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Tell El-Farkha (Ghazala): Season 2009

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TELL EL-FARKHA (GHAZALA) SEASON 2009

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Abstract: Excavations at Tell el-Farkha in 2009 were conducted on all three koms making up the site. A complex of buildings around an empty space continued to be investigated on the Western Kom, the results confirming the exceptional role of the Western shrine (Room 211) and its surroundings at the turn of the Protodynastic period. Remains of a Lower Egyptian “residence” were identified on the Central Kom. The layout of these rectangular units made of organic materials and wooden structures serving as enclosures proved to be quite complicated. A number of pits, some of them lined with mud, were found in and around the structures. On the Eastern Kom 23 graves were discovered and fully explored. They can be divided into three main groups. The most interesting are the richest graves lined with mud brick or even constructed in mastaba form, with numerous offerings inside them. Four subsidiary child graves were discovered in the south wall of a freestanding mastaba (grave 100) from the times of Dynasty 0.

Keywords: Nile Delta, Tell el-Farkha, Protodynastic Period, Early Dynastic, Lower Egyptian Culture, Naqada

All three tells forming this site were examined in the course of the season, already established trenches being reopened and small extensions being made on the Western and Eastern Koms [*Fig. 1*].

Post-processing work was also conducted on site, dealing with pottery, flint and other stone tools, as well as human and animal remains.

[MC, KMC]

WESTERN KOM

Fieldwork was carried out within an older trench opened in 2006–2007 and further excavated in 2008 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2008; 2010; 2011), now extended to include 1.5 ares more in the northern part of the tell, where the mound surface drops rapidly. The total excavation area explored at this level is now over 10 ares. The absence of any architecture in the southern and

southeastern part of the tell [*Fig. 2*], below previously excavated rooms of disparate function, suggests that in the Naqada IIIB period, a much smaller area of the Western Kom was inhabited.

The uncovered architectural remains belong to a building complex composed of rooms surrounding an empty space, probably a sort of internal courtyard (see

Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2011). The rooms to the north of this courtyard are clearly utilitarian [Fig. 3] and much better constructed than previously explored adjoining chambers. The ovens and hearths found inside them, layers of ashes, organic remains (bones of animals and fish) and typical pottery attested to their function. To the west of the courtyard there was a large room enclosed by massive walls, only half preserved due to modern damage to the tell. It contained three large storage jars [Fig. 4; see also Fig. 5, bottom left] sunk into the ground on both sides of a wall and a set of smaller vessels and other artefacts (see below). Meriting special attention among the small vessels was a miniature imitation of a Palestine jar with

wavy-handles and lug handles [Fig. 5, bottom right], which however could not have been an import; it was made in Egypt, presumably even in Tell el-Farkha. Stone vessel fragments were also recorded [Fig. 5, center left], as well as a fragment of badly preserved copper bracelet. A severely damaged model of a conical macehead, made of limestone, should be regarded as a votive offering [Fig. 5, center right].

During the season large amounts of pottery fragments were found as well as a dozen or so of complete vessels, mostly of smaller size. Bread moulds made of poor quality Nile silt were relatively rare. Jars made of better clay were more abundant. Some of them were evidently used for cooking in ovens and hearths, and one

