

TELL EL-FARKHA

PRELIMINARY REPORT, 2007

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During the present campaign, which lasted from 3 March to 7 May 2007,¹ work was continued in previously established trenches on all three tells forming the site of Tell el-Farkha. The thickness of anthropogenic deposits and large numbers of artifacts fully justified the effort. On the Western Kom, the trench which last year had yielded a few pots of undoubtedly ritual character, one of them containing 62 miniature figurines made of hippopotamus tusk (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2009: 128–147; Ciałowicz 2009 [2010]), was continued with more similar discoveries. On the Central Kom, which has been investigated since 2000, the culturally sterile gezirah sand was expected. And on the Eastern Kom, the trench was extended once again because of the need to examine several graves clearly visible in outline either on the surface or in section in the trench excavated in previous years.

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WESTERN KOM

Continued excavation of the trench opened last year (covering more than 1000 m²), revealed further rooms to the south and north of the room with the deposit discovered in 2006 [Fig. 1]. To the east there is an open area, probably an internal courtyard enclosed by walls that are much thicker than the partition walls inside the rooms. West of the room with the deposit the situation is unclear due to damage caused by modern agricultural activities, including a canal (now filled up) which was still operational at the start of the Polish excavations. The surviving fragments of walls probably belonged to an outer ring of rooms encircling on this side the shrine with deposit.

Pending the completion of excavations in the units north and south of the presumed shrine, it can be said we are dealing with relatively small rooms aligned NE–SW, divided by walls 0.30–0.45 m thick, containing remains of ovens and hearths. The fill, which was unfortunately severely disturbed by animal burrows and accumulations of contemporary rubbish, consisted of layers of ash, abundant potsherds (seldom whole vessels) and relatively rare examples of flint and stone tools. Little beyond the surface layer could be excavated this year.

Inside the room with the deposit discovered in 2006 [Fig. 2], the fill was explored by arbitrary levels 5 cm thick. Sieving assured a complete register of finds.



Fig. 1. Western Kom. Building north of the room with deposit
(Photo R. Słaboński)

Analysis of fragmented artifacts and their position within the levels (e.g. two matching pieces of a stone vessel found 0.50 m apart vertically and a fragmented clay figurine scattered all over the room) indicated that we are dealing with fill accumulated during a single period.

Finds included several whole or almost whole pots, the most interesting and significant of these being undoubtedly a ceramic stand with matching vessel and a *hes*-jar [Fig. 3, top left], used in ritual libations during the Early Dynastic period. Similar vessels were found, for instance, in deposits at Tell Ibrahim Awad (Eigner 2000: 17–36). The same fill strata also produced two stone vessels and fragments of a clay statuette representing a seated figure [Fig. 3, top right]. The fragment preserved, a pair of relatively large legs (18 cm high) with knees

drawn up, suggests that it may have portrayed a sitting boy holding an index finger to his mouth like in the ivory carvings found in the deposit from 2006. Among the finds of miniature bone figurines there was a schematic representation of a baboon [Fig. 3, bottom left], an undetermined animal with a long snout (anteater?) and yet another example from Tell el-Farkha of a female dwarf [Fig. 3, bottom right]. Also noteworthy is a bone amulet shaped like a bull's head (Hendrickx 2002: 275–318). Amulets of this type are particularly characteristic of terminal Naqada II and all of Naqada III periods. One of the finest pieces of craftsmanship discovered this year was a greywacke spoon (10.50 cm long) with a crocodile-shaped handle [Fig. 4]. Other finds worth mentioning include a flint knife found with some cattle ribs alongside the three storage jars referred to earlier, fragments of a greywacke bracelet, part of a bone spoon, remnants of copper artifacts unidentifiable due to their poor state of preservation, bone models of fish-tail knives and a pear-shaped head of a mace. Beads made of both semi-precious stones and faience were especially numerous (c. 350 pieces).

