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**Tell El-Farkha (Ghazala), 2008**

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# TELL EL-FARKHA (GHAZALA), 2008

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**Abstract:** Excavations were carried out on all three of the tells making up the site, continuing investigations started in previous seasons. A small test pit (5 x 5 m) on the slope of the Eastern Kom was excavated and backfilled. Post-processing work was conducted on site, dealing with the pottery, flint and other stone tools, as well as the human and animal remains.

**Keywords:** Tell el-Farkha (Ghazala), Western Kom, administrative-cultic complex, Central Kom, settlement, brewery, Eastern Kom, graves, Predynastic period

## WESTERN KOM

On the Western Kom exploration of Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic layers continued in a trench opened in 2006, covering 1000 m<sup>2</sup>. The main focus of the work was the western part of a large administrative–cultic building, the eastern part of which had been explored in the 2001–2002 seasons.

An earlier phase of the chapel (Room 211), containing the deposit of cultic figurines discovered in 2006 and other objects of cultic character found the next season (cf. Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2008; 2010), was discovered. It proved to be a chamber of virtually square shape, 2 m by 2 m (compared to the later shrine's rectangular plan aligned on an E–W axis, measuring 8 m by 3.30 m) [*Fig. 1*].

Dismantling of the walls of the younger chapel produced some more cultic objects, including two limestone pear-shaped mace heads [*Fig. 2*]. Such objects are represented abundantly in other temple

deposits (e.g. Hierakonpolis or Tell Ibrahim Awad, see Adams 1974: 5–14; Belowa, Sherkova 2002: Ph. 56) proving their potential connection with an early ruler. In their vicinity, very close to a pot containing an ostrich egg and a faience cylindrical seal discovered last year, a gazelle's horn was found — another hint at a connection between ostrich and gazelle and the administrative–cultic centre in Tell el-Farkha, already suggested by previous discoveries (see Ciałowicz 2008a). Other findings included a large zoomorphic figurine, unfortunately fragmented, most probably depicting a hippopotamus [*Fig. 3*]. The lower part of a stone zoomorphic pot in the shape of a frog and relatively few beads made of various stones and faience were among the other finds.

A Red Sea shell (*Pteroceras* or *Lambis truncata*) was found beneath the floor, in the centre of the room. Such shells were depicted occasionally in Late Predynastic

and Early Dynastic art. The most important representations are to be seen on the sides of the famous Coptos Colossi. On one of them, kept in the Ashmolean Museum, the head of a gazelle and the shells are depicted together (Payne 1993: 13, Pl. IVa); on the one from the Cairo Museum, an ostrich and shells are represented (Williams 1988: Fig. 2). This can be a proof of the *Pteroceras* shells being connected with cult practices, in similarity to the ostrich and the gazelle, or of at least the inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha being in contact with the Red Sea region.

Observations made on the layout and architectural development of the administrative–cultic complex proved of greatest interest this season [Fig. 4]. The

building consisted of an almost square courtyard enclosed by walls 1.60 m thick with an adjacent complex of relatively small rooms, mainly rectangular in shape, on the northern side [see Fig. 1]. The walls of these units, between 0.45 m and 0.60 m thick, were built rather carelessly; for the most part, however, they had been damaged heavily by animal burrows. Ovens with pots, as well as fireplaces and typical settlement pottery attested to the utilitarian character of these units.

More auxiliary rooms of a domestic nature, preserving ovens with pots inside them, were encountered in the westernmost part of the trench, but were largely destroyed, presumably by encroaching modern agricultural cultivation. The tell

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in this area has been cut off as a virtually vertical wall, while in the other directions it has rather gentle slopes. The eastern part of the tell and the administrative–cultic complex were explored in the 2001–2002 seasons; the thick walls limiting the afore-

mentioned yard from that direction were found to have been adjoined by numerous rooms, also of utilitarian nature.

