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THE NATURE OF THE RELATION BETWEEN LOWER AND
UPPER EGYPT IN THE PROTODYNASTIC PERIOD.
A VIEW FROM TELL EL-FARKHA

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The problem of mutual relations between Upper and Lower Egypt in the Predynastic Period is still both controversial and poorly known. Existing theories announced that during Naqada I or the beginning of Naqada II — at the time that the Lower Egyptian Culture was developing — these relations were extremely rare.

The situation changed completely between the end of Naqada II and the Early Dynastic period. During natural development the Naqada culture expanded to the North and replaced, at least in the Eastern Delta, the autochthonous Lower Egyptian culture. The results of recent studies evidently shown that at the beginning of Naqada III, the whole of Egypt was occupied by one cultural unit.

At the end of Lower Egyptian culture (the phase contemporary with the beginning of Naqada IID2 or even the end of IID1) the number of imported goods from the south present at Tell el-Farkha evidently increased. In the middle of Naqada IID2, pottery began to dominate and, in the same phase, elaborated mud-brick buildings appeared. The lack of layers of destruction allowed us to see in these processes slow infiltration rather than military campaign.

The results of the recent excavations at Tell el-Farkha seem to show that the relation between Upper and Lower Egypt in Protodynastic and Early Dynastic times was much more complicated. The Naqada occupation of the Delta was probably interrupted by different natural and probably also political reasons. It is possible that at least a few migrations, led by different political centres from Upper Egypt took place. It could also be proof that these political centres were rivals in the Protodynastic period. Maybe the later information about the conquest of Lower Egypt by Upper Egyptian Kings is not just a legend. Nevertheless it took place inside the Naqada culture alone, when one Naqada ruler wished to dominate another.

The problem of mutual relations between Upper and Lower Egypt in the Predynastic period is still both controversial and not well enough known. The hitherto existing theories suggest that during Naqada I or the beginning of Naqada II — at the time the Lower Egyptian Culture was developing — these relations were extremely rare. The inhabitants of both Upper and Lower Egypt devoted much more attention to contacts with the Sinai and Palestine. It is first of all proven by the discoveries in Buto and Maadi, where amounts of Palestinian imports and imitations varied from

a few to dozens of a per cent of discovered artefacts (Faltings 1998: 367; von der Way 1997: 101; Rizkana & Seeher 1987: 31). A similar situation, although not at this scale, occurred at Tell el-Farkha, where in Lower Egyptian layers undoubtedly, but rare, Palestinian imports were found (Mączyńska 2004: 186-187).

At the same time the account of Naqadan artefacts at Lower Egyptian sites is very scant. Single blacktopped vessels, rhomboidal palettes or fish-tailed flint knives were registered (Seeher 1990: 140 ff.). In Tell el-Farkha in an evidently Lower Egyptian installation, only a few Naqadan potsherds were found. The contacts between Lower and Upper Egypt during the Lower Egyptian culture were therefore relatively rare.

The reasons for such a situation were different and they are interpreted in a miscellaneous way (Ciałowicz 2001: 75), but one of the most important reasons is probably the lack of the necessity of direct relations. It is connected from one side with still not enough stratified societies and from another with a scarcity of attractive goods, which could be a base for such commercial relations.

The situation changed completely from the end of Naqada II until the Early Dynastic period. During natural development, the Naqada culture expanded to the North and replaced, at least in the eastern Delta, the autochthonous Lower Egyptian culture.

The results of recent studies has evidently shown that at the beginning of Naqada III all of Egypt was occupied by one cultural unit. In all probability Naqadan expansion to the northern part of Middle Egypt started in Naqada IIC and to the Delta at least during Naqada IID1 (Kaiser 1990: 288-289). It is confirmed by the results of excavations at Buto and Tell el-Farkha. Layer IIIa at Buto is evidently transitional and the architectural structures and artefacts typical for both the Lower Egyptian culture and for the early Naqada IID2 were found in this layer. Subsequent layers IIIb-f and IV contained only items characteristic of Naqada IID2 until the end of the 1st Dynasty (von der Way 1991).