The walls of this room are thicker than in the topmost layers (approx. 0.45 m), but still not as thick as those of another room in which another deposit was discovered in 2001 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz *et alii* 2002). Three large storage vessels found in the middle of the room, near its north wall, had clearly been concealed beneath the floor. Nearby, but hidden in the north wall, was a jar, covered with a small bowl identical in type to the one covering the jar containing a deposit found in 2006. The latter (a foundation deposit?) contained several dozen faience beads, and, most importantly, a faience cylindrical seal (2.40 cm high) adorned with crosses and two gazelle, and a poorly preserved sign above one of the

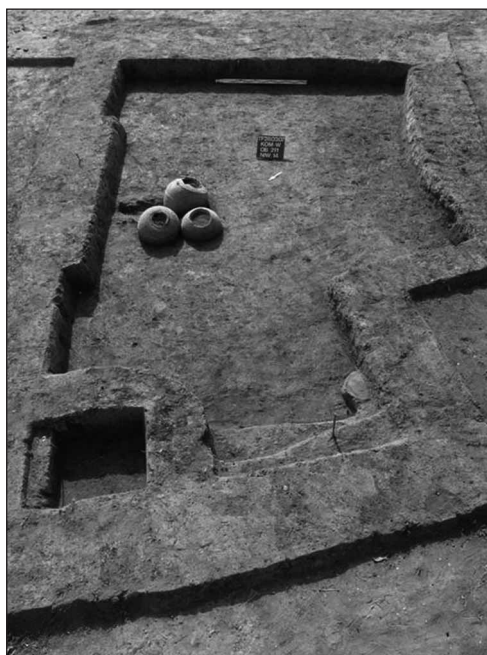


Fig. 2. Western Kom. Shrine with deposit, view after the season in 2007 (Photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 3. *Artifacts from the fill of the shrine on the Western Kom (clockwise from top left): hes-jar; legs of a sitting boy(?), clay; baboon and she-dwarf; both hippopotamus tusk*
(Photo R. Słaboński)

crosses, possibly a falcon [Fig. 5]. The jar also held an undecorated ostrich egg with an oval blowhole in its top [Fig. 6].

The combination of a seal with gazelles in the decoration and an ostrich egg may be of some significance. Ostrich and gazelle constitute a frequent combination in the imagery from Tell el-Farkha (Ciałowicz 2008a). An incised representation of a long-legged bird, probably an ostrich, and two horned herbivores, possibly gazelle, appeared on the vessel in which a votive deposit was found in 2006. A damaged stone cylindrical seal discovered on the Central Kom in 2003 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2004: 105; Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz *et alii* 2004: 47–74) was incised with an image of an ostrich and what appear to be the back legs of a herbivore.

The combined use of these two motifs appears on some Predynastic artefacts, such as the famous small palette from Hierakonpolis held by the Ashmolean Museum (Ciałowicz 1991). It may be assumed then that both animals were connected with the cult and rites performed at Tell el-Farkha or that they were even attributes of the godheads worshipped in this particular shrine. The schematic falcon(?) and crosses found on the seal also bear a reference to power, authority or cult in the broadest sense of this word. It should be kept in mind that the finds from the 2006 deposit included miniature images of a man in a characteristic cloak, possibly representing an anonymous ruler during the *sed* festival, a woman seated in a litter holding a child in

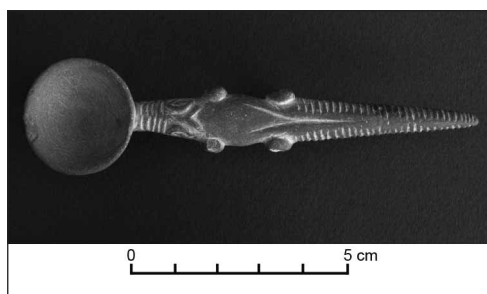


Fig. 4. Spoon of greywacke with crocodile-shaped handle (Photo R. Słaboński)

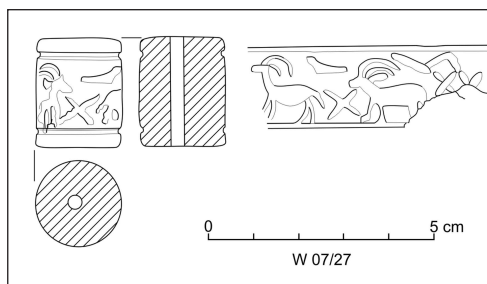


Fig. 5. Cylindrical seal with representation of gazelles from shrine deposit (Drawing A. Longa)

