

Lower Egypt in modern research on state formation in Egypt

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In the mid of september 2005 in Toulouse (France) the II-nd International Conference “Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt - Origin of the State” has ended. The first conference, which took place in Cracow in 2002 gave a new impulse for researchers and scientists dealing with all the aspects of the origin of state of pharaohs. Until quite lately the Nile Delta was one of white spot's on the archeological map of Egypt. It is obvious today that last years brought great changes in research progress and in our knowledge on this area. This progress requires verification of many theory's about participation of the Nile Delta in the Egyptian state formation.

The history of research on prepharaonic Egypt reaches second half of the 19th century and its beginnings and biggest discoveries are related with Upper Egypt. First finds from the second half of the 19th century were not correctly classified. Between 1894 – 1895 the large predynastic cemeteries in Naqada and Ballas were excavated by W.M.F. Petrie i J.E. Quibell. These investigations brought about new discoveries which became a base for the new Petrie's theory about new race that possessed Egypt during the Middle Kingdom period. After several years of investigations which included excavations in Abadieh and Hu cemeteries (1901) and under influence of J. De Morgan's work (1896-1897) who was the first one having remarked the existence of earlier stages, Petrie verified his former views and linked up those early finds with predynastic period. In the same year the first system of relative chronology based on ceramics (Sequence Dating) made by Petrie has emerged. Earliest development of pre- and early dynastic research is connected with excavations carried out in many important sites. During this period groups and sites, that in course of time became a „visiting-card” of the period in question, has been discovered and examined having also revealed objects of the highest class. It is necessary to mention Hierakonpolis (Quibell 1900, Quibell, Green 1902), Mahasna (Ayrton, Loat 1911), Abydos (Petrie 1900-1901; Randall-MacIver, Mace 1902; Naville 1914; Peet 1914), El-Amra (Randall-MacIver, Mace 1902), Gerzeh (Petrie 1912), Naga ed-Der (Reisner 1908; Mace 1909), Turah (Junker 1912) and Tarkhan (Petrie 1913-1914). The archaeological material found on these sites is still being studied. Unfortunately, many old publications do not allow their comparison with the newest results. It is of course an effect of lack of proper methodological standard in that time. Authors published or used for analyses only chosen material that supported their theories while the rest was left on the site where it underwent disruption. Many contemporary publications include errors, lacks in description

and documentation, moreover, a significant part of material has not been published at all. These in connection with lack of capability of research repetition or verification of obscurities cause huge losses. It has to be mentioned that the biggest sites from this period which were easy to identify because of their scale were examined in the first half of the 20th century. The 20th century brought publications and general elaborations which not occur in previous period. Research successfully led by G. Brunton (Badari-Tasa, 1928, 1937), G. Caton – Thompson and E.W. Gardner (Fayum, 1934) and H. Junker (Merimde-Beni-Salama, 1929-1940) revealed that cultural situation in the Egyptian area was more complicated than it occurred till those times and brought much material for research and studies on relations between previously identified cultural units. Due to this research three unusually important cultures which change the archaeological view of Egypt at that time have been discovered. The oldest – Fayum culture – were examined many times. The most important works were proceed in 30s and after world war II by polish archaeologists from Jagiellonian University in 80s. Presens of pastoral, roaming population which probably settled in Nile Delta beetwen 5 and 4 millenium BC were discovered by Polish excavators. In this aspect the Qasr el-Sagha region in Fayum Oasis became very important area (Ginter, Kozłowski, Pawlikowski, Śliwa 1982; Ginter, Kozłowski 1986).

At last in the interwar period researchers directed their interest towards the Nile Delta. In 1930 research on one of the most important prehistorical sites in Egypt – Maadi (a district of Cairo presently) – were initiated (Rizkana, Seeher 1987-1990). They ended after World War II – but their results were published not before the 80s. Identification of a new cultural unit Maadi-Buto (presently called Lower Egyptian culture) was an effect of these excavations.

After a break caused by the brake out of World War II a development of archeological research has followed. New trends appeared in science which required more holistic look on early Egyptian problems. In the post-war period range of excavation and material studies have been started. They have changed our knowledge of this period in the history of Egypt and brought up their meaning for Egyptian history. To the most important work led in this period belong, except continuously led excavations in Maadi till 1948, investigations of cemeteries in Heluan (Saad 1969) and Heliopolis (Debono, Mortensen 1988). On the first of them tombs from early dynastic period were found while on the second one graves from the times of the Lower Egyptian culture occurred.

After about half-century of using chronological system proposed by Petrie it became obvious that it did not mirror properly the predynastic cultural situation in Egypt. In 1957 a proposal to substitute Petrie's system was presented by W. Kaiser. He introduced the name of

Nagada and using his own observations on spatial distribution of antique objects on the Ar-mant cemetery distinguished 11 phases of the Naqada culture functioning dividing them also into smaller subphases. This system as less artificial and more opened have been adopted with just a little correction and is still in use.