At the southeastern end of the complex [Fig. 5], the situation resembled that in the northern part: a dozen or so rooms of



Fig. 1. Remains of older shrine on the Western Kom  
(All photos R. Słaboński)



Fig. 2. Pear-shaped mace heads from the younger shrine

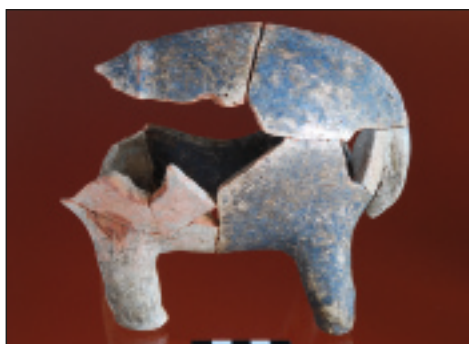


Fig. 3. Zoomorphic figurine from the younger shrine



*Fig. 4. General view of the administrative-cultic building on the Western Kom from the south*



*Fig. 5. Southeastern part of the administrative-cultic building on the Western Kom, viewed from the southwest*

different sizes and shapes, rectangular as well as almost square, sometimes in enfilade alignment, separated from one another by relatively thin and shoddily made walls. There were hardly any ovens and fireplaces here, although in some rooms a layer of ash was discovered.

From this area comes a relatively large number of complete pots, mostly of small dimensions and similar to the assemblage

found in the northern part. Flint tools were scarce, as is usual on the Western Kom. Two cosmetic palettes were found, one rectangular and the other, only partly preserved, in the shape of a fish; they add to the body of palettes already known from excavations in the southeastern part of the tell in the 2001 and 2002 seasons. Palettes were not commonly found in settlements.

[KMC]

## CENTRAL KOM

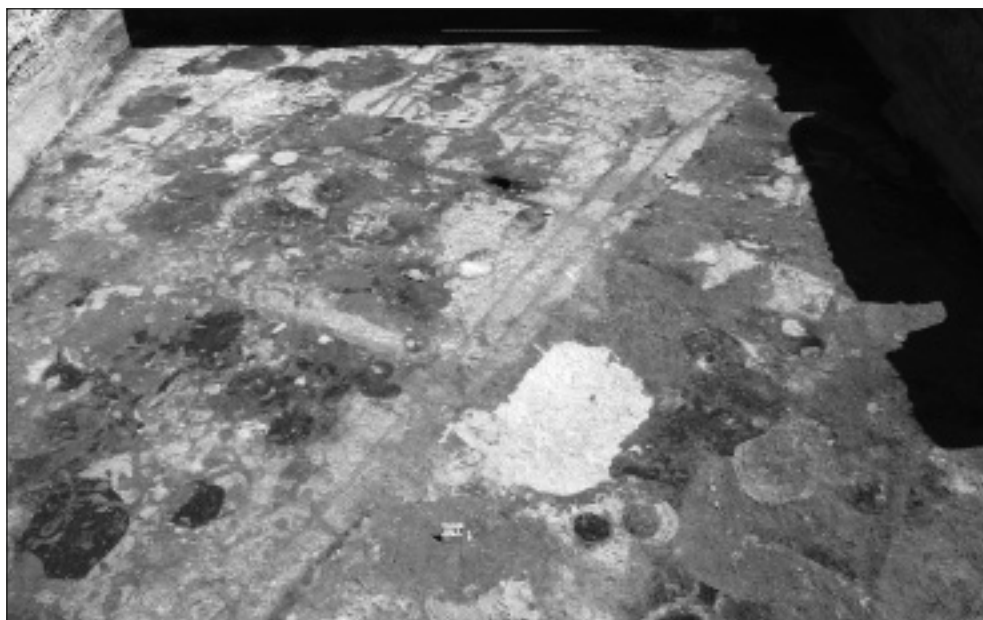
Research on the Central Kom was continued on the top of the kom excavated since 2000 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2002b: 81–83; 2004: 52–55; 2006: 80–84), reaching this year *gezirah* sand and the earliest settlement from the Predynastic period, connected with Lower Egyptian Culture. Excavations were completed in the eastern part of the trench, whereas in the western part they will have to be continued next year.

