

# TELL EL-FARKHA: ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK 2014–2015

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**Abstract:** The archaeological site of Tell el-Farkha is composed of three mounds excavated continuously by the Polish team since 1998. In the 2014 and 2015 seasons, covered in this report, investigations were carried out in already opened trenches in three sectors. On the Western Kom, another brewery was explored to add to the already existing set of investigated installations of this kind. It demonstrated three phases of use, the topmost separated from the middle one by a thick layer of burnt soil and ashes. The deposit attests to a conflagration that consumed the entire settlement. The study of a huge Naqadian building was continued on the Central Kom. Two occupation phases were distinguished: an older one at the beginning of the Naqada IIIA1 period and a younger one attributed to Naqada IIIA1–IIIA2. Remains of Lower Egyptian structures were unearthed below the foundations of this building. A big clay stamp-seal with hieroglyphs from the mid First Dynasty period was found associated with this feature. On the Eastern Kom, a big mud-brick edifice of unknown function was investigated. A further 17 graves, mostly from the second half of the First and the beginning of the Second Dynasty, were discovered as well.

**Keywords:** Lower Egyptian culture, Naqada culture, Protodynastic, Early Dynastic

Excavations were carried out on all three mounds forming the site in the 2014 season as well as the one in 2015. The trenches were mostly continued from earlier seasons, a new extension being dug only on the Eastern Kom. In this case, the main

trench was enlarged to the east to include three new squares (57c, 47a, 47c) [*Fig. 1*]. On-site post-processing work was also conducted, including analysis of pottery, flint and other stone tools, as well as animal remains.

## WESTERN KOM

Fieldwork was carried out in the old trench that had been opened in 2006–2007, further excavated in 2006–2008 and extended to the north in 2009, covering over 20 ares in the central part of the trench. The northern squares 63–64, 53a–c, and

54a were not investigated and neither was square 23 in the southwestern part of the trench. In the 2014 season, layers separating the oldest phases of a Proto- and Early Dynastic administrative–cultic center from the uppermost layers of a burnt

Naqada residence (see Ciałowicz 2012b) were studied and in 2015 the exploration reached layers between Tell el-Farkha phases 2 and 3 (Naqada IID–Naqada IIIA).

The most important feature in this section of the trench was a brewery (W272), discovered in 2012 and partly explored in 2013 (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015). More of the structure was now uncovered

[*Fig. 2*]. Two quadrants were explored in order to study the longitudinal and latitudinal cross-sections through the feature. Three nests with the lower parts of vats were excavated [*Fig. 3*].

At least three distinct phases of brewery use were distinguished. The stratigraphic evidence was especially clear in the northwestern quadrant and

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also in the southeastern one, but final determinations will have to wait for the excavations to be completed. The thick layer composed of burnt soil and white ashes, observed between the middle phase of the brewery and the youngest one at the top [Fig. 4], is of particular interest. In previously discovered breweries (Ciałowicz 2012a), the layers of ashes were usually removed, leaving almost no trace, during a reconstruction, rebuilding or raising of a new structure on the same spot. In the newly discovered brewery, the layer of destruction is quite thick (up to 15 cm) and looks like intentional leveling. This probably followed a catastrophic fire that must have had dire consequences for the entire settlement.

The destruction layer recorded on top of the Naqadian residence and beneath the older stage of the administrative–cultic center turned out to underlie the foundations of a few rooms in the southeastern part of the trench and to the east of the brewery [Fig. 5]. The stratigraphic sequence is observable very clearly also in the south trench wall [Fig. 6]. This layer of destruction, also recognized on the Central and Eastern Koms (see below), validates a hypothesis formulated earlier, positing that the settlement of the Naqada IIIA1 period had suffered burning in its entirety.

