

Joanna Dębowska-Ludwin

Works at the necropolis

Season 2004 brought the discovery of further 19 graves at the necropolis in Tell el-Farkha. During the season the fieldworks were concentrated on the area of ca. 25, whereas in season 2005 the excavated area was significantly widened to the south and east. Nevertheless, no graves were registered there, with the exception of a structure labeled grave 10, which is the subject of a separated note. The present state of research enables to point the eastern and northern range of the cemetery.

All graves discovered in 2004 represent two general types of construction: small and medium sized, roughly rectangular pits lined with mudbricks and simple pits, small, oval or rectangular. On account of their offerings, orientation and structural features, they can be divided into four main categories. The first one is represented by a single example, the second one counts 9 graves, the third one – also 9 burials, while the last one is present once again only in a single burial.

Group 1 is known mostly from previous seasons. Graves consisting for this category are dated to the end of Dynasty 0 (Naqada IIIB-C1) and the beginning of the First Dynasty (Naqada IIIC1-2). It is supposed that they belonged to Tell el-Farkha's middle class. This group is represented by **grave no. 26**. It was a rectangular pit lined with mudbricks (2.06m long; 1.1m wide; 0.63m deep) with a kind of bottom niche for the burial itself. The grave revealed an interesting set of offerings – many miniature vessels, numerous bowls placed beneath the biggest jars and crushed by them, all together 19 pottery vessels, steatite beads, a flint knife and animal bones. The skeleton of a 35-40-year-old male had been so tightly fit into the bottom niche, that it is impossible to unhesitatingly define its original position. All vessels were found beyond the niche. The grave was found undisturbed.

Graves of **Group 2** are rarely equipped with interesting objects. They are interpreted as belonging to people of the society's lower group and dated to the end of the First Dynasty (NIIIC2-NIIID). However, most of them is rectangular in shape

and lined or paved with mudbricks, the main difference revealing in smaller measurements and lesser effort invested in their construction. Although poorer in form, graves of this part of Farkha's population seldom are simple pits, which become popular not before later periods. This category is represented by following burials:

Grave no. 12 was found disturbed. It is a rectangular pit lined with mudbricks, 1.8m long, 1m wide and 0.61m deep. The skeleton of a 20-25-year-old male was dismembered, not in an anatomical arrangement and many its parts were missing. Probably, the head was pointed to S. 6 pottery vessels were found in two layers, the upper one consisting of items which might originally belong to the neighbouring grave no. 20 (bowl no. 3 from grave no. 12 matches bowl no. 7 from grave no. 20). The whole burial creates an impression of a cemetery dump.

Grave no. 20 was found disturbed. This is a rather small construction in the type of a rectangular pit lined with mudbricks, 1.8m long, 1.14m wide and 0.95m deep. The offerings consist mostly of pottery (18 vessels), though in an interesting set complemented by 1 unidentified stone object, 1 pottery idol, 1 counter? and fragments of clay jar stoppers. The majority of pots was found crushed and dumped over the lower part of the skeleton in the southern section of the burial chamber. The grave belonged to a 40-45-year-old male. He was found in a contracted position on his right side, his head to N.

Grave no. 21 was found undisturbed. It is a rectangular pit lined with mudbricks (2.6m long; 1.28m wide; 1.06m deep) and belonged to a 35-40-year-old male lying in a contracted position on his left side, the head to N. The grave goods consist of relatively few objects: 1 fragment of a stone vessel, fragments of clay jar stoppers, animal bones and 10 pottery vessels representing common and uninteresting types. However, careful distribution of the pots (the biggest in the southern section of the chamber, while the rest of them in the northern one) and at least partially preserved superstructure with a thick mudbrick cover protecting the burial make the grave one of the most interesting in Tell el-Farkha.

Grave no. 23 was probably disturbed. the grave goods were insignificant (with the exception of few beads found in vessel no. 7 and the unidentified metal object) being placed on the deceased, in the northern section of the chamber and – the biggest jars only – in its southern part. Both skeletons (a 20-30-year-old female and a 15-18-year-old teenager) were discovered lying very close to each other, unfortunately the weak state of bones' preservation – particularly the younger one –

makes impossible to ascertain the original position of the bodies. Once again the construction had been carelessly built, having its bricked walls irregular and twisted. Its total measurements reach 2.5m of length, 1.26m of width and 0.76m of depth.

Grave no. 24 was discovered undisturbed (secured with a covering mat and a superstructure of mudbricks), though the burial and its offering were severely damaged. It represents the type of a rectangular pit lined with mudbricks, 2.46m long; 1.6m wide; 1.35m deep. In general, the grave goods are quite numerous (24 pottery vessels; 1 stone grinder; 1 deposit consisting of bone implements; 2 bone awls; fragments of a clay jar stoppers), but they represent an average set of pottery types. Again, the largest storage jars had been placed in the southern part of the chamber, while the smaller ones in its northern section. The most interesting elements of the offering are bone implements: 2 awls (one complete) and so called deposit, that is at least 3 miniature cylindrical vessels and 3 figurines or plaques in a form of fish. The skeleton of a 20-25-year-old female was badly preserved and partially dislocated.

