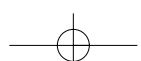
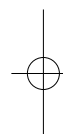
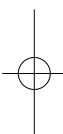


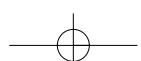
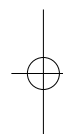
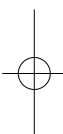
EGYPTIAN CIVILIZATION – FASCINATIONS AND RESEARCH



Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz



TELL EL-FARKHA





The Nile Valley in the earliest stages of its history entered the scope of Polish research back in the 1960s when Romuald Schild and Michał Kobusiewicz joined the international Combined Pre-historic Expedition to explore Fayum Oasis, among others. The next expedition to conduct investigations in the Fayum, as well as later in the Theban region of Upper Egypt, was a joint effort with the Deutsches Archaeologisches Institut (DAI), which worked in the 1970s and 1980s under the supervision of Bolesław Ginter, Janusz K. Kozłowski and Joachim Śliwa from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. In the 1990s, Professor Lech Krzyżaniak initiated studies of rock drawings in the Dakhla Oasis.

The first Predynastic and Early Dynastic site to be investigated by Polish archaeologists on a larger scale was Tell el-Farkha in the eastern Nile delta. It is composed of three mounds, called *koms* in Egypt, lying at the edge of the village of

Ghazala about 120 km to the northeast of Cairo. The mounds rise about 5 m above surrounding fields, occupying an area of more than 4 ha. An Italian expedition discovered Tell el-Farkha in 1987 but stopped excavations after a few brief seasons. The Polish Expedition to the Eastern Nile Delta, established by the Archaeological Museum in Poznań and the Jagiellonian University Institute of Archaeology in cooperation with the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University, cut the first trenches in 1998. The present author and Dr. Marek Chłodnicki have been in charge of the work right from the start.

The importance of the site for a new understanding of the processes leading to the emergence of Pharaonic civilization left no doubt practically from the first season. The early art and architecture of ancient Egypt offers little in the way of parallels for both buildings and finds, and the discoveries of the last few seasons are truly

unprecedented. Interest has been worldwide in a deposit of figurines of unmatched artisanship, crafted of hippo tusks, and gold-sheet figures depicting a Predynastic ruler and his son and heir, believed to be the oldest known from Egypt.

A comprehensive geophysical survey and geological drillings carried out on the site in the first season revealed remains of houses, workshops and graves concealed under the three inconspicuous mounds overgrown with sharp grass. Stratigraphical trenches in different places confirmed the thousand-year history of the site, starting many hundreds of years before the emergence of the pharaohs' state and clearly divided into several phases. The oldest period is connected with the Lower Egyptian Culture of the autochthonous inhabitants of the Delta, who inhabited the settlement at Tell el-Farkha from c. 3600 to c. 3300 BC. They were followed by settlers from the south, Naqadians or to be more precise men associated with the first political centers emerging in Upper Egypt at the time. The apogee of development came in Protodynastic times and during the rule of Dynasties 0 and I (c. 3200-2950 BC). A slump occurred about the middle of the First Dynasty, but settlement continued off and on into the early Fourth Dynasty (Old Kingdom, c. 2600 BC). It was not until the archaeologists appeared that life returned to the forgotten Chicken Hill (for that is the name of the site in translation).

The biggest progress after ten seasons of fieldwork can be seen on the smallest of the mounds situated farthest to the west. The oldest levels have revealed large domestic structures, not recorded previously in Egypt, constructed of posts and wattle-and-daub walls. Of much greater impor-

tance in terms of features connected with the Lower Egyptian Culture horizon were the remains of the oldest complex of breweries (c. 3500-3350 BC). Imports from the Near East and Upper Egypt are strong proof of the role trade by exchange played in the local economy.

Tell el-Farkha's position on the trail leading east made it highly attractive for the Naqadians penetrating into the Delta from the south with the express purpose of taking control of trade. There was a demand among the Naqada elites for luxury goods imported from the Levant on one hand and Nubia on the other, to emphasize status and rank.

The Naqadians lived briefly side by side with the Lower Egyptian Culture population, most certainly interacting with the autochthonous inhabitants, and then they gained predominance. There is no evidence of strife or destruction that could be connected with an invasion of settlers from the south. The more likely scenario is a gradual process of assimilation and acculturation, with the native population of the Delta adopting the more attractive and modern southern models.

