarid regions along wadis.

This author is of the opinion that until the end of Naqada II the contacts between the societies of Lower Egypt and the Southern Levant formed a reciprocity model of exchange (Renfrew & Bahn 2000: 368), whereby both parties hold mutually symmetrical positions.

Originally, in the 5th millennium BC, their contacts were only ideological and/or social, based on the exchange of ideas (agriculture, animal breeding). Only in the beginning of the 4th millennium BC, the exchange of information became accompanied by the exchange of a limited repertoire of goods, the most important of which was copper (Renfrew & Bahn 2000: 368).

The beginnings of commercial exchange between the Delta and the Southern Levant in the middle of the 4th millennium BC took the form of "private" expeditions, organized to cater for the needs of individual centers in the Delta. In early Naqada I the contacts could have been organized in accordance with the reciprocity – home base model (Fig. 3), which means that the exchange of goods between the Delta and the Southern Levant physically took place in the Delta area. The trade probably involved middlemen, traces of whom were found in Maadi. Over time the relative roles of both parties in the trade exchange may have equalized, particularly because it was not only goods but also concepts that were exchanged (ideas, inventions, ambitions and aspirations), thus leading to the development of both communities (*e.g.* introduction of copper to the Delta). Apart from Levantine merchants, there also appeared Egyptians, who allegedly reached as far as to En Besor H where typical Lower Egyptian pottery made of local materials was found. C. Renrew's third model of exchange (reciprocity – boundary) is not impossible either (Renfrew & Bahn 2000: 352). In accordance with this model, the bilateral exchange between Egypt and Southern Levant took place at the boundary of both territories. This view was proposed *inter alia* by I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989: 80). Towards the end of Naqada I and in Naqada II, the exchange allegedly became down-the-line-trade and involved a number of territories and their representatives. The number of Egyptian artefacts in sites dated to EB IA grew significantly as compared to the Chalcolithic, which may confirm an intensification of trade exchange between Lower Egypt and the Southern Levant. A thorough knowledge of the resources available in both regions, gained at the earlier stage, was another favorable factor.

In the beginning of EB I, the quantitative change in Egyptian and Levantine relations was not accompanied by any qualitative changes. Thus far no traces of any central organization of trade contacts (or a central place where such exchange would concentrate) have been found. It seems that import and export were a reflection of actual demand for given types of goods or materials. The lack of centrally organized trade resulted from a specific organizational structure of the Lower Egyptian culture on the one hand, and Southern Levantine culture in the Chalcolithic and in EB I (EB IA, early EB IB) on the other. In the Delta area there existed self-sufficient centers – settlements, *e.g.* Maadi, Buto, Tell el-Farkha, whereas in the Southern Levant there was an autonomous central settlement supervising a number of subordinate pastoral settlements/campsites. In a certain way, imported goods reflected the needs of the settlements' inhabitants and were not redistributed to other areas. The role of eastern imports could have been linked to the diversification of the Lower Egyptian society. Imported goods could have been treated as so-called prestigious goods, used to legitimize the status of an individual or a group. Possession of items made of foreign materials (copper, flint, stone, pottery) may have denoted the importance of their owners, and the

control over importation of those goods influenced the development of social and political hierarchy of the society in question (Renfrew 1975: 22). It is not impossible that import of prestigious goods triggered social stratification processes in the Lower Egyptian culture. A good example here are the oldest graves from Minshat Abu Omar, standing out for the presence of Southern Levantine and Upper Egyptian imports, deposited as grave offerings together with local pottery.

The relations between Lower Egypt and the Southern Levant drew the attention of Naqadian communities from the south. Originally, the contacts between both regions were rare. Southern imports are present in Lower Egyptian inventories as isolated finds only. They include blacktopped ware (Maadi), rhomboidal greywacke palettes (Wadi Digla), obsidian flint knives (Tell el-Iswid, Tell el-Farkha), fish tail knives, mace heads and bone combs (Maadi). Accordingly, in Naqadian sites only isolated Lower Egyptian vessels were found (Hemamieh, Naqada/Ballas, Armant, Hierakonpolis, Adaima) (Adams & Friedman 1992: 323; van den Brink 1989: 71). The low frequency of contacts between the Delta and Upper Egypt reduced the possibility to import eastern goods directly to the south. In Naqadian graves, the first eastern imports (lapis lazuli and turquoise beads, cylindrical seals) appeared in Naqada IB. Since no such artefacts were registered among imports to the Lower Egypt, they must have reached the south via an alternative trade route. According to U. Hartung (2002: 445-446) and D.E. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002: 129-135), the trade route contemporary to the Badari culture, leading from the Red Sea to Upper Egypt, was reopened in the middle of Naqada II.

