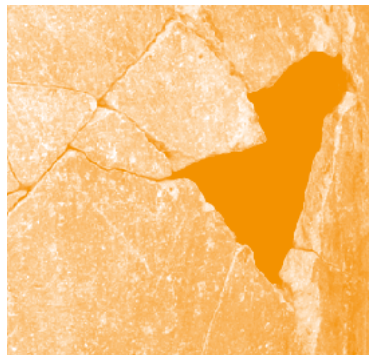


# Tell el-Farkha

## Archaeological fieldwork 2016–2017



**Abstract:** The paper discusses archaeological investigations carried out on all three tells making up the site of Tell el-Farkha, expanding on the findings from earlier seasons. Phasing of the brewery discovered four years ago on the Western Kom gave a time range for the use of the installation from the first Southern Egyptian occupation (Naqada IID) to the Naqada IIIA1/2–IIIB phase, when a catastrophic fire destroyed the entire settlement. The big Naqada warehouse on the Central Kom was also phased (beginning in Naqada IIIA1) and further parts of an underlying building attributed to the Lower Egyptian culture were explored, including a wooden fence around the structure. The 11 graves explored on the Eastern Kom were dated to the Tell el-Farkha Phase 6 (Naqada IIIC2–IIID). They cut into a building (temple?) from an earlier phase.

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

Seasons 2016 and 2017 at the site of Tell el-Farkha, a pre-dynastic site in the Nile Delta excavated by a Polish team since 1998 (for an overview of research to date, see, e.g., Chłodnicki et al. 2012), were dedicated to continued exploration of trenches on all three tells forming the site: Western, Central and Eastern, and it is in this order that the fieldwork will be presented. The only extension of an existing trench occurred on the Eastern Kom, where also new squares 36a–b were opened. Post-processing work on site facilitated expert studies of the pottery, flint and other stone tools, as well as animal and botanical remains.

**Marek Chłodnicki<sup>1</sup>**  
**Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Archaeological Museum, Poznań

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Archeology  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków

## **Team**

*Dates of work:* 20 February–22 March 2016; 23 September–25 October 2017

*Co-Directors:* Dr. Marek Chłodnicki, archaeologist (Archaeological Museum in Poznań; 2016, 2017), Prof. Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz, archaeologist (Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University; 2016, 2017)

*SCA representatives:* Ahmed Hosni Ezzat Mohamed (2016), Latifa Mohammed Elsayed (2017), Hamdy Ahmed Abdel Azeem (2017), Maaly Mohammed Hashish (2017)

*Archaeologists:* Bartosz Adamski (2016), Grzegorz Bąk-Pryc (2017), Daria Białobrzecka (2017), Marcin Czarnowicz (2016), Dr. Joanna Dębowska-Ludwin (2017), Marcin Gamrat (2017), Dr. Mariusz Jucha (2017), Alicja Jurkiewicz (2016), Jacek Karmowski (2016, 2017), Dr. Piotr Kołodziejczyk (2016), Karolina Rosińska-Balik (2017), Jakub Skłucki (2016, 2017), Magdalena Więckowska (2017) (all Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University), Gabriela Horodeczny (Institute of Archeology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, 2017) and Krzysztof Stawarz (freelance; 2016, 2017)

*Ceramologists:* Magdalena Kazimierczak, Magdalena Sobas (both Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University; 2016, 2017), and Dr. Agnieszka Mączyńska (Archaeological Museum in Poznań; 2016, 2017)

*Archaeozoologist:* Dr. Renata Abłamowicz (Silesian Museum, Katowice; 2016)

*Anthropologist:* Prof. Anita Szczepanek (Chair of Anatomy, Collegium Medicum, Jagiellonian University; 2016, 2017)

*Archaeobotanists:* Agata Bebel (Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University; 2016), Dr. Lucy Kubiak-Martens (BIAX Consult, Zaandam; 2017)

*Geologist:* Dr. Michał Wasilewski (Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University; 2016)

*Conservators:* Prof. Marcin Biborski (Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University; 2017), Małgorzata Żukowska (Archaeological Museum in Poznań; 2016, 2017)

*Photographer:* Robert Słaboński (freelance; 2016, 2017)

*Documentalists:* Daria Białobrzecka (2016), Urszula Doros (2016, 2017), Merita Dreshai (2016), Marcin Gamrat (2016), Aleksandra Węgrzynek (2016) (all Institute of Archeology, Jagiellonian University), Gabriela Horodeczny (Institute of Archeology, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; 2016)

*Student-trainees:* Klaudia Jagoda (2016), Jolanta Kiszka (2016), Izabela Sterczewska (2017), Dagmara Filek (2017), Małgorzata Leska (2017), Adrianna Niżnik (2017) (all Jagiellonian University in Kraków). Training for young inspectors from Mansura was conducted in both seasons.

