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THE NILE DELTA AS A CENTER  
OF CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN  
UPPER EGYPT AND THE SOUTHERN  
LEVANT IN THE 4TH MILLENNIUM BC

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**Abstract:** *The societies occupying the Nile Delta in the 4th millennium BC were not cut off from the neighboring regions of Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant. The Nile River, which served as a transport route between southern and northern Egypt, and the geographical proximity of the Southern Levant to the Nile Delta were probably both factors that allowed contact to occur between the regions. Whilst a significant number of Southern Levantine and Upper Egyptian imports have been found at Lower Egyptian cultural sites, the quantity of Lower Egyptian items from the same period found in the Southern Levant and in southern Egypt is more limited. This state of affairs did not occur by chance, which suggests that the scarcity of northern Egyptian finds outside Lower Egypt can probably be attributed to the nature of trade and the position of the Nile Delta in this period.*

*Although our knowledge of the contact of the Delta with Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant is constantly expanding, many issues still remain unclear, including that of trading patterns. Archeological research currently being conducted in northern Egypt (mainly at Tell el-Farkha, Tell el-Iswid, Sais and Buto) has provided us with new material that adds to our understanding of the field. From the most recent excavation results, it would appear that from the very beginnings of its existence, the Tell el-Farkha site in the eastern Delta was as an important exchange center where the influence of the east and the south came together.*

*The aim of this paper is to portray the interaction occurring between the Delta, Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant in the 4th millennium BC*

*on the basis of material found at the excavation site of Tell el-Farkha in the eastern Nile Delta and to explain the role of the Nile Delta in political and cultural relations between these regions.*

**Keywords:** *Nile Delta; interaction; Upper Egypt; Southern Levant*

## **Introduction**

The Nile Delta, considered an almost uninhabitable swampland in the Predynastic period (Butzer 1976, 26), lay outside the interest of archaeologists for many years. Although a few archaeological sites existed in Lower Egypt in the first part of the 20th century (e.g. Sakkara, Helwan, Merimde-Beni Salame, Heliopolis, Maadi), the Delta remained *terra incognita*. The key factors which made access to archaeological sites in this region so difficult were the high water table and the thick layer of mud which had been deposited by the Nile on top of the oldest of them.

In the 1980s and 1990s, intense archaeological research in the region led to the discovery of new important sites such as Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper 1988), Tell el-Iswid, Tell Ibrahim Awad (van den Brink 1988a) and Tell el-Farkha (Chłodnicki *et al.* 1992). In addition, archaeologists also continued to work on previously known sites, such as Buto (von der Way 1988), to verify the chronology of deposits from Predynastic and Early Dynastic occupation found underneath the ancient city remains. The discoveries made in these times demonstrated the great importance of the Nile Delta to those wishing to understand the past of ancient Egypt. Two important seminars held in 1986 and 1990 resulted in two publications (van den Brink 1988b and van den Brink 1992) on the archaeology of the Nile Delta, which both show the growing importance of the region in archaeological research. They continue to be important sources of information for anyone involved in the archaeology of the area.

With several expeditions working in the Nile Delta region every year from the 1990s onwards, our knowledge of the early occupation of the Delta has naturally increased. The results of this work have aided our understanding of human activity in the region in the Pre-, Proto- and Early Dynastic periods.

There are very few traces of the occupation of Lower Egypt just prior to the early Neolithic period. Only the remains of Epipaleolithic occupation, called 'Qarunian', have been noted at the Fayum Oasis (Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000, 35-36), whilst nothing of the period is known from the Delta. It is possible, however, that the oldest Delta sites remain covered

by thick layers of mud deposited by the Nile. Nevertheless, the number of known archaeological sites indicating early human activity in this region has increased over time. The remains of activity of the first fully agricultural societies in the north were discovered in the Fayum region, at Merimde Beni Salame and Wadi Hof. These discoveries provided the basis for the differentiation of three separate cultural units: Fayum A, Merimde and el-Omari (Midant-Reynes 1992, 101-122; Hendrickx and Vermeersch 2000, 36-39). As they are only known from the evidence of these single eponymous sites, our knowledge of the cultures remains limited (Mączyńska, forthcoming a).

