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### From the Residence to Early Temple: the Case of Tell el-Farkha

Night years of excavations at Tell el-Farkha revealed numerous structures and architectural remains unknown till now from the Northern Egypt. Most important were discovered on the Western Kom. The enormous quantity of artefacts (chiefly pottery), extensive evidence of settlement structures and a stratigraphic complex of layers reaching 4-5 m below the present ground surface provided sufficient evidence to distinguish five main chronological phases of occupation of the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha (Ciałowicz, Jucha 2003). The beginning of human presence at Tell el-Farkha were connected with the middle stage of Lower Egyptian civilisation which is contemporary with Naqada (IIb?) IIC-d1 according to Kaiser (1957) or IIC-IID1 according to Hendrickx (1996).

The Western Kom was abandoned during our Phase 5, which is characterized by an assemblage typical of transitional Naqada IIIb/IIIc1 (terminal IIIB-IIIC1), that is, the rule of the 0 and early I<sup>st</sup> dynasty. Central and Eastern Koms were occupied longer, till the beginning of the Old Kingdom.

Already present in the lowermost strata are numerous round and oval pits (measuring 1.20–2.20 m. in diameter), often intersecting each other, containing a black fill with a modest amount of small potsherds. These are probably the remnants of storage pits. Bigger pits, sometimes lined with silt, may have served as dwellings. Very characteristic are concentrations of small, round or oval pits (20–30 cm in diameter) lined with silt, occasionally fired red. Very similar settlement features found at other Lower Egyptian sites are explained as either cooking installations or as postholes (van den Brink 1992; von der Way 1997). Both interpretations seem likely, though in some instances the pits in question may have served as holders for large storage vessels with pointed ends.

Higher up the stratigraphic sequence, in layers still dating from phase 1, a series of furrows (10–20 cm wide) forming rectangular ground plans were recorded next to the aforementioned pits. These most probably represent the remains of structures built of organic materials.

The discoveries belonging to phase 1 at Tell el-Farkha are surprising and unparalleled on the whole. While fragmentary structures of the kind discussed above are known from other sites in Lower Egypt (e.g. Maadi or Buto), nowhere have they been preserved in such a good

condition and nowhere are they just as big. The traces of a Lower Egyptian (fig. 1) structure were discovered extending over practically the entire excavated area (ca 500 sq. m). They were covered with a thick layer of silt, which hindered explorations considerably, but which is proof of relatively frequent flooding of the *gezira* at Tell el-Farkha (before human activity resulted in a significant raising of its level) and of periods, difficult to estimate in length, when the site was abandoned. The building, which like all the later ones was oriented to the northeast, must have had walls of organic materials. All that remains of the structure are relatively narrow furrows (from a dozen to 30 cm wide) filled with a brown soil or silt (perhaps from a Nile flooding). Explorations revealed two or even three phases of rebuilding. The interior division into many small compartments is noteworthy (the smallest was 1.40 x 0.80 m in size), as well as the many pits lined with mud (from 0.20 to 1.00 m in diameter). Some of them, especially those within the outline of the furrows, must have been of structural importance, serving to mount the posts that had once supported the walls and roof. Others found inside the room could have served as vessel stands. The biggest of these pits, sometimes bearing obvious evidence of burning through and yielding D-shaped bricks, could have been used as fireplaces. The complex interior division may be due to the fact that parts of the house, clearly of a domestic character, could have been separated away from the other areas by low walls made of organic substances or silt.

West of the main building is a large space with the walls made of similar materials. Almost all of the area excavated were covered by furrows forming rectangular spaces in which lots of post holes, mud stands for pots and other features were found. On the west section of the trench four breweries were discovered (fig. 2).

Of greatest importance is the fact that they form a distinct chronological sequence. The earliest brewery was at some point destroyed by Nile flooding. It has to be borne in mind that the *gezira* on which the inhabitants lived at the time did not rise greatly above the level of the river. The annual flooding of the Nile would thus have resulted in the relatively frequent destruction of many settlements in the Delta. Following a period which is difficult to assess unequivocally a second structure was built, and when this was in turn submerged beneath Nile silt deposits another building was raised. In the last building a vat was preserved as well as some mineralized residues represent different stages in brewing process.