A few complete vessels and an abundance of sherds came from the

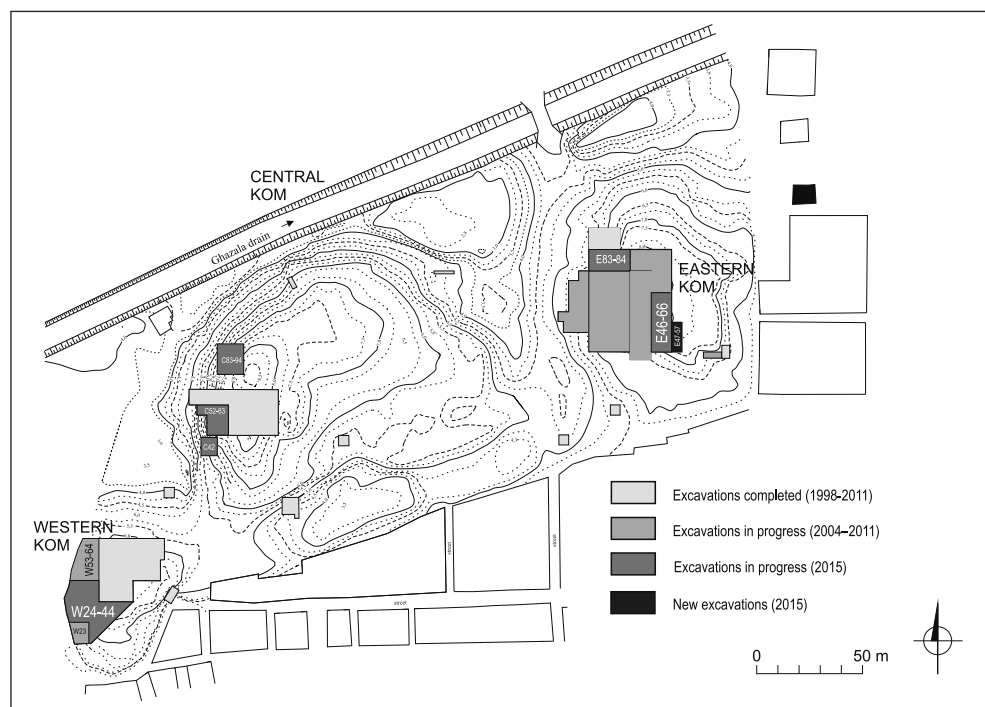


Fig. 1. Tell el-Farkha, plan of the excavated area (Drawing M. Chłodnicki)

excavation. Included among these were storage jars, some covered with a bowl [Fig. 7], and small globular jars and bowls. Most of them were crushed in deposition and could be documented only as found. They were mostly dug into the said black layer of destruction. A few tokens in the

shape of disks and balls were also unearthed. One of the most interesting finds was a stone tool, a kind of a “calibrator” [see below, Fig. 19], which could have been used to produce bone harpoons; a weapon of this kind was also found.

[KMC]

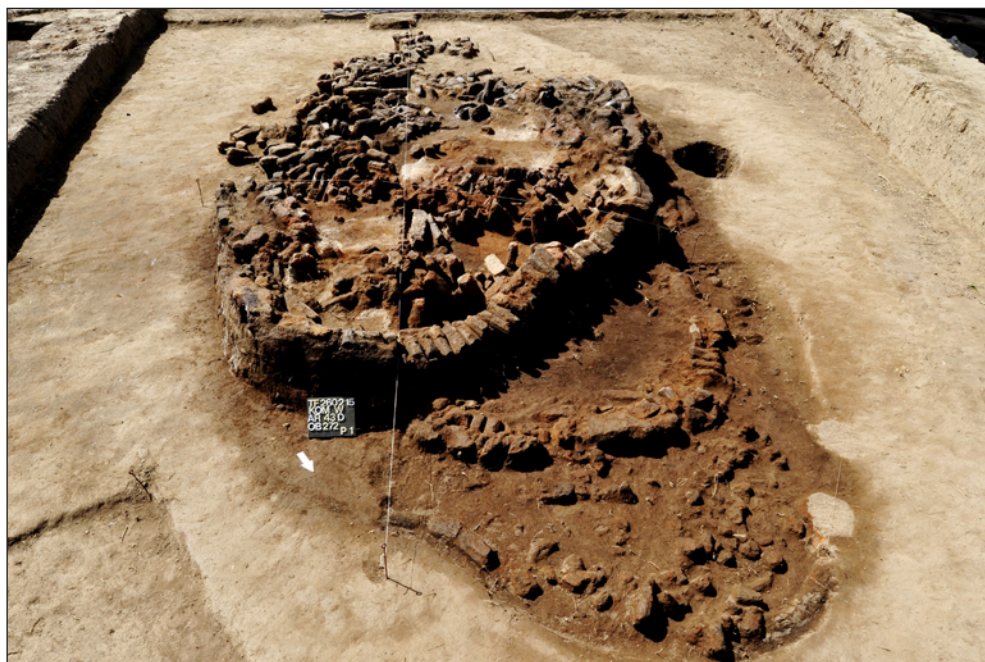


Fig. 2. Western Kom. Brewery W272: general view  
(All photos R. Słaboński)



