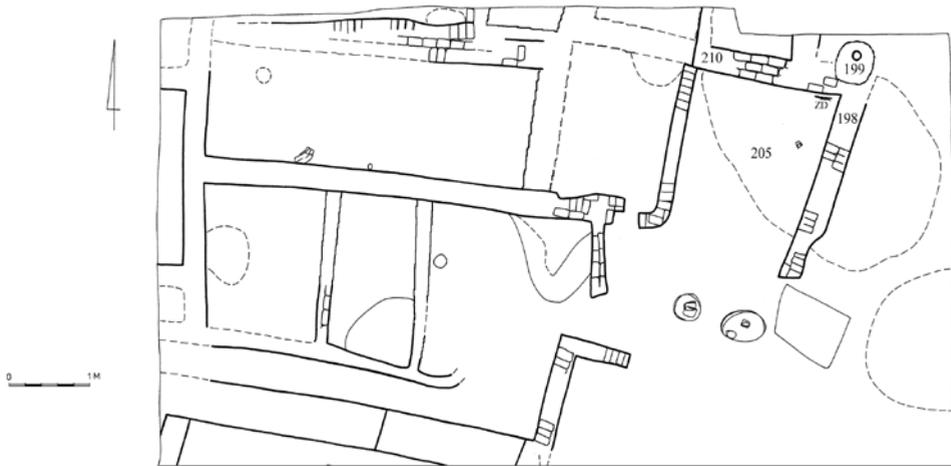

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GOLDEN FIGURES FROM
TELL EL-FARKHA

The Polish excavations in Tell el-Farkha (eastern Nile Delta) have been conducted since 1998¹. The site consists of three Koms situated on the edge of the Ghazala village, raising a few meters above the level of surrounding fields and located on an area of over 4 ha. The oldest settlement layers are connected with the Lower Egyptian Culture while the youngest ones fall to the beginning of the Old Kingdom. The settlement period encompasses roughly one thousand years (approximately 3600 - 2600 B.C.). From the beginning of the excavations a clear division of the site into three zones has been visible, each of them covering a particular Kom: a residential-cultic zone (Western Kom), a rich settlement (Central Kom) and a poor settlement with a cemetery (Eastern Kom)². A few years of research proved that the site was extraordinary and that archaeological constructions and artifacts discovered during subsequent campaigns in majority have no analogies with any of the previously excavated Egyptian sites from the Pre- and Early Dynastic Periods. Information regarding the period of formation of the Egyptian state is particularly important, showing both

¹ The excavations are organised by the Archaeological Museum of Poznań and the Institute of Archaeology of the Jagiellonian University with collaboration from the Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the Warsaw University

² See e.g. M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz, *Tell el-Farkha*. Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean X-XVII, Warsaw; M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz et al., *Polish excavations at Tell el-Farkha (Ghazala) in Nile Delta. Preliminary report 1998-2001*, *Archeologia* LIII, 2002 (2003), pp. 63-118; M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz et al., *Polish Excavations at Tell el-Farkha (Ghazala) in the Nile Delta. Preliminary report 2002-2003*, *Archeologia* LV, 2004, pp. 47-74.