Team

Dates of work: 28 February–27 April 2009

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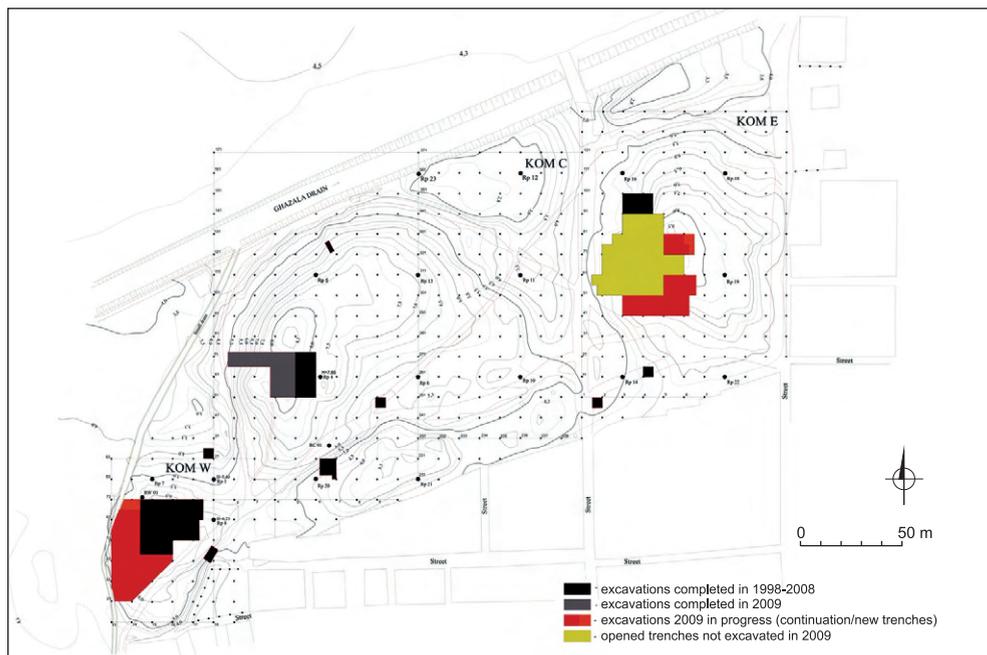


Fig. 1. *Collective plan of the excavations in Tell el-Farkha in 1998–2009 (Mission archives)*



Fig. 2. *General view of the kom in Tell el-Farkha, view from the southeast (All photos in this article by Robert Słaboński)*



Fig. 3. Western Kom. Rooms to the north of the courtyard, view from the north



Fig. 4. Western Kom. Storage vessels sunk into the ground of one of the rooms to the west of the courtyard



Fig. 5. Selection of finds from the Western Kom (counterclockwise from top): stone and flint tools (top), limestone model of conical macehead, storage vessel (for the vessel in situ, see Fig. 4), miniature Palestinian vessel, vessel made of basalt

was even unearthed standing inside an oven (Feature No. 250). Small jars with rounded bottoms and different shapes of necks and rims constituted another category. Twenty such vessels, in different states of preservation, were discovered in 2009. Bowls of different types also formed a numerous category. A few miniature vessels (bowls, cups) were also uncovered.

The rooms evidently formed part of a large administrative and cult complex excavated in 2006–2008, which included chapel (Room 211) in the northwestern part of the excavation area (see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2008; 2010). Finds made in and round the chapel have suggested its cultic function. They have included votive deposits composed of numerous anthropo- and zoomorphic figures found together with models of objects, miniature vessels, a rich collection of stone and flint tools [Fig. 4, top] used in the manufacture of stone vessels (which could have had a cult function beside a well attested sepulchral one, see Pryc 2009), and pottery, like pot stands, so-called Nubian barrel-shaped jars and a *hes*-jar, differing from assemblages from other parts of the site (see Sobas 2009) but with evident correlation to ceramics discovered in other early temples or shrines, e.g. Abydos, Elephantine, Hierakonpolis and Tell Ibrahim Awad. The faunal matter, examined by archaeozoologist Renata

Ablamowicz, has also demonstrated a predominance of cattle bones in this area, standing in direct contrast with the prevalence of pig remains in other parts of Tell el-Farkha, both settlement and cemetery, as is the rule in Lower Egypt as a whole (Linseele, Van Neer 2003: 7). A large flint knife was found with several cattle ribs alongside three storage jars hidden under the floor of a shrine (see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2010). This knife could have been used for ritual cattle killing. Similar flint knives were still used for ritual killing of animals during the Old Kingdom, as demonstrated in many reliefs from mastabas of the period. Taken as a whole, the finds clearly point to the exceptional role of this area in the Protodynastic and early Dynastic periods, leaving little doubt that the Western Kom was an area of key importance on Tell el-Farkha and was related to the local elite. Indeed, it is not unlike the HK29A locality at Hierakonpolis, which is much earlier of course, but which also contained pottery not used commonly by the populace (Friedman 1996: 29), crescent drills for manufacturing stone vessels (Friedman 2009: 98), as well as an assemblage of faunal remains not encountered at other sites in the low desert at Hierakonpolis (Friedman 1996: 24).

