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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN WADI TUMILAT, EGYPT IN THE 2025 SEASON: FIRST RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

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**ABSTRACT:** This report presents the results of archaeological investigations conducted during the 2025 season in Wadi Tumilat, located in the eastern Nile Delta. The study integrates systematic surface surveys with excavations at the Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery. Particular attention is paid to Early Dynastic burials, including funerary practices, grave goods, and anthropological analyses, which offer new insights into the social stratification of the local population. The findings underscore the role of Wadi Tumilat as a strategic communication corridor and a key region for early state formation processes

in Egypt, while highlighting the significant potential for future settlement research in the area.

**KEYWORDS:** archaeological survey, Early Dynastic Egypt, funerary practices, Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery, Nile Delta

## Introduction

In March and April 2025, intensive archaeological research began in the central part of the Wadi Tumilat valley located in the southeastern part of the Nile Delta.<sup>1</sup> This research consisted of surface prospecting at sites situated to the east of a known and well-recognised cemetery at Kafr Hassan Dawood (KHD) (Tassie and van Wetering 2003). Conducting surface survey in the area, particularly in regions associated with social activity during the Early Dynastic period, is extremely important for several key reasons – both for reconstructing the processes of the formation of Egyptian statehood and for filling in the gaps in the archaeological picture of settlement in this strategic region of Lower Egypt. Wadi Tumilat is a natural corridor connecting the Nile Valley to the Sinai and on to the Levant. During the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, the area may have played a significant role in contacts between Egypt and regions east of the Nile Delta. Despite this, the region still remains relatively under-recognised in terms of settlements from the late fourth and early third millennia BCE. Surface surveys – conducted systematically and using modern technologies such as satellite imagery, lidar and magnetic scanning – have great potential in uncovering previously unknown sites. The Wadi Tumilat area may have been the arena of early organisational activities of the young Egyptian state, and the new finds could significantly expand our knowledge of the processes of centralisation and control of space during this crucial period.

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<sup>1</sup> The members of the expedition included Grzegorz Radosław Bąk-Pryc (Director of the mission), Mariusz A. Jucha (Mission Assistant Director), Lawrence Owens (Mission Assistant Director), Claudia Ribeiro Campos Gradim (archaeologist), Karolina Lapeta (archaeologist), Mustafa Nour el-Din (archaeologist), Sameh Ahmed (archaeologist), Bartosz Wójcik (archaeologist) and Monika Krawiec (archaeologist, documentalist), Tomasz Herbich (geophysical prospecting) and Jan Kwiatkowski (geophysical prospecting). I would like to thank the Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism, particularly Mr. Sherif Fathy. I also extend my gratitude to Dr Mohamed Ismail Khaled (Secretary-General of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities), Dr Rizk Diab (Chief of Eastern Delta, SCA), Mustafa Hassan Nour (Director of Ismailia province, SCA), Sameh Hoshhem (Director of excavations in Ismailia province, SCA) and Musbach Zaki Mohamed from the inspectorate of Tell el-Kebir.

## Survey in Wadi Tumilat

During the 2025 season, surveys were conducted at five sites (Pl. 1). The research began with two settlement points: Ghezira Khadra 1 (WT25-1) and Gezira Khadra 2 (WT25-2), which had already been verified during previous field prospecting. These sites are located west of the cemetery at Kafr Hassan Dawood. During surface work at the site, single fragments of pottery vessels dating to later periods were discovered (Pl. 2: 1). The next positions are located east of KHD. The first is Abu Nashaba (WT25-3), followed by Tell el-Tahmoud (WT25-4) and Tell el-Gebel (WT25-5). Traces of Predynastic and Early Dynastic settlement were not identified at any of the sites. All the discovered relics date to the later period. In order to fully verify the layering system and the definitive chronology of individual sites, more in-depth research – probing and geological drilling – is planned for subsequent seasons.