The Tell el-Farkha structures represent the oldest breweries ever to be found in the Nile Delta, and are probably contemporaries of the brewery discovered several years ago in Hierakonpolis (Geller 1992). These are probably the oldest breweries in the world. However, unlike the discovery at Hierakonpolis, the Tell el-Farkha excavations revealed an entire

complex of successive breweries, suggesting that this site must have been an important beer production centre during the second half of the 4th millennium BC.

The discovery of this complex defies the previously held beliefs that prior to the emergence of the Naqada culture the inhabitants of the Nile Delta represented a largely unstratified society, living in primitive, sunken-floored dwellings or shelters. The above described building seems to be really big house. Maybe it is a proof that Lower Egyptian society was much stratified than was supposed till now, and that these place was connected, for instance, with local chief.

Exactly on the same spot the next inhabitants of Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha raised the most fully developed of all the building excavated to date in these area. At a depth of ca. 2.10 m below ground level (ca. 5 m a.s.l.) the outlines of a mudbrick structure became evident under two layers, of which the bottom one was undoubtedly a layer of burning with black, occasionally red burnt-through soil and lighter ashes. On top of this was a layer of steel-grey clay that is practically sterile as regards archaeological artifacts; its thickness varies from a few centimeters in the south to over 20 cm in the north. The layer is indubitable proof of the structure having been burnt at some point and then flooded by the waters of the Nile.

The building had at least two constructional phases. To judge by the preserved ceramic evidence, the older stage starts sometime in the end of phase 2 and lasts into phase 3 (terminal Naqada IID2- IIIA1/IIIA2). The later stage is to be dated to phase 3, while the catastrophic fire and the flood should presumably be placed at the end of these phase or in the early part of phase 4 (probably during Naqada IIIA2). The structure of a younger date has a size that may be termed almost monumental and comprises a wall 2,5 m thick following a NE-SW direction as is common for Tell el-Farkha (fig. 3). At the southern extreme it ends in a big rounded corner. The wall was actually made of two differently constructed sections. The inside part was erected of yellowish brick with an obviously considerable amount of sand, set in a dark-grey mud mortar. The outside face is definitely of mudbrick bonded in a light yellowish mortar tempered with sand. Inside the building there was a much damaged floor of bricks.

The structure in question should be considered in connection with a building discovered in 1999, featuring a considerable concentration of finds and storage vessels found standing still in place. Not only were the two structures recorded on the same absolute height, but also parts of the earlier excavated building have been noted in the pits opened in 2000.

A rectangular space was found to adjoin a thick (80 cm) wall running NE-SW for 11.70 m in its northwestern part. This room was almost 7 m long and had 50 cm-thick walls on the west and south. Successive floors were made of clay and most probably covered with a kind of lime mortar. Inside this space, especially in the southern part, there were considerable

quantities of artefacts - numerous potsherds, but also two complete storage vessels with conical bottoms, standing in pits lined with thick coatings of mud. A third vessel was fragmentarily preserved and there were six small vases, two with fish bones, lying on the floor, next to a flint knife and the flat ledge of a big stone vessel. A structure with rounded corner (1.20 x 1.50 m) abutted the room on the south; it was surrounded with a low brick wall equal in width to the thickness of one length of brick (ca. 30 cm). A similar wall surrounded a semicircular space (ca. 4.60 x 4 m) adjoining the main wall on the southeast. To the north of it, a few groups of bricks lying in all different directions could perhaps reflect the presence of a floor. The walls of this complex have been preserved to a height of 40-50 cm; they were constructed of layers of brick well visible in places, bonded in a kind of lime mortar and founded on an obvious layer of destruction.