[KMC]

CENTRAL KOM

Excavations in 2009 concentrated on the lowest layers just above the *gezirah* sands, as well as features embedded in the sand in the western part of the main trench on the top of the kom [see Fig. 1]. This is the area of the so-called Lower Egyptian “residence”, identified and explored partly

in 2008 (see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2011). More remains of residential buildings constructed of organic materials were uncovered along with a wooden structure serving as an enclosure. Such rectangular structures of organic building materials are known from other parts of the site

(Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2003; 2007), as well as from other Lower Egyptian settlements, such as Maadi (Seeher 1990), but never have they been noted to be so huge and well organized. The western boundary of the “residence” was also identified along with reinforcements on the western outskirts of the settlement.

The residence was 25 m wide and at least 20 m long. The interior 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 the timber beams had been 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 ran parallel or perpendicular to one another. The distances between particular beams were small

and not all of the grooves corresponded to partitions between individual rooms [Fig. 6].

A number of pits were found, some of them lined with mud, inside and outside the wooden structure [Fig. 7]. Structures of the kind are known from Neolithic times (Debono, Mortensen 1990: 22) and they occur at other sites of Lower Egyptian culture, such as Buto (von der Way 1987: Pl. 18). Postholes and mud pits or conical structures, 25–30 cm in diameter, made of solid silt mixed with diverse temper often accompanied the wooden structures. They are similar to many findings from earlier seasons (see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2010; 2011), as well as to features known from Maadi, Buto and Tell el-Iswid (Rizkana, Seeher 1989: 33–47; von der Way 1987: 61–76; van den Brink 1989: 62).



Fig. 6. Central Kom, remains of the Lower Egyptian “residence”, view from the south

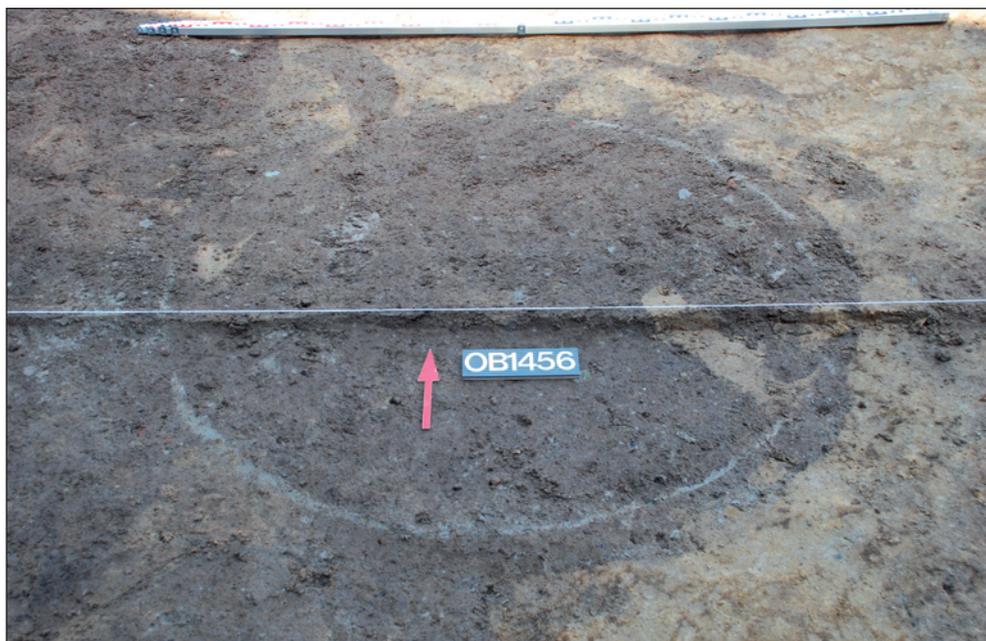


Fig. 7. Storage pit lined with mud in the Lower Egyptian "residence"



Fig. 8. Central Kom. Remains of the wooden building below the Lower Egyptian "residence"



Fig. 9. Central Kom. Remains of a rectangular room built of mud brick adjoining the Lower Egyptian “residence”, view from the southwest



Fig. 10. Central Kom. Remains of external wooden structures, view from the west

Older remains were found under wooden structures connected with the residence [Fig. 8]. These must have been individual buildings similar to those found in 2008 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2011). Exploration of floor layers of the deeper structures was encumbered

by underground water filtering into the trenches.

