

Tell el-Farcha 1987-1999. Ceramika predynastyczna i wczesnodynastyczna

(Tell el-Farkha 1987-1999. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Pottery)

This research project presents results concerning the Predynastic, Protodynastic and Early Dynastic pottery coming from excavations at Tell el-Farkha in the Nile Delta, about 120 km to the north-east from Cairo. The study concerns primarily research conducted at the Western Kom and comprises material from most of the trenches examined in the years 1998-2000. The research draws also on the data obtained during the excavations at the site conducted by the Italian expedition in the years 1987-1990, which results have been compared with the present results.

Research on the pottery allow to define the chronological framework for the site, which developed from the Predynastic (phases of the Lower Egyptian culture at the Nile Delta and phases dated to the end of Naqada II and the beginning of Naqada III, related to inhabitants of Naqada II culture, who had arrived at the area), via the Protodynastic (Naqada III) and the Early Dynastic periods, until the beginning of the Old Kingdom (III-IV Dynasty).

The excavated pottery material contains several basic types of pottery fabrics and wares. Their different occurrence allowed the distinction of basic settlement phases (1-7) at Tell el-Farkha. Due to the presence of pottery shapes characteristic for a given period, it was possible to determine a chronology of particular phases. The identified phases of development at the site are characterised by specific forms of pottery and pottery with decoration, typical of particular periods. The changes observed in forms occurring in various periods are related also to evident changes in manufacture techniques and the application of different clay types and techniques of surface treatment.

The research presented in this dissertation focuses mainly on a complete examination of the Predynastic layers at the Western Kom (phases 2 and 3), Protodynastic (phase 4) and those of the end of the Protodynastic and the beginning of the Early Dynastic periods (phase 5).

Phase 2 is comparable with the period when the Lower Egyptian Culture - existing up to now at the site (Phase 1), began to be replaced by the culture which had developed at the Upper Egypt. It is quite possible that in phase 2 the first group of people migrated from the South Egypt, and belonging to Naqada Culture (end of Naqada II), appeared at Tell el-Farkha. It was observed that some types of pottery known from the previous phase 1 still occur in the currently described phase. On the other hand, some kinds of pottery characteristic for the Lower Egyptian phase disappear. Moreover, new forms appear which may be related to Naqada Culture. Our phase 2 should be regarded as a transitional phase between the Lower Egyptian Culture and Naqada Culture. It is possible that in that phase the first people from the Upper Egypt, who may have arrived at the site, started to live among the community which existed here since phase 1. It seems also that probably in this period gradual assimilation of local inhabitants with people who migrated from the South began.

An analysis of the pottery belonging to phase 2 allows us to date it to the end of Naqada II – probably Naqada II₂ or the first half of Naqada II₂.

Phase 3 is characterised by the occurrence of a great quantity of Naqadian material. The vessel forms, characteristic of the Upper Egyptian tradition and typical of Naqada Culture, constitute a dominant group of the pottery in that phase. Among them, there are forms typical of the end of Naqada II and the beginning of Naqada III, though a few forms known from the previous phases are still infrequently present. The occurrence of a large quantity of Naqadian pottery proves that the tradition of the South of the country had been adopted at the site at this time. The pottery assemblage of phase 3 bears resemblance to the pottery characteristic of the end of Naqada II and the beginning of Naqada III. It seems that our phase 3 should be dated to the period of Naqada II₂/III₁ - the beginning of Naqada III₂ (?) or the end of II₂ – the beginning of III₁ (?).

The pottery of phase 4 shows differences from these known from the previous phase. They are visible in pottery shapes, decorative patterns and the percentage share of different pottery wares and fabrics. Apart from that, beside the forms which appear here for the first time, some forms known from the previous phases still occur among pottery shapes. Differences are mostly visible in the case of a gradual increase of wares which occurred sporadically or were not attested in the previous phase. Although at present they are not so abundant, their percentage share gradually increases, especially up the strata. The pottery assemblage of phase 4 shows an affinity to pottery characteristic of the beginning of Naqada III and allows us to date phase 4 to the period of Naqada III₂, with its end assigned somewhere during Naqada III_b or III_{A1}-III_B.