The first undertaking of the newcomers once they had settled in was to erect a huge building on top of the forgotten breweries. No bigger complex than this is known from the Egypt of the day (c. 3300-3200 BC). It measured some 25 by 25 m and consisted of an inner courtyard and a number of rooms separated by massive walls. The objects found inside it are proof of the role of trade in the life of the inhabitants. The building may have been a residence connected with stores, belonging to a Naqadian official from the south of Egypt charged with control over

the trade between Palestine and the Delta on one hand and Upper Egypt on the other. He would have been associated with one of the early Egyptian rulers residing in Abydos or Hierakonpolis, whose rule extended over all or a considerable part of Egypt. Ultimately the building burned down in a huge conflagration, which may have been the effect not so much of intentional torching as a cataclysmic earthquake or flood. Were it indeed destroyed in an act of warfare, it could be construed as evidence of a growing rivalry between the various centers of power emerging in Upper Egypt at the time.

Another monumental complex was raised on top of the torched building, again consisting of several chambers separated by walls of varying thickness. Votive deposits were found in two of the rooms. The first of these, discovered in 2001, contained small figurines of baboons and a representation of a prostrating man, whose nakedness suggested that he was most probably a captive. There were also five rattles decorated with engravings, models of maceheads, miniature vessels of stone and clay, game counters and a number of beads.

Further excavation in the western part of the complex in 2006 revealed in one of the rooms a number of ritual vessels, including a small jar, just 23 cm high, covered with a bowl. The jar turned out to be full of miniature objects, altogether 62 pieces. Figurines crafted of hippo tusks, which were equally precious as ivory, depicted men, women, fantastic creatures and animals, models of various objects made of stone, faience and bone, and miniature vessels of stone. More unique figurines, many of which have never before

been recorded for such early periods in Egypt's history, were discovered in 2007, including a small spoon of greywacke with a crocodile-shaped handle, models of weapons and hundreds of beads made from a variety of materials, such as faience and semi-precious stones.

The importance of Tell el-Farkha as an administrative and cult center has thus been confirmed and there is hope that further investigations will answer the question which deity was worshipped here. In any case, before the middle of the First Dynasty the complex and the entire western part of the site was abandoned. The settlement that continued on the central and eastern of the mounds obviously lost its status and gradually diminished in importance.

The settlement uncovered on the Eastern Kom also provided a surprise. In the southwestern part of the mound it was phased with a cemetery and the repeated change of function of this area, from settlement to burial and back to settlement again, which is quite exceptional in Egyptian conditions, is currently interpreted as reflecting a population change. It seems less probable at this point that it would be justified by the changing size of the inhabited area. The oldest of the 66 graves uncovered so far are dated to the times of Dynasty 0 and I, the youngest to the beginning of the Old Kingdom. The Early Dynastic burials range from rich to poor, while those from the Old Kingdom belong (at least to date) in the latter category exclusively. The medium-rich and rich tombs had chambers lined with mud brick and many featured massive brick superstructures reaching a height of 1.5 m. The biggest of the tombs measured 9.25 by 6.70 m. The

richest of the burials in terms of grave goods included up to 50 clay vessels, mostly up to 1m high, several stone vessels, ornaments of semi-precious stones and gold, clay idols, cosmetic palettes, models of granaries, tools, weapons and offerings of meat and grain as food for the dead.

Many of the vessels bore marks which are in essence the oldest known hieroglyphic signs, presumably intended as a means of identifying the origins of a pot or the export destination of the goods inside it. The names of two successive rulers of Dynasty 0, Iry-Hor and Ka, and that of king Narmer of Dynasty I have been deciphered among the signs.

The first of the graves were dug into a huge structure covering more than 400m² and dated to c. 3200-3100 BC. The regularity of the shape consisting of a number of chambers separated by massive walls, 2.5m at the thickest, surrounding an almost square main chamber furnished with an evident shaft, gives credit to the early architects and builders. It also throws new light on the beginnings of Ancient Egyptian architecture. Funerary mastabas of the kind were typical of Dynasties I-II and especially of the Old Kingdom. Assuming that the structure discovered at Tell el-Farkha was indeed a monumental grave, it would be earlier than Dynasty I and thus the earliest of its type known from Egypt. It will take researchers several seasons to complete the investigations of this structure, but even now the finds, which include a stone pendant with a *serekh* schematically carved with the name of some ruler and a dagger handle with geometric ornament crafted of a hippo tusk, suggest that the mastaba should be

associated with someone of rank in the power hierarchy of the day.