Remains of early mud brick structures, linked to the second phase of the Lower Egyptian “residence”, were found in the westernmost part of the explored area (7.5 m wide extension of the trench to the

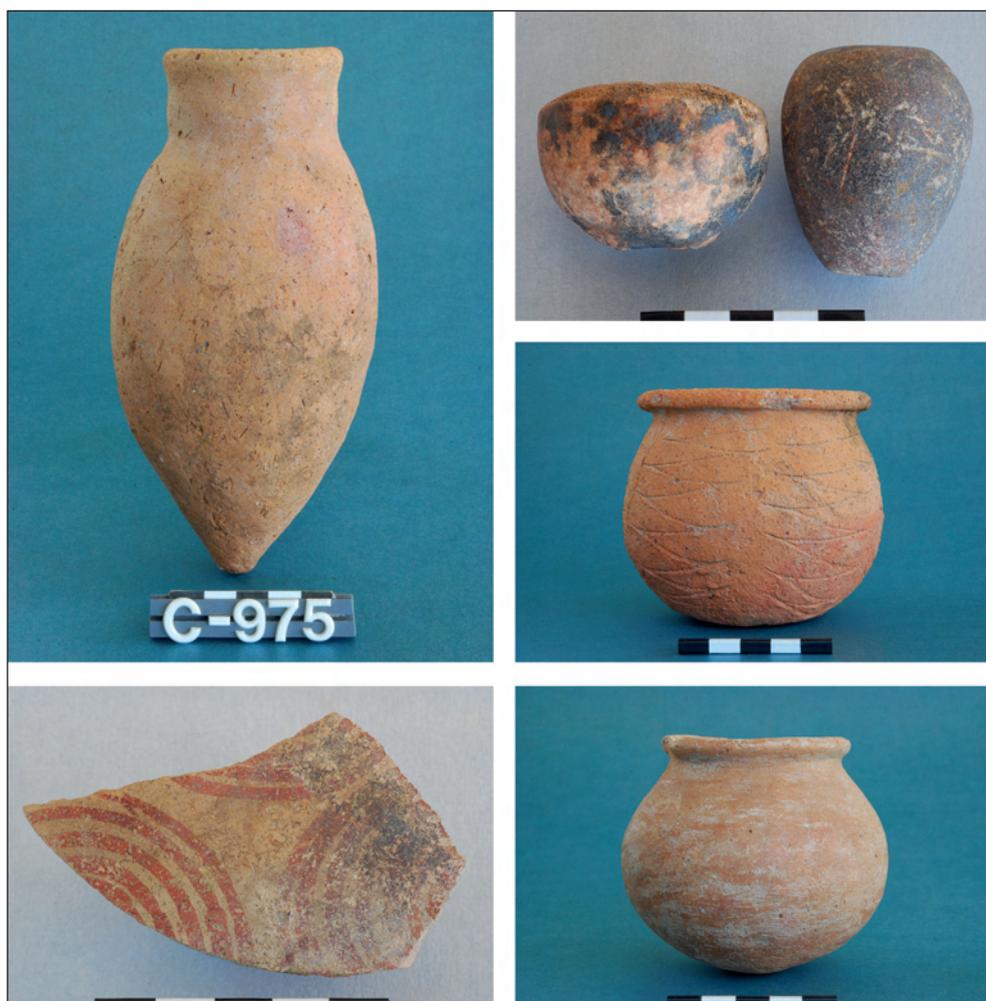


Fig. 11. Selection of finds from the Central Kom (clockwise from top right): bone and basalt mace heads, small jar decorated with zigzag pattern, small jar with brown slip, fragment of pot decorated with painted spirals, lemon-shaped jar

west, see Fig. 1) (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2011). The wall was 1.20 m thick. The westernmost end of this wall had been washed away, a process clearly observed in the southern trench wall. Following the disaster this part of the settlement was reinforced with layers of compact silt and ceramic rubble. Younger material, of early Dynastic and Old Kingdom date, filled the hollow left by washed-away soil.

A rectangular structure was identified adjacent to the residence wall, directly to the west of the brick wall. Only the lowest course of bricks was preserved in the form of marks imprinted in a sand-and-mud base. The walls of this structure were from 1.00 m to 1.20 m thick and the external dimensions were approximately 4.50 m by 7.00 m. It was additionally protected by a double wall on the western side [Fig. 9]. Remains of wooden structures found below the wall [Fig. 10] demand further study to determine whether they constituted part of the external reinforcements of the settlement.