The first culture to spread all over northern Egypt is known as 'Lower Egyptian' culture (Mączyńska 2011). Most of the sites ascribed to this cultural unit are located in the central and eastern parts of northern Egypt. The western part, which is poorly known, requires additional archaeological research before much more may be said of it. However, proof of Lower Egyptian occupation has been registered here, as well as at Buto (von der Way 1992; Köhler 1996) and Sais (Wilson 2006; Wilson *et al.* 2014). The origins of this culture have not yet been explained, but they are probably linked to the Merimde and el-Omari cultures (Midant-Reynes 1992, 206; Levy and van den Brink 2002, 10; Midant-Reynes 2003, 53; Mączyńska, forthcoming a).

Human occupation in the Nile Delta was influenced by the environmental and geomorphologic conditions specific to the region. An important aspect of the Delta landscape are the sandy-silt hills called *gezira*, or 'turtle-backs', which were not flooded during the annual inundations of the Nile. Almost all early settlements and cemeteries were located on top of them, i.e. Kom el-Khilgan (Tristant *et al.* 2008, 467) and Tell el-Farkha (Chłodnicki 2012, 9). *Geziras* not only protected people from floods, but also offered fairly easy access to agricultural fields and pastures for grazing, as well as to a rich supply of other food, such as fish and wild birds (Pawlikowski and Wasilewski 2012).

In the middle of the 4th millennium BC, important cultural changes, referred to as the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition, occurred. Although the causes, the workings and the course of this process are still under discussion (cf. Köhler 1996; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2007; Köhler 2008; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2011; Mączyńska 2011; Mączyńska, forthcoming b; Mączyńska, forthcoming c), it is generally accepted that at the beginning of the Naqada III period, the cultural division of Egypt into Naqada culture (in the south) and Lower Egyptian culture (in the north)

was replaced by a single Naqada culture which spanned the entire country. The past thirty years of research in the Nile Delta have changed the area's status at the time from a sparsely populated region into a location harboring sites key to understanding the emergence of the Egyptian state.

### **Interaction between the Nile Delta and the Southern Levant**

The societies occupying the Nile Delta were not cut off from the neighboring regions and the relatively small distance between the Delta and the Southern Levant was probably an important factor behind the contact that occurred between them (Hayes 1965, 122; Wetterström 1993, 200). Although some early links connecting the regions can be found in the material of the early Neolithic societies of Lower Egypt discovered at Fayum, Merimde and Wadi Hof (i.e. imported objects, raw materials and influences on locally made objects), an interpretation of these finds is not straightforward (Mączyńska 2008, 765-766; Mączyńska, forthcoming a). At the beginning of the 4th millennium BC, the Lower Egyptian and Late Chalcolithic societies probably entered a new phase in foreign relations. Lower Egyptian culture is probably the first to possess a significant number of Southern Levantine imports at its sites. However, the number of Lower Egyptian items found in the Southern Levant in this period is more limited (Mączyńska 2008, 769-770). In addition, the presence of the Levantines at the sites of Buto and Maadi should be noted (Rizkana and Seeher 1989, 49-55; Watrin 2000; Faltings 2002; Hartung *et al.* 2003).

Due to the scarcity of records concerning early relations between the Nile Delta and the Southern Levant, interpretations of them are both few in number and rather unimpressive; most are limited to statements simply mentioning the sporadic character of contact between the regions. Most authors indicate that the exchange of goods and ideas was the main motivation for early contact (Levy and van den Brink 2002, 18-19; de Miroschedji 2002, 39-40; Braun and van den Brink 2008, 644-650; Guyot 2008, 709-714; Braun 2011, 107-108). According to P. de Miroschedji (2002) and F. Guyot (2008), the Levantines were the ones who facilitated this exchange. According to de Miroschedji (2002, 39-40), the first Levantines appeared in Lower Egypt in order to assess the resources of the region. In the opinion of Guyot (2008, 714), the Lower and Upper Egyptian peoples participated in the exchange rather than organized it.

The character of relations between Egypt and the Southern Levant altered after the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition, which led to the cultural

unification of Lower and Upper Egypt. According to de Miroschedji (2002, 41-42), in Early Bronze IB (contemporary with Naqada IIIA1 and Buto III), 'a massive expansion of Egypt to the east' (which even included the colonization of southwestern Canaan by the Egyptians) occurred. However, according to E. Braun (2002, 181-183), archaeological records do not yet provide sufficient evidence to support the notion of Egyptian presence in the Southern Levant. He also underlines the fact that the nature of interaction between the Egyptians and the Southern Levantines was complicated and that its intensity changed over time.