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## WESTERN KOM

The trench that was investigated during the two seasons in question had first been opened in 2006–2007, then excavated in 2008 and extended north in 2009. During these seasons work had concentrated on the Northern squares (63–64 and 53a–c; 54 a). The most important task was the exploration of two quarters of a brewery discovered four years ago. The first two quarters had been excavated earlier (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2016: 228).

Three phases of use of the brewery had been distinguished. The oldest phase is tentatively connected with the first Southern Egyptian occupation. Ceramologists Magdalena Sobas and Magdalena Kazimierczak dated the pottery assemblage originating from this phase to the Naqada IID period. The brewery

was dug in a layer of mud covering earlier structures from a Lower Egyptian culture phase. It was composed of three round features forming a shape resembling a three-leaf clover, enlarged to the west and east by additional semicircular features [Fig. 1A]. The whole structure was surrounded by a rim of burnt mud bricks, which created a sort of low wall. Each of the three main parts of the construction was a kind of fireplace, in the center of which a vat (not preserved) was placed. The vats were supported on D-shaped bricks (partly preserved), placed obliquely toward the center.

The middle phase of the brewery (first half of Naqada IIIA<sub>1</sub>) was very badly preserved. The inner structures were completely destroyed. The bricks



Fig. 1A. Brewery on the Western Kom: older phase (Naqada IID) (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/ photo R. Słaboński)

were broken and scattered in a haphazard manner, covered by a layer up to 15 cm thick, composed of burnt soil and white

ashes (see Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2016: 229) [Fig. 1B top]. The overall appearance of these remains was that of intentional



Fig. 1B. Brewery on the Western Kom: top, middle phase (first half of Naqada IIIA1); bottom, younger Tell el-Farkha Phase 4 (Naqada IIIA1/2–IIIB) (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photos R. Słaboński)

levelling, which may have followed a catastrophic fire that destroyed much of the settlement on the tells (Ciałowicz 2018).

The younger phase was connected with Tell el-Farkha Phase 4 (Naqada IIIA<sub>1/2</sub>–IIIB). It came after the said disaster and should be associated with a second group of migrants from the south (Ciałowicz 2018: 13). New supports for the vats were installed on top of the destruction layer [Fig. 1B bottom]. Low walls of bricks of the same shape but in horizontal arrangement formed the enclosures.

Partly preserved remains of another brewery, contemporary with the older phase of the one described above, were discovered under a layer of Nile flood silt

in the western part of the trench [Fig. 2]. They were not explored further in the present season.

A few walls forming rectangular rooms were discovered in the northern part of the excavated area [Fig. 3]. They were erected on the said layer of mud and should be dated to a period contemporary with the beginning of Tell el-Farkha Phase 3 (Naqada IID<sub>2</sub>/IIIA<sub>1</sub>). They are undoubtedly connected with the oldest stage of the so-called Naqada residence. The eastern part of this complex was explored in the 2002–2003 seasons (Ciałowicz 2012: 163–171).

Layers beneath the Nile-flood mud yielded relics of Lower Egyptian culture



Fig. 2. Remains of a newly discovered brewery under a layer of mud (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo G. Bąk-Pryc)



Fig. 3. Remains of rectangular rooms in the northern part of the excavated area, dated to Tell el-Farkha Phase 3 (Naqada IID2/IIIA1) (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo G. Bąk-Pryc)



Fig. 4. Relics of Lower Egyptian culture (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo G. Bąk-Pryc)

[Fig. 4] comprising a mud brick wall and compartments made of organic material with storage pits inside them.