Fig. 3. Brewery W272: left, vat in situ; above, lower part of a vat



*Fig. 4. Western Kom. Layer of destruction inside brewery W272*



*Fig. 5. Western Kom. Relics of rooms in the southeastern part of the trench*



Fig. 6. Stratigraphic sequence seen in the south trench-wall section

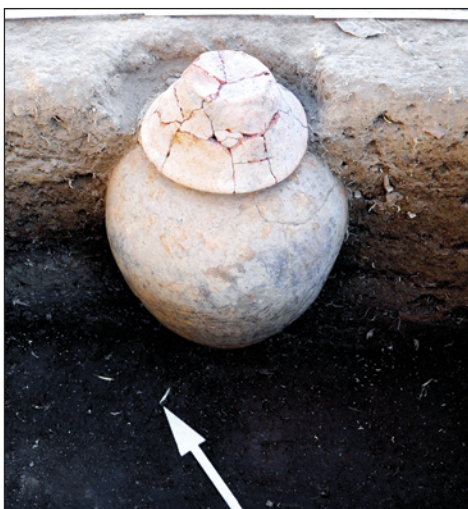


Fig. 7. Storage jar covered with a bowl

## CENTRAL KOM

Two trenches were dug on the western slope of the Central Kom: an extension of the main trench excavated in 2000–2009 (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2014: 123), designed to cover the area of the expected remains of the southwestern part of a Lower Egyptian “residence” (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: 92–96) and the trench from 2012–2013 which had been extended because of the discovery of a huge Naqadian building [see Fig. 1]. Squares C42, C52–53, and C62–63 covered the whole outline of the latter building, furnished with storerooms and a wide courtyard on the western side. The westernmost and southern parts of the complex were destroyed in antiquity (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015). This building may have played a role in protecting some central storage facilities.

At least two phases of the building could be distinguished: an older (beginning of Naqada IIIA1 = Tell el-Farkha phase 3) and a younger (Naqada IIIA1–IIIA2 = Tell el-Farkha phase 4). The building was connected with the Naqadian residence on the Western Kom, and still used during the oldest stages of the administrative–cultic center (Ciałowicz 2012b).

Explorations in 2014 covered the area of the entire building, whereas in 2015 work concentrated on rooms CW.119 (northern) and CW.57 (northeastern), courtyard (CW.122), and on the eastern side of the Lower Egyptian “residence” [Figs 8, 9]. The most destroyed southern part of the building was located in area C42. Layers from level 26 to 28 (4.80–4.60 m a.s.l.), connected with the younger phase of the building, were explored. The

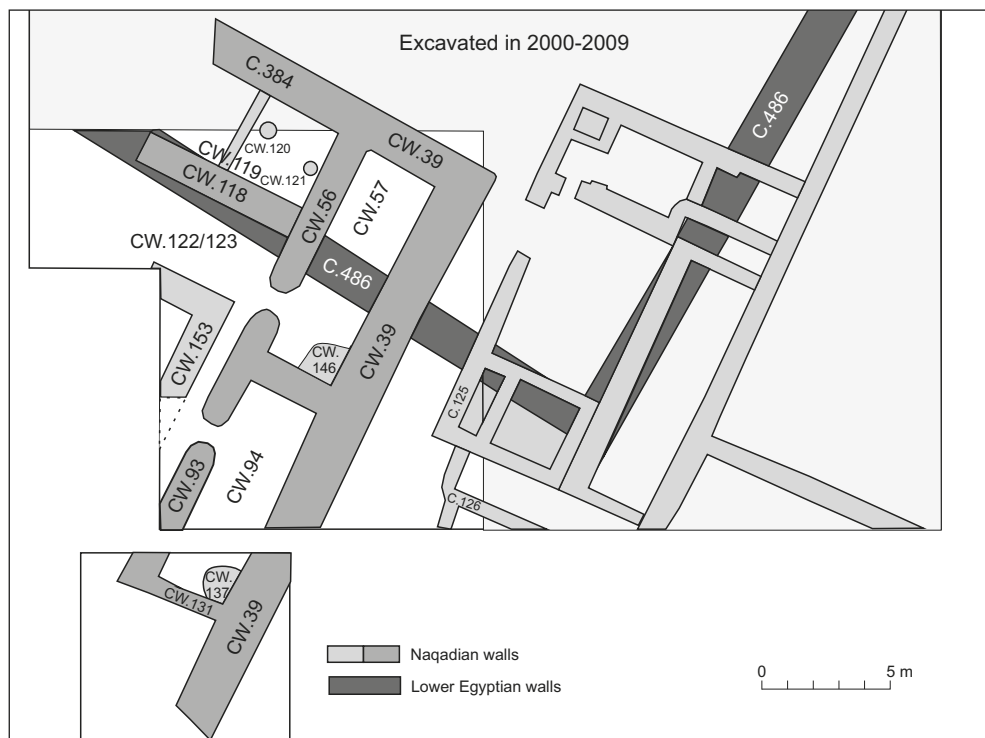


Fig. 8. Central Kom. Plan of structures, excavated from the year 2000 (Plan M. Chłodnicki)