Two pear-shaped maceheads were found within the residence. One of them was made of basalt, the other of the radial head of a femur bone [Fig. 11, top

right]. While the first one could have had some practical function (impact marks visible), the other one must have been purely symbolic. These two mace heads are the oldest items of their kind found in Tell el-Farkha, and the bone macehead is very rare indeed.

Pottery found in most of the features consisted of sherds of larger bowls and storage vessels. Several complete lemon-shaped jars were found [Fig. 11, top left], as well as globular vessels decorated with a zigzag pattern [Fig. 11, center right] or covered with brown slip [Fig. 11, bottom right]. A considerable part of Lower Egyptian pottery consisted of small globular vessels decorated with a zigzag pattern, as well as large bowls, sometimes decorated with crescents under the rim, usually coated with red slip. Furthermore, fragments of pottery imported from Palestine and Upper Egypt were found, the latter including a piece of a vessel decorated with a spiral pattern [Fig. 11, bottom left], found by the footing of the external wall. The pottery suggests a date not later than Naqada IIC for the raising of the first brick structures in this part of the site.

[MC]

EASTERN KOM

Investigations were focused mainly on the cemetery and to a much lesser extent on the settlement occupying the northern part of the tell. The 23 graves that were fully explored can be divided into three main groups (Dębowska 2008).

The first group is composed of poor and badly preserved burials [Fig. 12, bottom left] with skeletons in contracted position, their heads pointed north. The deceased were usually covered with mats but lacking

any offerings. Stratigraphic position 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 is made up of simple pit burials with no grave goods, but with the deceased in supine position. 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 westward or southwestward. Adult males were buried in graves 97 and 107, the former aged 38 to 47, the latter 20 to 22. In grave 97, the body (missing the left leg and left arm due to later activities on the site) was placed fully stretched out and lying on the right side in a narrow pit. The body in grave 107 [Fig. 12, top left] was also placed on its right side in a pit grave barely 0.35 m wide. Grave 101, just under the surface, was badly damaged. Most probably it was a grave of an adult male, the bones in serious disarray.

The other two graves were children's pit graves situated rather close to the surface: a child of 18 months in grave 95 and a child of 12 months in grave 96.

The third group is composed of the richest graves lined with mud bricks or even constructed in mastaba form with numerous offerings inside them. They are to be dated to the Protodynastic Period (Dynasty 0). The most significant examples of the group are tombs numbered 86 (partly excavated in the previous season), 91, 98, 99 and 100.

The fill on top of the brick structure of grave 86 contained huge amounts of animal bones [Fig. 13, left], identified



Fig. 12. Examples of three groups of burials from the cemetery on the Eastern Kom (counterclockwise from top left): simple pit burial in grave 107, male skeleton in supine position; simple pit burial in grave 105, skeleton in contracted position; mud-brick grave 86, skeleton in contracted position and grave goods

(by R. Abłamowicz) as representing fragments of skeletons of 31 pigs of different age, from seven weeks to five years, two cattle, three goats, a donkey, dog, two cats and a hippopotamus. Pottery sherds, mainly bread moulds, were found among the animal bones, together with a game counter, fragment of loom weight and six complete small vessels [Fig. 13, right]. All the objects seem to be in relation to the cult of the dead and may be part of the sacrificial offerings. The body of an adult male was deposited in the burial chamber [Fig. 12, right], on his left side, the head to the north. The grave goods were composed of 11 pottery vessels (six by the northern wall of the chamber; five close to the feet of the skeleton); two vessels of travertine (bowl and cylindrical vessel), copper awl, massive flint chip fragment (knife?) and four beads of agate. A small, poorly made

pottery cylinder (preserved height 3 cm, 2 cm in diameter) is intriguing: it could be a large bead or, more likely, a cylindrical seal model. The idea seems to be confirmed by the presence of sherds of pottery of Palestinian origin in the fill of the grave. It could suggest that the deceased had been involved in trade.

