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Tell El-Farkha (Ghazala): Season 2005

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TELL EL-FARKHA (GHAZALA) SEASON 2005

Marek Chłodnicki and Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz

The present campaign, sponsored by Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the Poznań Prehistoric Society, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University and the State Committee for Scientific Research (KBN) lasted from 22 February to 12 May 2005.¹

In the 2005 season, work was continued on the Western and Central koms in the areas excavated in previous years. On the Eastern Kom, work was also carried on in previously traced trenches and the area between them (Fig. 1).

1 The team, headed by Dr. Marek Chłodnicki and Prof. Dr. Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz included: Mr. Krzysztof Cichowski, Ms Joanna Dębowska, Mr. Maciej Jórdeczka, Dr. Jacek Kabaciński, Mr. Ryszard Kirkowski, Mr. Piotr Kołodziejczyk, Ms Grażyna Krawczyk, Ms Ewa Kuciewicz, Ms Anna Longa, Mr. Grzegorz Pryc, Mr. Michał Sip, Mr. Leszek Szumlas, Ms Magdalena Włodarska, archaeologists; Dr. Mariusz Jucha, Ms Agnieszka Mączyńska, Mr. Michał Rozwadowski, ceramologists; Ms Maria Abłamowicz, archaeozoologist; Mr. Michał Wasilewski, geologist; Ms Anna Biel; Mr. Krzysztof Kowalski, photographers; Mrs. Halina Żarska-Chłodnicka, documentalist; Ms Katarzyna Błaszczuk, Mr. Marcin Czarnowicz, Ms Anna Drzymuchowska, Ms Magdalena Kamionka, Ms Małgorzata Kujawa, Mr. Michał Kurzyk, Mr. Paweł Surówka, Ms Monika Włodarska, Ms Anna Zając, Mr. Szymon Zdziebłowski, students. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Messrs Yassir El Sayed El Gamal and Mohammed Mustafa El-Shafai from the Mansura Inspectorate.