The earliest phases of occupation on the Central Kom, contemporary with the brewery center on the Western Kom, can now be reconstructed based on the present findings. The oldest settlement featured characteristic rectangular structures made of organic building materials, storage and rubbish pits, and hundreds of postholes [Fig. 6]. These were accompanied by numerous mud-pits, that is, conical features 0.25–0.30 m in diameter, made of solid silt with different admixtures. Those that survived relatively intact (in most cases just the lower parts have been preserved), prove that they could have functioned as storage containers. Similar features are also known from the Eastern and Western Koms in Tell el-Farkha, Maadi, as well as Buto and Tell

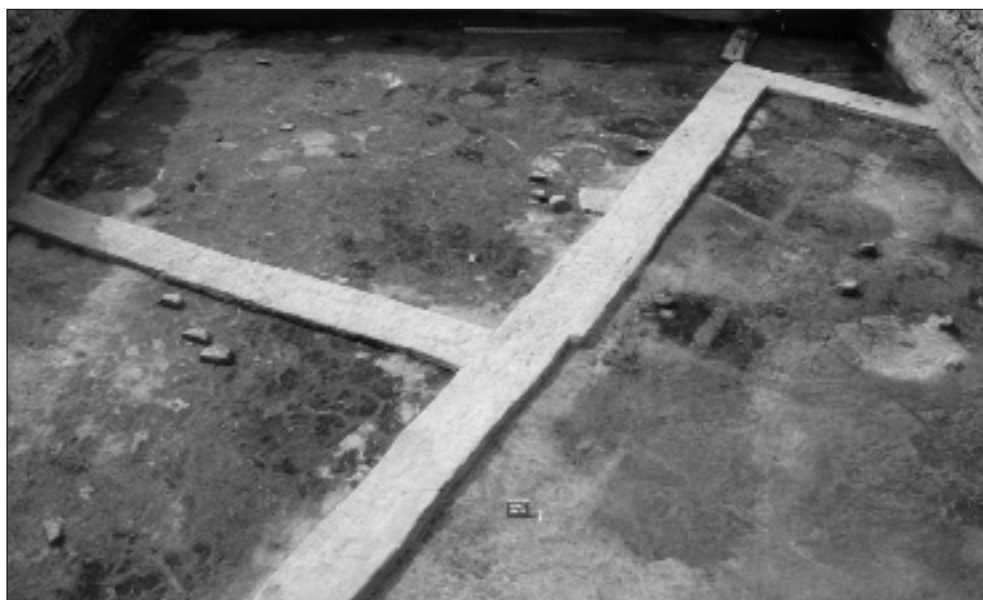
el-Iswid (Rizkana, Seeher 1989: 33–47, 57–64; von der Way 1997: 61–76; van den Brink 1989: 62).

The settlement was divided into zones with one zone, surrounded by a double wooden fence, apparently playing a role of some importance. The enclosed area was at least 20 m long and 20 m wide; inside it there was a structure with complex layout, which produced most of the valuable artifacts connected with Lower Egyptian Culture: golden and semiprecious stone beads, a fragment of copper knife and a stone vessel. The eastern part of this area remained seemingly open with nothing but pits being discovered here. Interestingly, all imports of Upper Egyptian pottery from this phase were found inside this enclosure, while fragments of Palestinian pottery were discovered throughout the whole area of excavations. As far as Lower Egyptian pottery is concerned, ceramics of the same kind were discovered on either side of the fence.

East of this Lower Egyptian “residence” the area was divided further by a single fence (extending perpendicularly from the double fence). To the north of this second fence the sector contained only



*Fig. 6. Oldest settlement remains on the Central Kom, view from the north; double wooden fence running diagonally across the trench*



*Fig. 7. Thick mud-brick wall replacing earlier wooden fence on the Central Kom*

a concentration of pits and postholes, while to the south there was a range of rectangular houses, approximately 3 m wide and from 5 m to almost 7 m long. Some of them had divided interiors.

By the end of Tell el-Farkha Phase 1, the wooden fences were replaced by walls made of mud bricks (brick dimensions 0.32 m x 0.16 m), 1.60 m wide at the base in place of the double fence, 1.20 m wide in place of the single fence [Fig. 7]. Massive walls of this kind were not in use at a later date in this part of the site. Apparently they separated different functional areas of the settlement rather than enclosing single houses. They could also have been intended as defensive. A wall of similar thickness surrounded the brewery centre on the Western Kom (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2006: 75).