The houses found in the northern part of the Eastern Kom were small in size and thin-walled. The rectangular rooms yielded a fairly typical assemblage of objects found in settlement conditions: numerous ovens, tools, stone and clay vessels and their fragments. Once again, however, Tell el-Farkha had a surprise in store for the excavators. One of the rooms contained a few dozen pieces of gold sheet accompanied by a hoard of ostrich-eggshell and carnelian beads and two large and perfectly crafted flint knives, 30 and 50 cm long respectively, undoubtedly of ritual function. This deposit proved to be a hundred years older than the origins of the first Egyptian state. Judging by the archaeological context of the deposit, it must have been hidden away here, possibly in fear of an approaching invasion or perhaps as loot pillaged by the inhabitant of Tell el-Farkha elsewhere. Whatever the reason, the owners did not live to recover what they had hoarded here. It is tempting to think that the objects were saved from the raiders who burned down the residence on the Western Kom, but this is only one of the possible explanations. What was clear from the moment of discovery was that the hoard was even older than the structure in which it was found. Once cleaned and studied, the gold fragments turned out to be the precious sheath of two naked figures of standing men, representing in all likelihood an early ruler and his young progeny and heir.

Last but not least, there is the central mound which has been identified as an ordinary settlement of farmers, herders, fishermen and artisans, subordinated to

the elites residing on the western mound. Even so, the jewelry found here, the copper artifacts, imported pottery and seals and impressions of seals leave little doubt regarding the affluence of this population and their avid participation in long-range trade. Excavations have uncovered a number of architectural phases, each ending in destruction. The traditional alignment of all buildings across layers is NE-SW. In most cases, walls from 45 to 60 cm thick surrounded rooms grouped around rectangular courtyards and containing numerous ovens and hearths, often still with pots standing on them. Flint workshops were also identified. The first brewery in this part of the site was discovered in 2007. Studies of the faunal and botanical remains have provided a rich documentation of everyday life of the ordinary inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha.

Looking back at ten seasons of work on the site, one appreciates its uniqueness. The zonal division into the residential and cultic complex on the Western Kom, the do-

mestic and economic quarter on the central mound and the cemetery and settlement on the eastern one has provided an exceptional opportunity to trace the origins, rise and fall of an important administrative center existing at the time of the emergence of the pharaoh's state. The size and elaborateness of the complex is comparable practically only with Hierakonpolis. It has also been disproved once and for all that the Lower Egyptian Culture of the Delta disappeared in effect of an armed invasion from the south. The Naqadians appear to have infiltrated slowly into northern Egypt, settling in empty areas, as well as in existing centers, and introducing a civilizational model that the local population adopted quickly and freely. The same phenomenon has been observed on other sites excavated recently in the Delta. The most important reason seemingly for this expansion was control of the eastern trade routes, necessitated by the ever-growing demand for luxury goods coveted by the power elites of Upper Egypt.

Cultural phases and approximate dating corresponding to the most important discoveries on Tell el-Farkha

Brewery complex: Western Kom	Lower Egyptian Culture (c. 3600–3300 BC) c. 3500–3300 BC
Residence of the Naqada governor: Western Kom	Naqada Culture (c. 3300–3100 BC) c. 3300–3200 BC
Mastaba: Eastern Kom Gold figures: Eastern Kom	c. 3200–3100 BC c. 3150–3100 BC

Cult and administrative center with votive deposits: Western Kom Rich graves: Eastern Kom	Dynasty 0 – mid Dynasty I (3100–3000 BC)
Abandonment of the Western Kom Graves of average wealth: Eastern Kom Common settlement: Central Kom	mid Dynasty I - Dynasty II (c. 3000-2700 BC)
Poor graves: Eastern Kom Poor settlement: Central Kom	Old Kingdom: Dynasty III (c. 2700–2600 BC)
Final abandonment of the site	Old Kingdom: beginning of Dynasty IV (c. 2600–2550 BC)

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Plan of the Tell el-Farkha site
(Drawing M. Sip)

Excavations on the Eastern Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)





*One of the breweries of Lower Egyptian date from the Western Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*

*An Early Dynastic deposit from the Western Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*





*Stone jars from one of the Early Dynastic graves on the Western Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*

*Predynastic mastaba on the Eastern Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*





*The smaller of the gold-sheet figures
from the settlement on the Eastern Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*

*Exploration of a brewery on the Central Kom
(Photo R. Słaboński)*