Fig. 9. Central Kom. Mud-brick walls of the storage facility, view from the east

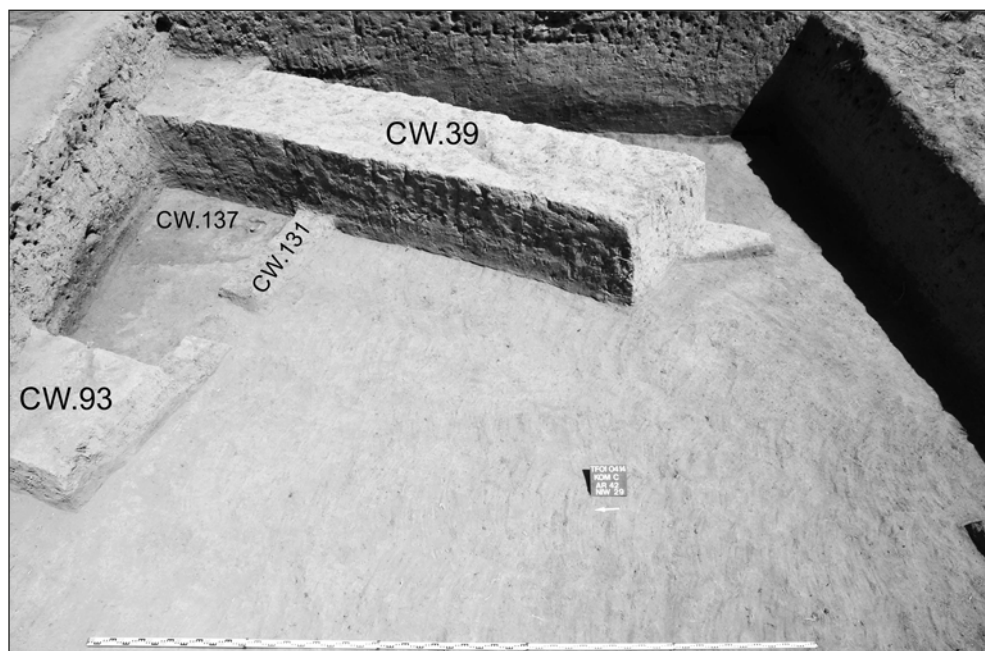


Fig. 10. Central Kom. Southern part of the storage facility, view from the west



Fig. 11. Central Kom. Area of the excavations in 2015, view from the east



external wall (CW.39), and the west wall (CW.93) of the southern room (CW.94) are preserved, but they are of the same length as in the strata already excavated in 2013. The southern side of room CW.94 was closed by a thin divider, a mere one brick thick (CW.131), probably constructed after the destruction of the building at the end of the older phase. An oven with a vessel inside it was located in a corner (CW.137). Everything to the south of this thin wall and to the west of the external wall CW.39 going south was destroyed. The mixed archaeological assemblage included vessels which could be dated to Early Dynastic times. The area to the west of wall CW.39 was not destroyed, but no structures were found there. It confirms the observation from squares C53–C63 that no other building was raised in the vicinity of the big storage facility [Fig. 10].

The northern part of room CW.94, located in trench C52d, was explored in 2014 as well as in 2015, starting from level 29 (4.50 m a.s.l.) to 33 (4.10 m a.s.l.),

which means that the younger layers of the older phase of the building were explored. The interior of the room was filled with soil mixed with ashes and potsherds. The ashes came from a fireplace (CW.144). The external wall proved to be thinner than half a brick below 4.30 m a.s.l. It seems that after the first destruction this wall was reinforced with an extra layer of bricks.

The most intensive work took place inside rooms CW.119 and CW.57, and in the courtyard (CW.122), as well as in the area to the east of the big storage facility [Fig. 11], where the top of the Lower Egyptian “residence” as well as wooden remains of this earliest settlement were reached (at a depth of 3.40 m a.s.l. [level 40]). The northern room (CW.119) used to be separated from the courtyard by a wall 1.20 m thick (CW.118). The wall, destroyed during the first catastrophe, was not rebuilt. Traces of this catastrophe were observed in the corner of wall C.56, where ashes penetrated(?) into the wall a few centimeters deep to the level at 4.50 m a.s.l.



Fig. 12. Central Kom. South trench-wall section with visible layer of burning

Wall CW.118 was preserved to the same level. The same layer of burning that attests to the destruction of the western part of the building [Fig. 12] could be observed in the south trench wall. The fire must have spread over a large part of the site (see the Western Kom and the southern part of the Eastern Kom). The external wall of this room (C.384) was excavated in 2006, although, at that time, it was impossible to interpret a wall, 1.50 m thick, going NW–SE (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2008: 147; Chłodnicki et al. 2010: 106, Fig. 30). Dark-brown soil mixed with ashes filled the northern room (CW.119). Two fireplaces (CW.120 and CW.121/121a) were discovered there. This room was divided at some point into two parts by a narrow wall, just one brick thick (C.394), already known from the excavation in 2006; it was 0.30 m high and was founded on the level of 4.20 m a.s.l.