The pottery assemblage consisted of 21 complete vessels as well as a large number of potsherds, mostly poorly preserved storage jars and much better preserved small globular jars. One should mention in particular a few painted potsherds

characteristic of Naqada culture and several fragments decorated with incised zigzags or semicircles, typical of Lower Egyptian culture. The dating of this collection assigned the upper explored layers to Tell el-Farkha Phase 3 (Naqada IID2/IIIA1) and the lower strata to Tell el-Farkha Phase 2 (Naqada IID1).

[KMC]

## CENTRAL KOM

The research on the Central Kom concentrated on three already open trenches located on the eastern slope of the mound (see Chłodnicki 2014: Fig. 23; Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2014: 123–124; 2015: 178–184; 2016: 232–242). The layers explored in individual trenches varied chronologically. The oldest were the strata explored in the biggest, central trench (squares C52–C63), those in the southern trench (square C42) were younger and the youngest were found in the northern trench (squares C84–C94).

### CENTRAL TRENCH

Investigations were the most intense in the central trench. The northern part of a big Naqada warehouse continued to be dismantled in 2016. This building, constructed at the beginning of the Naqada IIIA1 period, was explored in the 2012–2015 seasons (Chłodnicki 2014: 117–118; 2017: 50–53; Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015: 179–182; 2016: 232–238; Chłodnicki and Mączyńska 2018: 81–86). It had to be removed in order to excavate the oldest monumental building on the Central Kom, the so-called Lower Egyptian residence. The southeastern part of this structure was found in 2008–2009

(Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2011: 157–160; 2012: 140–145; Chłodnicki 2011: 41–46; Chłodnicki and Gering 2012: 92–96) and in 2011 the trench was extended westward in order to search for the rest of the residence. The unexpected discovery of thick walls of large Naqada magazines delayed the clearing of the lowest strata for several years until, finally, the mud-brick walls of the Lower Egyptian residence were reached in the last two seasons. It was found that at least some walls of the northern part of the Naqada edifice (walls C.384, CW.118, CW.56, CW.39 northern part) rested directly on a Lower Egyptian wall and even incorporated it to some extent [Fig. 5].

The southern part of the Naqada storeroom, located in the central trench, was explored in 2017. First, the interior of room CW.94 and later the surrounding walls (CW.58, CW.65, CW.39 southern part) were excavated. The upper parts of rough ware vessels (type L.30; Petrie 1921: Pl. XLVI) were found in the corners of room CW.94. Sometimes one vessel was set on the top of another. Almost all the sherds collected from this context belonged to the same vessel type. The only other feature located inside the

room was a solid mud-hole, located in the north-central part of the chamber [Fig. 6]. Remains of a settlement of Lower Egyptian culture were found in the underlying strata.

An enclosure wall (C.486) running around the Lower Egyptian residence,

discovered in the old trench in 2008, was found to continue west to the corner room (C.1521; Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: Fig. 12) and in front of the southern building facade. No entrances were identified in the wall, which was 1.30 m thick [Fig. 7], but it should be kept in



Fig. 5. Remains of a Lower Egyptian wall reused in the Naqada storage facility on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 6. Interior of room CW.94 in the Naqadian storage facility on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



mind that only the remains of the foot of the wall were discovered. In the western part, it was only two–three brick courses high. However, the remains of bricks imprinted in the sand of the *gezirah* are quite conspicuous [Fig. 8]. These bricks were quite large, 20 cm by 40 cm, bigger than the bricks used in the upper parts of the building (36 cm by 18 cm and 32 cm by 16 cm; Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: 95).

Having recorded no traces of door openings, one should assume that the entrance to the residence had led through a corner building located in the southwestern corner of the residence (room C.1521). This elongated room was about 5 m long and almost 2.50 m wide [Fig. 9] and it was the only mud-brick building constructed simultaneously with the surrounding wall. A similar building, interpreted as a gate, but much better

preserved, was discovered on the Eastern Kom. Entrances located opposite each other can be seen in this building. Although a bit younger (Naqada IID/III A1), the gate had similar dimensions and was placed directly on the *gezirah* sand (Ciałowicz and Dębowska-Ludwin 2013; Dębowska-Ludwin 2013: 129–130).