## Excavations in Kafr Hassan Dawood

Another archaeological activity during the 2025 season was the continuation of research at the Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery. The site is located in the central part of Wadi Tumilat and has been dated to the Proto-dynastic period through the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty and the later Ptolemaic periods (Hassan *et al.* 2008, 41). The site and cemetery have been previously studied by foreign and Egyptian missions (el-Hangary 1992; Bakr *et al.* 1996; Lovell 2001; Hassan *et al.* 2003; Hamden and Hassan 2003, Tassie and van Wetering 2003). The last research seasons at the site were conducted in 2019 and 2022 under the direction of Lawrence Owens. To date, archaeological research conducted in the Nile Delta by a team from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków at sites such as Tell el-Farcha (Dębowska-Ludwin 2023; Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2020) and Tell el-Murra (Bąk-Pryc *et al.* 2023; Małecka-Drozd 2021; Jucha *et al.* 2018; Jucha *et al.* 2017) has yielded excellent results and discoveries, placing Polish researchers among the most active and recognisable participants in the international scene of Egyptian archaeology. All of this indicates the importance of further exploration of archaeological sites related to the process of the formation of Egyptian statehood. In response to this need, a new surface research project has been set up in the Wadi Tumilat area of southeastern Egypt – a region with enormous research potential and an important cultural corridor between Egypt and the “eastern

lands”. One of the key elements of this project is the continuation of research at the Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery. This work, since the 2025 season, has been taking place under the direction of the lead author and is aimed not only at documenting and analysing more finds, but also at interpreting them in the broader context of the socio-political changes that were taking place in Egypt at the dawn of its historicity here.

During the latest season of archaeological research conducted at the Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery, work continued at sites where it had already been conducted in previous seasons. As a first step, the site was re-mapped, overlaying a new grid and adapting documentation methods to the standards previously used at the neighbouring Tell el-Murra and Tell el-Farcha sites. The main research objectives for the KHD cemetery in the 2025 season were: (1) exploring more graves for further comparisons in terms of construction and grave equipment; (2) identifying older phases of use of the necropolis, dating to the Predynastic period; (3) an attempt to detect traces of strictly settlement activity in the vicinity of this cemetery. An additional objective was to establish the final boundaries of this necropolis.

During the 2025 season, four test trenches (T1-T4) were established, all located within the cemetery (Pl. 2: 3). The research uncovered a number of burials from different chronological periods. For the purposes of our research, we focused only on graves from the Early Dynastic period. Most were discovered in sections T2, T3 and T4. Later graves – especially those from the late Islamic period – are under special conservation and social protection, and their exploration is not advisable for the time being.

The T1 test trench was located in the northeastern part of the site and contained mainly late burials (associated with modern Islamic cemeteries) and the phenomenon of seasonal flooding. Of particular interest was the structure discovered in this excavation, recorded under inventory number 10. It was a cluster of loose human bones and a nearly complete ceramic vessel dating to the Early Dynastic period (Pl. 2: 2). Analysis indicates that it may have been the secondary equipment of an earlier grave, disturbed by a later burial. The excavation also identified the southwestern boundary of the seasonal flooding zone in this part of the site through the cyclically occurring high groundwater level.

The T2-T4 test trenches were established in areas already identified that are located closer to the central part of the cemetery and the so-called “mission house”. In these excavations, more than a dozen graves were discovered, eight of which were fully explored. The others were documented and secured for

further research. Thanks to the anthropologist's work at the site, it was possible to determine the age and gender of those buried. Their bodies were deposited in shallow cavities shaped like an oval. The deceased were buried in a strongly flexed position, usually on their left side, with the orientation of burials and skeletons varying with the head to the northeast, southeast and west. Tomb furnishings also varied considerably. The most numerous category was vessel ceramics. Among them were classical cylindrical jugs with a typical cord imprint under the spout, dated to the Naqada III B-C phase (the turn of the Proto-Dynasty and Early Dynastic periods). An interesting practice was the placement of some graves (e.g. G1206) with a fragment of a ceramic vessel (often a "bread-form") in front of the face of the deceased. This is not an isolated case, as such a practice is already known from earlier graves discovered in KHD (Hassan and Tassie et al. 2008, 52). Similar practices were also used at other sites located in the Delta, such as the Tell el-Murra cemetery. Another significant category of relics accompanying the deceased was jewellery. These were mainly necklaces and bracelets made of beads, most likely of faience, semi-precious stones and shells. A particularly rich set was found in grave G1200, belonging to an adult woman whose burial was discovered in T3 test-trench (Pl. 3: 1). The deceased was laid in a heavily contorted position, with her face facing upwards and her head towards the southeast. Its rich furnishings included only pieces of jewellery and small copper items. Among the particularly interesting ones was a necklace made of five thin and delicate plates made of shells (Pl. 3: 2). Two holes (drilled through) are visible on each, presumably for hanging or other attachment. Other intriguing relics accompanying the deceased include stone and bone bracelets. The stone ones were carefully smoothed. Another noteworthy object, typical of the Early Dynastic period, is a rectangular cosmetic palette made of schist (Pl. 4). It was deposited in grave G1202, which was discovered in T4 test-trench. This palette has a carefully smooth surface. On one side and on the edge of each side, decorative elements in the form of two thin engraved lines are visible.