The continuation of the described complex was discovered in 2000 to the north of it. It is an almost square space (ca. 4.5 x 5 m) with two storage vessels standing inside it. West of this construction a continuation of the main wall surrounding the previously described monumental structure was found. Neither of the big vessel had a bottom and they stood one in a lump of pure clay and the other in a bowl. Also here there was a concentration of finds, including whole little vessels. The evidence clearly points to a sudden abandonment of the complex.

In the seasons 2002-2003 we continued the work. The main goal was west part of these Naqadian structure. Beginnings was almost the same. Under a layer of silt we found the next level, composed from white and red ashes and black burned soil. Beneath the outline of walls Naqadian building became evident.

Regular arrangements of mudbricks forming a clearly visible outline of a building appeared underneath the layers of destruction (fig. 4). The edifice was of significant size, divided into several inner compartments. Huge walls (2 m thick) draw attention as they separated the building from a southern additional room of later date, where two stoves with pots standing in them were discovered. Numerous postholes dug within one of the rooms along with a wall surrounding them from west are to be dated to the same period that is the last phase of the structure's occupation. It is very likely that the posts had been supporting a roof or an upper storey ruined in unknown circumstances. Both, the rooms with stoves and the posts, were raised before the edifice' final devastation.

The inside plan and dimensions of the whole building became more visible in lower strata hiding remains of the complex related to the age of its maximal extend and splendor. The inner room (party excavated in 2000) was 7 x 2 m in size. Within it a badly damaged brick floor was found. The so-called "western room" was situated to the west behind a wall

ca. 80 cm wide. Both compartments were limited by a northern room of similar measurement, with a thick separating wall, too. In the last compartment remains of stoves and hearths were registered. An internal courtyard was uncovered further to the west and it was enclosed by several rooms. Nevertheless, their size and mutual relation are difficult to estimate as long as their part remains unexcavated. The monumental dimensions of the edifice are particularly significant, since (including the sectors examined during former campaigns) it covered an area over 500 m<sup>2</sup>. Huge mudbrick walls (2.5 – 1 m wide) isolated most of compartments.

Judging by the hitherto collected data the complex constitutes the largest construction of this type, which has ever been discovered in Egypt in Naqada context. The edifice' significance as well as its inhabitants is – at least currently – difficult to unequivocal evaluation. Probably, the works' completion at the western part of the kom will make it possible. However, one should emphasize some potential solutions. Numerous findings like: so-called counters, fragments of clay undecorated seals and also some pieces of foreign (Palestinian) pottery vessels were discovered, likewise in season 2000, within the characterized structure. That seems to produce evidence that the people of Tell el-Farkha were considerably engaged in commercial activities. Furthermore, it indicates that we are dealing here with a residence, combined with stores, of a Naqada supervising trade between Upper Egypt and the Delta and Palestine. The building, as it has been already mentioned, was destroyed in a fire. It is hard to estimate whether it was a result of natural catastrophe (flood, earthquake) or an intentional human action. Taking into consideration the latter one should stress that it is scarcely provable. However, the epoch when the disastrous fire happened deserves a closer look. The catastrophic event is to be dated to Naqada IIIA2, which is the period when existence of earliest protokindoms in Upper Egypt can be assumed. First richly equipped burials recorded in southern necropolis demonstrate the final stage of the elites' formation process. The largest and most significant tomb (U-j) was found in Abydos. Its outstanding features clearly support the dignity and royal power of the person who had been buried in it (Dreyer 1998). The oldest hieroglyphs which were found there suggest not solely a considerable development of society's organization but administrative and bureaucratic control over many aspects of life. A discovery over 400 of vessels though originating from Palestine clearly ordered by Egyptians and then deposited in tomb U-j supports the postulated crucial importance of goods imported from the Levant that is the role of trade itself. More or less contemporary, although almost completely plundered, are the tombs recently unearthed in Hierakonpolis (Adams 1996). There are other testimonies uncovered at the latter site which indicate its colossal significance for the formative processes of the Egyptian state (Adams

