
Marcin Czarnowicz
Kraków

TELL EL- FARKHA 2006
OVAL- SHAPED POTTERY
FROM GRAVE NO. 9

During the season 2006 at the Tell el-Farkha site, special attention was given, apart from the two previously discovered deposits, to the unprecedented set of vessels, found in one of the graves¹.

In the course of the season 2002, a brick construction forming the superstructure of grave No. 9 was unearthed. As it was lying within the eastern trench profile, exploration had to be postponed until the whole area was excavated. Such opportunity finally occurred in the year 2006 with the site thoroughly examined and finds documented. Anthropological analysis of the human remains found there, followed. J. Dębowska- Ludwin has given a detailed account on this subject in her dissertation.

grave No.9 (Fig. 1) is a pit construction reinforced by a brick enclosure and a superstructure above 1 meter high. Of north-south orientation with a slight deviation to the east, it housed the remains of a male, aged 40-50, lying on his left side with head pointing north. Fortunately not robbed, the funerary gifts consisted of 27 ceramic vessels, 2 cosmetic palettes, 2 stone bowls, a spoon made of bone and a large number of semi-precious gemstone beads. Also a piece of a miniature vessel and ochre traces were found inside. Ceramic inventory was dominated by cylindrical objects, placed directly beside the body, while the remaining bowls and jars lined the chamber's shorter sides. One of the wine-jars bears a serekh with king's Narmer name.

According to J. Dębowska- Ludwin, the aforementioned set can be ascribed to group I, chronologically linked to the end of the 0 Dynasty and the

¹ See also the yearly excavation reports from Tell el-Farkha in PAM (X) and „Archeologia” LIII, Warszawa.



Fig. 1. Grave No. 9. Photo M. Czarnowicz

beginning of Dynasty 1. Grave No. 9 certainly merits attention due to its undisturbed order, curious architectural form and a wide variety of artifacts it housed, some of which lack analogy at the first glance. The objects of our interest are middle-sized jars with flattened body, their cross section resembling an ellipse. The surface bears clear traces of smoothing treatment. While the vessels themselves, or at least their bodies, were hand-made as indicated by the asymmetrical shape, the necks and rims could be formed separately, possibly with the use of a potter's wheel. The average dimensions are as follows: body diameter: 10,3 cm, base diameter: 6x8 cm, height: 20,2 cm. Made of a medium Nile clay, tempered with sand and straw (Fig.2). As the technique and material used does not differ from those generally employed at Tell el-Farkha, one can assume their local origin. Three discovered objects of this kind were given inventory numbers G9-17, G9-18 and G-20.

Detailed analysis brought only a few analogies to the grave No. 9 vessels. Similar artifacts appear on three different sites, two of them in southern Palestine, one in Upper Egypt. First of the aforementioned sites is **Tel Erani** cemetery, where an almost completely preserved object of unusual shape has been discovered – a middle-sized jar resembling the examples known from Tell el-Farkha. Probably 35 cm high, with significantly flattened elliptic body and a similar base, 8x4 cm (Fig. 3)². According to B. Brandl, the vessel is an

² B. Brandl, *Observations on the Early Bronze Age strata of Tel 'Erani*. [in:] P. de Miroschedji, *L'urbanisation de la Palestine à l'âge du Bronze ancien*, BAR International Series 52, Oxford 1989, Fig. 9.

Egyptian product, made of the Nile clay³. As no information is given on the artifact's exact strata position, dating is problematic⁴. Though lacking the archaeological context⁵, the object can be quite safely attributed to the period of king Narmer's reign, this being the main phase of the Egyptian-Palestinian contacts represented at Erani.

The aforementioned jar is larger than those from grave No. 9, nevertheless one can notice a similarity in form, as well as the treatment of the neck and rim. There is a possibility, these parts were formed on a potter's wheel to be joined later with the hand-made body and base in a fashion known from Tell el-Farkha. Undoubtedly intended for storing imported goods, its probable Delta (Tell el-Farkha?) provenance remains hypothetical without detailed petrological analysis.

Two fragments of similar jars with flat base and elliptical cross section of the body, come from **En Besor** (Fig. 3). Their exact size, apart from the base, cannot be established, due to the poor state of preservation. The longer diagonal of the base's ellipse is 6 cm, the shorter one – 2 to 4 cm⁶. The question of provenance has yet to be answered as R. Gophna laconically states the En Besor jars were in part of local origin, with the rest of them produced in Egypt⁷. One can assume though, on the basis of the shape, that they belonged to the group of imports from the Delta region⁸. Nevertheless, style analysis of seal impressions, combined with the serekh uncovered and ceramic analogies,