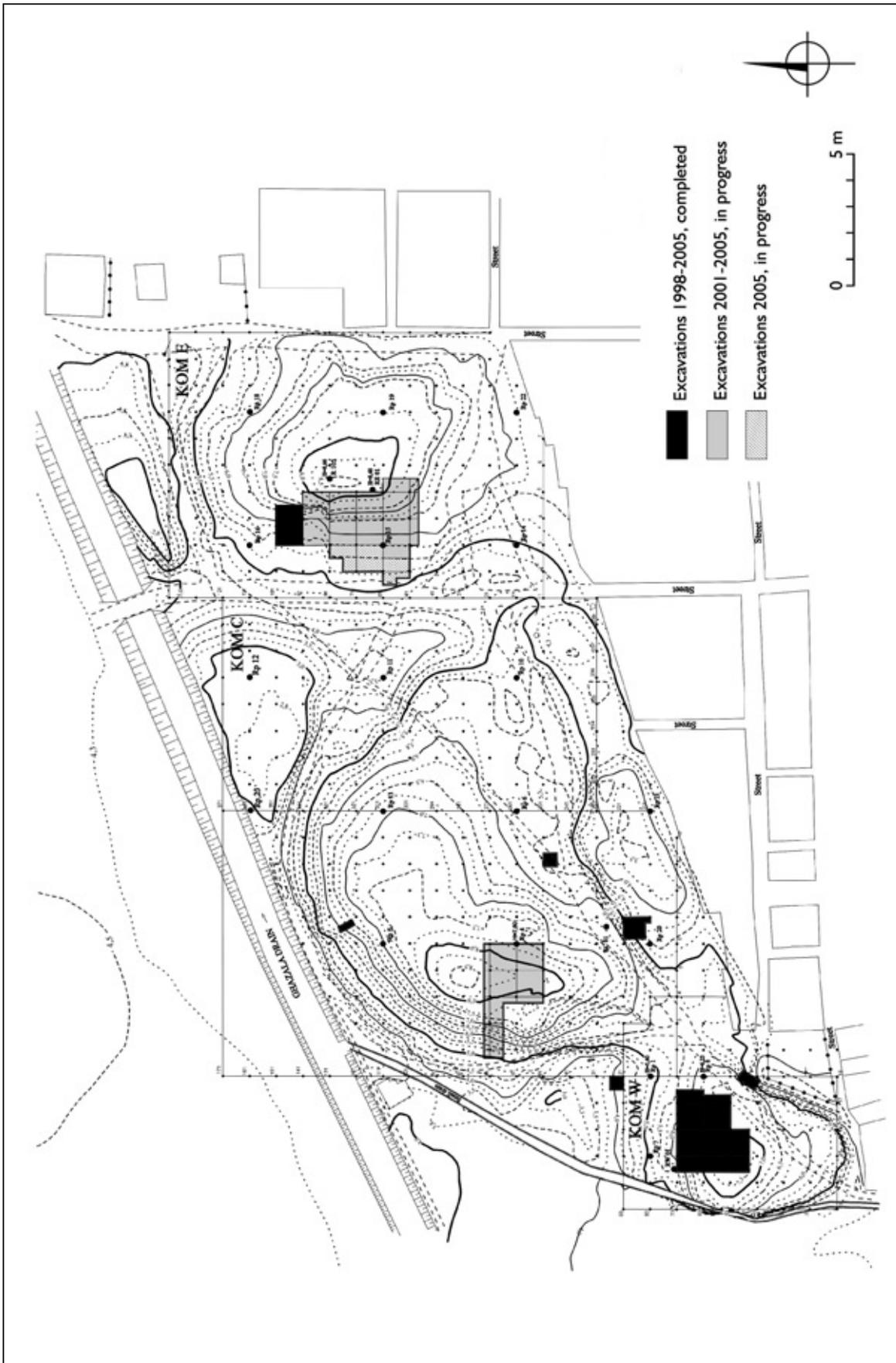


Fig. 1. Tell el-Farkha site plan
(Drawing M. Sip)

EXCAVATIONS ON THE WESTERN KOM

The main objective of this campaign was to complete the exploration of installations revealed in 2004 and to excavate the underlying layers.²

A fourth brewery was found this year, complementing the three discovered in the previous season [Fig. 4]. Of greatest importance is the distinct chronological sequence formed by the complexes. The earliest brewery was at some point destroyed by Nile flooding. It has to be borne in mind that the *gezira* on which the inhabitants lived at the time did not rise much above the river level and annual flooding would have been a relatively frequent occurrence in settlements of the Delta. After an indeterminate period the second and the third

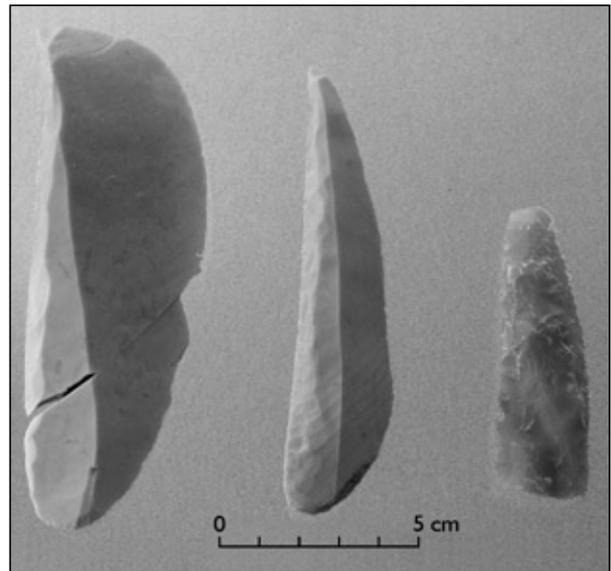


Fig. 2. Western Kom. Flint knives of Lower Egyptian culture (Photo A. Biel)



Fig. 3. Western kom. Complex of features of Lower Egyptian culture (Photo A. Biel)