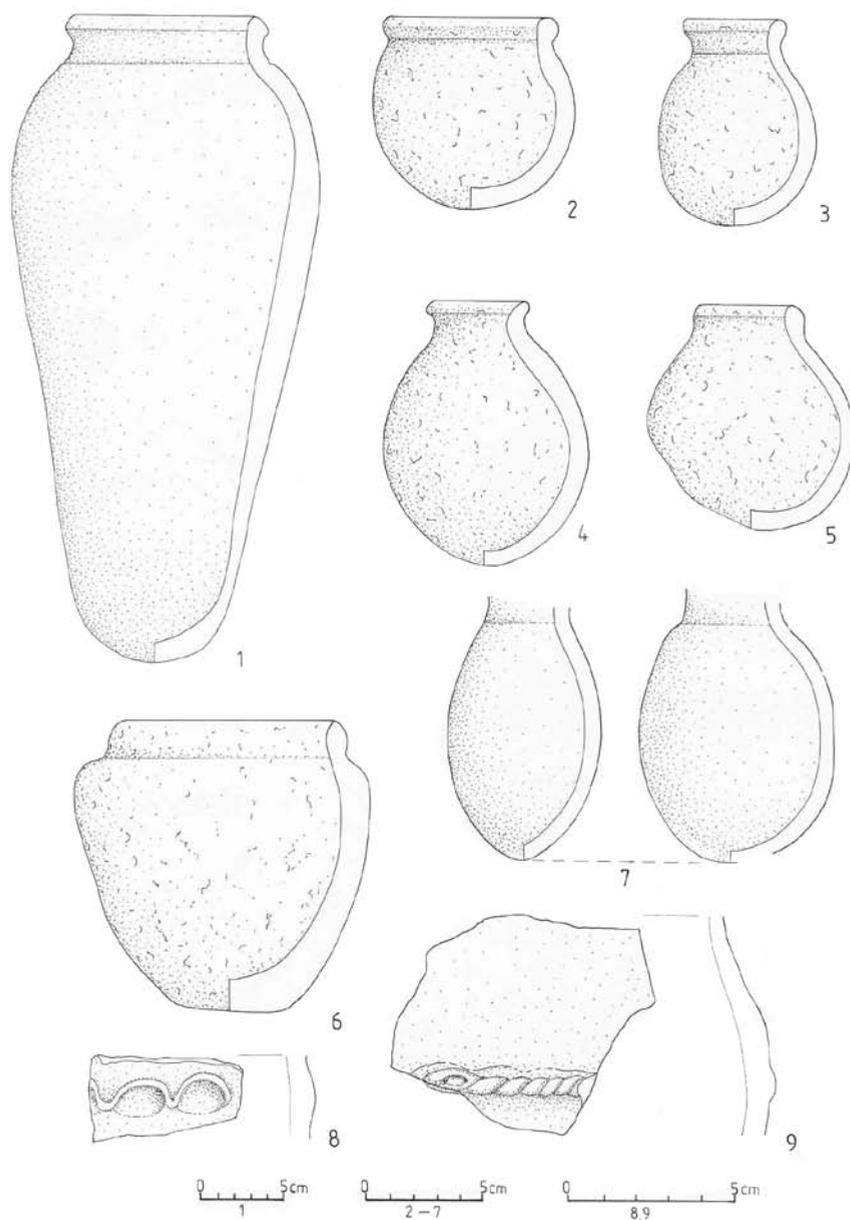
1. Tell el-Farkha. Plan of the building on the Eastern Kom, treasure discovery place (by E. Kuciewicz)

the significance of Tell el-Farkha and at the same time clearly pointing to the fact that our knowledge of that phenomenon, especially in the Delta, is more than modest.

Until now the most important discoveries were made during the 2006 campaign, when a votive deposit was uncovered on the West Kom that consisted of a few dozen figurines made mostly of hippopotamus tusks and depicting humans, animals and models of various objects. This group, unique in terms of its artistic and iconographic qualities, is dated to the beginning of the 1st Dynasty and proves the rank of the Tell el-Farkha settlement during that period³. Even more spectacular discoveries, however, were made in the poor settlement on the Eastern Kom, where remains of two golden figures were excavated in a layer dating to the decline of the Predynastic Period. Along with the figures two large flint knives as well as a necklace of 382 beads made of ostrich egg shells (326) and carnelian (56) were deposited.

The deposit was discovered in a structure marked as no. 505 in the layer 30/31, approximately 3 meters below present ground level (4.50 - 4.40 meters a.s.l.). The structure was formed by three walls - western, northern and eastern,

³ M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz, *Tell el-Farkha 2006*, PAM XVIII (in press); K.M. Ciałowicz, *Excavations of the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha in 2006*, *Recherches Archeologiques de 2004-2006* (in press)