The cemetery at Kafr Hassan Dawood provides valuable skeletal material for further anthropological analysis. Age and sex were determined by tooth wear, cranial morphological features and long bone length measurements. The estimated height of adults ranged from less than 150 cm (grave G1200 – a petite female) to more than 180 cm (grave G1204 – an exceptionally massive male). Both adults and children were found among those buried. Finds from this season significantly enrich our knowledge of burial practices and the social structure of the inhabitants of this part of the delta during the Early Dynastic period.

This information is extremely valuable, especially when there are no clear traces of settlement structures that could have accompanied such a large cemetery.

During the 2025 excavation season, geophysical surveys were also conducted in areas north, west and south of the Kafr Hassan Dawood cemetery. The main objective of this work was to detect possible settlement structures in the immediate vicinity of the necropolis. Preliminary findings are promising, but their analysis still needs to be confirmed through excavation methods. Further geophysical work is planned for the coming seasons, and where the results are promising, geological boreholes will be drilled and more sounding trenches established.

At the end of this season, with deep respect and gratitude, it was decided to honour the memory of Dr Geoffrey Tassi (1959-2019), whose unwavering passion and commitment played a key role in the research of the Kafr Hassan Dawood archaeological site. Dr Tassi was deeply convinced of the necessity of resuming excavation work at this extremely important site and tirelessly pursued this goal. His untimely and sudden death interrupted this vision before it could be fully realised; therefore, his contribution remains invaluable to our work and his memory will permanently accompany further research at Kafr Hassan Dawood.

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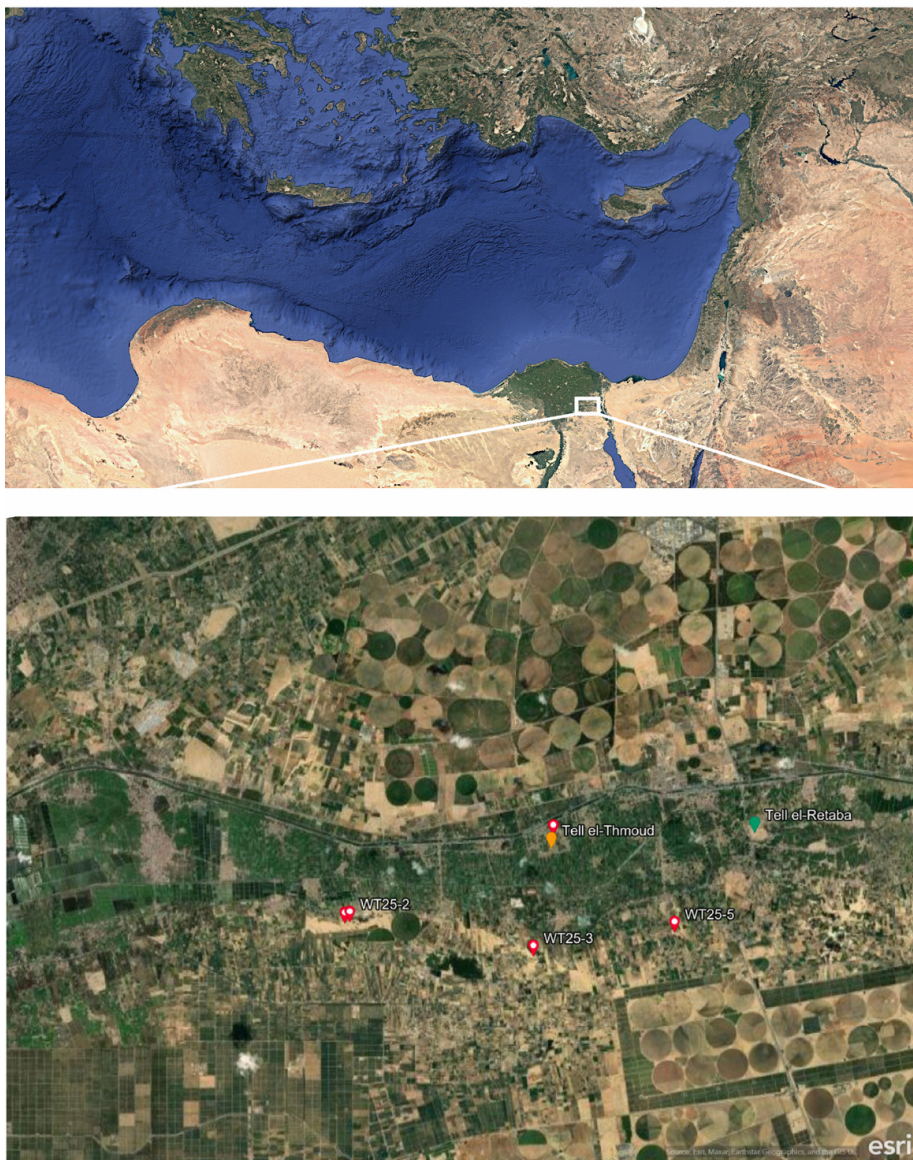
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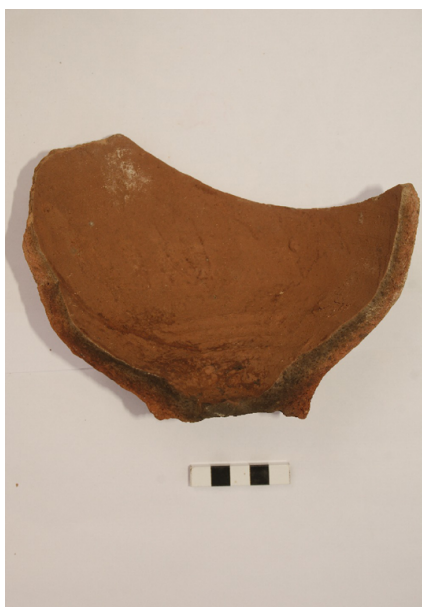