At the end of Lower Egyptian culture (the phase contemporary with the beginning of Naqada IID2 or even the end of IID1), the number of imported goods from the south of Tell el-Farkha evidently increased. In the middle of IID2, Naqada pottery began to dominate and in the same phase elaborate mud-brick buildings appeared. The first brick constructions at Tell el-Farkha were connected with the Lower Egyptian culture: pure mud-bricks were used to construct a wall, which protected the Western Kom from the northwest, where an ancient channel was situated. Undoubtedly, the first inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha knew the mud-brick

construction, but they did not use it on a large scale. The situation is similar in some ways to those observed at Maadi, where a few examples of mud-brick were found, but where elaborate constructions never existed (Rizkana & Seeher 1989: 55). In Buto, mud-bricks were found in layer II — contemporary with Farkha I — but also in unidentified structures (von der Way 1997: 64 ff.). The supposition, that in fact Naqada people introduced the mud-brick buildings to the Delta is then justified. In the first elaborate buildings in Tell el-Farkha, mud-bricks with a considerable admixture of sand were used — this could also confirm the mentioned hypothesis.

The first monumental building at Tell el-Farkha can be dated to Naqada IID2-III A1 (comp. P. Kołodziejczyk this volume). Undecorated seals, small finds which could have served for counting purposes, and potsherds of Palestinian origin may be evidence of the considerable role of commerce in the life of the inhabitants of these buildings. Perhaps we are dealing here with a residence, combined with stores, of Naqadan supervision of trade between Upper Egypt, the Delta and Palestine. The lack of layers of destruction allows us to see slow infiltration rather than military campaign in these processes. The same is confirmed by the discovery of a regular village at the Central Kom (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz 2003) and middle class graves, dated from the beginning of the 1st Dynasty, on the Eastern Kom. Autochthonous Lower Egyptian inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha either abandoned the site, or more probably they were assimilated by Naqadan people by the adoption of southern techniques and artefacts.

To summarise, it could be supposed that according to these dates the process of the Naqadan entrance to the Delta was relatively short and a single occurrence. The reasons for Naqadan expansion were probably different but one of the most important ones was the necessity of controlling trade routes.

At the end of Naqada II or the beginning of III, all of Egypt was included within one cultural unit. It is still unknown whether this cultural unification was connected with the political one, and whether all of Egypt was ruled by one king. According to some scholars, until the time of Narmer, the northern border of the Delta was governed by local sovereigns and real unification took place at the beginning of the 1st Dynasty (Helck 1987: 81 ff.). This hypothesis is now unconvincing. Another problem is, whether the infiltration of the Naqada culture into the Delta was in some way steered and whether there previously existed one kingdom of Upper and Middle (?) Egypt or rather informal political-territorial unions still existed.

One theory suggests that at the turn of Naqada II to III, kings of Hierakonpolis had a dominating position. This domination was interrupted by the owner of grave U-j from Abydos in the same way as Scorpion II from Hierakonpolis broke the reign of Dynasty 0 from Abydos (Kaiser 1990: 294).

Numerous imports found in the graves at Abydos, especially the uniqueness of U-j, with its wealth of equipment, and labels with the first hieroglyphic signs could suggest a dominating position of Abydos during Naqada IIIA2. Between Scorpion I, the owner of U-j, and the beginning of the 1st Dynasty, 9-10 kings could have ruled in Abydos, and they could have extended control over all of Egypt or its greater part (Dreyer 1998: 179-180). According to these conceptions, a central authority existed in Egypt from at least the end of Naqada II.

According to another group of scholars (Kemp 1989: 34 ff.) in Egypt in the Late Predynastic Period, there were three independent proto-kingdoms with capitals in This, Naqada and Hierakonpolis. During Naqada IIIB as a consequence of internal war (represented for example on Narmer palette), the Upper Egyptian kingdom was established. At the same time the rest of Egypt was still at a less organised level. According to this opinion, Dynasty 0 was composed not from one line (family) of kings but from many local rulers.

The results of the last excavations at Tell el-Farkha seems to show that the relations between Upper and Lower Egypt in Protodynastic and Early Dynastic times were much more complicated. The Naqadan occupation of Delta was probably interrupted by different natural and probably also political reasons. After short breaks to the Delta came new people, connected, possibly, with different political centres.