Grave 91 [Fig. 14, left] had been furnished with 30 pottery vessels, two stone vessels, a bone spoon and two copper tools with evidence of use: a chisel or axe/adze (see Tadmor 2002) and a punch [Fig. 14, bottom right]. Of particular interest are two large wine-jars with engraved *serekhs* of two different early rulers, which should have bearing on the establishing of a sequence of Dynasty 0 rulers. The *serekh* incised on the older vessel (Van den Brink 1996: 144) is composed of a frame enclosing a palace façade in the lower part



Fig. 13. Grave 86: top layer of fill with animal bones mixed with pottery sherds and a layer of pottery and other objects (part of the sacrificial offerings?) above the burial

and a simplified notation of the name in the upper part [Fig. 14, center top, and Figs 3:1, 4:1 on pages 630–631 in this volume]. The sign may be interpreted as a harpoon or a schematic rendering of a catfish. The second *serekh*, engraved on a younger jar (Van den Brink 1996: 144–147), comprises a palace façade topped with a falcon and two maces in the lower part of the frame, as well as a third already outside the *serekh* [Fig. 14, top right, and Figs 3:2, 4:2 on pages 630–631 in this volume]. Judging by jar types, the two names would have belonged to rulers preceding Iry-Hor of Dynasty 0, whose tomb is known from Abydos (see Jucha 2012, in this volume).

The skeleton in grave 91 was that of a 24–30 year-old male resting on his back with the head to the north. The limbs and mandible were in disarray, possibly indicating a secondary burial or that the grave was built some time after the death of the person buried in it. The wealthy equipment and the effort invested in the preparation of a mud-brick grave makes the second possibility more plausible (see Dębowska-Ludwin 2010).

The furnishing in grave 98 comprised eight pottery vessels (one large jar, one middle-sized jar and six cylindrical vessels), two stone vessels, a palette of greywacke with matching grinder and 72 beads of



Fig. 14. Grave 91 (left); two wine jars with engraved serekhs of early rulers (top right) and a copper chisel or axe/adze and punch (bottom right) from the furnishings of this grave

agate that probably made up a necklace. The skeleton of an adult female rested on her left side, her head to the north [Fig. 15]. A mat covered the offerings, another the body. The tomb was comprised of the actual burial chamber lined with bricks and of a superstructure that had been severely damaged by another younger grave (no. 55; see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2010: 173–177). The surviving part of the superstructure was built of mud bricks. It was rectangular (3.24 m by 1.20 m) and had massive walls (up to 1.10 m thick) resting on the mat securing the burial. The edges of the mat had been turned up over the substructure walls and marked the ground level of the time.

Grave 99 [Fig. 16, left] can be considered a model burial. The body had been covered with a mat and a thick layer of ochre scattered over it. Parts of the grave, mainly the southwestern corner, were also covered with intentionally sprinkled pure sand. All of these were thickly coated with mud.

The presence of pure Nile silt may be interpreted in two ways: as an element related to beliefs in rebirth or a way to seal the grave very solidly. In the first case, the situation can be compared in some ways to the red bottles and highly polished black egg-shaped jars from the Predynastic ceremonial centre at HK29A in Hierakonpolis, interpreted as used



Fig. 15. Grave 98: burial and furnishings

in temple rites associated with coming of the Nile flood (Friedman 2005: 5). In graves at some cemeteries pure mud was discovered also in pottery vessels (see, e.g., Petrie, Quibell 1896: 16–26). In the second case, a compact covering of dried mud may have hindered effective robbery. It also resulted in the crushing of most artefacts

due to the weight of the mud cover and its probably rather careless deposition.

The grave goods in this burial included 11 pottery vessels and three stone ones: two bowls of basalt and a cylindrical vessel of travertine, as well as three palettes of greywacke [Fig. 16, bottom right]. Both the palettes and the stone vessels were found in



Fig. 16. Burial in grave 99 (left), necklace (top right) and cosmetic palettes from the grave furnishings

the southern part of the chamber. Beads of carnelian and serpentinite, 114 of them, made up a necklace [Fig. 16, top right]. The burial belonged to a 30–35 year-old male. His body rested on the left side, the head to the north.

