

TELL EL-YAHUDIA: NEW INFORMATION FROM UNPUBLISHED EXCAVATIONS

By Aiman Ashmawy Ali

Since the last published excavation about Tell el-Yahudia by Shehata Adam in 1958,¹ many excavations have been carried out by Qalubia Inspectorate for several years in different areas of Tell el-Yahudia. All of these excavations have not yet been published. Thus it is deemed important to restudy and republish the Tell in the light of these excavations, especially those relating to the Second Intermediate Period, which were conducted by Abd El Fatah Ahmed Abd El Fatah in 1982. This excavation yielded new information and results that specifically shed light on the history of the tell or generally on the eastern Delta.

INTRODUCTION

Tell el-Yahudia (ancient Egyptian *Nay-ta-hut*, Greek Leontopolis) is situated about 2 km south east of Shpin el-Kanater and 19 km north of

Heliopolis. In the past it was one of the cities with in the 13th (Heliopolitan) nome of lower Egypt.²

The site is a high tell at the edge of the desert owned by the SCA. The area of the tell measures about 71 Fadan, and is divided into two parts cut by the road of Shpin el-Kanater via Abu-Za^cbel. The first part, the southern one, is called the great tell (El Tell el-Kebir) as it contains the Hyksos camp, the remains of the temple of Ramesses III and the temple of Onias, the second one extends north east of the great tell; it is known as the small tell (El Tell El-Soghier) the most important feature of which is the rock cut tombs from the Graeco-Roman period in its southern part.

THE EXCAVATION SITE (Fig. 1)

The excavation of the 1982 season was carried out in the north-eastern part of the small tell. The

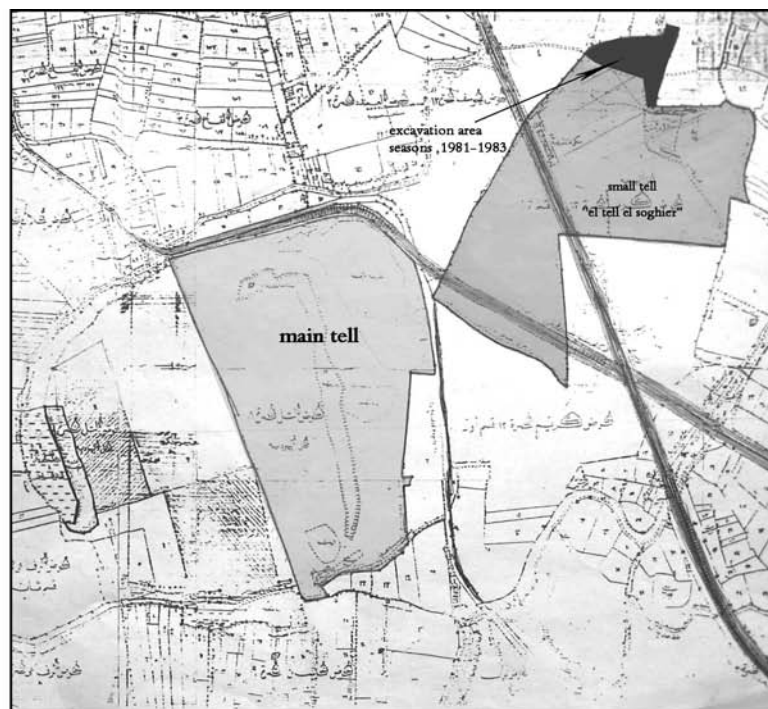


Fig. 1 Map of the site of tell el Yahudia

¹ ADAM, S., Recent discoveries in the eastern delta, *ASAE* 55, 305,308f.

² SHAW, I., and NICHOLSON, P., *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, 308; BAINES, J., and MALEK, J., *Atlas of*

Ancient Egypt, 174; HOLLADAY, J.S., Tell el Yahudiyya, 527f, in: D.B. REDFORD (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*; PETRIE, W.M.F., *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, 1ff; GARDINER, A.H., *Ancient Egyptian Onomastica*, vol. 2, 146f.