The storage facility in room CW.57 turned out to have at least two utility

levels. The upper one (4.00 m a.s.l.) was a solid threshing floor with potsherds, ashes and traces of mats on it. An oven (CW.146) with a vessel inside was located in the southeastern corner. More than 80 unfired clay balls were found near the



Fig. 13. Kneading trough in room CW.57

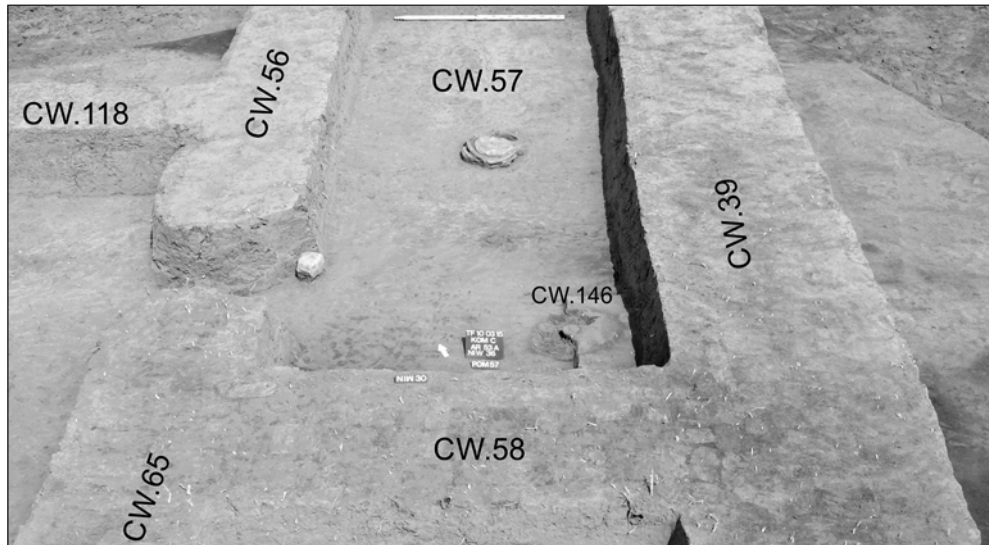


Fig. 14. Central Kom. Room CW.57 with door socket, oven and a kneading trough, view from the south

oven. Most of them had a diameter of 3–4 cm, but smaller ones of about 2.5 cm, and bigger ones of about 5 cm were also recorded. An inward opening door set into a stone door socket (found in place) on the left side led to the oven [Fig. 14]. The first utility level with the remains of a mat on the floor was recorded at 3.70 m a.s.l. Two shallow elongated vessels with one end formed into a spout (kneading trough), filled with a whitish solid substance [Fig. 13], were discovered in the middle of the room. A second door socket (blocking the entrance to the room) was also noted.

Courtyard (CW.123), in front of the storerooms, consisted, in the upper parts, of a solid layer of silt with very few potsherds. Below were the remains of several fireplaces, each about 1 m in diameter, some of them with vessels inside.

The unexpected discovery of a carefully crafted corner of a wall that was 1.20 m thick (CW.153), constructed of four rows of bricks [Fig. 15], in level 37 (3.60 m a.s.l.) posed a question about its dating. It may have been raised during the first phase of the storage facility, whereby it would have filled most of the courtyard, but it could be older as well, which further excavations of the feature should be able to resolve. Unfortunately, the western part of this construction was destroyed, like other buildings on the western slope of the kom.

By and large, the older phase of the storage facility contained many more fireplaces and a greater abundance of material than was ascertained for the younger phase, which was notable for the few potsherds and no installations like ovens (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015).



Fig. 15. Central Kom. Corner of a thick mud-brick wall, view from the northwest

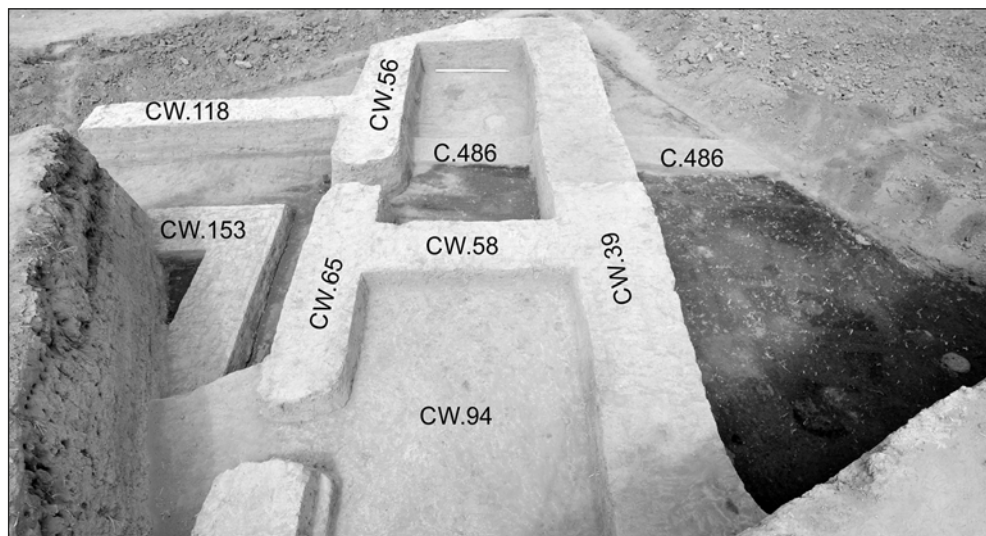


Fig. 16. Central Kom. Wall of the Lower Egyptian “residence” (C.486) and remains of wooden structures, view from the south