1999). It is very likely that both centers were competing in various fields, the substantial one could be the issue of controlling trade routes leading to the Sinai and Palestine. Located by them Tell el-Farkha presumably was an spot important for commercial exchange, its supervision and control along with the north-eastern trade route itself. That is why, it is possible that the final destruction of the described complex found in Tell el-Farkha was a result of conflict between those two centers of emerging kinship, unfortunately rather hard to specify. Accepting this theory, it should be strongly stressed that it remains in close relation to a conflict on a regional scale, but connected to the Naqada culture, therefore, it cannot be transferred to a position of an evidence for Upper Egyptian conquest of the Nile Delta.

When considering the reasons of the Naqada building of Tell el-Farkha's devastation natural factors also should be noted. The fire could be started accidentally or as a result of regional earthquake. Evidence confirming the latter possibility were found in layers dated to the terminal (fifth) occupational phase at the Western Kom and while uncovering the structure in question, as well. The space stretching out to the south and north-east from the main building were covered with pieces of collapsed wall, frequently lying on their side and squeezing numerous small artifacts. In this context crushed pottery vessels of storage and also table use can be mentioned as well as flint or stone tools, fragments of cosmetic palettes. One of the most interesting findings is a skeleton of a pig, undoubtedly killed by a falling wall.

Directly on top of described construction, on the layer of destruction mentioned above the rests of next great building, dated to our phases 4 and 5 (Naqada IIIB-IIIC1) were found. Just below the surface a small deposit of figurines and vessels made of faience, clay and stone was discovered. Of special interest are two figurines of baboons and a representation of a prostrate man (fig. 5). His only covering is a penis sheath and he wears his hair and beard long, while the features of his face are distinctly archaic. Another clay figurine found nearby represents a standing man, longhaired and bearded, and also naked; the manner of execution of this figurine points to its Predynastic origins. Another group deserving emphasis is a set of five egg- and barrel-shaped clay rattles with engraved decoration. One should also mention models of piriform maces, miniature vessels made of different materials, zoomorphic vessel representing a water bird (duck or goose), clay double-vases, faience beads, part of faience figurine of crocodile and objects that are game counters in all likelihood. Some objects of the deposit, like the baboon figures and the prostrate man, were deposited presumably in the last phase of the building's use, at the very end of the dynasty 0 or beginning dynasty I. Others come from earlier periods, with the oldest being a zoomorphic vessel and the figurine of a standing man.

The deposit was uncovered within massive walls (fig. 6) marking off a relatively small room that was part of a building of considerable size (at least 25 by 15 m). The said structure is made up of a series of rooms, which agglutinated over a certain period of time or were rebuilt and developed after natural disasters of cataclysmic consequences. One such event may have been a fairly mild earthquake which resulted in the collapse of walls of part of the rooms lying southeast and northwest of the area where the deposit was discovered. The debris covered many items, including large storage vessels, thin-walled red bowls and cosmetic palettes of greywacke. To judge by the geometric forms of these palettes, they were made in the third phase of the Naqada culture.

The differences in the material used to produce bricks deserve note (it is either silt with sand in considerable amounts or silt practically devoid of sand), as well as the varied care put into the execution of the walls, presumably due to different room function. Brick size remains more or less constant at ca. 15 by 30 cm throughout the period. In a few cases the bones of wild cattle (shoulder and long bones) were found set into the wall instead of bricks.

Another observation that should be emphasized is the functional differentiation of particular rooms and the related differences in the thickness of walls and wall execution techniques. The main walls and those surrounding the deposit are the thickest, reaching ca. 120 cm. The NW corner of the space with the deposit and the west wall had been intersected by a trench excavated by the Italian expedition in 1988-89. Walls either one, one-and-a-half or two bricks thick (from 30 to 60 cm) surround other rooms that are of distinctly domestic character. Small hearths were discovered chiefly in the small units, enclosed by thin walls that separated them from the neighbouring spaces. An especially big concentration of these hearths was discovered in the north-western part of the complex. Occasionally, bottomless vessels were found standing in the hearths.