### **Interaction between the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt**

Relations between the Nile Delta and Upper Egypt prior to the Naqada IIC period are also described as sporadic. Underlying evidence is rather poor and mostly limited to Naqadian imports in the north and some Lower Egyptian items found at southern sites. Maadi is the site with the highest number of Upper Egyptian items dating to the Naqada I and II periods (black-topped pottery, rhomboid palettes, combs, mace-heads, bifacial flint tools) found in the north. Upper Egyptian pottery has also been recorded at other sites in the Delta, such as Buto I and II (von der Way 1992, 104-106). In contrast, only a few Lower Egyptian sherds and vessels have been registered in Upper Egypt, found with material dating to Naqada I and the first part of Naqada II at sites such as Hierakonpolis (Adams and Friedman 1992, 322-325; Friedman 2003, 10) and Adaima (Buchež 2007, vol. 1, 123-124, 130, 132 and vol. 3, fig. 3/96: 1). The Upper Egyptians' desire for Southern Levantine items and products is considered to be the main cause behind the exchange which occurred. Naqadian items were offered to local Lower Egyptian society in return. Some products, such as the black-topped vessels, were locally imitated, as was the case at Maadi. Although the Lower Egyptians from Maadi used vessels imported from the south and imitated them, they did not adopt the southern practice of using them as grave goods. No grave of Maadi or Wadi Digla contained black-topped vessels, which were probably used only in the settlement, for example in Maadi (Mączyńska, forthcoming c).

Contact between Upper and Lower Egypt is visible in the changes in the flint tradition of both regions. During Naqada IIB-IIC/D, the northern production method of twisted blades reached Middle Egypt and then Upper Egypt. As a result, the assemblages of southern sites (e.g. Adaima and Hierakonpolis) contain a mixture of both northern and southern flint

traditions (Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2011, 851-852). Bilateral interaction between Upper and Lower Egypt is also visible in the assemblages of two cemeteries at Gerzeh and Harageh, where a mixture of the two pottery styles can be observed in graves (Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2011, 845-846). However, an opposing view is maintained by A. Stevenson (2009, 55-57), who believes there is little evidence from the cemetery at Gerzeh indicating direct material exchange between the community of Gerzeh and those of the Lower Egyptian culture.

The second half of the Naqada II period witnessed more intensive contact between the societies of Lower and Upper Egypt. The number of Upper Egyptian imports, especially pottery, increased in the Nile Delta at Tell el-Farkha (Mączyńska 2004, 435, 438-439) and Buto (Jucha 2005, 55-56). This period is referred to as the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition, during which both the Lower Egyptian and Naqada cultures underwent changes (Mączyńska 2011; Mączyńska, forthcoming b). The most important reason for this transition is attributed to the Naqadians' desire for the wealth of Lower Egypt and control over trade with the Southern Levant (Siegemund 1999; Wilkinson 1999, 311; Bard 2000, 58; Ciałowicz 2001, 74-77; Campagno 2004). This cultural transition is often called the 'Naqada expansion'. Most scholars who refer to it assume that there must have been a movement of people involving the arrival of the Upper Egyptians in Lower Egypt (e.g. Kaiser 1964; Kaiser 1985; Kaiser 1987; Kaiser 1990; Wilkinson 1999, 17; Ciałowicz 2001, 74-77; Midant-Reynes 2003, 45; Kemp 2006, 88). Since the Naqadians are considered to have been the dominant party in this process, their culture is believed to have strongly influenced or even replaced local culture (e.g. Bard 2000, 58-59; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2007; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2011).

### **Interaction between Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant**

The interest of Naqada culture in the Southern Levant is believed to have occurred following social changes in Naqadian society which began at the end of Naqada I. This process is mostly evidenced by funerary data, which indicates more and more important concentrations of goods in an increasingly restricted number of graves throughout the Naqada II period (Guyot 2008, 715). Social differentiation fuelled the demand for prestigious items denoting the special status of their owners, which in turn must have led to the intensification of interregional contact (Köhler

2010, 39-40). Lower Egypt was one of the areas where much sought after items were available. However, as typical Lower Egyptian objects were innumerable at southern sites, Naqadians were mostly interested in items imported by the Lower Egyptians from the Southern Levant. The low number of Southern Levantine objects registered among materials dating to Naqada I and the first part of Naqada II at the sites of Middle and Upper Egypt (cf. Watrin 2003, 568-570) reflects the small scale of trade in this period, as the demand for prestigious objects in the south had only just begun to emerge. In return for Levantine goods, Lower Egyptians could obtain Upper Egyptian items. Their number is comparable to that of Levantine objects in the south, which also indicates the small scale of exchange in this early period.