2 Cf. M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz, *PAM XVI, Reports 2004 (2005)*, 132-135.

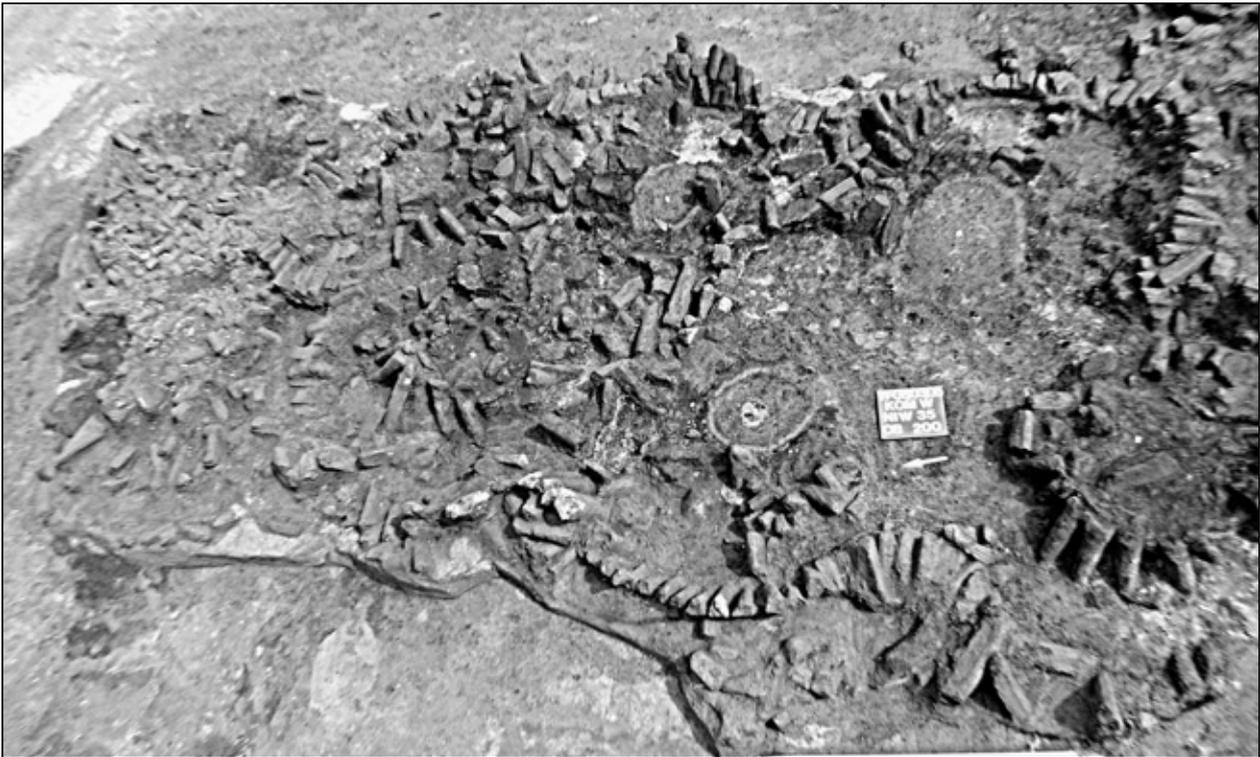


Fig. 4. Western Kom. Brewery, details of construction (top) and example of circle surrounded by fire-dog bricks (Photo A. Biel)

structures were built, and when these were in turn submerged beneath Nile silt deposits another building altogether was raised.

All served the same purpose and all were similarly constructed. Each building consisted of several (8 to 12) circles, surrounded by fire-dog type bricks [*Fig. 4*, bottom]. Some of these bricks were inserted diagonally into the ground and supported thick-walled vats with wide rims and narrow bases. Two of these vessels have been found *in situ*, but fragmentary pots of the kind have also been registered. The bricks were fired on the whole, although possibly not intentionally, as in many places the same bricks appear in sun-dried form. In functional terms, these structures were all used for the same purpose and in the same way.³ The Naqada potsherds found in the breweries provided grounds for dating the breweries to a period contemporary to Naqada IIB/C.