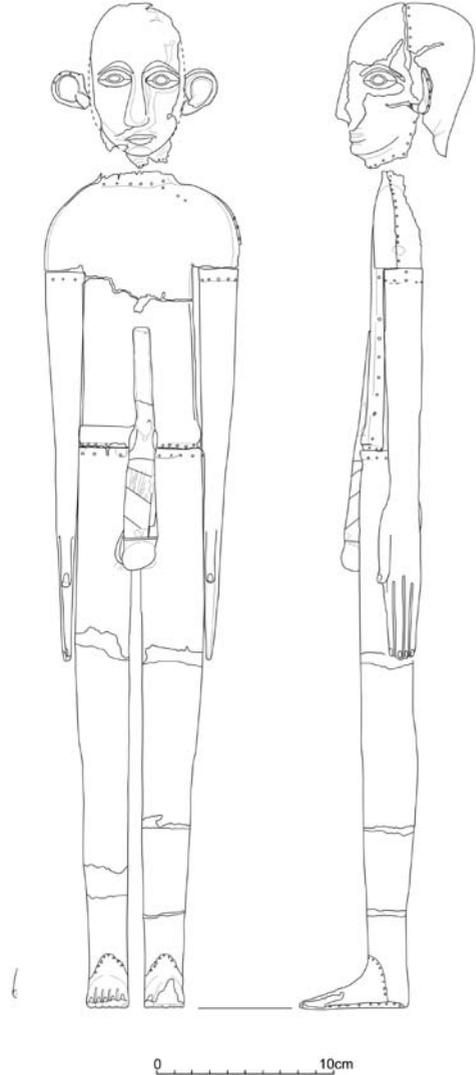


2. Tell el-Farkha. Pottery from the vicinity of the treasure (by M. Rozwadowski)

while it was open to the south. The northern and western walls were more solid than their eastern counterpart. They were 50 cm thick with bricks laid either in three rows parallel to the face of the wall or in two rows, one of them composed of header bricks and the other of stretcher bricks. The wall was wider at



3. Tell el-Farkha. Golden figure of a ruler. Height 57 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo

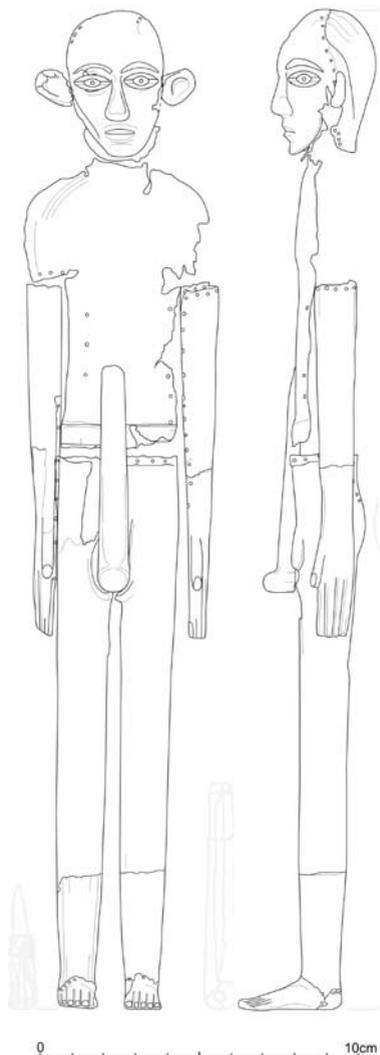


4. Tell el-Farkha. Golden figure of a ruler. Height 57 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo (by Anna Longa)

the bottom part (about 60 cm, two brick lengths). The bricks were not homogeneous, sometimes they were formed of gray silt only and other times they contained an admixture of sand, which turned them yellowish. The western wall was considerably thinner. It was built of one row of header bricks. The bricks here were not homogeneous either. At places the wall has a light-gray color, at other places it was made of green silt. The walls encompass an area that is



5. Tell el-Farkha. Golden figure of the heir of the throne. Height 30 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo



6. Tell el-Farkha. Tell el-Farkha. Golden figure of the heir of the throne. Height 30 cm. Egyptian Museum, Cairo (by A. Longa)

approx. 3 - 3,5 m wide and 3,6 - 4 m long. A hearth with a vessel inside was located in front of the structure. The structure itself constitutes a south-western corner of a larger complex, probably habitable. (fig 1)

It is however hard to directly link the time the structure was used and the hearth functioned with the moment the treasure was hidden. Probably during that time the structure had already been ruined. The layer in which the de-