The pottery of phase 5 shows some affinity to that found in previous phases. The decrease tendencies of certain fabrics and wares while on the other hand increase in others observed in phase 4 are continued. The differences are visible mostly in a larger amount of certain fabrics and wares which increase starting from the previous phase. Moreover, some types of pottery as well as decorated potsherds which appeared for the first time in phase 4 are still present. The differences are visible mostly in a greater amount of certain types of pottery, which appear for the first time in the previous phase 4 and now occur in a larger quantity, and therefore should be considered characteristic mostly for phase 5. Furthermore, some forms disappear and some new forms – previously unknown – are discerned. The pottery of phase 5 shows affinity to pottery characteristic of the period of the final stage of state formation in Egypt and the beginning of its functioning as an organised state. It seems that our phase 5 should be assigned at the end of the Protodynastic/beginning of the Early Dynastic period and that this phase of occupation ends somewhere during the I Dynasty (Naqada III_b/c₁ or the end of III_B-C₁). Phase 5 is the last phase attested at the Western Com of Tell el-Farkha. The subsequent – Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom phases – were attested at other Coms of that site.

One of the most significant results of research is definition of a transitional phase (phase 2) between the Lower Egyptian and Naqada cultures. An evident continuation of certain pottery forms characteristic for the Lower Egyptian society, apart from pottery related to the Naqada culture, allow an assumption that the transition could have been gradual rather than rapid. It seems possible that instead of the extermination of Tell el-Farkha inhabitants by the new settlers coming from the South during phase 2, we may speak rather of their assimilation with groups representing the Naqadian tradition. In the mentioned phase, apart from certain vessel forms known from phase 1 belonging to Lower Egyptian Culture, also pot-

sherds with fibrous temper, typical for that culture, prove the continuation of the local pottery tradition. On the other hand, there are fragments of pottery related to the Upper Egyptian tradition of Naqada IId. Primarily, pottery with a painted decoration is significant here as characteristic for the period discussed. It should be noted that the observations are confirmed by the occurrence of settlement structures typical of phase 1 and associated with the Lower Egyptian Culture, apart from brick buildings characteristic for Naqada Culture.

Important research results also include similarities observed between phase 2 and 3 and differences especially between phase 3 and 4. They are both distinguished in the percentage share of particular fabrics and wares and occurrence of certain pottery forms. However in the subsequent phase 4, there are still some pottery forms of the previous phases. It should be assumed that, in a sense, that phase is a continuation of the prior period and the observed differences result from the progressive typological and technological development in pottery manufacture within the same cultural unit. It should be noted that the changes take place in the period when cultural uniformity was achieved in Egypt. Doubtlessly, between phase 3 and 4 relations of inhabitants of the Nile Delta and the South Egypt became stronger. Changes observed at the turn of the Predynastic (phase 2 and 3) and the Protodynastic (from phase 4) periods evidently contributed to the development of trade, the exchange of thought and cultural and social progress. Therefore, the inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha participated in the essential events in the history of Egypt.

Between phase 4 and 5, certain differences may also be identified in the percentage share of various pottery types, yet the phases are similar with respect to tendencies, observable in phase 4, which reflect a decrease in the number of certain fabrics and wares and an increase of other ones. Both phases are alike also with reference to characteristic pottery types. The typical pottery and decorations occurring in those phases, in particular in phase 5, enable the definition of the possible moment when the settlement at the Western Tell was terminated. As chronologically younger pottery has been encountered only on the surface in the explored part of the Western Kom, it seems that it was abandoned just at the beginning or during the Early I Dynasty.

The research at Tell el-Farkha has revealed also both marl clay pottery from Upper Egypt and pottery of Palestinian origin. It proves developed contacts with other areas. The development of those relations was undoubtedly influenced by the location of Tell el-Farkha in the Nile Delta and along the trade route linking the Nile Valley and Delta with the Canaan region.