In the immediate vicinity of the breweries, across virtually the entire extent of

the area excavated evidence was discovered of a complex of structures undoubtedly linked to Lower Egyptian culture [*Fig. 3*]. These were covered with a thick layer of Nile silt, clearly demonstrating that the Tell el-Farkha *gezira* must have been affected quite frequently by episodes of flooding before human intervention led to a significant rise in its relative height. The structures in question must have had walls made of organic materials, which have left their trace in the form of narrow furrows. The complicated interior division may stem from the fact that some sections of the building, which were clearly utility areas, may have been separated from other parts by low walls made from organic materials or silt.⁴ A dating contemporary with Naqada IIB/C is supported for this architecture.

Finds included potsherds and a few complete vessels, in distinct concentrations as well as solitary pieces. A modest number of flint tools, both whole and fragmentary, was also recovered from these deposits [*Fig. 2*].

EXCAVATIONS ON THE CENTRAL KOM

The work on the Central Kom was begun across the whole surface of the trench marked out during the previous seasons (690 m²). The objective was to complete the exploration of mud-brick constructions revealed in 2004 and to excavate the underlying layers. The complicated stratigraphic record encountered on site resulted in slow progress and so the *gezira* sand was not reached this year.

In 2004, excavations had been interrupted on three different levels. On the tell slope, only the upper, Old Kingdom and

Early Dynastic layers were excavated, whereas in the main trench different levels of Naqada IIIA had been reached, older in the northern part, where the trench was 60 cm deeper, and younger (Naqada IIIB-C) in the southern part.⁵

Remains of a mud-brick wall, two bricks wide and going NW-SE, were discovered in the trench on the tell slope. Two other walls joined it on both sides, forming units on either side. They constituted the lower part of the construction discovered in 2004. The cross-walls were built during a later phase

3 Ibid., 133.

4 Ibid., 135.

5 Ibid., 135-136.

in the building's exploitation. In the older layers (Naqada III), there is only one wall, but very thick (1.50 m). It served as a base for a narrower wall built in the Early Dynastic period, and later other walls were added. Remains of floors, silos and hearths were found in the vicinity.

Fieldwork in the southern part of the main trench aimed at reaching a level corresponding with the northern end of the excavations (achieved in 2003). Thirteen successive layers, a total of 1.30 m in depth, were explored, uncovering late Naqadian buildings, which proved to be organized

along the same thick wall running NE-SW, discovered in higher layers. The setting of the buildings around a square space, c. 5 x 5 m, is still clearly visible. Oblong rooms are up to 3.50 m wide and almost 10 m long. The group of buildings is located east of the said wall and was exploited during the entire Naqada III period until Early Dynastic times [*Fig. 5*].

Explorations were interrupted this year at early Naqada IIIB – late Naqada IIB levels, at which time the area east of the above-mentioned wall was built upon scarcely and a complex of oblong rooms



Fig. 5. Central Kom. Naqadian mud-brick constructions, level 42 (Photo A. Biel)

around the square was constructed to the west of it. Further investigations should answer questions about the functional changes that this part of the settlement underwent at this time.

The data collected so far imply that the Central Tell was a subsidiary service area. The general spatial organization does not seem to have changed despite various alterations that the village went through with modified room function resulting in the division and merging of different units. Numerous remnants of kilns, hearths, grain silos and storage facilities of some kind were registered inside the buildings and on the courtyards.

The finds also imply that there was real wealth in the village: copper chisel,

fragments of copper bracelets and a copper fish hook, carved stick of hippopotamus-tusk ivory, stone jewelry, high quality pottery, as well as bifacial knives.

Of particular interest is a large cylindrical seal (5.9 cm long, diameter of 2.4-2.8 cm), which is dated to the beginning of the Naqada IIIB period. It was made from ordinary clay in fairly slipshod manner. The marks incised on it resemble hieroglyphs [Fig. 6]. These marks may possibly represent elements linked to royal titulary, a *serekh* and *nebti*. Bearing in mind that tomb U-j at Abydos (Naqada IIIA2) yielded the oldest traces of a hieroglyphic text, we can assume that this form of recording must have become known very quickly in the eastern Delta.



Fig. 6. Two views of a cylindrical seal of Naqada IIIB period
(Photo M. Jórdeczka)

EXCAVATIONS ON THE EASTERN KOM

As in previous years, excavations on the Eastern Kom were conducted in the north (squares 83, 84 and 72, 73, 74) and south (squares 63, 64 and 53, 54) of the area.