To the east of the wall, the zone to the north remained free of more permanent structures, while a brewery (discovered already in the previous season but explored now) was built in place of former houses in the zone to the south [Fig. 8]. Its size and construction paralleled feature no. 47 from the Western Kom, made up of three overlapping concentric circles formed of D-shaped fire-dogs. The inner row of fire-dogs was positioned at an angle to support the vats. A later pit destroyed half of this structure, which measured 4 x 4 m, leaving intact only the outer of the three circles, part of the middle circle and nothing of the inner one. D-shaped bricks were stacked around the edges, burned through inconsistently, from mud-colored examples to ones that were red or even entirely black. Most probably, at the time



Fig. 8. Remains of a brewery on the Central Kom



the brewery was in use a wall was added to the corner of the residence, enclosing the brewery from the west, probably to protect the structure from Nile floods.

The brewery did not function for long and was soon disassembled; some of the fire-dogs were used in the construction of another building. This brewery and the similar feature no. 47 from the Western Kom are the youngest installations of this type known from Tell el-Farkha. It has been dated to Naqada IID1–IID2, contemporary with Tell el-Farkha Phase 2 (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 2006: 74; Cichowski 2008). It is assumed that beer production was not stopped with the dismantling of this brewery but that the process was moved to another, as yet undiscovered place.

Throughout this phase the “residence” inside the eastern zone remained in use. This big household in the center of the square enclosure was built in a traditional Lower Egyptian way, although slightly modified in comparison with the earlier

plan. Domestic pits were discovered along the fence wall of the building.

Examination of faunal remains indicated the greater popularity of fishing at Tell el-Farkha during Lower Egyptian Culture compared to later, Naqada times.

Standing out among the objects of Lower Egyptian Culture found here this season were a stone vessel [Fig. 9, left] of a type already known from Maadi (Seeher 1990: 141; Pl. 9:6–7), a complete Hamamiya knife and a necklace made of different semiprecious stones and golden beads [Fig. 9, right]. The four barrel-shaped beads were made of thin gold foil and came in different sizes (from 0.60 mm to 1.20 mm). This is the first case of gold being used by the Lower Egyptian Culture and it seems, judging by the material and shape of the beads, that the necklace was an import from Upper Egypt. This demonstrates much more developed trade relations with the southern part of Egypt than presumed to date.



Fig. 9. Lower Egyptian Culture artifacts from the Central Kom: stone vessel, left, and necklace of stone and golden beads

Only a few complete or almost complete pots were found. The prevailing shapes were small globular jars with short necks and a simple form of bowl. Bigger jars were seldom preserved. Zigzags composed of dotted and continuous lines are

very characteristic of Lower Egyptian pottery. A row of crescents below the rim also appeared on the bowls. There were also some ceramic forms identified for the first time in the assemblage.

[MC]

## EASTERN KOM

Successive layers of units dated to the Naqada IIIB (western part of the kom) and Early Dynastic (eastern part) periods were uncovered in the settlement on the Eastern Kom, but due to time constraints the work was concentrated mainly on the cemetery. Here, 26 graves were explored

(bringing the total number of excavated graves up to 94) and a number of others were identified [Fig. 10].

The explored graves were classified into one of three main groups based on the number of vessels and other equipment (although size and method of con-



*Fig. 10. Part of the cemetery excavated in 2008 on the Eastern Kom*

struction of the burial itself were also taken into consideration, e.g. grave 60 which contained only four clay pots, but was a big mud-brick structure, measuring 2.64 x 1.80 m). Seven of the tombs were considered as rich graves, containing from four to 73 clay pots besides other offerings. Four graves were classified as average burials with less than four clay or stone pots. Finally, there were the poor graves, 15 in all, without any equipment.

All the graves can be dated to the period from Dynasty 0 till the end of the First Dynasty, but it is important to remember that the poor graves were dated only based on horizontal stratigraphy. A few of the graves were dug into earlier burials. For example grave 71 [Fig. 11], from the second half of the First Dynasty, was dug into the

corner of mastaba 63 (dated to Dynasty 0 / Dynasty I) and touched the southeastern corner of grave 60 (also from the beginning of the First Dynasty). Pit graves without any equipment (nos 87 and 90) had damaged an as yet unnumbered grave located underneath them. Work on this large grave, surrounded by a solid wall, was not completed this season.