In 2006 season the area on the West to the described building was opened. The most important discoveries made in these region was a long room (8 x 3,30 m) in the north-western corner of new trench (fig. 7). The space was surrounded by 45 cm thick brick walls (1,5 brick) and was oriented on the NW – SE. In the middle of the mentioned room a concentration of 8 vessels was found (fig. 8). The special interest were one so called Nubian vessel – a bowl decorated with punctured dots and incised triangles and a pot stands with triangles cut in its body. Both vessels (and probably other found together) are considered (by many scholars) as connected with cult or some rituals. Few centimetres below (but still in the same level and in the same room) two stone vessels and a kind of container for ink were found. Especially interested is the last one. It was a thin pottery slab, 7 cm wide, with three

(about 4,5 cm in diameter) round containers filled with black substance. It was probably a scribe palette.

Just at the Eastern wall of these room a small jar (23 cm high) was found (fig. 9). It was also decorated with punctured dots and incised decoration: 2 quadruped animals (gazelles?) and ostrich. The mentioned jar was covered by a small bowl. Inside 62 small objects were found (fig. 10). It was evidently a deposit of cultic items hidden in the jar. These deposit was composed from 2 figurines of children; 7 figurines of women (fig. 11); 5 figurines of men (fig. 12); 6 figurines of dwarfs (fig 13); 12 figurines of different animals. In the last group especially interesting are 4 cobra-snakes, the oldest known till now uraeuses. All of them were made from the hippopotamus tusks. Besides in the jar were also 19 models of different items (p. ex. knife, boats, mirror, pieces of games, cylindrical seal, tablets, boxes) and 10 miniature vessels. These items were made from different materials: hippopotamus tusks, stones, Nile silt, faience and copper. Both deposits (connected undoubtedly with the Dynasty 0 and beginning of I Dynasty) and other items found in the described building allowed to interpret it as a administrative-cultic centre. It played probably a great role not only for the Tell el-Farkha itself, but also for the region (at least part of Eastern delta) at the beginning of I dynasty.

In the deepest layers the plan of building is much simpler. But probably it is still a place of ceremonial importance. In one of the last layer a great (almost 30 cm long) falcon shaped greywacke palette was found. The main walls are still very thick and rooms narrow and long. Is possible that in centre was a kind of inner courtyard.

The layers excavated in these area have yielded a noticeable quantity of small finds, including mentioned objects from deposit. From other objects connected with temple area is worth to mention: cosmetic palettes, some examples of wavy-handled pottery or with lug handles imported pottery, whole vessels, mostly of small size, sickle blades and fragments of flint knives, flint scrapers, numerous pieces of querns, stone grinders and pestles, mudseals used to close all kinds of containers (some with impressions of cylindrical seals), stone pendants (amulets) in the shape of a duck and of a stylized female figure. A highly schematic figurine of a ram was discovered north of the deposit, but within the thick wall surrounding the complex. One of the most interesting finds was a cylindrical jar with 187 fin bones of fish, some with the thicker end broken off, others whole. Even without further processing, the fin bones with their sharp serrated edge constituted excellent material for making harpoon heads (e.g. for fishing) or even arrowheads for bird hunting. The bones may have been collected on purpose as valuable raw material or was deposited in the sacred area. Immediately next to the jar a half of a clay boat model was discovered.



To summarise: at Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha we deal with three great buildings, erected in the same place but from different chronological periods. First, the older one, was evidently a house; second connected with Naqada culture was probably a residence of great men, maybe governor of one of the earliest Egyptian prince or even king. Third was probably an administrative-cultic centre, raised on the same spot when the earlier residences were. It is worth to stress that it is much more bigger than for instance so called Satet temple at Elephantine. Probably our building was divided on the spaces (rooms) served for different function. Both rooms with deposits could served as a kind of chapels or sacred places, another seems to be rather connected with daily life. Maybe in some of them were the workshops in which the cultic objects were produced, in another the local chief (king's administrator?) could to reside. Mentioned chief had probably a strong relation with the first Egyptian kings (serekhs of Iry-Hor, Ka and Narmer were found at the cemetery).