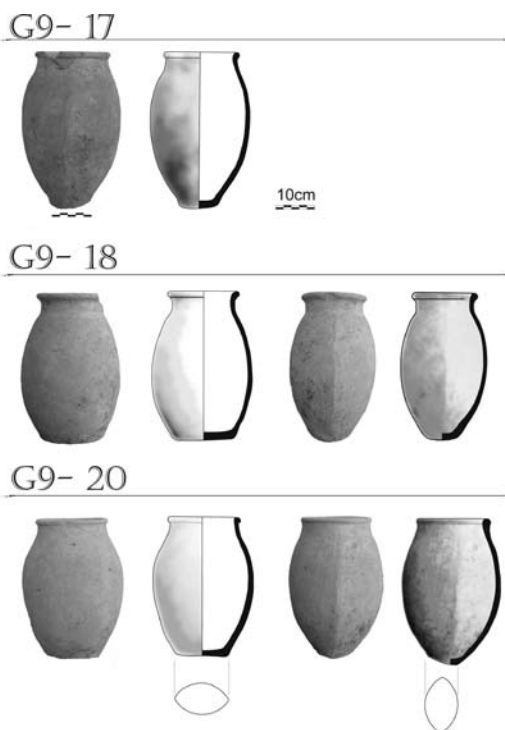


Fig.2. Oval-shaped pottery from grave No.9.
Drawing by M. Czarnowicz

³ B. Brandl, *Observations ...*, p. 357-387.

⁴ B. Andelković, *The Relations Between Early Bronze Age I Canaanites and Upper Egyptians*, Belgrade 1995, p.39.

⁵ B. Brandl, *Observations ...*, XX; B. Andelković, *The Relations ...*, 39.

⁶ R. Gophna, *The Egyptian Pottery of 'En Besor*, Tel Aviv 17, 1990, p.157.

⁷ R. Gophna, *The Egyptian Pottery*, 158.

⁸ R. Gophna later states, that the narrow-rimmed vessels found in stratum III, belonged to the group of imported ceramics, used for storage and transport of luxury consumer or cosmetic goods; p.158.

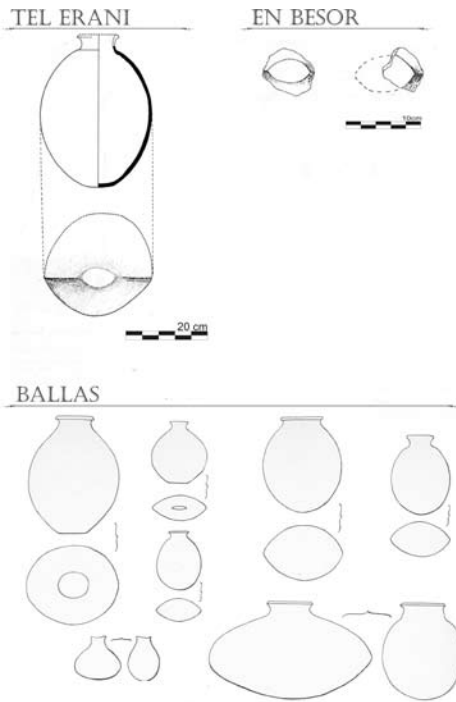


Fig.3. Nagadian oval shaped pottery from Southern Levant and Upper Egypt. Drawing M. Czarnowicz

allowed for a certain dating – phase III of the settlement belongs to the period of late Dynasty 0 and the beginning of Dynasty 1⁹.

Though only a scarce amount of En Besor pottery survived, one can easily see similarities with Tell el-Farkha jars. Both the shape of the base, as well as the angle it forms with the body, make them the closest analogy to jars found in grave No. 9.

At least 7 vessels of oval-shaped, flattened body (Fig.3) come from the **Ballas** cemetery¹⁰. In two examples of this set, body diameter exceeds the height, while three others lack a fully formed base – a feature clearly separating them from Tell el-Farkha ceramics. The closest analogy to the objects of our interest, seem to be the jars from Pl. XXVI (Fig.3)¹¹. Unfortunately, the author of the site's study omitted crucial information on the vessels' exact location, their dating, details

of shape and objects found inside them¹². Nothing can be said about the material used, surface treatment or the color of the ceramics as well. Though the lack of detailed data about the jars makes further analysis hypothetical, their very presence on the Upper Egyptian site is another argument for long distance trade connections linking Tell el-Farkha with regions far away.

Apart from the Ballas pottery of which our knowledge is quite modest, all other examples are, in all probability, of Egyptian origin, made of similar quality clay tempered with sand and straw. Discovery of king Narmer's serekhs allows us to date vessels from both Tell el-Farkha, En Besor and possibly also those of Tel Erani to the same – Nagada IIIC1 phase. In such context, one can safely assume that En Besor ceramics belong to this time period as well. The majority of the oval-shaped pottery, excluding a few Ballas examples, has an

⁹ R. Gophna, *The Egyptian Pottery*, 151.

¹⁰ J. E. Quibell, *Ballas*, London 1896, pl. XXVI.

¹¹ J. E. Quibell, *Ballas...*, pl. XXVI, 30, 31a, 31b, 31c, 31d, 34a, 34b.