A building located in the southern part of the residence (C.1517) has been known since 2008, when the north and west walls were identified and found to be a little later than the external wall of the edifice (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: Fig. 96). It was also assumed that once reconstructed, it reached all the way to the outer wall (Chłodnicki 2012: 130–131). Current research has noted a passage about a meter wide between the building and the wall. The room was actually a rectangle, 7.50 m by 3.50 m. This span



Fig. 7. Wall C.486 encircling the Lower Egyptian residence (in the middle), interior of the residence with remains of storage pits and room C.1517 (on the right) and Naqadian granary (on the left), all on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

permitted a wooden ceiling without any need for internal supports, explaining the absence of postholes inside the building. The room width falls into the pattern for later mud-brick buildings from Tell el-Farkha, which are between 2.50 m and 3.50 m wide. Despite no new spectacular finds from the room, it is still believed to have been of official nature based on its size and the two pear-shaped mace heads discovered in 2008 (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: Fig. 13).

Several storage pits were discovered east of this representative building

[Figs 7, 9]. Together with those discovered in previous seasons, they filled the entire space between the outer, east wall of the residence and the mentioned building. The pits contained rich organic material. An archaeobotanical analysis of the contents identified grains of wheat and barley, as well as small fish bones. Samples have been taken from the upper layers before further exploration in an upcoming season.

Two parallel lines of furrows [Figs 8, 11] were discovered under the mud-brick enclosure wall of the residence. In similarity to the earlier finds under other



Fig. 8. Traces of the lowermost layer of the mud bricks from wall C.486 (lower left corner) and remains of furrows below it (continued to the right) (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/ photo R. Słaboński)

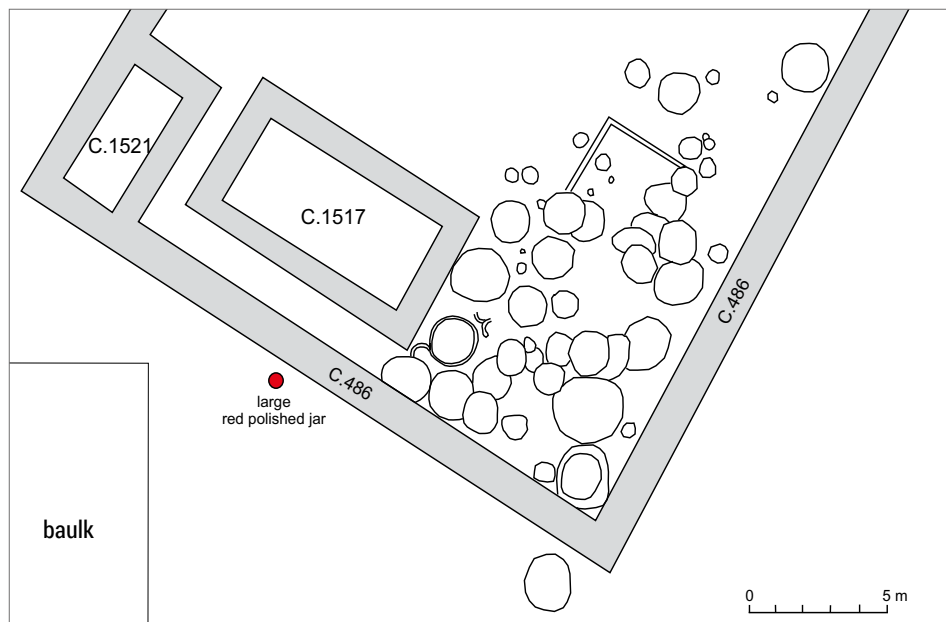


Fig. 9. Schematic plan of the Lower Egyptian residence on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/drawing M. Chłodnicki)



Fig. 10. Lowermost strata (level 46) explored in 2017 in the central trench on the Central Kom: remains of the Lower Egyptian residence and the settlement in front of it (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

parts of the walls, these furrows are interpreted as the remains of wooden fences delimiting the area of the older phase of the Lower Egyptian residence (Chłodnicki 2011: Fig. 3; 2012: 129–130).