The interest of Naqadian groups in the Nile Delta grew in Naqada II. A greater number of southern imports in general and pottery in particular appeared on the sites in the Delta. The underlying reason was the process of social stratification, leading to the formation of social elites in the south. Legitimization of their position required prestigious goods, such as those coming from Nubia and Southern Levant. Thus far, access to prestigious goods imported from the Southern Levant has been quoted as one of the key causes of the so--called Naqadian expansion. As a result, the Lower Egyptian culture was allegedly absorbed and replaced by the southern culture. Meanwhile, archeological materials do not contain any evidence supporting the above assumption (Köhler 2008; Mączyńska *in press* a; b). In the Naqada I and II periods Lower Egyptians controlled the exchange with the Southern Levant and most probably acted as intermediaries between Upper Egyptians and Southern Levantines. The Nile was probably the main trade route along which the transport of goods was organized. Actual exchange could have taken places in major settlements in the eastern Delta, such as Tell el-Farkha or Minshat Abu Omar.

In the opinion of the excavators of the Tell el-Farkha site, the settlement was a center responsible for long-distance contacts and exchange with Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant (Chłodnicki & Geming 2012; Ciałowicz 2012a). The settlement was probably situated on a trade route and its position in the center of the eastern Nile Delta facilitated the transfer of goods further to the east and south (Fig. 4). It could have been a meeting place

for people of different origins: Naqadians, Southern Levantines, Lower Egyptians, who probably were partners in exchange. The local societies took part in, and probably organized, the exchange of goods and ideas in an active way. Moreover the local societies benefited from these contacts and adapted new techniques and raw materials: mudbrick architecture, beer production, copper and gold (Mączyńska *in press* d).

In the case of the site in Minshat Abu Omar, the scarcity of data does not allow one to make conclusions similar to those from Tell el-Farkha. However, southern and eastern imports deposited in local graves could indirectly confirm the settlement's participation in the exchange between Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant. Minshat Abu Omar lies very close to the boundary between the Delta and the Sinai, not far from the place where caravans must have entered the Delta area (Fig. 4). It would thus be only natural for the inhabitants of Minshat Abu Omar to take part in the exchange.

Late Naqada II and early Naqada III saw major changes in Egyptian societies, both in the north and in the south. Their social, economic and ideological systems were remodeled. It is generally accepted that a uniform Naqada culture encompassing the entire Nile Valley and Delta emerged in early Naqada III. Meanwhile, analyses of archeological data show that a homogenous culture as such did not exist. Instead, there probably were up to twenty centers which – apart from certain common features – differed from one another in a number of aspects. Social and economic processes commenced in Naqada II in the north and the south (*e.g.* specialization, social stratification) still continued. The demand for prestigious goods (including imports) did not diminish. In Naqada IIIa the presence of a larger group of Egyptians in the Southern Levant became constant, although they were still connected with their mother state administration. In Naqada IIIB Egyptians took full control over bilateral trade probably by establishing their own colony in southern Canaan. Egypt's control over trade exchange is also visible in the northern Sinai, where Egyptian pottery represents the greatest share (sometimes as high as 80%) of inventories found stopover sites for caravans.

Egyptian presence in the Southern Levant was peaceful and intertwining of both cultural traditions is noticeable. The key Egyptian centers in the Canaan were Tell es-Sakan, En Besor and Tel Ma'ahaz, where apart from common appliances (Egyptian vessels, flint implements) explorations revealed a number of items linked to Egyptian administration and even typically Egyptian mudbrick architecture (En Besor). However, discussions on the colony's nature and its status vis-a-vis the mother territory still continue (Braun 2002: 182-183). It seems that Egyptian and Canaanite contacts were fairly complex at the time, which seems to be illustrated by considerable differences in the number of Egyptian items in various Canaanite sites, as well as by the presence of Egyptian style artefacts manufactured on Early Bronze sites in Southern Levant (Braun 2003).

The number of Levantine artefacts in Egypt grows dramatically on Protodynastic sites, particularly in rich graves. Attention is drawn to grave U-j in Abydos on the U cemetery, dated to Naqada IIIA2 (mid EB IB), where over 400 Palestinian wine jars were found (Hartung 2001). Petrographic analyses of the material used to manufacture those vessels

showed that while most of them were not made of Canaanite clays, all of them were made in accordance with Levantine cultural traditions, thus denoting well developed commercial exchange (Porat & Goren 2002: 252-270). The use of an alternative material may be linked to a different function of those vessels. The jars may have been made especially for a foreign ruler. Canaanite imports dated to late EB IB are also known from the Delta area, *e.g.* from the graves in Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper 1989a: 407-422) and from the settlements in Buto and Tell el-Farkha (Köhler 1998; Mączyńska 2003a; Czarnowicz 2012b).

In EB II the role of the Egyptian colony in the Canaan was reduced due to the urbanization process in the Southern Levant and the growing importance of city-states. Egypt's attention was directed to Syria and Lebanon, accessible via naval routes. While some isolated goods from the Palestinian colony were recorded on Egyptian sites dated to late EB II, the contacts between the two regions became very infrequent by then.