Fig. 17. Central Kom. Mud-brick walls C.486 and CW.157, view from the southeast

It is possible that the restoration after the first disaster sealed the rubbish and installations from the first level under a layer at least 0.50 m thick, presumably to protect it from flooding.

The wall of the big storage facility was raised of mud bricks with sand temper, 26 x 13 x 5 cm in size. The bondwork differs from course to course, although mostly stretchers were used in the outside face. The external wall was wider at the foot and slightly sloping outward [see *Fig. 11*]. Three small globular vessels and a grinding stone, intentionally placed in the wall, were discovered in the northwestern corner of room CW.57. A similar situation was observed in room EN.353 on the Eastern Kom (Chłodnicki 2012: 24–25). Moreover, an empty compartment was discovered in the northeastern corner of room CW.57 (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015).

Remains of the Naqadian settlement were uncovered to the east of the storage facility, at some distance from the thick wall CW.39. Walls (CW.124–CW.128)

were only 0.50 m thick (one-and-half brick). They constituted a continuation of house walls discovered in the main trench in 2007–2008.

The first remains of the Lower Egyptian “residence” were found below the foundations of the big storage facility, at 3.50 m a.s.l. The wall was visible below room CW.57 and continued to the east, joining with a wall (C.486) excavated in 2008. To the north of this wall (inside the “residence”), the debris consisted mostly of compacted silt (remains of levigated mud bricks), whereas on the outside it consisted of dark loose soil mixed with ashes and traces of wooden constructions [*Fig. 16*]. Remains of another thick wall (CW.157) were discovered to the south of wall C.486 which surrounded the residence. It was preserved to the height of just one brick. This wall formed a corner enclosed by three postholes (CW.147–CW.149). It was constructed most probably in the times of Lower Egyptian culture [*Fig. 17*]. Unearthed below it were the remains of a wooden house similar to the other one found before, to the east of the Lower Egyptian “residence” (Chłodnicki 2011: 43, *Fig. 3*).

As said before, the entire western part of the site was destroyed during a catastrophic flood and later covered with settlement debris. By level 40 (3.40 m a.s.l.), however, the evidence of destruction had all but disappeared, raising hopes that cultural layers connected with Lower Egyptian culture had been left undisturbed.

The archaeological material from all levels includes mostly pottery, animal bones and a few flints. Tokens of different shape have also been found. Among the most important finds is a pear-shaped macehead of quartzite [*Fig. 18*], unfortunately found



*Fig. 18. Central Kom. Quartzite macehead*



Fig. 19. Bone harpoon, shown here with a stone “calibrator” found on the Eastern Kom

in the disturbed part of the site. It is similar to another, basalt macehead found in the Lower Egyptian “residence” (Chłodnicki 2011: 43, Fig. 4; Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: Fig. 13) and it may be of similar date. A harpoon discovered in the settlement to the south of the “residence” is of Lower Egyptian date [Fig. 19].

#### NORTHWESTERN TRENCH (C83–C94)

A rounded structure located in the course of a geophysical survey and explored in 2012 (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015) continued to be explored. Its structure encompasses a double mud-brick wall (CW.50/51), each ring being 0.95 m thick, encircling an interior measuring 7 m in diameter. The internal wall was complete, whereas the external one was preserved only in the eastern, higher, part of the trench. The most destroyed southwestern part of the building was



Fig. 20. Central Kom. Rounded building with wall CW50 in the process of being dismantled

dismantled in 2014 in order to study the relation between these two walls. The base of the external wall (CW.51) was found to lie about 0.50 m higher (6.79 m a.s.l.) than the base of the internal one (CW.50, 6.23 m a.s.l.). Therefore, this wall was not preserved on the western, sloping part because the surface of the site is below the level of the foundation of wall CW.51. Placing the foundation of two adjacent walls on different levels is not unknown at the site. The same instance occurs in the big mastaba on the Eastern Kom (Chłodnicki et al. 2014: 129). In 2015, the whole building was dismantled, first the outer wall and then the inner one [Fig. 20]. Underneath, a layer of organic matting,

separating the wall from the soil, was discerned, confirming that the structure was built in the middle of the First Dynasty.