The space in front of the residence may have been arranged in a special way. Traces of fences and remains of many mud pits and fire places were found there, but no dwelling structures [Fig. 11 top]. Mud



Fig. 11. Remains of mud pits and furrows in front of the Lower Egyptian residence on the Central Kom; bottom, mud pits at different stages of exploration (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/ photos R. Słaboński)

pits often occurred in pairs, sometimes intersecting each other [Fig. 11 bottom]. The contents of the better preserved pits included grains of wheat. Furrows filled with darker soil confirmed that there had been some structures made of wood, but none of them actually belonged to typical Lower Egyptian houses discovered on the Central Kom in 2007–2008 (Chłodnicki and Geming 2012: 98, Figs 20–21).

A large complete jar standing in front of the residence is noteworthy (for its location, see Fig. 9). This marl clay,

red slipped jar (type P84b; Petrie 1921: Pl. XIV) is, undoubtedly, a southern Egyptian import [Fig. 12 left]. A typical lemon-shaped Lower Egyptian vessel [Fig. 12 right] was found nearby.

Fragments of pottery, some decorated with a characteristic zigzag pattern, and a few flint tools, among them knives, have been found south of the residence. Of interest are also fragments of spinning bowls, the oldest known from Tell el-Farkha [Fig. 13].



Fig. 12. Big red-polished jar and small lemon-shaped vessel found near the Lower Egyptian residence on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

A mace head made of bone [Fig. 14] was found in front of the residence. It is similar to the one discovered in 2008 inside the residence, also made of the radial head of a femur bone (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2012: Fig. 11), but much



Fig. 13. Fragment of a spinning bowl (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

more flattened on top than the other one. Although differing in shape, both were made in the same way and were symbolic in nature. The porous bone surface in the upper part of the mace was filled with a white paste and the mace head was painted with black patches imitating a stone texture.

Excavations in the central trench were stopped on level 45 (2.85 m ASL). The collected finds were dated to Tell el-Farkha: Phase 3 (Naqada IIIA1: remains of the storehouse), Phase 2 (Naqada IID: second phase of the Lower Egyptian residence), and end of Phase 1 (Naqada IIC: first-phase Lower Egyptian residence and settlement).



Fig. 14. Bone mace-head, top, side and bottom views; bottom, microscopic images of some of the black-painted patches (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photos R. Słaboński and G. Bąk-Pryc)

### SOUTHERN TRENCH

The southern trench (C.42) was explored in 2017, starting with the dismantling of the outer wall of the Naqada storage edifice (CW.39) and clearing the area to the level 29/30 (4.40–4.30 m ASL) reached in the rest of the trench. This part of the Naqada edifice was heavily damaged in ancient times and only the outer east wall was better preserved, although in considerable disrepair at the southern end (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2016: Fig. 10). Further excavation in this spot revealed the wall (CW.39) to be better preserved in the lower parts and although destroyed at the western end, continuing south toward the trench edge [Fig. 15]. It also seems that more of the west wall (CW.93) is preserved than in layers higher up. Although both

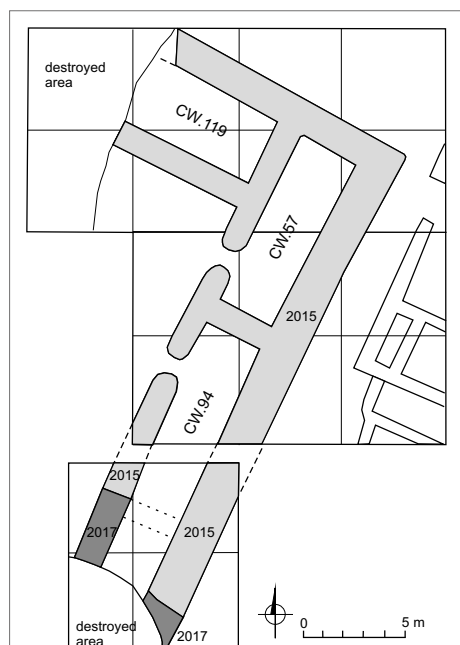


Fig. 15. Plan of the early phase of the Naqadian granary on the Central Kom, extended after the 2017 excavations (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/drawing M. Chłodnicki)

walls were destroyed by the same big pit, it is clear that they continued to the south; they may be better preserved at a deeper level.