Before drawing a final conclusion, it is necessary to present some proof, which was obtained during the research at Tell el-Farkha, but it is essential to remember that everything took place within a relatively short period of time: from Naqada IIIA until the beginning of the 1st Dynasty, so 150-200 years. It is also possible that later, at the end of 2nd Dynasty, similar events took place.

The Polish excavations at the Eastern Kom started with a small test pit (2 × 3 m). Subsequent discoveries resulted in the extent of the excavated area on the Eastern Kom covering almost 1500 m², with the same levels being reached in different seasons (Fig. 1). Additionally it should be remembered, that as we are excavating on the slope, we sometimes meet chronologically different structures on the same working level. At the beginning, few graves dated to the beginning of the 1st Dynasty were

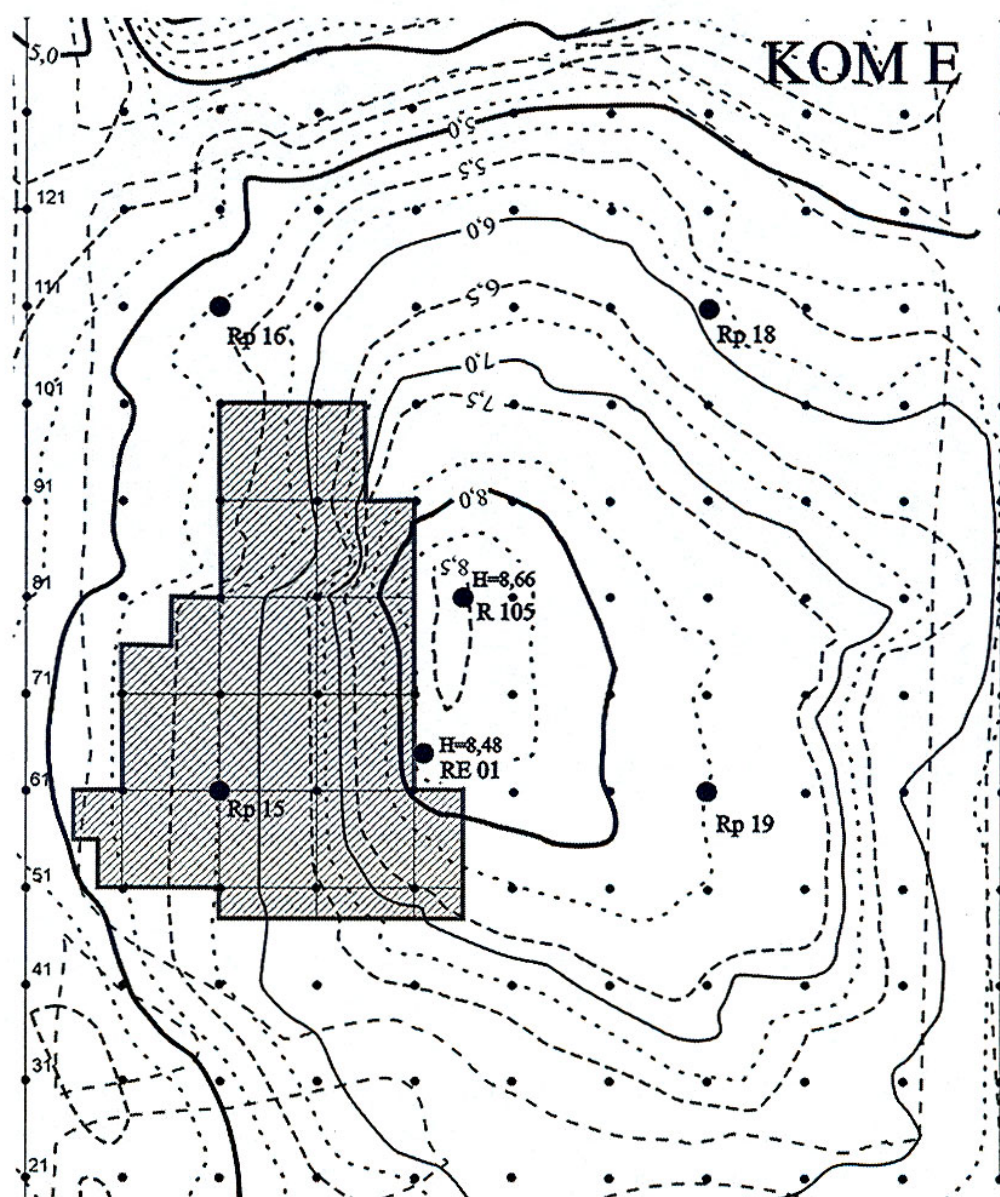


Fig. 1. Plan of the trench at the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha.

found (see J. Dębowska this volume), but an extremely interesting situation was met under the graves. In most of them a different arrangement of bricks was visible beneath their bottom and these graves had very thin walls of 8-9 cm. Only one tomb discovered farther to the east had solid walls, half a metre thick, and cut in the level of dark soil.