NORTHERN TRENCH

Fieldwork begun in sections 83 and 84 led to the northern and southern trenches being joined. The general objective was to reach the level of section 83 in all of the northern trench (in 2004, the section had been explored separately due to its location on the slope and the extensive interference of *sebakhin* digging in the past, resulting in the ground here being lower by 1.50 m compared to elsewhere in the northern trench).⁶ Therefore, only two 10-cm layers were removed from section 83, while the major focus was on the rest of the northern trench – a total area of 450 m² – with levels 13-25 (c. 1.20 m) being explored in sections 74 and 84 and levels 10-25 (c. 1.50 m) in sections 72 b/d and 73.

The two layers removed in section 83 did not change the recorded situation. The massive mud-brick wall discovered last year is still very well visible. It is probably part of a bigger structure, which should become clearer once more of the trench is uncovered at this level in the coming season.

Walls revealed in sections 72, 73, 74 and 84 form a network of more or less rectangular habitations oriented according to the cardinal directions [*Fig. 7*]. Three parallel walls are built perpendicular to the main wall running N-S. Minor walls run off these main structures to form particular units. Below level 19, the architecture seems to have spread further to the east. The remains are heavily disturbed by later pits

and holes of all kinds. Hearths and ash deposits were found in prominent quantities.

The configuration of the area changed substantially from approximately level 23. The entire structure appears to have moved eastward and the quality of wall construction improved significantly. Superimposed and overlapping hearths were noted in many compartments, some still with vessels inside them. It seems that we are dealing with two major buildings, the one disappearing into the eastern wall of the trench being like a mirror reflection of the uncovered one. As for the difference between the southern and northern parts of the trench, it is quite amazing: large and impressive walls dominating in the south and thinner walls, only 2-3 bricks wide, surrounding rooms tightly packed with hearths, in the north. The two areas appear to have performed entirely different functions.

The most interesting pottery from the northern trench included cylindrical jars, bag-shaped jars and a jar with cylindrical neck and pointed base. On the whole, the ceramic assemblage permits the levels explored this year in the northern trench to be dated roughly to the Naqada III period. Other finds include numerous flint implements (including several knives), fragments of grinding stones, various stone pestles and grinders, a stone (cornelian?) pendant in the shape of an elongated water drop, one complete but unornamented rectangular cosmetic palette, and a fragment of another one presumably of zoomorphic shape. Of interest is a ceramic object of undefined function, found in one of the

6 Ibid., 137ff.

hearths, resembling a comb with very short teeth or a scraper of some kind.

SOUTHERN TRENCH

Excavation in the southwestern part of the Eastern Kom concentrated on the remains of a huge structure covering more than 350 m² discovered in previous seasons (the trench, which has been under exploration since 2001, now covers an approximate 650 m²). It should be kept in mind that the excavation has proceeded at different rates in the various parts of the site, hence, annual reports have often concerned remains of different chronological attribution.

In 2001-2002, a few mud-brick graves from the beginning of the First Dynasty

were explored. The walls of these tombs were very thin (8-9 cm); only one structure, discovered farther to the east, had solid walls, half a meter thick, and was cut in a layer of dark soil. What came as a complete surprise was the corner of a massive brick wall found below the level of the graves. Some pots were placed inside the corner and in the following seasons of digging more walls were discovered and the space between them observed to be filled with soil and scattered bricks.

Further extension of the trench to the west and north brought more surprises. While on the west there were only some poorly constructed walls, in the north mud-brick graves appeared just below the



*Fig. 7. Eastern Kom. Mud-brick constructions
(Photo A. Biel)*

surface, some of them evidently cut into earlier, badly constructed and poorly preserved walls of limited thickness. These were obviously the remains of some settlement. In the lower layers, the outline of a monumental brick structure became exceedingly clear with thick walls dividing the area into compartments. In the upper layer, the remains of mud-brick graves were still visible.