Excavations ceased at level 32 (4.20 m ASL), although, based on the central trench, the base of the walls of the Naqada storehouse should be found on level 37 (3.70 m ASL). The length of this storage building can now be established at 26 m at the least, to be confirmed once the excavation is extended in an upcoming season.

### NORTHERN TRENCH

The northern trench was excavated in the 2016 season, exploring layers below a rounded building excavated in 2011–2014 (Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2015: 183–184; 2016: 240–241; Chłodnicki 2017: 54–57). Remains of a settlement dated to Naqada IIIB times were discovered. It was a mud-brick structure (walls one-and-a-half brick thick) with remains of ovens and storage pits [Fig. 17].

The discovery of burials in the area came as a surprise, although human bones scattered in this trench had already been recorded earlier. The tombs were simple



Fig. 16. Calcite vessel found in a symbolic(?) grave in the northern trench on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 17. Remains of a settlement in the northern trench on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 18. Grave C1 in the northern trench on the Central Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



pits. The skeletal remains (all identifications by A. Szczepanek) included an adult male buried in a contracted position without any grave goods [Fig. 18], fragments of two skulls, and some badly preserved bones of a child. In one case, a pit with sand on the bottom yielded remains of a mat and a stone vessel [Fig. 16], possibly a symbolic grave or

burial of a child or newborn whose bones were not preserved. The fill around the graves produced potsherds, some flint and stone implements, and animal bones. All the human burials and scattered human bones were found in an area located around, but not under the Early Dynastic rounded building (see Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2016: 240–242). [MC]

## EASTERN KOM

Excavation in both seasons was focused on squares 46, 47a,c, 56, 57c, extending the explored area into the adjacent square 36a,b to explore fragments of a big mud-brick edifice (No. 128) discovered earlier in squares 46 and 56 [Fig. 19]. This is the most interesting structure discovered recently on the Eastern Kom. It is dated to Tell el-Farkha Phase 5 (middle of Naqada IIIB to Naqada IIIC<sub>1</sub>), contemporary with the reign of Dynasty 0 (from Iry-Hor) and the beginning of Dynasty I (until the reign of Djer) (Ciałowicz, Czarnowicz, and Chłodnicki 2018: 7). The building measures at least 15 m by 10 m and comprises three rooms, severely damaged by several later graves (see below). All the walls (0.80–1.00 m wide) were covered inside and outside with a coat of pale mortar, 3–5 cm thick [Fig. 19 inset]. An identical mortar had been found on the walls of mastaba-grave 63 discovered a few years ago (Dębowska-Ludwin 2012: 65), dated to the same period [Fig. 20]. The northern room (A) of the building was separated from the outer north wall by a 1.50-m-wide corridor. A kind of step or bench, also of mud brick, adjoined the north wall of that room.

Two other rooms (B and C) occupied the southwestern part of the building. Both were very similar, almost square (approximately 4 m by 4 m) and in both some short walls joined the inner face of the west wall. Two wine jars and pot-stands with engraved decoration were placed side by side under the floor of room B (see Chłodnicki and Ciałowicz 2016: 243). Potsherds from a few jars, and a completely preserved bread-mould were discovered under the southern part of the floor of room C and beneath the north wall of the room respectively [see Fig. 21]. A collapsed wall lay in the eastern part of the room. An entrance was located in the southeastern corner.

A straightforward interpretation of this structure is not forthcoming at present. The method of construction, including walls coated with a pale mortar, complex layout and pots buried under the building, suggests that it was not an ordinary house. Its location is significant as well. It is still not known whether there are any earlier graves buried in the deepest layers of this part of the site. If not, it is possible that the edifice was erected on the eastern bor-



Fig. 19. Mud-brick edifice (No. 128) on the Eastern Kom; inset, fragment of the plastered north wall of this edifice (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/drawing M. Czarnowicz and J. Karmowski, photo R. Słaboński)

der of the Naqada IIIB–IIIC<sub>1</sub> cemetery (Dębowska-Ludwin 2012: 55). It should also be taken into consideration that the edifice might have been connected with an important grave situated in the southern part of the Eastern Kom. Traces of some big structures can be observed in the results of geophysical prospection (Herbich 2012: 388–390). Nevertheless, the edifice on the Eastern Kom may have been connected, in one way or another, with a posthumous cult.