Beneath one of these mentioned graves, a massive brick corner — with evident traces of burnt soil — was found, in which a few pots were deposited (Fig. 2). During the next campaign in this area an ivory dagger



Fig. 2. Massive brick corner and Early Dynastic graves.

handle and stone pendant with *serekh* were found evidently in the outline of the walls (Fig. 3). The space between them was filled with bricks lying in different directions and mixed with soil.

In the next season the trench was enlarged both in the west and the north. On the west, the situation was simple: no graves and only a few badly preserved walls, in one of them a small jar with painted decoration was found. In the north, things were more complicated. Just under the surface, outlines of mud-brick graves were discovered. Additionally, some of them were evidently cut into earlier, thin, badly constructed and poorly preserved walls (Fig. 4). Farther to the North the situation was much more intricate. Under the surface remains of a poor settlement were discovered, which could be dated to the end of Early Dynastic Period and the beginning of Old Kingdom (Fig. 5). Beneath them were some pit graves without any offerings and in a very bad condition. In the following layers the situation changed once more and the rest of the settlement structures were discovered.

During the last two seasons on the southern edge of the trench, an outline of a monumental brick structure was visible (Fig. 6). The wide mud-brick

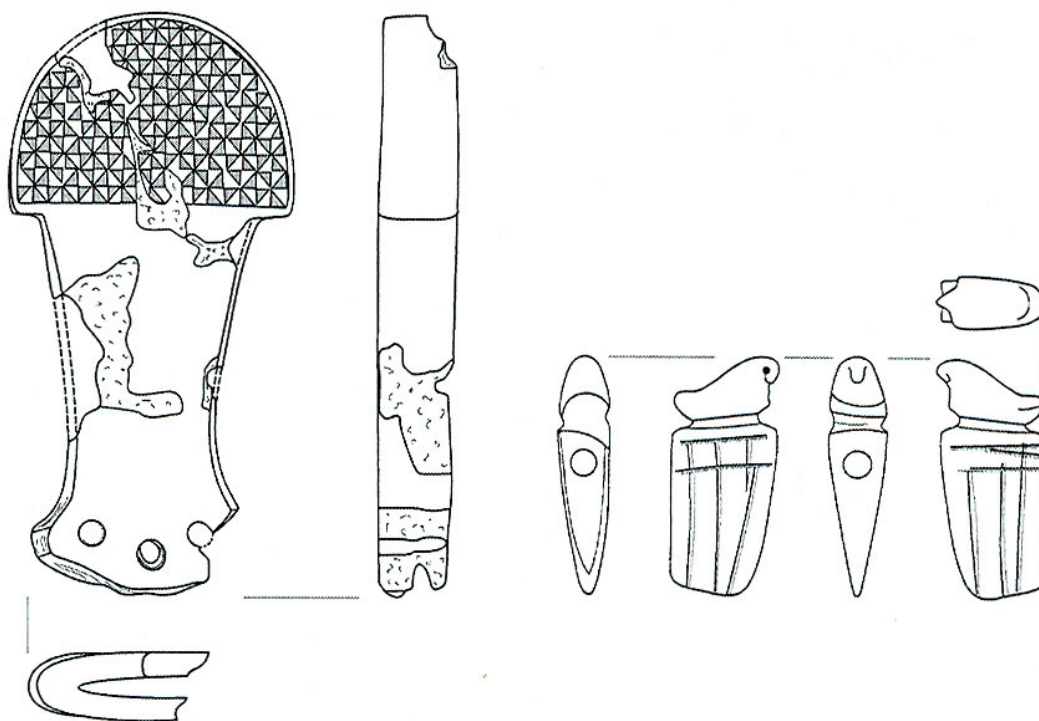


Fig. 3. The ivory dagger handle and stone pendant with *serekh*.