¹² J. E. Quibell, *Ballas...*, 4-8; 14-15.

elliptic base. Characteristic of them is also a short neck, that could be formed on a potter's wheel, as well as the externally projecting rim. The question of contents remains unanswered. At this stage of investigation, we can only follow R. Gophna's statement they were used for transporting luxury goods of consumer or cosmetic variety¹³. Providing the vessels came from Tell el-Farkha, it is plausible to assume that e.g. fish meat or pork were placed inside. As the so-called non-consumer fragments outnumber those containing significant amount of meat, R. Abłamowicz (verbal information) considers meat to be produced and exported beyond the site's boundaries.

One shouldn't also dismiss the possibility of other, e.g. vegetable products being stored and transported in similar manner – beer, brewed for generations at Tell el-Farkha, fits this category perfectly.

Though the general technique employed in creating jars from grave No. 9 doesn't differ from the one used for the rest of the local pottery, an appealing theory of oval-shaped vessels being manufactured on the site has yet to be confirmed.

Despite fragmentary information, the analogies cited indicate a broad range of contacts linking Tell el-Farkha residents and those of the Delta Valley or southern Levant. The ceramics unearthed can be dated to the reign of Narmer – a time when the presence of Nagada culture people in western Canaan intensified. There is a general consensus, that a form of settlement had to exist, possibly involved in the trade between Nile Valley and Palestine. Of special importance in this process was the Delta territory, leading the exchange already in the past, during the Lower Egyptian culture period. The rank of

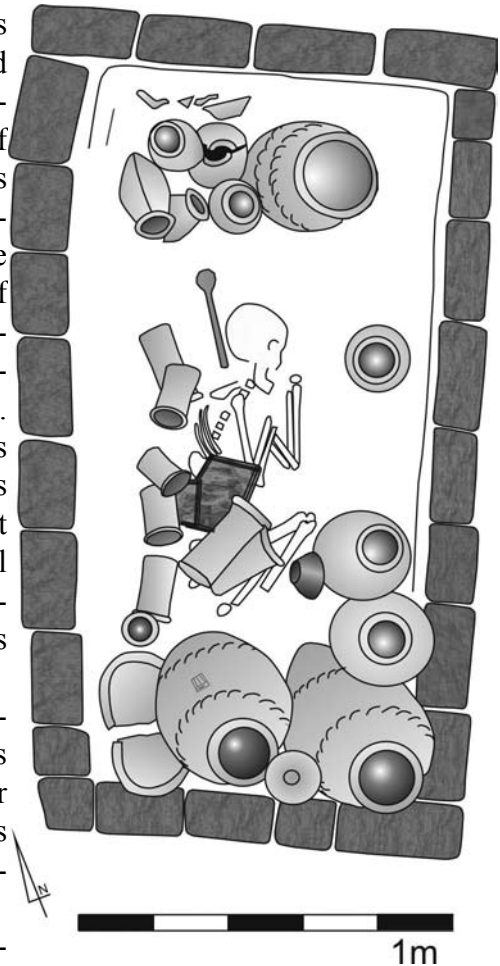


Fig. 4. Grave No. 9.
Drawing by M. Czarnowicz

¹³ R. Gophna, *The Egyptian Pottery. ...*, 157.

settlements lying by the trade routes to Canaan grew, as could be the case of Tell el-Farkha¹⁴. An important discovery of a spacious construction should be mentioned here, with various trade related objects found in its ruins – e.g. so-called counters or seal impressions¹⁵, as well as a vessel of Palestinian origin¹⁶. Other ceramic forms imported from the southern Levant are known from the site, also a miniature stone vessel unearthed at kom W, has distinctly foreign features¹⁷. One should keep in mind, that the period of prosperity ended when the water route at great distance to Tell el-Farkha started being used more commonly. The extent of impoverishment observed at the site is an irrefutable proof of a healthy profit the residents of ancient Ghazala gained from trade. Undoubtedly, Tell el-Farkha played a special role during the formative period of the united Egyptian state. The site, currently at the edge of a modern Arab village – Ghazala, was involved in commercial exchange with Palestinian territory, possibly controlling the distribution of goods in the Delta area¹⁸, as suggested, among other traces, by the vessels from grave No. 9.

Marcin Czarnowicz
marcin.czarnowicz@uj.edu.pl

¹⁴ M. Jucha, *Tell-el Farcha i rozwój kontaktów handlowych Egiptu od V do początku III tys. p.n.e.*, Alma Mater 99, 2008, p.213.

¹⁵ Chłodnicki M., Ciałowicz K. M., *Tell el- Farkha(Ghazala) Season 2002*, Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean, XIV-2002, 2003, p. 102.

¹⁶ Chłodnicki M., Ciałowicz K. M., *Tell el- Farkha...*, p.100 - 103.

¹⁷ Vessels forming the deposit discovered in 2006 are currently being studied. Any work on this subject has yet to be published.

¹⁸ M. Jucha, *Tell el Farcha...*, 213.