7. Tell el-Farkha. Face of the heir of the throne.
Eyes of lapis-lazuli

posit was discovered was composed of brick rubble settled in green and yellow silt (probably from bricks), mixed with traces of burning. A considerable number of white marks from mats were also discovered there. A part of the wall in the NE corner was destroyed by a hearth dug into it (object no. 199) a mere 10 cm above the place where the hoard was hidden. The treasure was concealed near that same corner. It was placed alongside the northern wall with all the objects positioned parallel to one another, two of the knives adjacent to the wall and the remains of the figures next to them. The

beads were scattered between the neck and waist of the bigger statue. The statues were crushed and the gold plate that covered them was often ruptured, which probably resulted from the pressure and movement of earth. Their anatomical order was preserved, however, and golden rivets fastened to the gold plates prove that entire statuettes covered with gold plates were hidden rather than just gold ripped from them. Probably all of the objects were originally wrapped into something. Poor archaeological context suggests that the objects in question were hidden in the structure and it is not a place where they had been previously stored or exhibited. Pottery fragments discovered in the vicinity of the deposit was very fragmentary and uncharacteristic. Nevertheless, on the basis of ceramics (fig. 2) encountered directly over the golden statuettes and in adjacent rooms, we may date the time the objects were deposited to the middle of the Naqada IIIB period (phase 4 in Tell el-Farkha)⁴.

⁴ K.M.Ciałowicz, M. Jucha, *Tell el-Farkha 1998-2000. Stratigraphy and Chronology of the*

The statuettes depict standing naked males - one of them measuring approx. 60 cm in height (figs. 3, 4); the other approx. 30 cm (figs. 5, 6). Both consisted of a core made of an unpreserved material (probably wood), no traces of which are distinguishable. The core was later covered with sheets of thin gold plate, which was fastened by golden rivets (140 of which are preserved), each measuring 4 mm in length and 1 mm in diameter. The rivets themselves prove that the abilities of goldsmiths



8. Tell el-Farkha. Palm of the ruler

at that time were spectacular. The Lapis-lazuli eyes of both figures are preserved. Their eyebrows must have been incrustated with some other unpreserved material (fig. 7). The heads of the figures were probably bald and their faces bear no signs of beards. The faces of both figures are lean, with distinctively shaped noses and mouths. Their protruding ears were made of separate pieces of metal. Comparatively short torsos of both figures were shaped together with arms. Their hands fell alongside the body reaching one-half shank length, ending with large palms with clearly marked fingers and nails (fig. 8). Considerably large penis sheaths were placed sticking upwards between their long legs. The penis sheath of the larger figure is decorated with a carved band running around it. The feet of both figures were fitted with plastically modeled toes and toenails (fig. 9). Because both statues are poorly preserved it is hard to establish whether the characters were depicted standing or walking, although the



9. Tell el-Farkha. Foot of the heir of the throne

first possibility seems more plausible. A necklace adorned the first of the figures, however it is hard to define whether it was wrapped a couple of times around its neck or was hanging from its shoulder, which seems to be indicated by the position of the beads at the time they were discovered.

The style of the figures and the way some of the details were accented - large protruding ears, unnaturally large phalluses, meticulously carved nails of hands and feet - fit well into the art of Predynastic Egypt. The first example to confirm this rule is the famous statuette of Mahasna carved in ivory, depicting a naked male with small but visibly protruding ears and a big phallus, discovered in a grave dating to the Amratian Period⁵. Other figures of a similar type and dating are known from el-Amrah and Diospolis Parva⁶.

A number of statuettes depicting males were discovered in a deposit in Hierakonpolis. Unfortunately the majority of them were only preserved partially and additionally the group has not been sufficiently published yet, although

⁵ E.R. Ayrton, W.L.S. Loat, *Predynastic Cemetery at el-Mahasna*, London 1911, pl. XI,1

⁶ D. Randal-MacIver, A.C. Mace, *El Amrah and Abydos*, London 1902; W.M.F. Petrie, *Diospolis Parva*, London 1901



10. Tell el-Farkha. Necklace of beads of carneol and ostrich egg shells

works are in progress⁷. The heads that were preserved depict bald and short haired males, with faces with short or long pointy beards. Their eyes were almond shaped and in most cases were encrusted with other types of materials. Their noses and lips are distinctively modeled and ears are big. The characters are usually naked, wearing only penis sheaths, with hands along the torsos⁸.