It is generally accepted that more intense trading began after the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition (i.a. Guyot 2008, 719-730). In Naqada I and the first part of the Naqada II period, the Lower Egyptians could have acted as intermediaries between the Upper Egyptians and the Southern Levantines. The Nile was probably the main trade route along which the transport of goods was organized. However, this hypothesis has been criticized by S. P. Tutundžić (1989, 430), who suggests two different sources for Southern Levantine pottery found in Maadi in Naqada II contexts. In 1993, Tutundžić stated that Maadi could have had links with the Southern Levant prior to contact with Upper Egypt, which could explain the difference in the imported pottery found in the north and south of Egypt to a certain extent. However, it cannot be precluded that other routes were used at the time. D. E. Bar-Yosef Mayer (2002, 133) has indicated another trade route on an east-west axis, between southern Sinai and Upper Egypt, based on her research of bangles made of shells found near Nawamis. However, she does admit that interaction via this route was sporadic and that it was probably organized individually, rather than collectively.

### **The Nile Delta as a place or center of interregional interaction?**

In most interpretations of Egyptian – Southern Levantine interaction, the Nile Delta and Lower Egypt are merely considered to be places where this interaction occurred. The region is viewed as a passive site of interaction, or even just as the background for interaction between the dominant Naqada culture and Early Bronze Age societies. Even the presence of Levantine newcomers at Buto and Maadi is always linked to trade with the Naqada

culture. In most existing interpretations, the Nile Delta did not benefit from hosting this interaction and the Lower Egyptians therefore did not capitalize on their role as intermediaries in trade.

In my opinion, this widely held interpretation results from the generally accepted traditional model of Predynastic Egypt, which sees it as divided between the dominant (more developed and socially stratified) Naqada culture and the unspectacular, egalitarian Lower Egyptian culture (Köhler 1993; Köhler 1995; Köhler 1996; Köhler 2008; Köhler 2010; Mączyńska 2011; Mączyńska, forthcoming b). Our poor knowledge of Lower Egyptian culture and the still limited number of well-excavated and published sites in the region have also had an impact on scholarly opinion. I personally believe that this passive role of the Nile Delta in interaction is highly questionable, especially in the light of new discoveries at Tell el-Farkha.