Modern archeology differs in a determined manner from its beginnings. Due to methods elaborated by decades, experiences as well as techniques development and even changes of political conditions complex research and maximization of effects became possible. During the last 25 years archaeological excavations on several important, predynastic sites have been started. Results which we are still obtaining are not only important for knowledge of this period but also for knowledge of the history of archeology and evolution of research technique. Secondary excavations are lasting at Hierakonpolis (Hoffman 1982, Adams 2000) and Umm el-Qaab cemetery at Abydos (Dreyer et al. 1990-2000). The former allowed to reconstruct the role of this place in the birth of society, aristocracy and base of pharaoh's authority. Abydos necropolis with tombs of the first rulers and tombs of people from different social levels leads us – thanks to more pedantic and methodical explorations – to more data on the first years of united Egypt, beginnings of hieroglyphic writing system etc. As verification of old research results reexamination of huge earth banks left by first excavators at the beginning of the 20th century was proceeded resulting with surprising results.

Northern Egypt was always an unusually important area for our knowledge of the history of Egyptian state. The country of papyrus called by Egyptians „temehu”, their feeder and granary, a communication centre important for contacts with Palestine. There were several Egyptian capitals located here and towards the close of the antic period the region became a centre of culture, sciences and the cradle of coptic religion. Paradoxically, this curious area was until quite lately very poorly investigated and its history during the reign of the first pharaoh's was almost unknown. The rare and investigated in the period before World War II sites (Maadi, Merimde Beni Salame) (Rizkana, Seeher 1987-1990; Eiwanger 1984-1992) or in 50-th (Abu Roash, Heliopolis) (Klasens 1957-1961; Debono, Mortensen 1988) i 60-tych (Tell el-Ruba; Ciałowicz 1999) did not allow to reconstruct the importance of the Nile Delta area in the state formation process. Additionally, the manner of their elaboration and publication was repeatedly very bad and insufficient. Complex excavation that were introduced in the 70s and are continued till today appeared to have a key meaning for research on these problems and allow to have a hope for a change of the situation. The development of investigation technique and engagement of scientists of many fields into archeological work caused that a number of information we get about the Nile Delta is instantly growing. Simultaneously, decrease

of the Nile water level and utilization of drainage equipment on several sites allowed to reach the deepest layers dated to the beginning of the Egyptian state.

The biggest meaning have three sites located in the north-western and north-eastern Delta – Buto (von der Way 1997), Minshat Abu Omar (Kroeper, Wildung 1985) and Tell el-Farkha (Chłodnicki, Ciałowicz 1998-2004). The first of them provided information for the ultimate rejection of the theory on invasion of Naqadian tribes on the Delta and as its effect consolidation of Egyptian state. Simultaneous functioning of local and foreign – Naqadian – people was observed here. Excavations in Buto are still in progress and every campaign gives us new information. The second site proved the presence of Naqadian population and different social status in the Nile Delta already during the IIC-d phase of the Naqada culture and it confirmed a particular role of trade contacts of the Delta inhabitants with Upper Egypt and Palestine. Recent research conducted on the sites in Tell Ibrahim Awad (van den Brink 1992) and Tell es Iswid (Ciałowicz 1999) prove the importance of the area of the north-eastern Delta and the existence of a strong authority centre before the ultimate consolidation of Egypt. Since few years research led by Polish archeologists on the third site – Tell el-Farkha - became the more important. The site is located in the north-eastern Delta, about 120 km from Cairo, 10 km from Simbillawin and about 15 km from the ancient city of Mendes that played a significant role in the history of Tell el-Farkha's decay. It consists of three hills-koms (approximately 4,5 hectares) and their height does not surpass 5 meters over the sea level (Chłodnicki, Fattovich, Salvatori 1996). Discoveries performed there during 8 years gave us a new look into early Egyptian problems in the Nile Delta. Polish archaeologists found a big settlement area located on a crossroad connecting Palestine with Upper Egypt. Three basic parts of the site have been also distinguished: a residential-votive one, a habitable-productive and a cemetery. All of them are still being studied but it is proper to mention five phases of Tell el-Farkha occupation and the most important discoveries.