Yet another important object of art is a figure, its provenance unfortunately unknown, from the former collection of Mac Gregor, currently in the Ashmolean Museum⁹. The basalt sculpture depicts a standing male wearing a penis sheath only. His head seems to be covered with a soft, tightly adhering cover reaching to his cheeks and chin, but this impression results from a conventional depiction of hair and pointy beard, reaching almost to his waist. His eyes are almond shaped and large, with bulging eyelids. The eyebrows repeat the line of the eyes. The mouth, with the upper lip pushed forward, is relatively narrow, and the unpreserved nose was probably wide. His ears

⁷ H. Whitehouse, *The Hierakonpolis Ivories in Oxford. A progress report*, [in:] R. Friedman, B. Adams, *The Followers of Horus. Studies dedicated to M.A. Hoffman*, Oxford 1992, pp. 77-82

⁸ J.E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I*, London 1900, pl. V-X.

⁹ W.S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old kingdom*, London 1949, p. 7



11. Golden figure. Height approx. 22 cm. Royal Ontario Museum. Copyright and courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum

are large and protruding and his fingernails are carved with great precision.

The most enigmatic of all such objects is a small figure (approx. 22 cm) that has been bought by Ch. T. Currelly from two villagers in the vicinity of Thebes during the years 1907-09¹⁰ The statuette is currently in the collection of the Royal Ontario Museum (910.85.158 [B.987]), where it is exhibited as probably originating from Syria (fig. 11)¹¹. It is made of a partially preserved clay core covered with sheets of gold plate. The figure was not preserved undamaged and on the basis of a photograph it is hard to define to what degree it has been reconstructed. The carefully crafted head was preserved best. It was formed of one piece of gold plate, together with

the ears, which are large indeed, but not protruding. Visible holes form rivets prove that the plate was fixed, at least in some parts, to the core. The almond shaped eyes were encrusted with some other unpreserved material, just like the eyebrows. The nose and lips are distinctively marked and the face is surrounded by a short beard, emphasized by an undercut. Facial hair is marked by engraving. The hands are long and drop along the body, the fingernails of large palms are made with precision, in a way analogical to the figures from

¹⁰ The authors would like to thank Dr Roberta Shaw and Dr Krzysztof Grzymiski for providing access to illustrations and descriptions of the figure in the collection of the Royal Museum of Toronto.

¹¹ Copyright and courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum

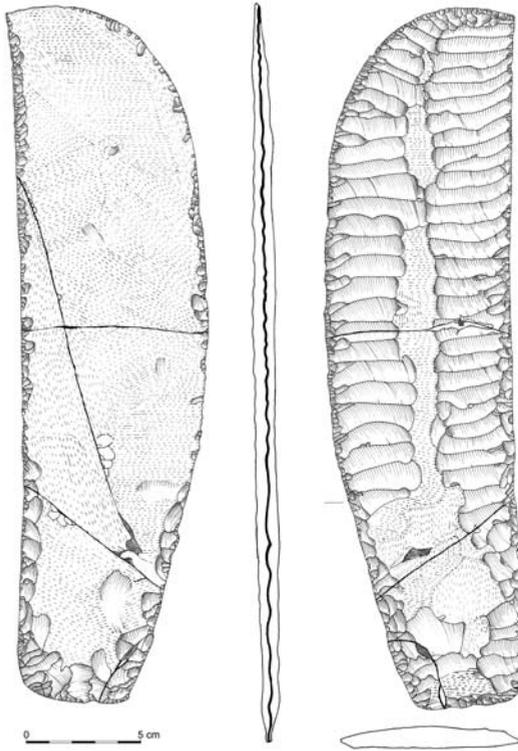
Tell el-Farkha. The character wears a belt suspending a penis sheath, which seems to be modeled in the front of the silhouette. The legs of the character have been visibly repaired. It is hard to judge either whether the length of the legs has been properly reconstructed - they seem visibly too short, or whether both legs were in fact made of one piece of gold plate and joined. The feet, probably original, seem to be joined together. The attribution of the figure to the Sumerian circle or a wider Near-eastern circle - despite it had been bought in Egypt - is also mysterious.