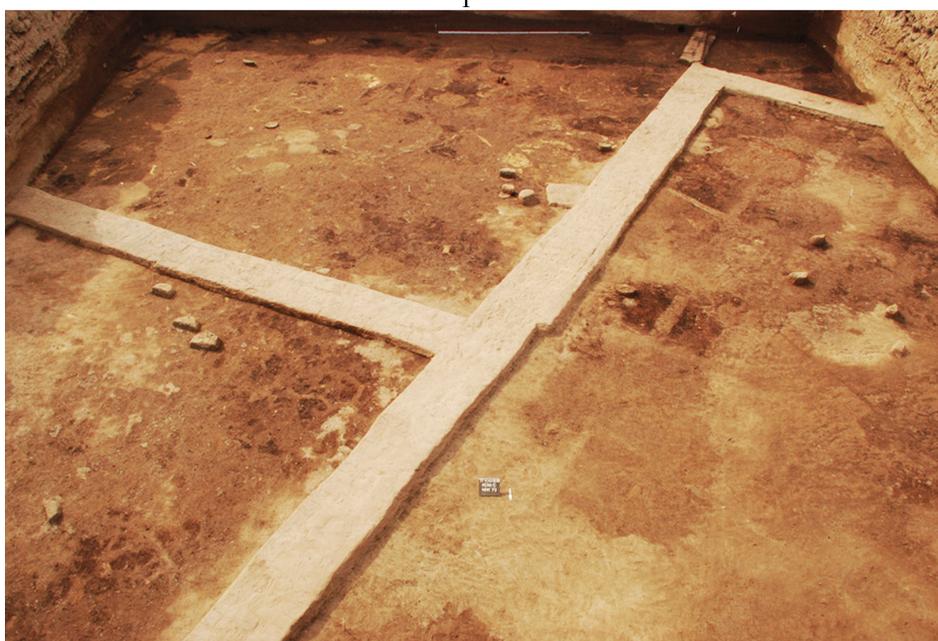
### **The Tell el-Farkha site**

The settlement was occupied from Naqada IIB-C by a Lower Egyptian community. The oldest Lower Egyptian occupation is divided into two phases: the first dates to Naqada IIB-C (contemporary with Buto II) and the second to Naqada IID1 and the beginning of Naqada IID2 (contemporary with the end of Buto II and the beginning of Buto III) (Chłodnicki 2012, tab. 1). Occupation by Lower Egyptians was registered on all three koms of the site and exploration of layers dating to the two oldest phases have revealed remains typical of Lower Egyptian architecture. Long furrows, remains of rectangular buildings of organic material, postholes and storage pits are the most commonly discovered structures at Tell el-Farkha (e.g. Chłodnicki and Geming 2012, figs 3-4, 7, 20-21; Ciałowicz 2012, figs 2-3). Excavations on the site have also yielded a large number of pottery, flint and stone implements typical of Lower Egyptian culture. Additionally, pottery imports from Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant have been discovered in both of the oldest phases (Jucha 2005, 55, pl. 91; Mączyńska 2011, 897; Czarnowicz 2012a; Sobas 2012, 183). A copper knife of Levantine origin found at the settlement is also worthy of mention (Czarnowicz 2012b, fig. 1: 2).

The presence of imports from the Naqada cultural region and the Early Bronze Age Southern Levant at Tell el-Farkha has led to the conclusion that the inhabitants of the settlement interacted with neighboring regions (Pl. 1; Fig. 1). Although they do confirm contact and also probably trade, they do not shed any light on the nature of the interaction occurring.



Pl. 1. Tell el-Farkha. Imports from Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant:  
1 – Ledge Handle. Photo by M. Czarnowicz; 2-4 – D-ware. Photo by R. Słaboński



Pl. 2. Tell el-Farkha. Central Kom. The Lower Egyptian Residence:  
1 – Phase 1; 2 – Phase 2. Photo by R. Słaboński

At other sites in the Delta dating to the same period (Maadi and Buto), objects imported from the east and south have also been discovered. However, it should be stressed that other discoveries important to the understanding of interaction between the Delta, Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant have also been made at these two sites. Subterranean structures unearthed at Maadi are similar to those found at sites of the Late Chalcolithic horizon in the Beersheva Valley.



Fig. 1. Tell el-Farkha. Import from the Southern Levant: Ledge Handle.  
Photo by M. Czarnowicz

They are believed to be traces of the presence of Southern Levantine traders (Rizkana and Seeher 1989, 49-55; Watrin 2000; Hartung *et al.* 2003). At Buto, non-Egyptian locally made pottery forms have been discovered showing a strong affinity to Late Chalcolithic pottery from the Southern Levant. According to Köhler (1996), these foreign-looking vessels were produced by groups of Canaanite immigrants who settled at the site. As the quantity of this pottery diminished over time, she has also suggested that the immigrants adopted Egyptian techniques and gradually abandoned their own.

At Tell el-Farkha, two important discoveries associated with Lower Egyptian culture have been made: the largest known brewery center and the oldest mudbrick architecture in Lower Egypt (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012, 92-100; Ciałowicz 2012). Although at first they may not seem to be linked to interaction with the Naqada and Early Bronze Age cultures, a closer study reveals that they are an important source of information for understanding it.