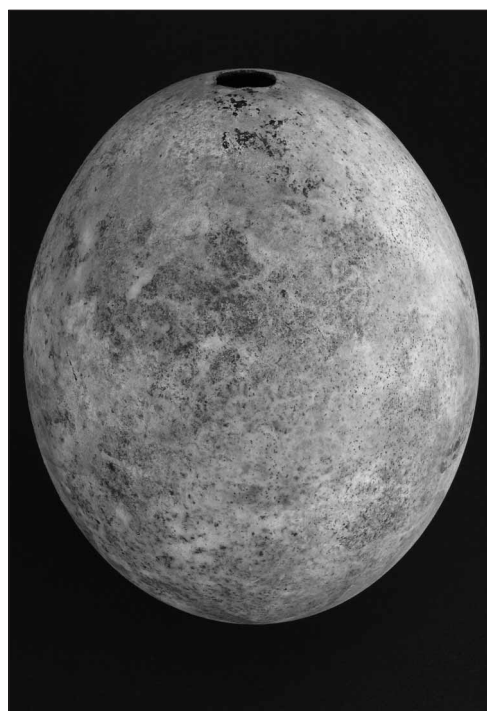


Fig. 6. Ostrich egg from a jar in the shrine deposit (Photo R. Słaboński)

her lap (possible *reput* or mother of the ruler, cf. Kaiser 1983: 261-296) and schematic falcon figurine (Ciałowicz forthcoming).

In any case, the ostrich egg must have been imported to Tell el-Farkha from the south, possibly from Upper Egypt, as must have the ostrich eggshell beads recovered last year from the Eastern Kom together with the gold figurines (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2007: 7-21). Neither ostrich nor gazelle were a species then present in the Nile Delta. The fact that the egg was left as a deposit and not made into beads indicates the considerable symbolic value of the deposit. The seal found with it thus takes on additional significance, confirming the symbolic and cultic significance of the animals. The two could have constituted a foundation deposit, a substitute offering of ostrich and gazelle.

The three jars from under the floor contained a far greater number of items, although the contents of each jar was not the same. The first contained only a few faience beads and small fragments of animal bone. Over 400 faience beads were found in the next jar, along with three objects made of

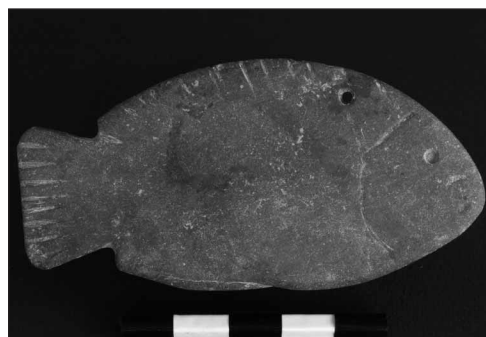


Fig. 7. Pottery jar (left) containing deposit of, among others, a cosmetic palette of greywacke in the form of a fish (top right) and a she-dwarf figurine of hippopotamus tusk (Photo R. Słaboński)

hippopotamus ivory: a ring (finger ring?) of 2 cm in diameter, a model of a bull's leg (3.20 cm high) and poorly preserved and fragmentary remains of an anthropomorphic figurine, possibly a woman with centrally parted hair. The third vessel [Fig. 7, left] contained a far greater number of artifacts, the most important of these being a hippopotamus-tusk figurine [Fig. 7, bottom right] representing a female dwarf (8.50 cm high).

This naked figure with heavy pendulous breasts and a relatively large belly stands on spread legs bent at the knees, or rather it does not stand, because the intentionally made stubs of legs could not support it independently. The head is disproportionately large; only one ear survives and vestiges of the hair, which was probably braided, some of the plaits falling onto the breasts, those at the back reaching down to the waist. The face is well modelled and the facial features, such as the eyes, nose and mouth, are distinct. Of the right arm only the shoulder survives. A hole 0.50 cm in diameter pierced through the left shoulder provided attachment for the arm, which was found in two pieces outside the vessel (hence the difference in coloring, the arm having been affected by external factors). The hand was clenched into a fist, the hole pierced through it suggestive of an object, staff or stick, held in it. This third point of support could have permitted the figurine to keep an upright position.