The provenance of both the described figure and the previously mentioned statuette from Oxford is unknown and it is hard to precisely define at what time they were created. However, both have some stylistic features characteristic to the late Predynastic and early Dynastic periods. Most of the figures that are certainly dated to that period depicting men are characterized by penis sheaths, large, almond shaped, often encrusted eyes, large and protruding ears and carefully modeled fingers and toes together with nails. They are usually depicted standing or walking. Some of those features (large ears, encrusted eyes, penis protector) are also characteristic for the plastics of an earlier period. Such a meticulous depiction of fingers as in the case of the above described statues, however, does not appear. Beards as well only became popular during the late Predynastic and early Dynastic Periods. They may be both long and pointy¹² as well as short, surrounding the chin and cheeks, as known from some of the statuettes from Hierakonpolis¹³ and also the recently discovered so called 'king' from Tell el-Farkha¹⁴. In case of the statue from the Royal Ontario Museum, the situation is complicated by the fact that it has been assigned to the Sumerian circle and regarded as an import from Syria or Mesopotamia. It seems, however, that both the fact that it was discovered in Egypt and its stylistic traits that fit into the tradition of late Predynastic and early Dynastic art allow to regard it as a work of an Egyptian artist of that period or at least a figure that was created in Egypt. It is worth to remind the reader about the famous knife from Gebel el-Arak, the creation and connections of which with Egypt are obvious,

¹² J.E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I*, London 1900, pl. VI, 2

¹³ J.E. Quibell, *Hierakonpolis I*, London 1900, pl. VI, 1

¹⁴ K.M. Ciałowicz, *Excavations of the Western Kom at Tell el-Farkha in 2006*, *Recherches Archeologiques de 2004-2006* (in press)



12. Tell el-Farkha. Flint knife of the ripple flake type. Length 30 cm (by J. Sawicka)

yet the origin of its creator is still an object of lively discussions¹⁵.

As mentioned above, the eyes of the figures from tell el-Farkha were made of lapis-lazuli. The material was imported during that period from the area that today is Afghanistan, a region that at that time was on the peripheries of the world. The eyebrows of our figures were also inlaid with a material different than gold. Because it was not preserved, we may only assume that it may have been bitumen or ebony. Both those materials must have also been imported to Egypt - the first one from the Near East, the second one from Nubia. The beads - or at least the materials used to

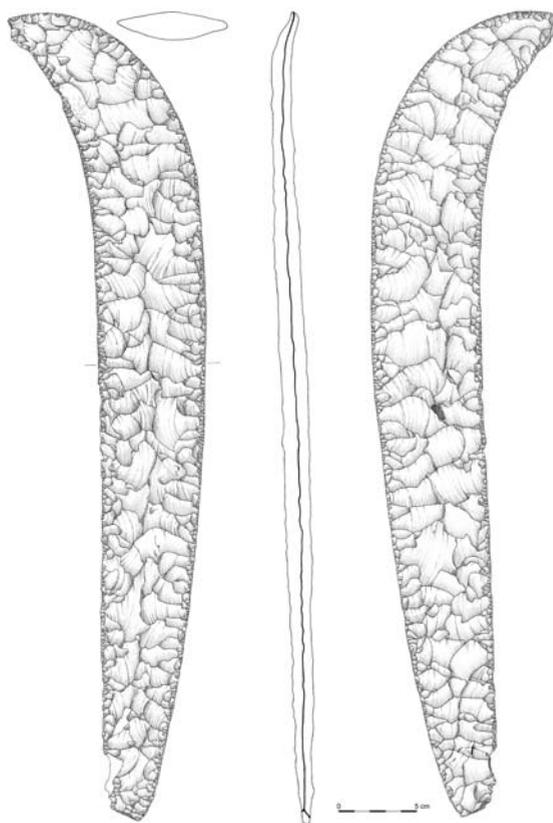
produce the necklace - also originated outside of the Delta area (perhaps the Eastern Desert and Upper Egypt). The technique used to make flint knives is characteristic for the Naqada culture. Ripple flake-knives, such as the smaller knife from Tell el-Farkha (fig. 12), are especially characteristic for the Naqada IID period¹⁶, whereas the execution of the larger knife (fig. 13) may point both to the close of the Gerzean Culture and an early phase of Naqada III.