### **The brewery center at Tell el-Farkha**

The earliest structure connected with beer production discovered at Tell el-Farkha can be dated to the Naqada IIB period. Exploration of the oldest layers of the site has shown that the breweries appeared just a little after the first settlers, who built these first structures of organic material directly on top of the *gezira*. To 2013, six breweries have been discovered on the Western and Central Koms (Fig. 2). All seem to have been very well

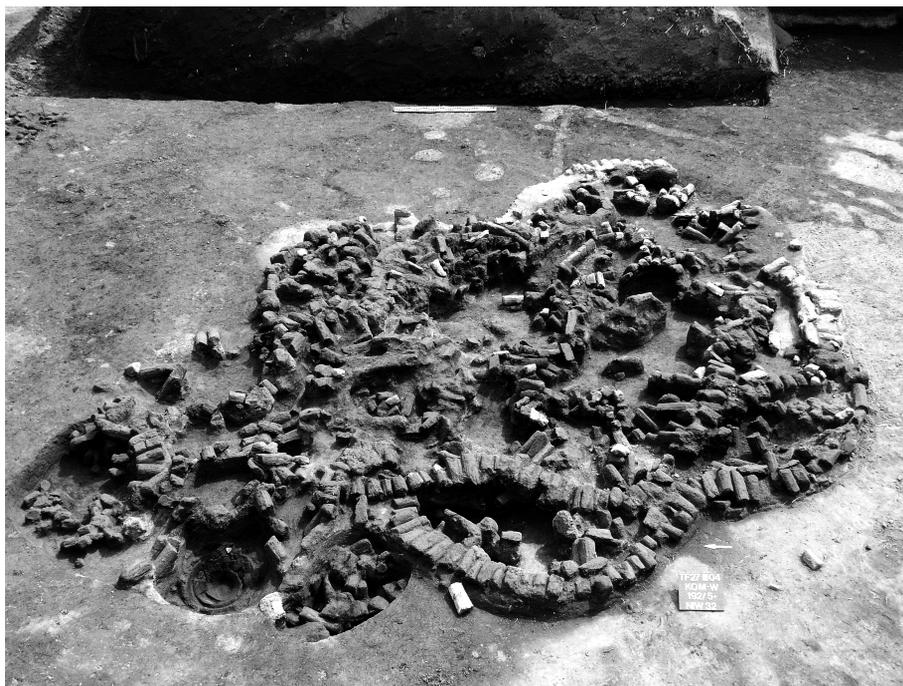


Fig. 2. Tell el-Farkha. Western Kom. Remains of the brewery. Photo by R. Słaboński

planned to enable beer brewing just after completion of construction work (Ciałowicz 2012). The oldest breweries in Egypt date to Naqada IB-IIA and can be found in the south at Mahasna, Abydos and Hierakonpolis, where they form part of some of the most important centers of Naqada culture (Peet and Loat 1913, 3-4; Geller 1992; Takamiya 2008). Considering the fact that the breweries of Tell el-Farkha were erected later on and that they were well-developed and properly organized, it seems that the idea of beer production was copied from the region of its origin, Upper Egypt (see also Adamski and Rosińska-Balik 2014).

Beer production required certain special vessels, namely large vats used for fire and also for beer storage. According to S. Hendrickx *et al.* (2002, 293-294), the earliest beer jars are Petrie's types R81, R84 and later L30, which were quite common in Upper Egypt in Naqada II and appeared at Lower Egyptian sites towards the end of this period. The only exception to this rule is Tell el-Farkha, where jars R81 and R84 appear coevally with material dating to Naqada IIC, which in turn is contemporary with the breweries (Fig. 3; Mączyńska 2011, 890; Mączyńska, forthcoming b). Their early appearance at this site could possibly be explained by their

function. If the idea of beer production originated in the south, the idea of its storage could have also come from the same region. It is not possible to determine who made these vessels, but Lower Egyptian potters were probably able to imitate the work of Upper Egyptians. It is likely that they could have produced them in the north using the same, readily available Nile clay, especially since the production of early beer jars did not require any special skills (Mączyńska, forthcoming c).

### **Mudbrick architecture at Tell el-Farkha**

The oldest mudbricks discovered at the site were used to construct breweries. The most common, D-shaped bricks, were used for constructing external and internal walls and also for supporting vats. Bricks with triangular cross sections were used mostly inside kilns to support vats (Ciałowicz 2012, 155). However, mudbricks from the breweries were different from those used to construct walls. On the Central Kom, a large structure referred to as the 'Lower Egyptian Residence' was unearthed, situated in a well-organized area divided into zones of differing function (Pl. 2). The residence was surrounded by a double wooden fence, which was later replaced by a thick mudbrick wall at the end of Naqada IIC. The wall was 1.6m thick at the base and 1.2-1.3m at the top with slightly oblique sides. The mudbricks used to construct it were of different sizes and were also arranged in different ways in different sections of the walls (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012, 92-97, figs 8-10). A similar wall surrounding the brewery center was registered on the Western Kom (Ciałowicz 2012, 161).