Fig. 4. Early Dynastic graves cut into earlier walls.



Fig. 5. The poor settlement from the end of the Early Dynastic to the beginning of the Old Kingdom.



Fig. 6. The outline of a monumental brick structure.

walls divided the whole area into a few compartments. The space separating the walls was filled with brick mixed with soil. Especially interesting was the inner wall composed in fact from two different ones: the first was built from yellow bricks, the second from grey bricks. In the same way the outside walls were constructed. Both, southern and eastern, are very thick (about 2 m) and their façades are not straight but wavy. The profile of the eastern wall proved that it was a little bit oblique and in the bottom it had a kind of bank (Fig. 7). In these moments the supposition was born that our mysterious construction may have a sepulchral character.

Unfortunately the following weeks of excavations neither confirmed nor denied these hypotheses. The big compartments — mainly 3-7 m — were filled with bricks mixed with soil or with ashes as in one of the compartments, where a mud brick oven was build. It is necessary to stress that it was not layer of destruction but intentional filling of the compartment. Usually in Tell el-Farkha, and another sites, layers of destruction are easy to recognise. Here on the Eastern Kom there is a more than 1.5 m deep, mainly brick, filing between very thick walls. It must have been done for some reason. It is necessary to remember that in early mastabas many chambers were empty and filled with earth. In the filling

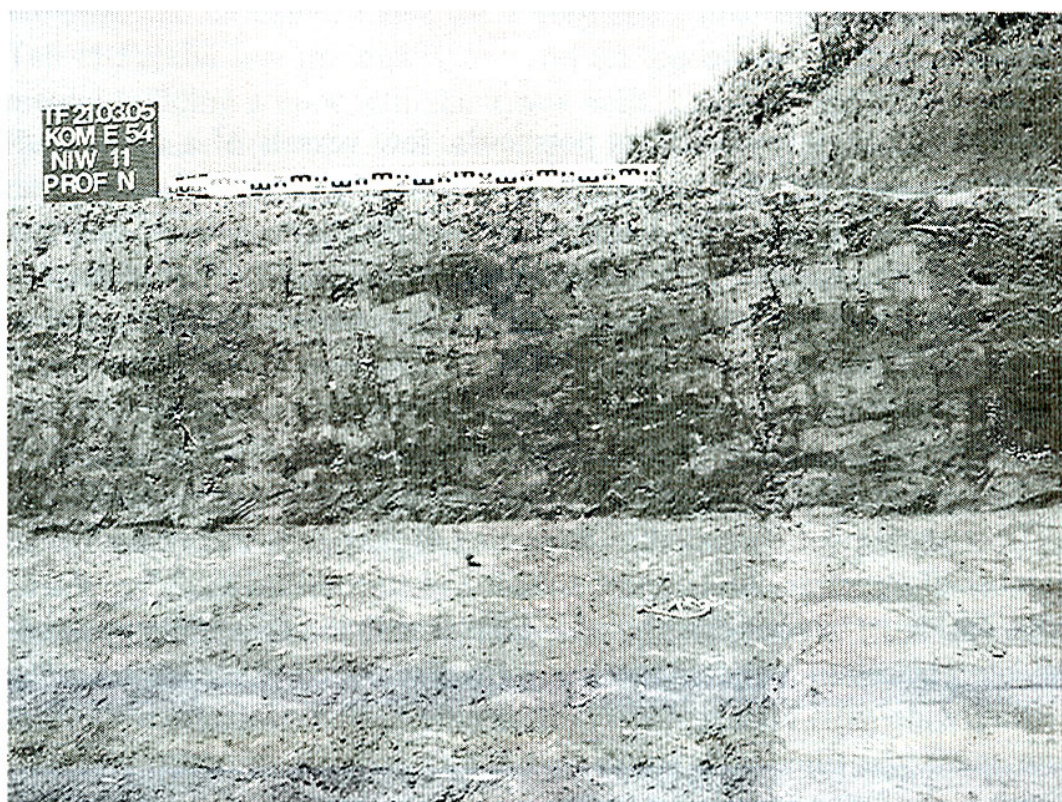


Fig. 7. The profile of the eastern wall.