The vessel containing this figure also included two cosmetic palettes: the larger one rectangular (17 x 8.80 cm) and the smaller one fish-shaped (8.70 cm long) [Fig. 7, top right]. Other items found inside the jar included a bone model of a dagger, imitating copper daggers typical of this period and often noted at sites in Upper Egypt, and a hollowed bone object which is probably an imitation of a sheath for the said dagger. Two small stone vessels (a bowl and

a water bottle), several beads and a few fragments of animal bone were also recovered from the jar.

All of the above finds can be dated to the first half of the First Dynasty.

At this point, a few words of comment in summary of the finds are in place. The present architecture should be considered in juxtaposition with the building uncovered in 2001 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz *et alii* 2002). This large structure, which was undoubtedly used for domestic and utilitarian purposes (ovens and hearths, layers of ash and finds of typical domestic pottery and numerous flint and stone tools), also included a small, almost square room with thick walls, which yielded the first votive deposit from Tell el-Farkha (two human figurines, several representations of baboons and one of a crocodile, five ceramic rattles adorned with incised decoration, models of mace-heads, gaming pieces and numerous miniature vessels made of clay, faience and stone). A comparison of the ground plans of the buildings discovered in 2001 and 2006–2007 lead to the conclusion that both complexes served as an administrative and cultic centre, one of the oldest of its kind to be found, not only in the Nile Delta, but in all of Egypt. This complex consisted of a central, almost square, empty space, probably an inner courtyard, surrounded by rooms of different size and nature, and of various function. The two most important rooms were indubitably those in which the votive deposits were found (one in 2001 and the other in the last two seasons). The first of these, almost square in plan, abutted the northeastern side of the courtyard. The second, a long rectangular, room was positioned on the western side of the courtyard, nearer to the southern corner than the northern one. The remaining rooms (those on the southern side have still to be fully explored) appear to have been used for

domestic and utilitarian purposes. The size of the complex (several hundred square metres), the variety, not only of the rooms, but also of building techniques, and in particular the two probable shrines used for cult purposes, permit a number of preliminary conclusions at this stage.

Firstly, it is becoming increasingly obvious that Tell el-Farkha was a very important centre in the Eastern Delta during the transition between the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods. It may have even served as a local capital or administrative centre associated with the first rulers of Egypt.

Secondly, votive deposits found in numerous locations throughout Egypt (Elephantine, Hierakonpolis, Abydos in Upper Egypt, Tell Ibrahim Awad in Lower Egypt) evidence a variety of complex local cults, even if it is still difficult to ascertain whom they were addressed to. It is still unclear whether at the dawn of Egyptian statehood specific, clearly defined gods were already being worshipped, or whether the king, as guarantor of order and all aspects of life, was the subject of cult devotion.

Thirdly, the deposits discovered at Tell el-Farkha are the only ones in Egypt to be so precisely dated. All of those found earlier included items from later phases of

Egyptian civilization: the Old Kingdom, First Intermediate period and even the Middle Kingdom. This led some scholars to link them to much later periods, negating the very idea of a separate stage in Egyptian art associated with the Proto- and Predynastic period (Baumgartel 1968: 7–14; Kemp 1989: 75). The Tell el-Farkha deposits come from contexts securely dated to the transition between Dynasties 0 and I. It is worth recalling that the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha was ultimately abandoned in the first half of the First Dynasty and was never resettled, thus providing an excellent *terminus ante quem*. This dating of the finds from Tell el-Farkha makes it possible to assert conclusively that the first great period of development in Egyptian art took place during the formation of the Egyptian state. Many models established at that time were copied with greater or lesser modifications over the next three thousand years up until the fall of Egyptian civilization.

Fourthly, the fact that the content of deposits varies between individual sites suggests that no universally accepted canons were in force during the emergence of the Egyptian state. It also implies that various forms of rituals and cults were practised in various parts of Egypt.