Grave no. 27 had been equipped only in a nominal way (1 pottery vessel, 1 fragment of a clay jar stopper with a textile impression); its construction was rather small sized (1.5m long; 0.86m wide; 0.38m deep) and simple having its mudbricked lined walls low and narrow. The skeleton of an adult male was found in a dislocated position, though there was no sign of robbery recorded.

Grave no. 29. Although the grave was found undisturbed and had been lined with bricks, lack of offerings (with exception of the single bead) makes it rather poor. Similar is its state of preservation. Not much can be said about an adult female lying in a contracted position, on her right side, the head to S, who was the owner of the rather small sized (1.5m long; 0.78m wide; 0.18m deep) structure.

Grave no. 30 represents a more elaborated kind of construction, though it had been rather carelessly built, what is clear when considering its twisted bricked walls and hardly interesting offerings (3 pottery vessels, 1 fragment of a seal impression). It measured 1.9m of length, 1.06m of width and 0.57m of depth and belonged to a 20-25-year-old male buried in a contracted position on his left side, the head to N.

Grave no. 32 was found undisturbed. It is a roughly rectangular simple pit, that measured 1.02m of length, 0.65m of width, 0.15m of depth and belonged to an adult male buried in a contracted position on his left side, his head to N. The unusually good state of matting's preservation deserves extra stressing. Mats were recorded as white fibers covering the burial and lining the pit's bottom. Quite

untypical is also the rectangular shape of the pit itself, which chiefly implies the usage of mudbricks.

Group 3 of graves consists of very similar to each other simple pit burials (mostly oval but chiefly their exact shape remains undefined) lined with mattings and devoid of any offerings. This group of graves is dated only by its archaeological relation to the Old Kingdom structures, most probably to the end of Early Dynastic Period. Most of them was found undisturbed, probably because of lack of any offerings deposited by the dead. This group is represented by the following burials:

Grave no. 11. The very contracted skeleton of a 35-40-year-old female was found in a small (0.7m long; 0.4m wide; 0.09m deep), very dusty pit of indistinct edges. The burial had been placed beneath younger mudbrick constructions of economic character. No other dating hints were recorded.

Graves no. 17 and no. 18 are very similar to each other simple pits. These very decayed burials were found next to a mudbrick wall of structure no. 13 and merely 0.5m from themselves. It seems that the burials were not in connection to the building, which should be regarded as of younger date. The graves belonged to a 18-23-year old female and a 20-25-year-old male. Both people were lying in a very contracted position, the woman on her left side, her head to W, while the man – slightly turned to his right side, the head to N. It is uncertain if the fragments of seal impressions recorded in both presently inseparable though probably self-contained pits are in actual relation with the graves.

Grave no. 19. Only a solitary skull was recorded. It was lying its facial part up in a dusty pit on a mat. Below the matting a compact bricked level was found covering the whole trench surface. The skull belonged probably to an adult male.

Grave no. 22 is a very simple pit burial, without any traces of mattings or offerings. It measured 0.94m of length, 0.64m of width and 0.19m of depth. The head of a 35-45-year-old male was found on a much higher level than the rest of the contracted body lying on his right side, the head to E, the feet pressed against the pit's northern side. The grave was discovered beneath younger mudbrick constructions, unrelated to the cemetery. No other dating hints were recorded.

Grave no. 25. The burial itself was found in a very weak condition, though the little pit had clear edges carefully lined with mattings. It measured 0.88m of length, 0.56m of width, 0.16m of depth and was comprising the body of a 35-55-year-old

female, buried in a contracted position on her left side, the head to N. Particularly well preserved was the matting covering the whole grave from above.

Grave no. 28 is a very simple and poor burial. The small pit (0.76m long; 0.5m wide; 0.1m deep) had clear edges, carefully lined with mattings. No offerings were recorded except an isolated piece of rough pottery in the filling. The burial belonged to a 20-25-year-old female lying in a contracted position on her left side, the head to N.

Grave no. 31 is a very simple pit construction, lined with mattings, unfortunately badly disturbed by another pit of dusty filling. The bones were in a very poor condition, lying in a contracted position on the left side, the head to W, partly burned, probably thanks to the later cutting. The skeleton belonged to a 5-year-old child and the pit measured 0.7m of length, 0.32m of width and 0.12m of depth.

Finally, **Group 4** of graves is the youngest on the site. The single burial that was assigned to the group was found on the very top of the tell over ruins of a poor settlement. **Grave no. 15** is especially noteworthy because of the splendid state of bones' preservation and perfectly anatomical arrangement of the skeleton. These make impression that it should be regarded as much younger than the other graves of Tell el-Farkha. The straight position of the deceased (a 30-40-year-old male) lying on his right side, its orientation along the axis WE and the good state of bones' preservation suggest the Old Kingdom date of this grave.

It seems that in Tell el-Farkha necropolis we deal with socio-political changes of a local society reflected in graves of its members. Wealthy graves of Group 1 are contemporaneous with the terminal stage of the settlement's political importance, Group 2 shows the society's gradual decline and Group 3 proves the settlement's low rank. This category reveals no traces of social differentiation and this – together with the architectural evidence – points to the elites' final departure from Tell el-Farkha. The last Group closes the history of the necropolis, presumably belonging to some other group of people with their own customs. Our works will be continued soon in the future.