Eleven graves were discovered during the two field seasons [see *Fig. 19* and *Table 1*]. Six of them were dug into edifice No. 128. Age and sex were determined only provisionally owing to the poor condition of the bones. Four of the graves contained very poorly preserved burials oriented with the



Fig. 20. Mastaba-grave 63 on the Eastern Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 21. Room C of the mud-brick edifice (No. 128) on the Eastern Kom (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo G. Bąk-Pryc)



head to the north, e.g., Grave 147 [Fig. 22]. The burials were devoid of any equipment, therefore their dating needs to be based on their stratigraphical position and similarities to graves

Fig. 22. Simple burial in Grave 147 (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 23. Grave 141: successive stages of exploration, in rows from top left to bottom right (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photos R. Słaboński)

discovered during previous seasons. They may be connected with Tell el-Farkha Phase 6, i.e., the second half of the First Dynasty and the beginning of the Second. Six of the graves yielded richer grave furnishings in the form of pottery vessels and stone pots. Grave 141 [Fig. 23] was that of a woman, about 30–40 years old, accompanied by 12 beer-jars [Fig. 24A] and eight stone pots: seven of travertine and one of sandstone [Fig. 24B]. Grave 144 belonged to a man (40–50 years old) and was equipped with five pottery beer-jars and three stone ves-



Fig. 24A. Beer-jar from Grave 141 (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 24B. Grave furnishings from Grave 141: selected stone vessels (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

sels: two of travertine and one of basalt [Fig. 25]. The skeleton of an adult individual in Grave 148 [Fig. 27] was only partly preserved. The grave goods were composed of five beer-jars, one wine jar [Fig. 26] and a small cylindrical jar, as well as part of a basalt bowl. The male buried in Grave 149 [Fig. 28 top] was equipped with six beer-jars,



Fig. 25. Basalt vessel from Grave 144 (Tell el-Farkha Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 26. Wine-jar from Grave 148 (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)



Fig. 27. Grave 148: excavated burial (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photo R. Słaboński)

a bowl and two travertine pots [Fig. 28 bottom]. Similar stone vessels were the only goods in Grave 146, the burial of a probable male, 30–35 years old. Grave 150 of a child, 5–6 years old, yielded a small cylindrical vessel and a jug.

In all the graves, the deceased were laid on the left side with the head to the north and in contracted position. These graves were from the turn of the First Dynasty. [KMC]



Fig. 28. Grave 149: top, excavated burial; bottom, clay bowl and travertine pots (Tell el-Farkha Archaeological Project/photos R. Słaboński)

Table 1. Burials from the Eastern Kom: identification of age and sex (anthropological analysis A. Szczepanek) and grave furnishings

Grave	Sex and age	Grave furnishings
Grave 141 [Fig. 23]	Female about 30–40 years	12 beer-jars, 8 stone pots: seven of travertine and one of sandstone [Fig. 24A, B]
Grave 142(?) (scattered in the northeastern part of the trench)	Young individual 14–18 years old, possibly destroyed burial	–
Grave 143	Child one year old	–
Grave 144	Male 40–50 years	Five beer-jars and three stone vessels: two of traver- tine and one of basalt [Fig. 25]
Grave 145	Juvenile 11–13 years	–
Grave 146	Male(?) 30–35 years	Stone vessels similar to those from Grave 149
Grave 147 [Fig. 22]	Adult, probably male, 30–40 years	–
Grave 148 [Fig. 27]	Adult	Five beer-jars, one wine jar [Fig. 26] and a small cylindrical jar, part of a basalt bowl
Grave 149 [Fig. 28 top]	Male 35–45 years	Six beer-jars and a bowl, two travertine pots [Fig. 28 bottom]
Grave 150	Child 5–6 years	Two small pottery vessels: cylinder and jug
Grave 151	Male 40–50 years	–

**Dr. Marek Chłodnicki**

Poznań Archaeological Museum, Pałac Górków  
61-781 Poznań, Poland, ul. Wodna 27  
mchlod@man.poznan.pl

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**Prof. Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz** ORCID 0000-0001-9448-703X  
Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Institute of Archeology  
31-007 Kraków, Poland, ul. Gołębia 11  
kmcialowicz@interia.pl



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