No older buildings were unearthed directly below it, only leveling layers, dark brown soil with many potsherds which could be attributed to a specific time period. The first traces of a huge rectangular structure were noted at 5.70 m a.s.l. and will continue to be excavated in the next season.

Many human remains, not of one individual, were found scattered loosely around the building. No remains of a grave were encountered there, the only cemetery on the site being located on the Eastern Kom, some 300 m away.



Fig. 21. Clay object (stamp-seal?) with hieroglyphs

A unique ceramic object with three hieroglyphic signs on the surface was discovered close to the building [Fig. 21]. The object was about 10.5 cm by 6.5 cm in size. Sign *shm* (S42) on the right side is the most legible, the others are more problematic: the top one could be a ram head (E11), while the one on the left side, partly broken, might have been the name

of the owner or supervisor of the big silo. The shape of the section was more or less triangular (height of about 8.5 cm). The object could have been a stamp-seal, but its function is still unknown. On the basis of the context, the object could be dated to the end of the First or the beginning of the Second Dynasty.

[MC]

## EASTERN KOM

### NORTHERN TRENCH

Exploration in 2014 was limited to squares E83–E84, on the northern part of the Eastern Kom [Fig. 22]. The explored area was between the walls EN.141, EN.381 and EN.131 known already from the previous excavations (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015). Between them,

two fireplaces (EN.378 and EN.379) and several pots (also big storage vessels) standing undisturbed (only their lower parts were preserved on the whole) as well as some postholes were discovered. The layers were rich in potsherds, among which fragments of spinning bowls were found. On level 50 (3.10 m a.s.l.), *gezira*



Fig. 22. Eastern Kom. Walls EN.141, EN.381 and EN.131



sand appeared close to the groundwater level.

With groundwater still at a high level, little depth was achieved in square E83, which was the only part of the trench continued in the following season. The western parts of walls EN.131 and EN.381 were dismantled. The first one was made of bricks with high sand content, the second of very silty bricks. The walls were raised on a thin soil layer covering the *gezira* sand. Interestingly, no remains of Lower Egyptian wooden structures were noted, in contrast to the evidence found just behind the thick wall EN.141 in the area around the mastaba (Chłodnicki 2012: 19–20). Also very few Lower Egyptian potsherds were found. It seems that in the final phase of that culture the Lower Egyptian settlement occupied only the northern part of the *gezira*, close to the water (Chłodnicki 2014: 63).

[MC]

### SOUTHERN TRENCH

Excavations were carried out in the area to the east of the big mastaba E10, in the same trench as in the earlier seasons (Ciałowicz and Dębowska-Ludwin 2013). The main focus of exploration were squares 46, 56 and 66, enlarged in 2015 to include squares 47a, c and 57c to the east [see *Fig. 1*], in order to investigate a big mud-brick edifice of unknown function found in square 46. It is at least 10 m long and covers more than 50 m<sup>2</sup>. A continuation of this structure was discovered in the squares opened during the 2015 season [*Fig. 23*]. The main walls were coated with a kind of pale mortar, up to 5 cm thick.

In the southern part of the structure, between the bricks, two tall wine-jars and a potstand decorated with incisions were unearthed in the same layer [*Fig. 24*]. The potstand touched the second jar from the north. A potmark (a rectangular frame and fish) was engraved on the first wine-jar.



*Fig. 23. Eastern Kom. Mud-brick structure*

Seventeen graves were discovered during the 2014–2015 campaign. In one of them only a few human bones were preserved. Eleven graves held very poorly preserved skeleton burials (of children and adults), the heads to the north and facing east [Fig. 25]. Eight graves yielded no equipment and can be dated based only on their stratigraphic position and similarity to the graves discovered during earlier seasons. Three graves contained

some offerings: two travertine vessels (Grave 134), one travertine vessel (Grave 138) and two clay pots, namely a beer-jar and a small jug imported from the Levant, with one travertine pot (Grave 139). Most likely, all the described graves are connected with phase Tell el-Farkha 6 which corresponds to the second half of the First and the beginning of the Second Dynasty. Most of the burials were intentionally placed between the



Fig. 24. Two wine-jars and a pot-stand decorated with incisions; below, wine-jar and pot-stand in situ

bricks forming the floors and walls of the structure mentioned above. These graves should possibly be regarded as subsidiary burials connected with that structure.

A similar custom is known from a few small mastabas discovered earlier at Tell el-Farkha (Dębowska-Ludwin 2012: 53–61, 69–70).