Fig. 8. The monumental building from the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha after the 2005 campaign of excavation.

of our structure only numerous potsherds, few vessels of a rather bad quality and very rare flint implements were found. It is hard to believe that the Protodynastic inhabitants of Tell el-Farkha had made such an effort of raising really a monumental construction just to fill it with rubbish or use it as an ordinary house or a platform on which they erected a really poor settlement.

In all likelihood, the compartments that have been discovered until now form only a part of the whole construction (Fig. 8). The rest of it (on the west and north) has already been destroyed or is still hidden under the later settlement. Especially interesting is that is probably the main chamber of structure. It is almost square and surrounded by 2.5 m thick walls. Inside it, but not exactly at its centre, at first a thin wall appeared and later, traces of wooden espalier were discovered. Beneath it a succeeding wide wall appeared, forming inside a kind of shaft, while the outer space was filled with bricks mixed with soil. The structure was left in such a condition for the next season, and it is possible that research in 2006 will allow us to solve most of the problems.

Settlement	Late Early Dynastic / Early Old Kingdom
Cemetery	Early Dynastic
Settlement	Naqada IIIB
Monumental sepulchral (?) construction	Naqada IIIA / IIIB
Naqada occupation	Naqada IID – beginning IIIA (?)
Lower Egyptian occupation	Naqada IIB(?) – IIC

Table 1. Stratigraphical sequence at the southern part of the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha.

The first occupation (Table 1) of the Eastern kom at Tell el-Farkha was probably connected with Lower Egyptian people. It is proved not only by the presence of characteristic potsherds in one of fully excavated test pits, but also by the characteristic Lower Egyptian constructions which were found in the northern part of trench (Chłodnicki & Ciałowicz, 2005: 137). The latter was probably the first Naqadan occupation, connected with the Late Gerzean period. In the third phase, a monumental building can be dated. Later for a very short time the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha lost its importance and on top of the mentioned monumental building a poor settlement was built. Later, on the same spot we have an Early Dynastic Cemetery, and finally once again a settlement dated to the late Early Dynastic and the beginning of Old Kingdom. If we accept the hypothesis that the mysterious monumental structure has rather a sepulchral than domestic character, it is strange that the people living in Tell el Farkha so often changed the way the Eastern Kom was used. There are of course examples of building graves in an abandoned part of the settlement or sometimes the settlement covered the earliest graves, but the situation in our case is unique. Especially interesting is the relationship between the monumental building and later settlement. Maybe we have found the proof that after some disaster, natural or political, completely new inhabitants came to Tell el-Farkha. After arriving here they had no consciousness of the preceding history of the site and nobody could tell them about it. A similar situation could have taken place between the Early Dynastic cemetery and the early Old Kingdom settlement.

On the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha we have a somehow similar. All five phases which we distinguished are separated one from another by what are evidently layers of destruction: mud that has flowed from of

the Nile or ashes and burnt soil testifying to other disasters. Particularly important here is the destruction of the above-mentioned Naqada residence, connected with the first Southern settlers in Tell el-Farkha. This building seems to be a little earlier than the described structure from the Eastern Kom, but for the final conclusion we should wait until the end of our research in the above mentioned building. Nevertheless, a layer of destruction (ashes and burnt soil) on top of the monumental residence from the Western Kom could be proof of the unsteady political situation in Delta during Naqada IIIA-B.

To summarise it is worth stressing two points:

1. Changes in function of the Eastern Kom at Tell el-Farkha could be a proof that the Naqadan occupation of Delta was not a single, one-off process. It is possible that at least a few migrations, led by different political centres from Upper Egypt took place. It could also be proof that these political centres were rivals in the Protodynastic period. Maybe the latter information about the conquest of Lower Egypt by Upper Egyptian Kings is not just a legend. Nevertheless it took place inside the Naqada culture alone, when one Naqada ruler (for instance from Abydos) wished to dominate another (for instance from Hierakonpolis).
2. Until now, the proof seems to point to the huge building from Eastern Kom having rather a sepulchral than domestic character. In this case we would receive the final proof that monumental, mud-brick graves really have a Lower Egyptian origin. The oldest mastabas known until now were discovered in Naqada and Saqqara and come from the reign of Aha. Our construction seems to be much older.

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