The complexity and monumental character of the administrative-cultic centre and the Naqada residence will be expose especially when we compare these buildings with houses known from the Central Kom. Excavation of the central tell in 2001 enabled the uppermost extent of settlement from dynasty I, contemporary with the last layers of temple from Western Kom. A layout of buildings different from that in younger phases was noted here, although the NE-SW orientation of these buildings is still the same. Exploration revealed a compact group of architectural features consisting of a number of small rooms (from 2 x 2.5 m) and larger ones with corner stoves. Walls are constructed with three or four parallel lines of bricks.

Work on the Central Kom yielded a considerable amount of finds, predominantly potsherds, though a number of complete vessels were also found. Other materials included a large tool assemblage, among others a deposit of flint sickle blades – a harvester's kit – concealed within a wall.

In the deepest, older layers we still can observe simple settlement, with narrow and long rooms located around courtyards, sometimes the traces construction supported by post with many traces of oven – inside and outside of walls and next silos at the courtyard.

The situation is almost the same in deepest levels, dated on our phase 4 (contemporary with the beginning of administrative-cultic centre and with the destruction of Naqada residence). Many relatively small compartments, long and narrow, grouped around the courtyards forming the rests of quite big houses with many ovens and workshops.

The data acquired thus far clearly indicate that in the Late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods the Central Kom functioned as a utility area serving the residential and temple sectors of the settlement located on the western tell.

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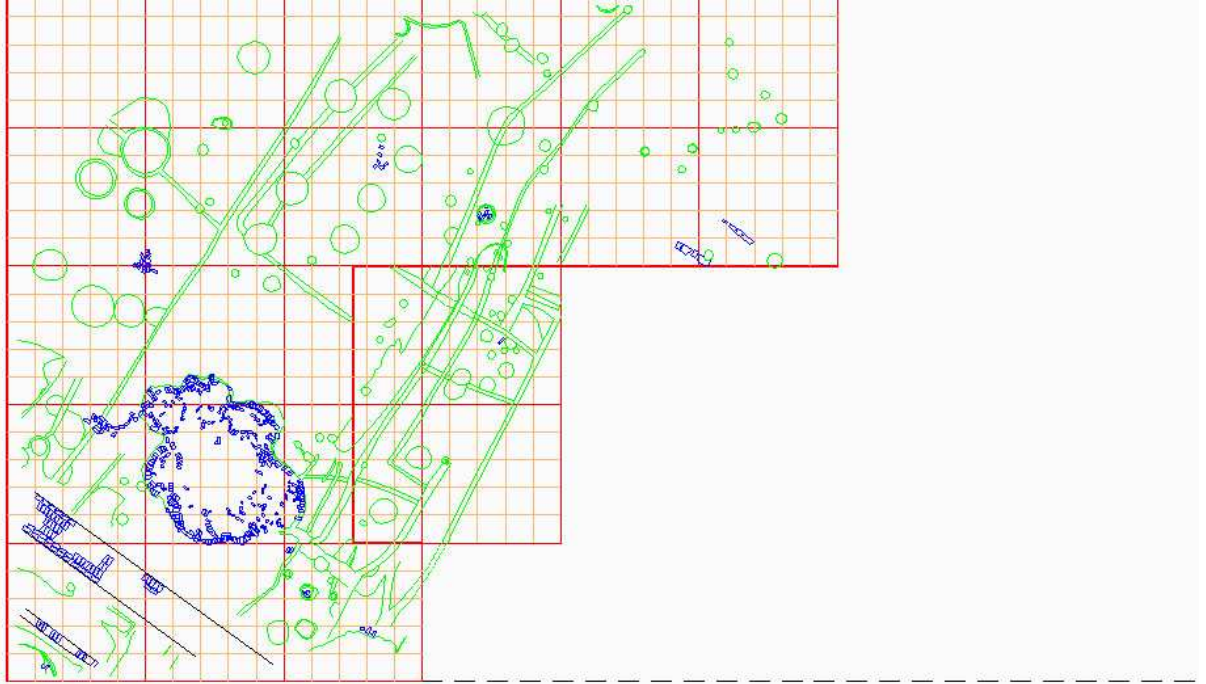