The Upper Egyptian origin of this new technique of erecting walls has been generally accepted (cf. von der Way 1992, 3; Wilkinson 1996, 95; Wengrow 2006, 82). However, these discoveries in Lower Egypt show that the earliest use of mudbrick was also known in Lower Egypt at Maadi (Rizkana and Seeher 1989, 55-56) and Tell el-Farkha (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012). According to certain researchers, this is the reason why it is more reasonable to link the appearance of the mudbrick technique to the influence of the Southern Levant rather than that of Upper Egypt (Tristant 2004, 120; Sievertsen 2008, 794). The idea of erecting mudbrick walls could have spread southwards from Lower Egypt in the same way that the flint tradition did (Buechez and Midant-Reynes 2007; Buechez and Midant-Reynes 2011).

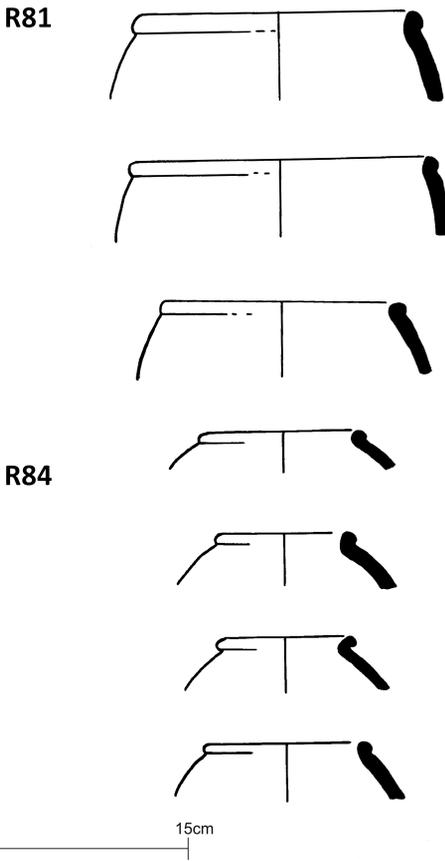


Fig. 3. Tell el-Farkha. Jars R81 and R84 from the Central Kom. Drawing by the autor

## Visitors in the Nile Delta

Interaction between different societies is mostly based on contact between people and the most common form of interaction is the exchange of goods and ideas. People engaging in such an exchange can play the role of traders or inter-mediaries. Finally, the desires of a people can also be motivation for exchange (Renfrew and Bahn 2000, 351-352).

Archaeologists have only noted the presence of newcomers from the Southern Levant at Buto and Maadi. However, it seems that the two groups who appeared in the Delta did so for quite different reasons. It would appear that the foreigners in Buto settled among the locals, but kept their distinct cultural identity, as is reflected in their pottery production. Over time they adopted local techniques and abandoned their own (Faltings 2002). At Maadi, a group

of traders lived side by side with local society, but in subterranean structures rather than in the standard houses found at the site. According to I. Rizkana and J. Seeher (1989, 80), they stayed on the outskirts of the settlement and were isolated from its other parts. In the opinion of Maadi excavators, the traders visiting the site must have been forced to stay longer on the site due to some transportation difficulties, for example the annual inundation of the Nile.

A few interpretations exist concerning the organization of trade between Lower Egyptians and Southern Levantines in the first part of the 4th millennium BC. These make reference to the exchange models proposed by C. Renfrew (1975, 3-59). T. Harrison (1993) has suggested the 'down-the-line' exchange model, which has goods circulating through

several intermediaries between the Nile Delta and the Southern Levant in this early period. However, L. Watrin (1998, 1218) has excluded the Buto site from this model, as he considers it to have been a center of maritime trade with direct access to West Asian goods. He has also proposed a dual-access trading exchange model in which small groups of foreign traders from each region settled in small outposts in other regions, such as Maadi and Site H (Watrin 1998, 1220-1221). According to Guyot (2008, 712-714), the most appropriate term describing the organization of trade in this early period is 'from neighbor to neighbor contacts', stressing the multidirectional aspect of neighborly exchange. Moreover, he believes that the model of exchange was random and that the Lower Egyptians only disposed of exogenous goods that were randomly dispatched to them.