CENTRAL KOM

This season the Predynastic level dated to the Naqada IID phase was reached on this mound, which was continuously occupied until the Old Kingdom period (as indicated by excavations carried out here since 2000, cf. Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2001: 96; 2002: 111–113; 2003: 104–106; 2004: 104–105; 2005: 135–137; 2007: 147–149; 2009: 147). This phase is especially interesting because it was a transitional one with

material of both cultures, Lower Egyptian and Naqadan, being found together at Tell el-Farkha.

Fundamental changes in the settlement layout can be observed at this level. The first Naqadans at Tell el-Farkha built mud-brick walls which are more solid than those noted in the uppermost levels of the Central Kom.² The bricks measure approximately 16 by 32 cm. Three rows of bricks

constitute a wall about 0.90–1.00 m thick [Fig. 8]. On the kom outskirts walls can be even thicker, reaching 1.20–1.50 cm. Walls between rooms are 0.60 cm thick.

The mud-brick walls bounded large courtyards, which are at least 8 m wide and more than 20 m long [Fig. 9]. Less solid structures were raised in the courtyards, where remains of hearths have been found [Fig. 10]; these could be houses in the Lower Egyptian tradition. Circular structures, 0.25–0.30 m in diameter and up to 0.30 m high, made of solid clay sometimes with lime particles and crushed potsherds added as temper, were noted very frequently. Some of them have shallow depressions with pots or fragments of pots fitted into them. The

function of these clay supports is unclear. They have been found earlier in the upper layers of the site (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2009: 109), but now they are much more frequent. They are not arranged in any regular way, which may suggest that they were used either as a base for house building posts or as stands for some other activities of the inhabitants of the settlement.

A D-shaped structure (no. 485), partly damaged by a later pit (elements from it were reused in a later wall constructed here), was discovered in a courtyard located in the southeastern corner of the trench [Fig. 11]. Exploration of the structure has yet to be completed, but it is clear by comparative analysis that it should be interpreted as



Fig. 8. Close-up of a mud-brick wall on the Central Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)

- 2 Excavations in the following season (2008) demonstrated that some of these walls were founded in Farkha subphase 1 (Lower Egyptian).



*Fig. 9. Mud-brick structures on the Central Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*



*Fig. 10. Remains of a house in the Lower Egyptian tradition on the Central Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*

a brewery (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz *et alii* 2004; Cichowski 2001). It measures 4 by 4 m and comprises three adjacent circles. The one circle that has been preserved has D-shaped bricks, unevenly fired (judging by the color which ranges from mud-coloured through red to entirely black), stacked around its edges. The bricks also vary in shape: some are simple with sections ranging from virtually semicircular to trapezoidal and even almost triangular. Others, which are also of different length, are flatter and evidently concave at one end, the concavity having been modelled carelessly by hand (fingerprints on the side walls). The bricks measure up to 50 cm long (complete firedogs of this kind were

discovered in the later wall here). The two kinds of brick can be put together so that the convexities of one fit the concavities of

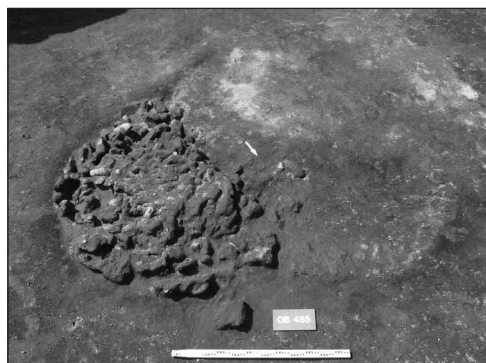


Fig. 11. Remains of a brewery on the Central Kom (Photo R. Słaboński)