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



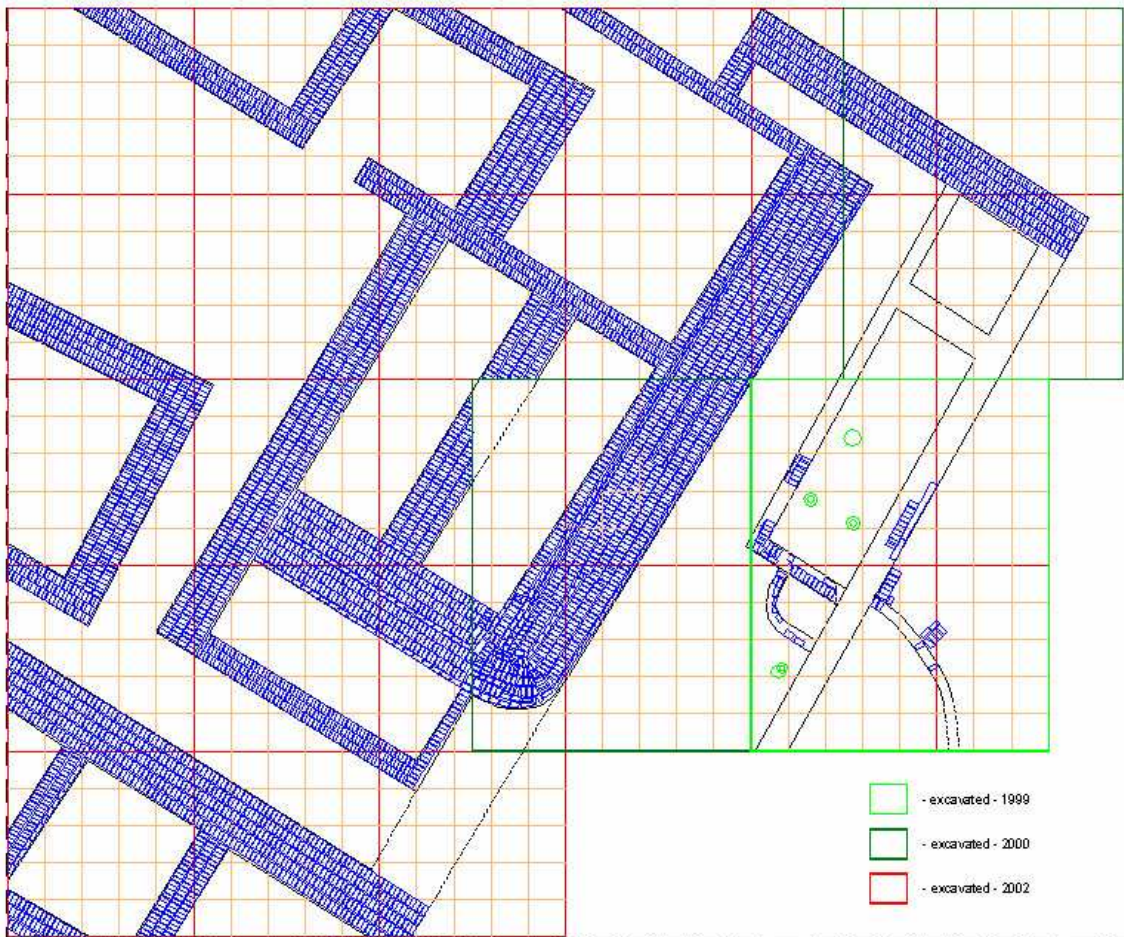


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5