The materials used to manufacture the entire group were thus imported to the Delta from various directions. It is - by the way - yet another proof of how huge a role did trade exchange play for the ruling elite. Flint knives may point to the fact that the treasure discovered in Tell el-Farkha is in truth older than

¹⁵ K.M. Ciałowicz, *Le manche de couteau de Gebel el-Arak. Le problème de l'interprétation de l'art prédynastique*, Warsaw Egiptological Studies I. Essays in honour of Prof. Dr. Jadwiga Lipińska, Warsaw 1997, pp. 339-352

¹⁶ B. Midant-Reynes, *Contribution à l'étude de la société prédynastique: le cas du couteau "ripple-flake"*, SAK 14, pp.185-224

it was indicated by the archaeological context of the discovery place. It is however doubtless that all the objects that were part of the treasure were created in the Naqada Culture and by artists that originated from that culture. Nevertheless, due to the fact that we lack any analogies, it is hard to define whether it had been created in Upper Egypt, from where it was later transported to the Delta, or, on the contrary, it originated in the Delta and was made from imported materials. It is also hard to unambiguously resolve whether the fact that it was discovered in a poor settlement on the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha is a proof that it had been hidden by its inhabitants because



13. Tell el-Farkha. Large flint knife. Length 51 cm
(by J. Sawicka)

of an impending danger or, quite the opposite, it points to a robbery performed by the inhabitants on some other competing city. The fact that the hoard had not been dug out in the past seems to point to the first possibility. Probably those who hid it had never returned to Tell el-Farkha. Otherwise the treasure - and especially the gold - would have been utilized in some way instead of having to wait 5000 years to be discovered. A complicated stratigraphic situation on the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha, that is subsequent phases of the cemetery and settlement overlapping one another, seem to point to a different than usual process of overtaking the Delta by the Naqadians and a rivalry between various power centers in Upper Egypt¹⁷. Political trouble and military skirmishes for centers situated on trade routes must have taken place between

¹⁷ K.M. Ciałowicz, *The Nature of the Relation between Lower and Upper Egypt in Protodynastic Period. A View from Tell el-Farkha*, (in press)

political centers of power until the time the country was finally unified under the rule of one dynasty. Tell el-Farkha, as indicated by graves and the so called 'mastaba' from the Eastern Kom (situated to the south of the above mentioned poor settlement and the place the treasure was discovered), but above all buildings on the Western Kom, must have been an important and high ranking center in the period between Naqada IIIA and the half of the 1st Dynasty. It is yet difficult to evaluate the role and significance of Tell el-Farkha, mainly due to the lack of sufficient information from other sites. We may assume, however, that it was one of the most important (if not the most important) center in the eastern Delta. If we assume that the Tell el-Farkha hoard was hidden by the inhabitants of the settlement, we may wonder where its original location had been. The most probable location is the Western Kom, where - according to the excavation results - an administrative and later administrative and cultic center was located at least from Naqada IIIA. It is verified not only by the buildings that were discovered there, but also two deposits which clearly served a cultic purpose. It is therefore possible that the golden statuettes, depicting - as it may seem - a Predynastic ruler and his son, the heir of the throne, were kept in some early chapel that stood on that spot. It is the first known depiction of the type that will be most famously represented by the group showing Pepi I and Merenre, created about a thousand years later.

It is harder to unambiguously estimate the period in which the figures from Tell el-Farkha may have been created. Taking into consideration the stylistic traits existing during the Naqada period: emphasis put on the details that have already been mentioned, a lack of beards and the period during which flint knives of the ripple-flake type are encountered, we may assume that the figures were created even earlier than it is pointed to by the archaeological context they were discovered in. The latter only gives us *terminus ante quem*. The most important examples of art flourishing during the Naqada III period, in relief and sculpture alike, are also dated with little precision. The majority of objects of art known today either come from purchases or were discovered in conditions that hindered a precise chronological definition. A stylistic analysis of such items usually only allowed to date them roughly. We may assume, however, that the figurines from Tell-el-Farkha have not been hidden right after they had been made, but rather had been created a few/few dozen years before they have

been concealed on the East Kom. The general development of Egyptian art that was going through its first great period at least from the beginning of Naqada IIC/D (the painting from Hierakonpolis) until the 1st Dynasty and a dominant role of depictions of leaders/rulers that from the beginning was clearly distinguishable allow us to make an assumption that the golden figures from Tell-el Farkha may even have been created during the Naqada IIIA period. However, due to the fact that we have not gathered - at least until now - irrefutable evidence to back the above hypothesis, it is necessary to assume that our statues were created between the beginning of Naqada IIIA and the half of Naqada IIIB, and certainly earlier than the rule of any of the kings of the 0 Dynasty that we know of today.