The poorest graves were mostly simple pit graves, sometimes with a mud-brick casing. The skeletons, in contracted position, wrapped in or covered by a mat, were usually aligned with the head to the north and lying on their left side. The position of the body and the custom of wrapping or covering of the body with a mat was present also in burials from the average class. These graves were better constructed



Fig. 11. Stratigraphic position of graves 60 and 71 (left of center) relative to mastaba 63 (on the right)

overall. Grave 75 [Fig. 12] can be singled out as containing a pot and two skeletons, one of a woman, the other of an individual of undetermined sex, lying on their right sides one behind the other, with their heads to the south. The bones were very poorly preserved. This class of burials also included two pit graves: no. 89 (0.70 x 0.40 m) in which a child was buried with one pot and no. 92 (0.88 x 0.67 m) which contained the severely damaged bones of an elderly person of undetermined sex and age and a single stone pot.

The rich graves were all chamber graves (sometimes with a double chamber) made of bricks. Of the seven graves discovered this year five contained more than 16 pots.

Grave 69 was among the most important ones discovered this year. It was a double chamber grave (3.88 x 2.08 m), equipped with 20 clay pots [Fig. 13]. First the grave was dug deep into the ground and then the brick chambers were built inside it. Everything was covered with a mat, of which clear remains survived. In the northern, smaller chamber eight vessels were found, among them five large jars. The most interesting is a large wine-jar [Fig. 15] with the name of Iry-Hor, first known ruler of Dynasty 0, carved on it. The name has already occurred at Tell el-Farkha (grave 2, see Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz *et alii* 2002a: 115), read then provisionally as Hor-Aha, now revised to



Fig. 12. Grave 75 from the cemetery on the Eastern Kom

Iry-Hor), seemingly refuting the arguments of some scholars against the existence of such a king (Wilkinson 1993: 241–243). Abstracting from the proper pronunciation of the name, the inscription on the jar is more proof that this ruler, known mostly from the Abydos region where his grave was discovered, had extended his rule also into the eastern Delta. A woman's skeleton (approximately 30–40 years old), as well as the rest of the pots were found in the larger, southern chamber. The skeleton was not buried in anatomical order, suggesting secondary burial or burial some time after death (possibly due to the time needed for building the grave).

Another important discovery was grave 63 [Fig. 14; see also Fig. 11], which proved to be a mastaba-type grave. The freestanding aboveground structure measured 4.00 m x

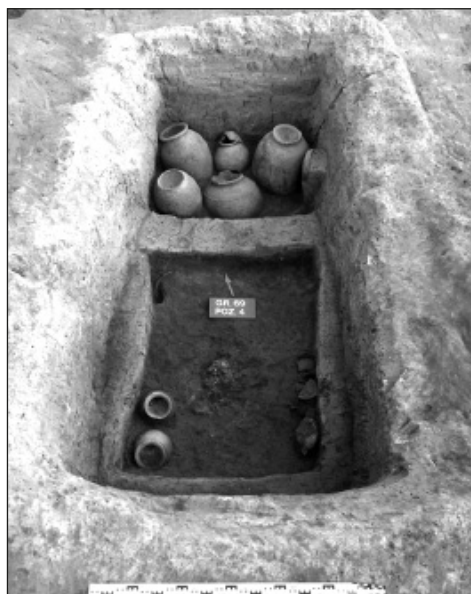


Fig. 13. Grave 69 on the Eastern Kom



Fig. 14. Mastaba superstructure of grave 63 on the Eastern Kom (left) and chamber with skeleton and equipment in place (right)

2.50 m and stood about 2 m high. Four regular niches stood out on the east façade of the superstructure. The outer walls of the grave were covered with a coating 2–5 cm thick of light plaster. The northeastern and possibly the northwestern corners may have been slightly rounded at first and given a rectangular cut only at a later stage. This observation is important in view of the fact that corners shaped in similar fashion have also been observed on the monumental structure from the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha, discovered a few years earlier (Ciałowicz 2008b: 501–513).

The walls surrounding the chamber were 0.60 m thick. Bricks and a layer of mud filled the chamber, introduced directly on top of the skeleton and grave goods, which rested at the very bottom. The mud may have been intended as a means of protection against robbery (a procedure confirmed also in other graves), but Nile silt is also known to have been put in graves as a symbol of rebirth in the other world. The body of a man around 24–30 years old was buried in the southwestern corner of the chamber, head to north [Fig. 14, right]. The bones were damaged severely, but it is



Fig. 15. Wine-jar with the name of Iry-Hor from grave 69



Fig. 16. Medium-sized wine jar from grave 63

very likely that in this case also there was no anatomical alignment and the burial had been completed some time after death.