In phase 1 occupation probably covered second part of the middle stage of Lower Egyptian civilisation (Ciałowicz 2001: 17), which is contemporary with Naqada IIb/IIC-d1. This is evidenced not only by pottery finds but also by the characteristic settlement features of that period – long, complicated wooden houses, divided into several activity areas. However the most important structure from this phase seems to be a brewing complex which has allowed for reconstruction of beer making processes in predynastic times. Very important phase 2 continues to have Lower Egyptian artefacts, but complemented already with Naqadian influences. A specially it may be said of the architecture, with structures typical of the northern cultural sphere appearing right next to mudbrick buildings that are believed to be characteristic of set-

tlers originating from the south. This seems to be a transition stage, confirming the coexistence of these two assemblages at a time more or less contemporary with the end of Naqada II - probably Naqada IId2. It should be treated as a terminal stage of the Lower Egyptian Culture in this region and at the same time the first, in which the earliest settlers from the south may have made their appearance at Tell el-Farkha (Ciałowicz 2001: 17). In phase 3, already fully Naqadian settlement have been found. The most important discovery from this phase should be the large, mud brick construction so called "naqadian residence" related with Upper Egyptian presence and trade route from Upper Egypt to Nile Delta and Palestine. The youngest phases 4 and 5 seems to be characteristic for the period of state formation in Egypt. The small deposit of figurines and vessels made of faience, clay and stone linked up to this phases was discovered just below the surface and it indicate that kind of cultic-votive activity took place here. The cemetery discovered on the other kom contains till now the graves only from the beginning of dynasty I while the earlier stages are not represented here.

The presently unique complex of structures of various character, construction features and measurements gives the first opportunity to study changes in the social complexity, economy and believes of the people from the Delta in the period of unification and the royal authority evolution.

In last years excavations on several sites in the eastern Delta were also started. That makes the north-eastern part of the Delta better known and important for understanding the formation process. Works in Tell el-Ruba (Mendes) led to exploration of early dynastic strata, however, multilayer character of the site creates a great problem and reaching the deep layers is still impossible. Also excavations at Kafr Hassan Dawood gave us new data, however, archaic elaboration methods and chaotic publications make the results difficult to use for other researchers. The most promising, except the work at Tell el-Farkha, are excavation at Kom el-Khilgan (Midant-Reynes at all. 2002). This small cemetery that includes graves of Nagadian and local - Lower Egyptian - population have been discovered by French archaeologists. Perhaps farther research will confirm the theory on a gradual colonization of local people by newcomers from the south. According to the most popular, formerly favored hypothesis Lower Egypt was subjugated and included under the reign of the first pharaohs by the more developed and militarized South (Emery 1961). Now we know that consolidation of Egypt was a slow and mostly peaceful process of economical and social changes leading to unification and working out of common culture for all Egyptian territories. The most important role belongs to economical factor which is for example visible in Tell el-Farkha: long-range trade, production and exchange of goods, also exchange of technical ideas and religious tradition. In

this aspect research in south-west Israel became more important where several sites called by many authors Egyptian colonies from the times of first pharaohs were found. Excavation conducted for example at Tel Lod put question not only about the nature of Egyptian presence in this area but also about trade exchange and Egyptian colonization of Palestine (Braun 2005).

The last important aspect of research on the history of northern Egypt in the period of state formation are verifying works on material from older excavations (led before World War II). They allow to partially recover some material explored using archaic methods. Such work is being performed for e.g. materials from El-Gerzeh (Stevenson 2005) giving us capability of making comparisons and reexamination of the role of this site in Naqadian penetration of the Nile Delta.

Last years brought big changes in our view on the role of Nile Delta in the pre and early dynastic period. It became clear that these area was settled/was inhabited by the people representing different material culture and architectonic tradition. This has been proved by Tell el- Farkha excavations which indicate that the “Lower Egyptian” name for this culture seems to be more suitable. We know that in phase Nagada I some upper Egyptian influences reached Nile Delta. It has been confirmed in a certain way by finds of imported upper Egyptian vessels especially from Maadi and Buto sites. However, the character and meaning of these contacts is still unknown. It seems that gradual economic colonization and adoption of upper Egyptian models led to unification and consolidation of Lower and Upper Egypt under the reign of first pharaohs of the 0 dynasty between 3200-3100 b.c. (Nagada IId/IIIa). If we assume that the difference between Nagada I Ib and Nagada I Id phases (two periods which saw the appearance of Nagada artifacts in the north Egyptian sites, such as Harageh, El-Gerzeh, Sedment etc.) lasted ca. 150 years, we must concede that the 200 kilometers way from Harageh to Minshat Abu Omar was long and hard process. It was not marked by military conflicts but economic and social changes. Nile Delta became a part of the first pharaohs state not as a conquered territory but as its important component. The most important achievements of lower Egyptian people included trade exchange with Palestine, architectural tradition based on construction of large family houses made of wood and clay, and production of pottery and utilitarian objects. It should be stressed that archaeological investigations carried out during last several years (including Polish excavations at Tell el-Farkha site) - may provide us with a new important data which will reexamine old hypothesis as well as implement the new ones.

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