## PLATE 1



Pl. 1 – General map of the eastern Mediterranean region showing the location of the study area, followed by a map of the sites in Wadi Tumilat visited in the season 2025. (Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc)

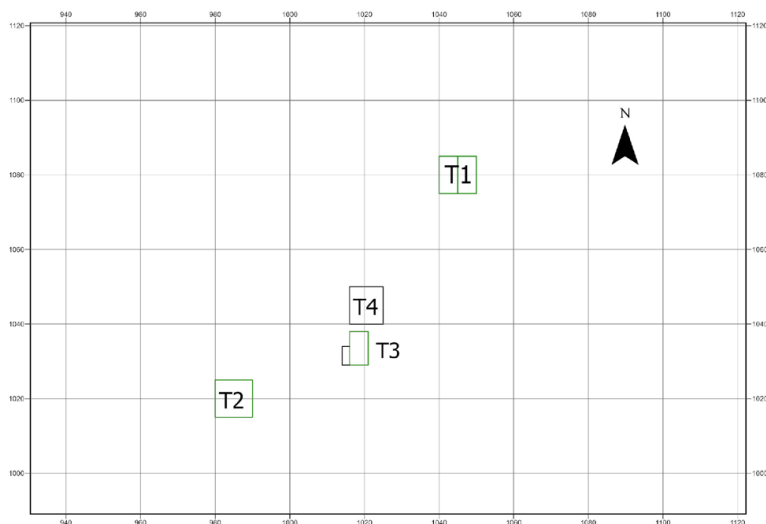
## PLATE 2



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2



3

Pl. 2: 1 – Fragment of a vessel from the Late Period (photo: Karolina Lapeta)

Pl. 2: 2 – Pottery vessel from structure 10 (photo: Karolina Lapeta)

Pl. 2: 3 – Map of test trenches in Kafr Hassan Dawood 2025 season (dig. Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc)

### PLATE 3



1



2

Pl. 3: 1 – Grave 1200 belonging to an adult woman (photo: Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc)

Pl. 3: 2 – Shell plates found in G1200 (photo: Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc)



**PLATE 4**

**Pl. 4** – Cosmetic palette from the Early Dynastic grave (photo: Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc)