

TELL el-FARKHA (GHAZALA) 2009

Preliminary report on the activities of the Polish Archaeological Mission

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The most recent excavation campaign lasted from 28th February to 27th April 2009. During this time all three tells forming this site were examined by reopening the previously established trenches with very small extensions on the Western and Eastern Koms.

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The present campaign was carried out under the auspices of The Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology Warsaw University in Cairo, Jagiellonian University in Cracow and Archaeological Museum in Poznań.

WESTERN KOM

Excavations on the Western Kom were started on 28.02. and continued till 02.04.2009. Fieldworks were carried out within an older trench that had been opened in 2006-2007 and further excavated in 2006-2008. Only in the northern part of the tell the trench was extended to include 1.5 are more. It was the field conditions (the mound surface there rapidly comes down) that allowed the action and so the whole excavation area covered over 10 ares which are presently at the same level of exploration.

During the season large amounts of pottery fragments were found as well as a dozen or so of complete vessels, mostly of smaller size. The most significant seems to be the situation in the NW part of the trench just beneath the chapel with votive deposits that had been discovered within last seasons of works. There 3 large storage vessels were found sunk into the ground at both sides of a wall and a concentration of smaller vessels and other artifacts.

The most important excavation results in the Western Kom are related to architectural remains. A building complex has been unearthed that was composed of rooms surrounding an empty space, probably a sort of internal courtyard. The latter was enclosed by massive walls (100 – 120 cm wide) preserved to the height of ca. 100 cm.

A complex of small rooms (fig. 4) of a clearly utility function was adjacent to the courtyard from the North. The function was pointed out by stoves and hearths, layers of ashes, organic remains (bones of animals and fish) and typical pottery. Walls that divided particular rooms were very poorly preserved and measured 50-70 cm of width on average. Some of them, usually thin and badly made (there is no right angles, the walls' face line is uneven) give the impression of side attachments built in a hurry as a replay to immediate needs. However, it should be stressed that the northern rooms that have been discovered this year had clearly formed a part of the large administrative and cult complex excavated in 2006-2008. There among others the numerous anthropo- and zoomorphic figurines were found together with model objects, miniature vessels etc. (see reports 2006-2008).

The western part of the tell was destroyed probably many years before excavations on the site were started. It was presumably due to modern farmland establishing and building a drain which was still in use when our expedition was starting its works. In the area only a part (one half, more or less) of a large room has survived. The room was enclosed with

massive walls, where the above mentioned 3 storage jars were discovered. It is worth to stress, that stone and flint tools found there enabled to state a presence of a workshop manufacturing stone vessels. These vessels might be of both cult (a few stone vessels but mostly their numerous stone miniatures were discovered in previous seasons) and burial use. Many examples of stone vessels comprised for grave goods and in some of the to date examined burials from few to several dozen of vessels of various stone kinds were registered. To sum up, it seems that we have gained another evidence for the Western Kom in that period was the most significant area of the site in Tell el-Farkha and was related to the local elite.

Clearly different is the situation observed now in the southern and south-eastern part of the tell from the one noted there previously. During earlier seasons we had discovered there a few rooms of various function. In the uppermost strata explored this year some remains of badly preserved rooms were slightly visible, although, deeper layers preserved no architectural remains. So, it is possible that in the period (Naqada IIIB) the Western Kom was inhabited in a much smaller area than it was later.

Among objects discovered in the last season, it is worth to mention one of the hitherto noted storage vessels and a set of small vessels. From the latter a miniature of a Palestine jar with wavy-handles and lug-handles' imitation especially attracts attention. It, however, should be stressed that the discussed jar probably was not an import. It was rather made in Egypt, presumably even in Tell el-Farkha. Also partially preserved stone vessels were recorded as well as a fragment of a badly preserved copper bracelet. A limestone object – presumably related to the previously discovered complex – a severely damaged model of a conical macehead should be regarded as votive offering.

CENTRAL KOM

Explorations of the Central Kom continued from February 28 to April 9, 2009. The works were held in the western part of the excavation marked in 2000, thus finalizing the excavations held in the C53-C75 area. In 2009 the lowest parts of the site were explored, consisting of layers situated just above the *gezira*, as well as of features embedded in the sand. This is the area where the structures of the so-called “Lower Egyptian residence” were identified in 2008. The upper sections of its eastern part were explored.

This year's research allowed to uncover remains of residential buildings made of organic materials and wooden structures serving as enclosures. In the western part of the explored excavation remains of early mud brick structures were found, linked to the culture of Lower Egypt and to the transition stage between Lower Egypt and Naqada. Furthermore, the western boundary of the "Lower Egyptian residence" was identified, and so were the reinforcements in the western outskirts of the settlement.

The newest of the discovered walls was ca. 1 meter thick. It was made of solid silt. It constitutes remains of a building erected after the conversion of an older residence by Naqadians (beginning of Farkha 3 stage; see 2007 and 2008 reports). A corner of the building explored in 2007 and 2008 was identified. The wall was resting directly on a cultural layer formed within the Lower Egyptian residence. It was further extended by another wall, running in the north-west direction, also 1 meter thick. The other wall seems to have been built on older foundations.

Directly to the west of the wall there are remains of an older wall built of mud clay (similar to the one enclosing the residence on the east and on the south). This wall was 1.2 meters thick. It must have been destroyed as a result of washing away of this part of the site, well visible in the southern profile of the excavation. The hollow formed by washed-away soil was filled with younger materials (Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom). Following the disaster this part of the settlement was reinforced with layers of compact silt and ceramic rubble.

Directly to the west of the said brick wall a rectangular structure, adjacent to the residence's wall, was identified. Only the lowest level has been preserved, with brick marks printed in sand-and-mud base. The walls of this structure were 1 to 1.2 m thick, and its external dimensions were ca. 4.5 x 7 m. To the west it was additionally protected by a double wall. Below the wall remains of wooden reinforcements were found. It takes further efforts to clarify whether these structures constitute part of external reinforcements of the settlement. Apart from an analysis of the already gathered documents it will be necessary to extend the excavation north and southwards.

The interior of the "Lower Egyptian residence" was lined with furrows filled in with sand mixed with humus, constituting remains of timber structures. In many cases it was possible to ascertain that timber beams were half-round, placed flat side up. The width of the beams was usually not greater than 20 cm, although a number of them were 30 cm wide. The

beams run parallel or perpendicularly to each other. The spaces between the beams are small and it seems that not all of the grooves correspond to partitions between individual rooms.

Under the wooden structures connected with the residence, traces of older developments were found. These must have been individual buildings similar to those found in 2008 (see Report 2008). Particularly outstanding is a house sized ca. 10 x 15 m, with visible layout of internal chambers and posts. This house is bigger than the houses discovered in 2008 (3 x 7 m), and thus it might have given origin to the future “residence”.

Inside and outside the said wooden structures a number of pits were found, some of them lined with mud, post-holes and rounded structures, 25-30 cm in diameter, made of clay, similar to many findings from earlier seasons (*cf.* 2007 and 2008 Reports). Exploration of floor layers of deeper structures was very difficult due to the presence of underground water filtering into explored cavities.

Two pear-shaped mace heads were found within the residence. One of them was made of basalt, whereas the other one was made of the radial head of femur. While the first one could have had some practical functions (impact marks visible), the other one must have been purely symbolic. These mace heads are the oldest items of this kind found in Tell el-Farkha, and the bone mace head is a very rare finding.

Pottery was found in most of the features. It usually consisted of sherds of larger bowls and storage vessels. Also, several complete lemon-shaped jars were found, as well as round-shaped vessels decorated with a zigzag pattern or covered with brown slip. A considerable part of Lower Egyptian pottery consisted of small, round-shaped vessels decorated with a zigzag pattern as well as large bowls, sometimes decorated with crescents under the rim of the beak, usually covered with red slip. Furthermore, fragments of pottery imported from the Palestine and Upper Egypt were found (the latter one including a piece of a vessel decorated with a spiral pattern found at the footing of the external wall and dated to Naqada II B-C). The pottery seems to mark the time scale of erecting the first brick structures in this part of the site.

EASTERN KOM

Excavations on the Eastern Kom started on 28th February and continued till 27th April. The works were focused mainly on the cemetery and in a much smaller extend on the

settlement that occupies the northern part of the tell. During the season, 23 graves were discovered and fully explored. All the burials can be divided into 3 main groups. The first group is composed of poor and badly preserved burials with skeletons in a contracted position, their heads pointed North. The deceased were usually covered with mats but devoid of offerings. Stratigraphic relation of the graves as well as the contracted position of the dead suggest that the burials are to be dated to the early dynastic period. The second group comprises of simple pit burials with no grave goods, either, however, they differ much with the straight position of the deceased. Graves of this type were found usually in the surface layer of the tell and they are probably related to the final settlement phase in Tell el-Farkha, that is the beginning of the Old Kingdom.

This group consisted of graves numbered 95, 96, 97, 101, 107. All the dead were buried with their heads placed west or southwestwards. Adult males were buried in graves 97 and 107. The first one was aged 38 to 47, and the other one 20 to 22. In grave 97, the body was placed in a narrow crevice, fully stretched and lying on the right side. As a result of further activities at the site, the left leg and the left arm are missing. The body in grave 107 was also placed on its right side, and the grave itself is also very narrow. Grave 101 was badly damaged. Most probably it was a grave of an adult male. It was situated just under the surface. The bones were seriously mispositioned and many of them were missing. The current condition of the skeleton results from the fact that the grave was very shallow and was located in a place of increased animal activity. The other two graves in E76ac are children's pit graves. Both of them are situated rather close to the surface. In grave 95 a child of 18 months was buried, and a child of 12 months was buried in grave 96.

The third group is composed of the richest graves lined with mud bricks or even constructed in a mastaba form with numerous offerings in their interior. All these graves are to be dated to the protodynastic period (the reign of Dynasty 0). The most significant examples of the group are tombs nos. 86, 91, 98, 99 and 100.

Grave no. 86 was partially excavated last season. In the filling material on the top of the brick structure huge amounts of animals bones were found. The bones belonged to various species to mention only ca. 35 pigs, a few sheep/goats, cattle, dogs, cats as well as hippopotamus tusks. The same layers revealed also numerous pottery fragments (bread moulds, among others), a game counter, a fragment of a weaving weight and 6 complete small vessels. It seems, that all the objects are in relation to the cult of the dead and may be a part of offerings sacrificed for the deceased. In the burial chamber the body of an adult male

was deposited on his left side, the head to North. Grave goods were composed of 11 pottery vessels (6 by the northern wall of the chamber; 5 close to the deceased feet); 2 vessels of travertine (a bowl and a cylindrical vessel), a copper awl, a fragment of a massive flint chip (a knife ?) and 4 beads of agate. An intriguing find is a fragment of a small and poorly made pottery cylinder (preserved to the height of 3 cm and 2 cm wide), that could be a large bead or, more likely, a cylindrical seal model. The hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the presence of pottery fragments of Palestinian origin in the structure filling. All of these may suggest that the tomb owner was involved in trade.

Grave no. 98 comprised 8 pottery vessels (one large jar, one middle-sized jar and 6 cylindrical vessels; fig. 48-49), 2 stone vessels, a palette of schist with a matching grinder and 72 beads of agate that probably come from a necklace. The skeleton of an adult female was resting on her left side, her head North. A mat was covering the offerings, another one the body itself. The tomb comprised of the actual burial chamber lined with bricks and of superstructure that was severely damaged by another younger grave with no. 55. The survived part of superstructure was built of mud bricks. It was rectangular (3.24 x 1.20m) and had massive walls (up to 1.10m) that was planted on the mat which the burial had been secured with. The mat's edges had been turned over the substructure walls up and marked the ground level of the time.

Grave no. 99 consists an extremely interesting example of various substances use as elements of grave offerings. The deceased had been covered with a mat and then scattered with a thick layer of ochre. Some parts of the grave, mainly the SW corner, were also covered with intentionally sprinkled pure sand. All of these was thickly coated with mud. The presence of pure Nile silt may be interpreted in two ways: as an element related to the rebirth belief or a kind of solid way of grave closing. When dried the mud became a very compact cover that made any robbery hardly effective. On the other hand, however, the weight of the muddy cover and its probably rather careless way of depositing severely affected the offerings as almost every piece of pottery was crushed in numerous fragments. The deceased had been offered 11 pottery vessels and 3 stone ones (2 bowls of basalt and a cylindrical vessel of travertine) as well as 3 palettes of schist. Both the palettes and the stone vessels were found in the southern part of the chamber. In the tomb also 114 beads of carnelian and serpentinite were found. The burial belonged to a 30-35 year-old male. His body rested on the left side, the head North.

Grave no. 100, one of the oldest (Dynasty 0), free-standing mastaba structures in Egypt, measured ca. 5 x 4 m. It was surrounded by walls of an uneven thickness. The thickest one was in the North and was 2m wide, the eastern and southern walls were over 1m wide while the western wall was less than a meter. It may result from the fact that the western wall was the only devoid of niches. In case of the remaining ones niches were perfectly preserved – clearly and with no doubts. Surprising is also the location of the burial chamber, which was not in the centre of the structure but visibly shifted to South. After the deceased and offerings were placed in the tomb the burial chamber was poured over with a thick layer of mud that crushed all the grave goods deposited beneath. The superstructure that topped the burial had been built only over all the described layers. The muddy cover may be similarly interpreted as it was the case of grave no. 99. The assumption is proofed by a clearly visible robbery trench running from the top of the construction. The robbers, however, were not able to cut through the mud and did not reach the chamber. The offering set was composed of 36 pottery vessels in their majority severely damaged during the grave construction, 6 stone vessels: 3 bowls of basalt, 1 plate of basalt, 2 cylindrical vessels of travertine, a flint smoothing stone with clear traces of use and a single bead of carnelian. The most precious find is a pottery ladle. Its handle is turned up and the scoop is on its internal side modeled in a rib pattern that suggests a plaited prototype of the object. 4 corners of the scoop were decorated with small animal figurines (3 of them have survived). Heads of the animals were not preserved but the position of the creatures and their characteristic long and turned up tails suggest they were representations of lions.

The skeleton of a 30-35 year-old male had been deposited in the northern part of the chamber, while the majority of his goods (mostly cylindrical stone and vessels) had been put in the central part of the chamber and by the deceased feet or even exactly over them. In the southern section of the room 3 large jars were found together with a few other pottery vessels and finally the ladle that was close to the northern wall. The eastern wall was much later (the end of Dynasty 1 or Dynasty 2) reused as a base for another grave (no. 108) furnished with 2 badly damaged vessels of travertine and a beer-jar. But the most interesting observations were made in the southern wall of the mastaba. There 4 child burials were discovered. They had been covered with mats and were devoid of any offerings (fig. 71). The skeletons' destruction degree was so advanced that nothing but the age of 2 of the children was estimated at 5-6. One child was older and the age of the last one remains undefined. The discussed burials had been placed in the mastaba wall undoubtedly during its construction –

there is no traces of their digging into a complete structure, moreover, layers of bricks over them were homogenous and kept the same arrangement pattern as it was in other places in the wall. Unfortunately, there is no indication of how the burials should be interpreted, and whether the described child graves were subsidiary ones and so known from few cemeteries (mainly from Abydos and Saqqara). Another explanation is that as a result of a fatal coincidence children who died a sudden death but akin to the owner of grave no. 100 were buried on a one-off basis with their relative.

North from grave no. 100, and very close to its wall, another two simple burials with no offerings were found.

Explorations of the northern part of the Eastern Kom were held within the Early Dynastic settlement. The works were held at two levels. Works commenced in 2007 were continued in are 75. In the current season we explored layers numbered 12 to 16, dating back to the beginnings of the Early Dynastic period. The whole area was badly damaged by later pits and leveling. Only fragments of round household buildings (silos) were preserved. They are up to 5 m in diameter and have thin walls (just 1 brick thick). All the walls are cut with odd-shaped cavities and burnt materials. Pottery in its turn is abundant, consisting most of all of bread moulds. It seems that one deals here with leveling layers. It must be remembered that an Old Kingdom burial site was found in these layers. A unique finding was a decorated ivory tag. Items of this kind are typically found in graves, usually pre-dynastic. It seems therefore that the tag must have been originally placed in an older grave, from which it was subsequently stolen.

Excavation E75 was extended eastwards by 5 meters, to include (E76ac), where explorations started at the top of the tell. Layers numbered 1 to 7 were explored. They were related to the end of the Early Dynastic period and the beginning of the Old Kingdom. Two mud brick structures were identified within the excavation. The wall was narrow (just 1 brick thick) and it enclosed a small, rectangular room, 2.4 m wide and at least 2.4 m long (the feature was only partially explored). Probably, the structure is part of a larger architectural development running southwards and eastwards. The structure was damaged by two pit graves (97 and 107), dug into it. Directly to the NW there was a large semicircular feature with a diameter of ca. 5 m, with a hearth in the middle. This is where a deposit of eight clay studs comes from. It is the largest collection of items of this kind found in one place at Tell el-Farkha. In a yard enclosed from the west and the south with the aforementioned buildings

two large storage bowls were found *in situ*. An interesting finding was the larger of these bowls (61 cm in diameter, 46 cm high), anciently damaged. The missing part of the beak was repaired using a fragment of another vessel, glued by means of mud mortar. The bowl itself was not decorated, but the glued piece had a chevron motif under the beak. Another collection found in the layer consisted of a rectangular slate pallet, a cylindrical basalt vessel decorated with a rope pattern and a burnt-out bronze harpoon, identical to the harpoons found in grave 55. It seems that also these findings come from a looted grave – probably from a graveyard located directly to the south.