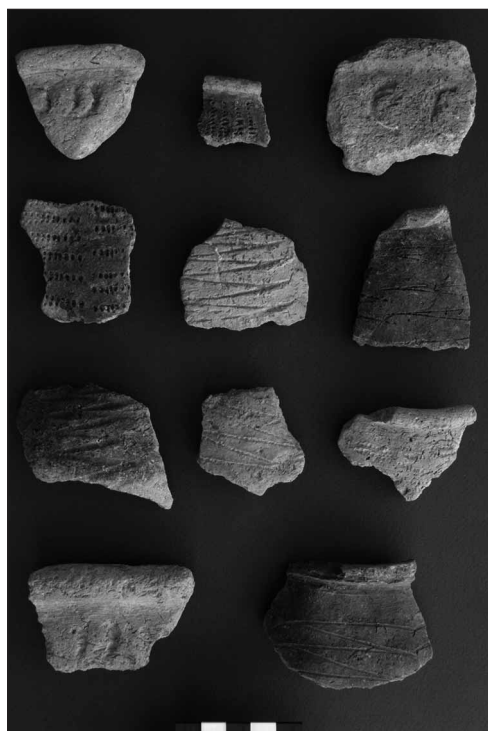


Fig. 12. Lower Egyptian pottery sherds from the Central Kom (Photo R. Słaboński)

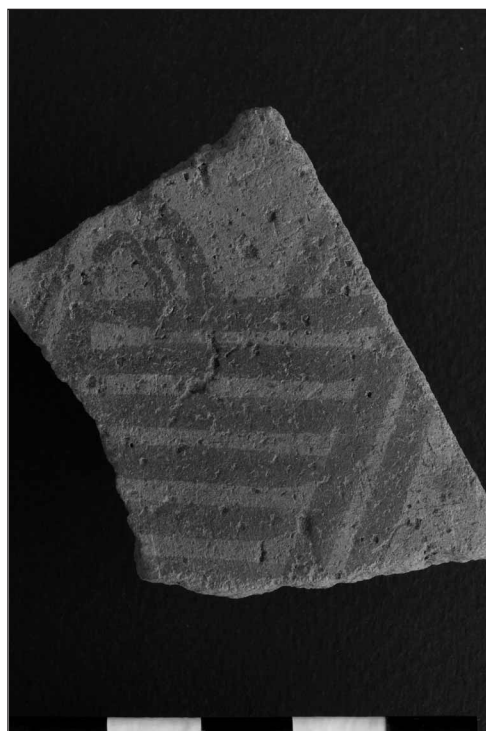


Fig. 13. Fragment of jar with painted representation of a boat (fragment of the cabin) (Photo R. Słaboński)

the other. The flat bricks presumably either lay on the ground or were dug into it, and the convex ones fitted into the concavities stood upright to support the vat or vessel.

Another structure found to the north (no. 490), hexagonal in shape and measuring about 1.15 m across, could have also been used in the beer-making process. Traces of fire activity were noted in and around it. D-shaped bricks were also featured in its construction. Multiple small clay structures (stands) of the kind described above were found around it.

Pottery, while still the most common find (as at all other levels), was less abundant than in the upper layers. Only a few complete or almost complete pots were found, small globular jars with a short neck and simple bowls predominating. Larger jars were seldom noted. Pottery decorated with zigzags of dotted as well as continuous lines characteristic of Lower Egyptian ceramics appeared as did bowls decorated with a row of crescents below the rim [*Fig. 12*].

Vital chronological indications were supplied by the evidence of imported

pottery, which included fragments of jars imported from Palestine, dated to the Southern Horizon Middle EB I (Tell Erani C) (Kempinski, Gilead 1991: 164–192) and imports from Upper Egypt, decorated with painted wavy lines and spirals. The first instance of a jar with painted boat representation (fragment of a boat cabin) was recorded this season (cf. e.g. Petrie 1921: Pl. XIX) [*Fig. 13*].

Some changes in the flint industry were observable in this level. Very pale flint became very popular. Short sickle blades were superseded by longer sickles with serrated and glossy edges. Other pieces deserving mention include simple knives and scrapers. Flint cores confirm that some of the implements were produced on site.

The assemblage of stone finds was less numerous represented than in the upper layers. Grinders and hammer-stones made of different kinds of sandstone and quartzite were the predominant form. Fragments of querns or larger stone slabs are less common. Only a small fragment of a stone palette was found.