In 2005, further work in the extended trench once again revealed the same stratigraphy. Mud-brick graves were found in the upper layer, overlying a settlement characterized by very thin and poorly executed walls (0.30 m wide) made of typical mud bricks, dividing the space into

narrow rectangular rooms. Many ovens, grinding stones, flint implements, fragments of cosmetic palettes, and typical settlement pottery were registered. The most intriguing discovery was a set of eight alabaster vessels lying upside down in a kind of basket [Fig. 8].

Finally, the monumental brick structure was cleared over a larger area. An inner wall proved to be of dual composition: the outer shell of yellow bricks, and gray bricks inside. The outer walls, uncovered on the south and east, turned out to be very thick (about 2 m) and their façades not entirely vertical, receding somewhat toward the top. At the bottom, they were furnished with a kind of bench.



*Fig. 8. Eastern Kom. Alabaster vessels from a deposit
(Photo A. Biel)*

By the end of the season, five chambers had been explored [Fig. 9]. An almost square space was set off by walls 2.50 m thick and four compartments, mostly 3 by 7 m in size, adjoined it on the east and south (more compartments should be expected to the west and north, either destroyed or still concealed under later settlement remains). These chambers were all filled with bricks mixed with soil or with ashes as in one of the compartments where a mud brick oven had been constructed. The fill was evidently intentional, not a destruction layer. Also the finds were surprisingly poor for such an elaborate structure: a few pots and numerous potsherds of mainly rough ware, an occasional flint blade and animal bones.

Some fragments of human bones mixed with earth were found in the southwestern chamber.

Inside the main chamber, more or less in the middle, traces of a wooden frame were discovered. Beneath it, there was a wide wall, forming what appears to be a shaft. The space outside it was filled in with bricks mixed with soil.

The construction can be dated to the turn of Naqada IIIA/IIIB and is the biggest Naqada building known to date. While further research should answer questions about the function of this building, a few ideas can be put forward concerning the relations between Lower and Upper Egypt in the Naqada III period.



Fig. 9. Eastern Kom. Chambers of a monumental brick structure, state at the end of the season in 2005 (Photo A. Biel)

It is commonly assumed that Naqada culture expanded to the north, pushing out, at least in the Eastern Delta, the autochthonous Lower Egyptian culture. But before this happened, the two cultures must have had some relations and at Tell el-Farkha Naqadian sherds have been found in evidently Lower Egyptian installations. Nonetheless, these contacts must have been relatively limited. Again general opinion has it that the situation changed, rather suddenly and in a single shot, in the period between Naqada IID and IIIA when almost all of the Delta was occupied by the Naqadians. The most probable reason for Naqadian expansion, although most likely not the only one, was control of trade routes.

Following recent finds at Tell el-Farkha, this relation between Upper and Lower Egypt in Predynastic times should be seen as much more complicated. The first to occupy the site were people of Lower Egyptian Culture, as evidenced by characteristic potsherds in one of the fully excavated test pits, and the characteristic Lower Egyptian structures discovered in 2004 in the northern part of the Eastern Kom. The first Naqada occupation came probably in the late Gerzean period. The monumental building should be assigned to the third phase. Then, the Eastern Kom seems to have lost its importance for a short time and a poor settlement appeared on top of the ruins of the mysterious building. This

was followed by an Early Dynastic cemetery, and the last occupation was a settlement dated to late Early Dynastic and the beginnings of the Old Kingdom.

The relation between the monumental building and later settlement is of particular interest. It could be proof of a total exchange of the population in Tell el-Farkha, possibly following some natural or political calamity. These newcomers had no idea of previous site history and occupation and obviously had no one to tell them. The same break in continuity of site tradition could have occurred between the Early Dynastic cemetery and the early Old Kingdom settlement.

The functional changes noted on the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha could be considered as proof that Naqada occupation of the Delta was a process more complicated than previously supposed. There could have been successive waves of migrations originating from different political centers in Upper Egypt, which could have been political rivals in the process of occupying the Delta in Proto-Dynastic times. The later information about the conquest of Lower Egypt by Upper Egyptian kings may be more than just legend, but whatever rivalries took place, as when one ruler from the South (Abydos, for example) wanted to dominate another one (say, from Hierakonpolis), it all occurred within Naqada culture as we know it.