The grave goods included 73 clay pots, five stone vessels, a copper axe and a flint knife. Meriting attention among the ceramics were medium sized wine-jars with triple rope bands, a type not known from other Egyptian sites [Fig. 16]. Other pots included mostly cylindrical jars typical of the turn of Dynasty 0. Among the stone vessels there were three typical basalt bowls, as well as two cylindrical jars of travertine decorated with rope bands under the rim.

Another grave, no. 71, was cut into the southwestern corner of mastaba 63 [Fig. 17; see also Fig. 11]. It was a double chamber grave (1.80 m x 1.14 m), only

0.65 m deep, devoid of superstructure. The skeleton was lying on its left side with the head pointing to the north. The bones were heavily damaged but could be identified as belonging to a man 35–40 years old. Grave goods included 16 clay pots, 15 of these being beer-jars, and four stone vessels made of travertine (badly damaged as most objects of travertine found at Tell el-Farkha). Beer-jars of this kind, as well as the stone vessels, were typical of the second half of the First Dynasty and thus grave 71 should be dated to this period.

Before grave 71 could be dug, the underlying mastaba grave 63, into which it had been cut, must have been concealed from view with a deposit of soil approximately 2 m thick. This process must have



Fig. 17. Chamber grave 71 on the Eastern Kom with the grave goods in place



Fig. 18. Grave 70 on the Eastern Kom

been extended over time, at least a couple dozen of years, and so it follows from the dating of the pottery in grave 71 that grave 63 should be dated to the end of Dynasty 0 or, at the very latest, to the beginning of the First Dynasty. This dating is confirmed by pottery from grave 63, which shows clear similarities to that discovered in grave 69 described above and believed to come from the times of Iry-Hor. Therefore, grave 63 can be assumed to be one of the older, if not the oldest known mastaba-type structure in Egypt, predating such burials from the time of Horus Aha. It may not be, however, the first example of a mastaba structure, if one considers the monumental structure found a few years ago in Tell el-Farkha (see Ciałowicz 2011, in this volume), as well as features found at other sites.

At the bottom of grave 63 a wall was uncovered in the northern part [see *Fig. 14*, left]; it was around 1.50 m thick and aligned east–west. The grave had obviously been built on top of an older construction. It will take at least three years of excavations to solve this riddle, but a similar situation was encountered already once in the part of the cemetery located further to the north. There, most graves had been dug into an already mentioned monumental structure from the Naqada IIIA/B period.

The last of the burials to be described here is grave 70 which belonged to an adult woman. It produced some fragments of a stone bowl and a spindle-whorl, as well as 20 clay vessels, all resting by the northern wall [*Fig. 18*]. Among the pottery one should note the large jars, one of which is



*Fig. 19. Remains of Naqada IIIA settlement on the Eastern Kom*



of the wine-jar type, with potmarks and a couple of cylindrical pots and a small jar with rounded body made of bright clay. The last kind of pot, sporadically found on the Tell el-Farkha necropolis, may have been imported or is an imitation of Levantine pottery. Consequently, it may be assumed that grave 70, like 69, contained the burials of people with some connections to trade. It comes as a surprise that both of them were women.

Little work was done in the Naqada IIIA settlement in the northeastern part of the Eastern Kom, but a wall-enclosed courtyard with ovens was traced [Fig. 19]. One of the noteworthy artifacts found there was a small, peg-shaped and very schematic human figurine made of ivory [Fig. 20]. It was 8 cm high, 2.2 cm wide and 1 cm thick. Its shape is very simplified, the face triangular with a pointed beard and a conical headdress. The figurine resembles some of the bone figurines (known as “tags”) from Naqada (Petrie 1920, Pls I–II, XLVI; Payne 1993, 236ff.).

Settlement-related structures were discovered in a small test pit (5 m x 5 m) opened in the southern part of the Eastern Kom. A single poorly preserved grave

without any grave goods was also found. The trench was backfilled after completing the exploration.

[KMC & MC]



Fig. 20. Schematic human figurine of ivory, Naqada IIIA

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