The presence of newcomers from the south has not been confirmed at any site in Lower Egypt. This situation seems strange considering the widely accepted notion of Naqadian expansion and the arrival of the Naqadians in the north. Moreover, recent discoveries in Lower Egypt have shown that the process of cultural transition between Lower Egyptian and Naqada culture is not easy to explain (Köhler 1993; Köhler 1995; Köhler 1996; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2006; Köhler 2008; Buchez and Midant-Reynes 2011; Maćczyńska 2011). The idea of Naqadian expansion has been criticized by E. Ch. Köhler (1995, 79-92; 2008, 7), who rejects the idea of the arrival of Upper Egyptians as a cultural bloc or as an invasion from the north. According to her, Naqada culture and Lower Egyptian culture were not two completely different or opposing cultures, but facies which developed in specific geographical, ecological and social circumstances. Moreover, for Köhler (2008, 13), there is a degree of uniformity between the materials of Lower and Upper Egypt, which is the effect of interaction between the two regions. She interprets this as movements of people, goods and ideas, facilitated by the geographical conditions of the Nile and its valley.

There is no doubt that the Naqada and Lower Egyptian cultures were not as different as previously thought (Maćczyńska, forthcoming b; Maćczyńska, forthcoming c). The uniformity of certain aspects of culture, including utilitarian pottery, makes it difficult and sometimes even impossible to differentiate Naqadian from local, Lower Egyptian elements. The inhabitants of the settlement at Tell el-Farkha (Phases 1 and 2) would have had direct or indirect contact with Upper Egyptians. D-ware pottery and the idea of beer production and storage seem to confirm this interaction. Moreover, there is no evidence that the Naqadians exercised authority over

this settlement or of any other dominance at the site in this early period. On the contrary, the continuing occupation of the site by locals and their continued production can be observed (Mączyńska 2011, 897; Mączyńska, forthcoming b; Mączyńska, forthcoming c). It seems more proper to use the term ‘Naqadian expeditions’ when referring to this interaction than to call it ‘Naqadian expansion’ (cf. Mączyńska 2011, 899).

### **Tell el-Farkha as a center of exchange between Southern Levantines and Upper Egyptians**

The largest and earliest breweries, the sizeable building called the ‘Lower Egyptian Residence’, the earliest mudbrick walls and the settlement zones devoted to specific functions all denote the great importance of the settlement at Tell el-Farkha in the first part of the 4th millennium BC. All these features appeared in the middle of the Naqada II period, before the Lower Egyptian-Naqadian transition. Their special character can be additionally confirmed by the fact that structures of this kind have not been registered at any other site in Lower Egypt.

The size of the brewery center indicates that production exceeded local consumption and suggests that beer was exported to other sites located in different directions. The ‘Lower Egyptian Residence’, surrounded by a double wooden fence, differs from the small and simple isolated houses found elsewhere on the site. By the end of Phase 1, most certainly in the Naqada IIC period, the wooden fence was replaced by a massive mudbrick wall. This unknown construction technique was not used by chance, but appears to have been intended to deliberately segregate its inhabitants from those outside the compound, indicating that the building played an important role for the inhabitants of the settlement. Finds from inside the residence, including basalt and bone mace-heads, beads of gold and stone (probably from a necklace), copper and flint knives and a fragment of a ripple flake knife, also confirm its special nature (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012, 96-99; Czarnowicz 2012b, 352, fig. 1: 2). It is worth noting that 75% of the vessel fragments imported from the Levant were excavated inside the residence (Czarnowicz 2012a, 261, fig. 15).

In the opinion of the excavators of the site, Tell el-Farkha was a center for long-distance contact and trade with Upper Egypt and the Southern Levant (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012; Ciałowicz 2012). The settlement was probably situated on a trade route and its position in the center of the eastern Nile Delta facilitated the transfer of goods farther to the east and to the south.

It was probably a meeting place for people of different origins (Naqadians, Levantines and Lower Egyptians), who were presumably mutual trading partners. Local society took part in and probably organized the exchange of goods and ideas in an active way. Moreover, it benefited from this contact by adopting new techniques and raw materials, as is evidenced by the presence of mudbrick architecture and beer production and the use of copper and gold.

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