Fig. 25. Eastern Kom. Four examples of poor burials



Fig. 26. Eastern Kom. Grave 121, view from the east

Grave 121, also dated to the Tell el-Farkha phase 6 (Naqada IIIC1–IIID) [Fig. 26] was a small mastaba with two chambers, and the deceased adult male (35–40 years old) was equipped with 42 pottery vessels, mainly beer-jars and bowls covering them, and twenty stone vessels of different shapes [Fig. 27]. Almost all the stone vessels were made of travertine. 180 small carnelian beads were also discovered. The deceased was lying on his left side in a very contracted position, with his head to the north. Ceramic vessels were placed in the southern chamber, and the rest of the equipment was found together with the body in the northern one. The grave was dug into an earlier structure, probably from the Protodynastic period, although this needs to be confirmed during the next seasons. Such a situation is also typical of the cemetery at Tell el-Farkha.

Another two graves were not so richly furnished. In both, the skeletons were in contracted position, on the left side and with their heads to the north. In Grave 132 (Naqada IIIC2/D), remains of a man,

30–35 years old, were found together with three beads, seven clay vessels and one stone pot. Grave 137 (Naqada IIIB/C1), in which another male 30–35 years old was buried, was equipped with eight ceramic vessels and five beads.

The most interesting finds were Graves 126 and 130. The first, a double-chamber grave, is dated to the turn of the First Dynasty (Naqada IIIC2/D). It was built on top of the second one [Fig. 28]. In the northern chamber, a man of 25–35 years was buried, in typical position, together with 12 stone pots and one bead. In the southern chamber, 11 clay vessels (mainly beer-jars) were deposited [Fig. 29].

The small mastaba 130 was older. It is dated to the very beginning of Tell el-Farkha phase 5 (Naqada IIIB/C1), which means it was built during Dynasty 0. At Tell el-Farkha Early Dynastic graves were often embedded in small Protodynastic mastabas (for example Grave 100; Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2012: 151). The said Grave 126 not only was built on top of Grave 130, but its north wall was erected on the south wall of mastaba 104 [see Fig. 28]. It was discovered a few years before and is also dated to the beginning of phase 5 [Fig. 30]. The cover of the burial chamber was partly preserved below the superstructure (which was at least 1.50 m high) [Fig. 31]. It was a kind of mat made of reeds and twigs in a manner similar to the method used for roofing houses in modern Egyptian villages. Further down, a burial chamber with rounded corners was found. It was enclosed by mud-brick walls and filled with almost liquid mud [Fig. 31]. Such a method of construction is well known from Tell el-Farkha. Mud poured into burial chambers to protect the goods



Fig. 27. Stone vessels from Grave 121

and the deceased was a common practice in many graves from the Protodynastic period discovered earlier in this cemetery.

A woman, 30–39 years of age, from Grave 130 was found lying in a contracted position on her left side, with her head to the north. She was equipped with four stone and 17 clay pots [Fig. 32], a square

greywacke cosmetic palette, and a necklace of 139 carnelian and one lapis-lazuli beads.

Grave 130 was dug into the burnt layer of destruction and built on a wall belonging to the oldest Naqadian settlement [Fig. 33]. The same wall can be seen (approximately 20 m to the west) in the section opposite mastaba E10 [Fig. 33 bottom]. It forms the



Fig. 28. Eastern Kom. Stratigraphic position of Graves 126 and 130



Fig. 29. Eastern Kom. Grave 126



Fig. 30. Grave 104: top, superstructure; bottom, burial chamber

southern border of a rectangular room. The north wall of the room is easily discernible as well. A thick burnt layer lies against the north wall, and the space between the walls looks like a heap of broken bricks. From the south wall, the layer of destruction slopes gently down to the south.

With the progress of works around the oldest Egyptian mastaba, it became



Fig. 31. Grave 130: top, covering of the burial chamber; center and bottom, burial chamber



Fig. 32. Eastern Kom. Stone vessels (top row) and clay pots from Grave 130

evident that the mastaba itself, and the walls separating it from the north, south and east, were founded on the burnt layer of destruction. It is therefore plausible that the oldest Naqada settlement on the Eastern Kom was destroyed at the

same time (Naqada IIIA1) as the Naqada residence on the Western Kom. It could be a record of a second group of Naqadians arriving from the south, probably associated with another political center (Ciałowicz 2016).



Fig. 33. Eastern Kom. Wall of the oldest Naqadian settlement beneath Grave 130; bottom, trench-wall section opposite mastaba E10, view from the west



The small finds registered during the excavation included a flint knife with a handle of Early Dynastic date, perhaps the most interesting of the collection, and a flint round scraper presumably from the same period [Fig. 34 top]. Two idols, probably representing falcons, were also found. Along with numerous pottery sherds,

the area between the graves also yielded 22 broken, but almost completely reconstructable clay pots (wine-jars, bowls, small jugs, bread moulds). In the upper layers of the newly opened squares 47–57, a few cones [Fig. 34 bottom] were also discovered, as well as an almost completely preserved bread-mould.

[KMC]



Fig. 34. Early Dynastic artifacts: top left, flint scraper; top right, flint knife; bottom, clay cones

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