Grave 100 [Fig. 18] is one of the oldest, dating from Dynasty 0), freestanding mastaba structures in Egypt. It measured approximately 5 m by 4 m (see Dębowska-Ludwin *et alii* 2010) and had walls of uneven thickness, the north wall being the thickest at 2 m, the east and south walls 1 m thick and the west wall less than a meter, the differences possibly due to the absence of niches from the west wall, which were distinct and well preserved in the other three walls. The location of the burial chamber was also interesting: not in the centre of the structure, but visibly shifted to the south. A thick layer of mud covered the body and offerings [Fig. 18, bottom left], crushing everything underneath. The superstructure was built on top of the burial and the mud layer, which evidently prevented penetration by the robbers (note the robbers' trench in the north wall of the burial chamber, Fig. 18, bottom right).

The skeleton of a 30–35 year-old male was deposited in the northern part of the chamber, while the majority of the grave goods (mostly cylindrical stone and clay vessels) were placed in the central part of the chamber and by and over the feet of the skeleton [see Fig. 18, bottom right]. Three large jars and a few other vessels stood in the southern part of the chamber. The offering set was composed of 36 pottery vessels, most of them severely crushed, six stone vessels (three bowls of basalt, one plate of basalt, two cylindrical vessels of travertine), a flint smoothing stone with evidence of use and a single bead of

carnelian. Close to the north wall there was a pottery ladle. The scoop is covered on the inside with a ribbed pattern imitating plaitwork [Fig. 19]. The four corners of the scoop were decorated with small animal figurines, three of which have survived. Although the heads are lost, the position of the creatures and the characteristic long and turned up tails suggest they were representations of lions.

The east wall of the burial chamber was reused at a much later date, in the end of Dynasty 1 or beginning of Dynasty 2, as a base for another grave (no. 108) furnished with two badly damaged travertine vessels and a beer-jar. Four child burials were discovered in the south wall of the mastaba. The burials were covered with mats and were devoid of any offerings [Fig. 17]. The age of two of the skeletons could be estimated at approximately 5–6 years, one other appears to have been