EASTERN KOM

The cemetery discovered on the Eastern Kom is dated to the period between Dynasty 0 and the early Fourth Dynasty (cf. e.g. Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2002: 113–117; 2003: 106–109; 2004: 106–109; 2005: 137–145; 2007: 150–154; 2009: 147–151; Dębowska-Ludwin 2007), but in contrast to other Egyptian necropolises which usually evidence unbroken development, the individual phases of the cemetery at Tell el-Farkha are separated from one another by settlement levels. The reasons behind this phenomenon are not yet entirely clear, though many clues point to successive waves

of settlement from the south and the existence of political rivalries such as those witnessed in the Naqadan cultural realm (Ciałowicz 2008b).

The graves uncovered to date can be divided into groups depending on their construction and the number of goods they contained (Dębowska-Ludwin 2007). The first and second groups are represented by burials with rich and moderately rich equipment, dating from Dynasty 0 to the early Second Dynasty. The third group consists of poorly furnished graves, most of them entirely devoid of goods and dated

stratigraphically to the end of the Early Dynastic period. The last group comprises poor burials in which body position and grave alignment is completely different to that noted in the other graves. These date from the early Old Kingdom.

In 2007, excavation of the cemetery was confined to an area of 200 m² extending from the southeastern corner of the old trench in an effort to examine a number of graves marked in outline either on the surface or in trench sections. These graves would have been threatened with destruction, if left unexplored. During the season 10 graves were discovered, but not all could be investigated due to the time expended on documenting the extremely rich burial in grave 55 (graves 59, 60, 63 left unexplored). All of the graves excavated in 2007 were dated to the late phase of the First Dynasty and the early Second Dynasty.

Graves 51, 56, 57, 58 had brick surrounds measuring 122–136 by 78–81 cm. The burials inside the pits were moderately rich, containing grave goods in the form of pottery and stone vessels, placed at the southern end of the pit, by the feet of the deceased. The bones were in fairly poor condition. When undisturbed, the skeleton lay on the left (in one case on the right) side, in contracted position, with the head to the north. A mat was usually found under the body and another one covering it. [*Fig. 14*, top and bottom left]

Grave 62 had a modestly-sized pit (64 x 46 cm) bounded by a mud-brick wall one brick thick [*Fig. 14*, bottom right]. The child interred in it lay in contracted position on its right side, head to the north. Two small, stone vessels (very poorly preserved) were placed behind the child's back. A bowl lay on the surface of the grave and three beer-jars stood outside it, alongside the south wall. No doubt the

vessels are indicative of rituals associated with the cult of the dead, not necessarily connected with the funeral alone.

Graves 61, 65 and 66 were poor pit burials, 70–102 by 40–62 cm, either wrapped in mats, covered by mats or devoid of wrapping of any kind. The bodies had been laid in contracted position, either on the left or on the right side with the head to the north, east, or in the case of the double internment, one above the other, in grave 66 to the north and northwest. Grave goods consisted of a miniature pot and a fragment of quernstone recorded at the feet of the deceased.

Another poor pit burial, grave 64, in a brick surround (48 x 37 cm) one-brick thick was found abutting the southernmost section of the west wall surrounding grave 55. There is no doubt that the two were somehow related. The fragmentary remains of the skeleton (the skull and a small number of long bones covered with a mat) indicated that the body had lain with the head to the north, probably on its right side; the state of the bones, however, makes it impossible to tell whether the bones have deteriorated so severely or whether originally only fragments of a skeleton had been interred here. Only one carnelian bead was found in the fill of this grave. It could very well have been a secondary burial accompanying one of the wealthiest graves discovered thus far at Tell el-Farkha, or it may have been a sacrificial burial.

The mastaba-type grave 55 is the largest (9.16 m N-S by 6.74 m E-W, superstructure 1.52 m high) and wealthiest burial recorded thus far at Tell el-Farkha [*Fig. 15*]. It is surrounded by a low wall with rounded corners and a clearly defined entrance in the southern side. The substructure comprised four chambers divided one from the other by narrow, mud-brick walls. The north chamber was almost square in plan (0.54 by 0.57 m)