Fig. 6



Fig. 7





Fig. 8



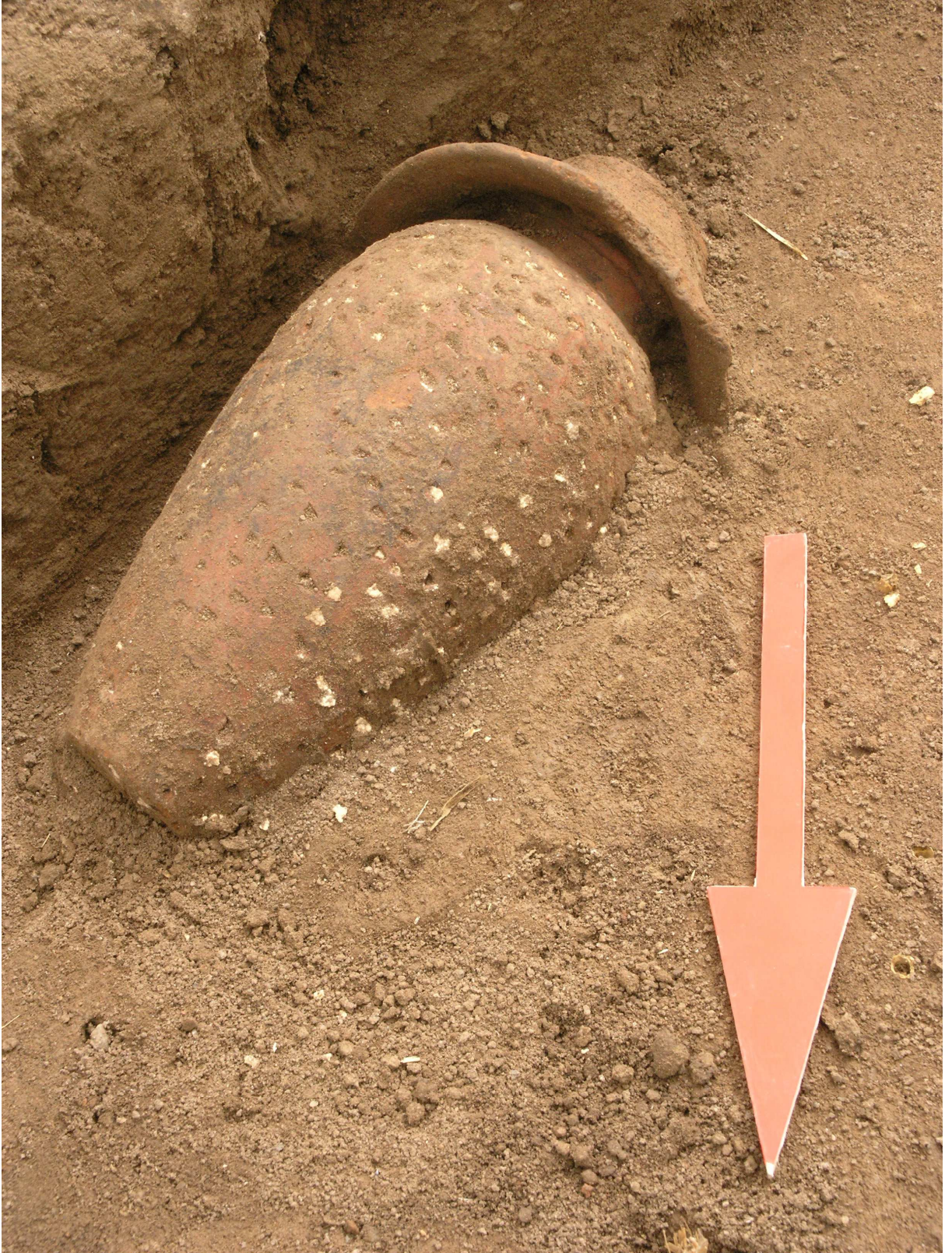


Fig. 9





Fig. 10



Fig. 11





Fig. 12



Fig. 13