Fig. 17. Child burial found in the southeastern corner of Grave 100

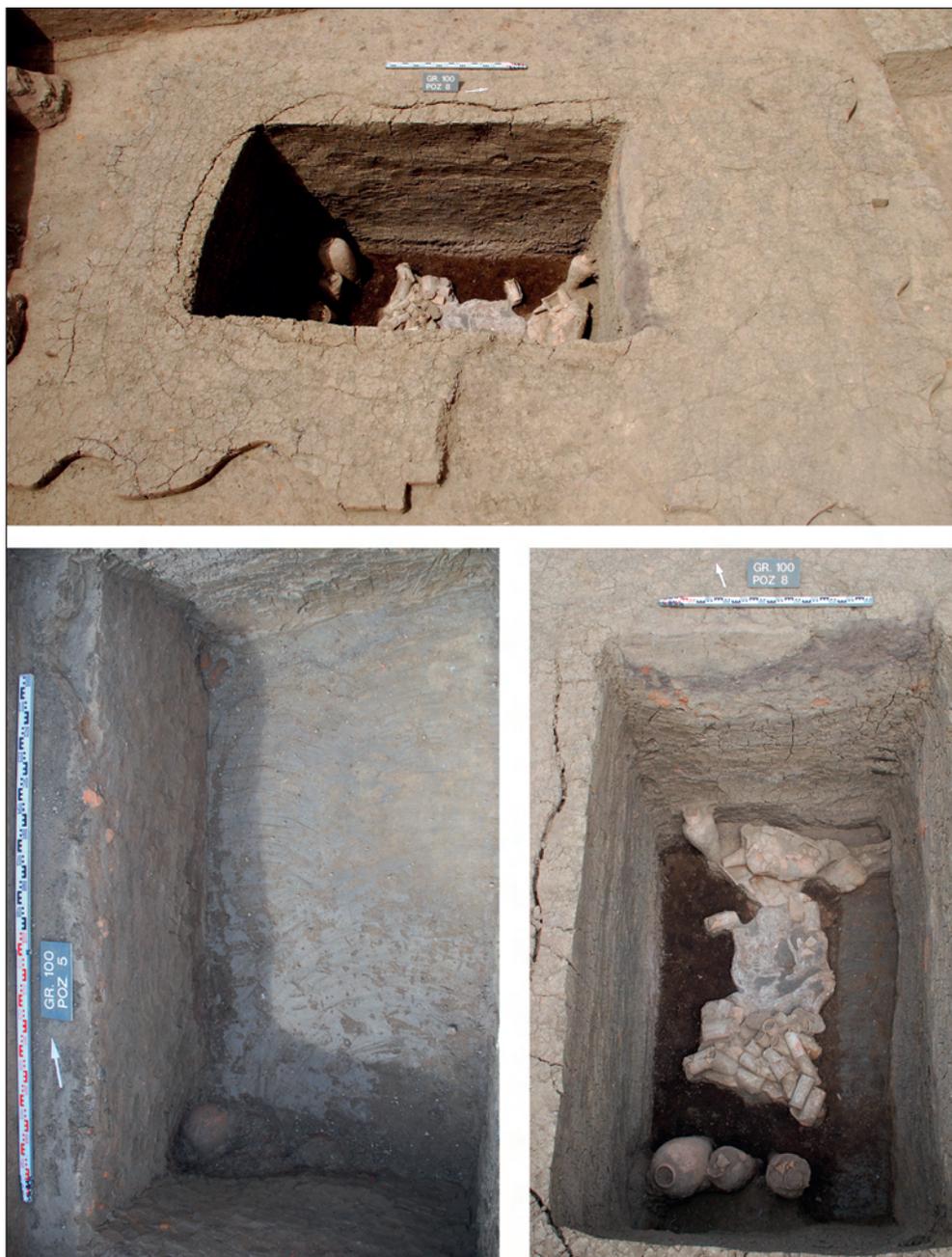


Fig. 18. Grave 100 viewed from the east (top), layer of mud covering the burial (bottom left) and a view of the burial chamber

older and the age of the fourth could not be established. The burials were placed in the mastaba wall during its construction, there being no evidence of digging into the finished structure and the brick layers over them being homogenous and in line with the rest of the construction. There is no indication of how the burials should be interpreted. They could be considered as subsidiary graves, similar examples of which have been found mainly in the cemeteries in Abydos and Saqqara (Ciałowicz 2001: 131, 141). On the other hand, they could be the result of a fatal coincidence, the children dying a sudden death and buried on a one-off basis with their relative.

The Early Dynastic settlement in the northern part of the Eastern Kom continued to be explored in area 75, which had been opened in 2007, now concentrating on layers from 12 to 16, dated to the beginnings of the Early Dynastic

period. Fragments of circular household structures survived intensive later activity in the form of pits and leveling. The silos are up to 5 m in diameter and have thin walls (just one brick thick). All the walls are cut with odd-shaped pits and contain burned material. Pottery, mostly bread moulds, was abundant. The layers seem to be leveling layers (it should be recalled that there was an Old Kingdom burial site in this spot). A unique decorated ivory tag [Fig. 20, top left] is of a kind typically found in Predynastic graves (Crowfoot Payne 1993: 236ff.); it may have been plundered from some older grave on the site.

Excavations in the extension of E75 (E76ac), going east 5 m, started from the surface 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. The wall



Fig. 19. Pottery ladle from grave 100

was narrow (just one brick thick) and it enclosed a small, rectangular room, 2.40 m wide and at least 2.40 m long (the feature was only partly explored). This structure may be part of a larger architectural complex running eastward. The structure was damaged by two pit graves (97 and 107), dug into it. Directly to the northwest there was a large semicircular feature with a diameter of approximately 5 m, with a hearth in the middle. A deposit of eight clay cones discovered in this feature

is the largest collection of items of this kind found in one place at Tell el-Farkha. Two large storage bowls were found in place, in a yard to the east and north of the buildings. The larger of these bowls (61 cm in diameter, 46 cm high) had been damaged and repaired, the missing part of the rim pieced with a fragment of another vessel attached with mud mortar. The bowl was plain, but the inserted piece was decorated with a geometric motif under the rim [Fig. 20, bottom left]. Other finds from



Fig. 20. Selection of finds from the Eastern Kom (clockwise from top left): decorated ivory tag; cylindrical basalt jar with a rope band; cosmetic palette; copper harpoon; storage bowl with repaired rim

this layer included a rectangular greywacke palette [*Fig. 20*, top right], a cylindrical basalt vessel decorated with a rope pattern [*Fig. 20*, top center] and a burnt copper harpoon [*Fig. 20*, bottom right], similar

to the harpoons found in grave 55. These finds seem also to have come from a looted grave, probably from a graveyard located directly to the south.

[MC, KMC]

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