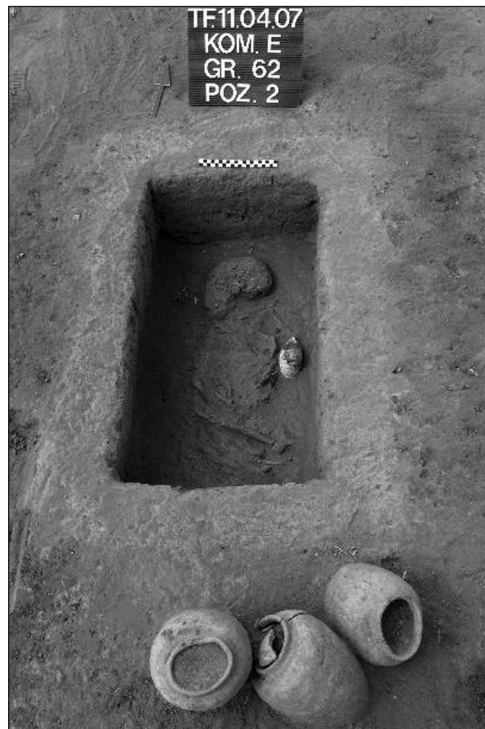


Fig. 14. Eastern Kom. Graves 51 (top),
57 (bottom left) and 62
(Photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 15. General view of the burial chambers in Grave 55
(Photo R. Słaboński)

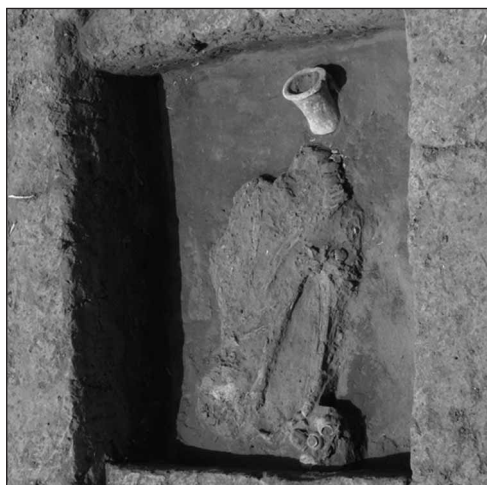


Fig. 16. Burial in the northern chamber of
Grave 55 (Photo R. Słaboński)

Fig. 17. Close-up of stone vessels from Grave 55
(Photo R. Słaboński) ►



and contained a crouched skeleton lying on its left side, head to the north [Fig. 16]. A cylindrical, stone vessel was placed above the head, five small, barrel-shaped vessels and two copper harpoon heads lying at the feet. Several pieces of a red dyestuff (probably ochre) were found at the bottom of the pit.

Two small niches (30 x 26 cm and 27 x 26 cm) abutted this chamber from the south. The eastern niche contained stone vessels [Fig. 17], whilst the western one was empty. This situation is similar to that noted during the previous year in grave 50, where there was also an empty space to the west of a stone vessel deposit. It is possible that in both instances the now empty spaces once contained receptacles made from perishable organic materials (e.g. baskets). The last, southernmost chamber (67 x 28 cm) was filled with pottery vessels of the beer-jar variety. Further jars of the same type were found on the wall circumscribing the grave from the south. They were placed on the crown of the chamber, probably below the beams supporting the superstructure. A layer of brown soil between the superstructure and the chamber is probably evidence of planks or beams forming the roof of the chamber and the foundation for the brick-built superstructure. In total, over 50 pottery vessels were recovered from this grave. The jars placed on top of the wall had been crushed to such a degree by the overlying superstructure that it is impossible at present to determine the exact number of vessels represented. Similar difficulties apply to establishing the number of stone vessels, especially those in the small, eastern niche which were already broken into numerous small fragments at the time of their deposition, the vessels primarily affected being alabaster plates and trays. Cylindrical vessels and jars survived in much better condition. Around 30 vessels (with only one exception) made of alabaster were placed in

this grave. The one exception was a miniature vessel made of agate [Fig. 18, top]. Of particular note among the alabaster vessels is a large [Fig. 18, bottom],



Fig. 18. *Miniature vessel of agate and cylindrical calcite jar from grave 55*
(Photo R. Słaboński)

cylindrical jar (0.51 m high). Each chamber was covered with a mat, further mats being found inside the chambers. It is worth noting that a layer of pure sand was intentionally deposited in the southwestern corner of the grave, at a level where the beams had been installed. The floor of the burial chamber was also lined with sand.

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