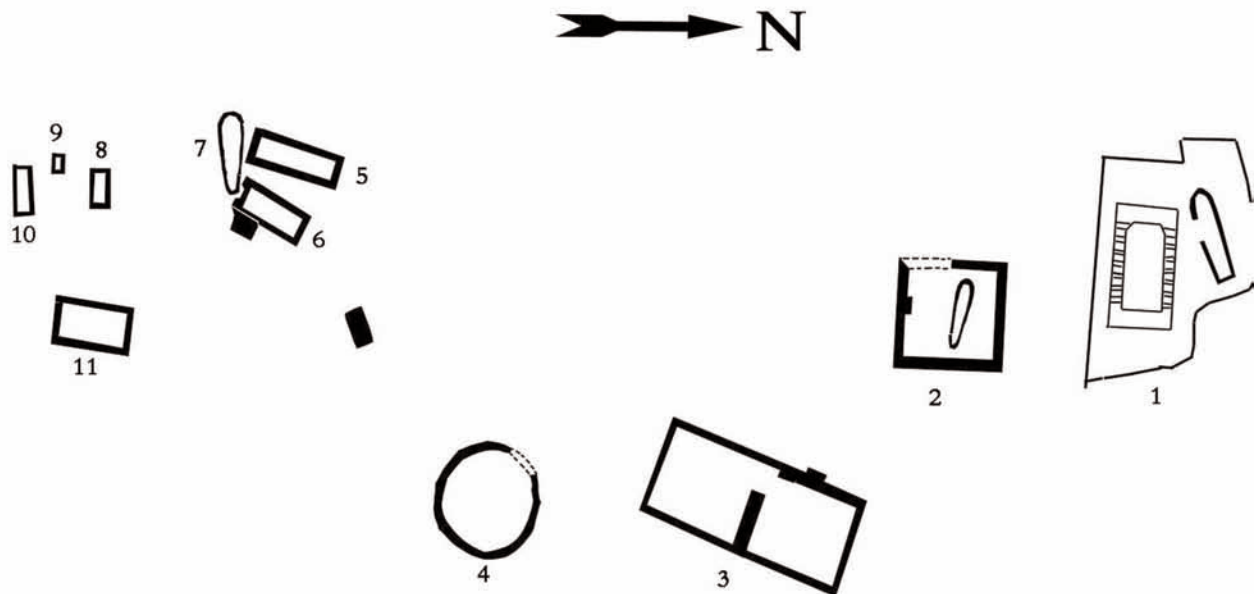


Fig. 2 Sketch plan of the excavation site "season 1982"

area is about 2 m high and surrounded by agriculture land on three sides. The surface is covered by pottery sherds from the Graeco-Roman period and *Halfa* grass overgrowth.

The excavation was conducted by Abd El Fatah Ahmed Abd El Fatah and was a continuation of the excavation started by him in 1981. The period of this excavation was as follows;

The first season lasted for two months from 3/1/1981 till 2/3/1981.

The second season lasted for about three months, from 22/11/1981 till 22/2/1982.

This excavation uncovered a large cemetery which dates back to the Graeco-Roman period, the Late Period, New Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period. It also brought new information about the burial customs and the tomb styles at Tell El -Yahudia.

The tombs discovered during the excavation can be classified as follows:

Pottery coffins

They are about 190 cm long and 35 cm wide and were discovered in the first layer. It is noticeable that those coffins cut into the mud-brick tombs of an earlier period. Some pottery jars were discovered in these tombs whilst two coins were found in the surface debris³ (Figs. 2, 4).

³ ABD EL FATAH AHMED ABD EL FATAH, *Scientific report of the excavation at Tell el-Yahudia markez shbin el Qanater from 22/11/1981-22/2/1982*, 3, in Arabic, unpublished.

Mud-brick square tombs (Fig. 2)

These are square mud-brick tombs, measuring 2,70 m in length, the bricks measuring 47 × 17 × 13 cm. The door is to the east and, in some cases, two tombs were found conjoined.

They were used for more than one person, the body being placed in an elongated position on its back facing east-to-west with the head west, the hands were crossed over the pelvis.

Skeletons of dogs were found in front of the tombs, or on either side, or at the back of the tomb.⁴

Round tombs

Two tombs of this type were discovered, they comprise round silos of mud bricks, are 1,5 m in diameter, and the bricks measure 45 × 17 × 13 cm. Inside them many skeletons which were placed in an irregular position were discovered.

Skeletons of dogs were discovered in front of the tomb.⁵

Rectangular mud-brick tombs (Figs. 2, 3)

The most common type in the cemetery, they are rectangular mud-brick buildings, the bricks measuring 44 × 16 × 8 cm. The vault of one of these tombs was broken in antiquity and the tomb was completely robbed; only the skeleton remained.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ *Loc.cit.*



Fig. 3 General view of the excavation site

It is of a person lying on his back in an elongated position from north to south with the head south and the hands crossed over the pelvis.

Next to the tombs skeletons of dogs were discovered within cremation ashes.

From these tombs came several small objects, including a *wadjet* eye amulet, a Bes amulet and some pottery jars.

Pit tombs

These comprise either a pit lined with mud bricks or an oval pit cut in the ground, which are 2 m long and 40 cm wide, whilst they are 60 cm deep. The mud bricks measure $40 \times 15 \times 8$ cm. The body was placed on its back in an elongated position from east-to-west with the head generally west although, in some cases, the head pointed south. Near these tombs burials of dogs were found with cremation ash at the head or at the back of the tombs, or on either side.

Tombs cut into the ground

Two tombs of this type were found, they are like a tunnel or loculi dug in the ground about the same size of the body. The deceased was pushed

into the opening of this tunnel which was later closed with mud bricks measuring $40 \times 15 \times 8$ cm. The orientation of the body is east-to-west with the head west. Skeletons of dogs were found on the surface near these tombs.⁶

Children's tombs

These are small tombs made of mud brick. The burials measure 72 cm, 62 cm, 60 cm, and 55 cm long. The deceased was buried in a contracted position on his right side, the face to the south. In one of the tombs a scarab was found in the hand of the deceased.

Mud-brick tombs decorated with projecting bricks (Figs. 2, 4a, b)

These are rectangular buildings measuring 2.90 m long, 1, 80 m wide and 90 cm high. Their long sides were decorated with projecting bricks, the bricks measure $40 \times 15 \times 10$ cm. The body was placed on its right side in an elongated position from east-to-west, the length of the skeletons being about 160 cm. Some second intermediate period pottery was found inside those tombs. No animal burials connected with these tombs were discovered.⁷

⁶ *Ibid.* 4.

⁷ *Ibid.* 5



Fig. 4a, b Mud brick tomb from the SIP and pottery coffin from the roman period

Animal burials

Dog burials (Fig. 5)

Besides the dog burials connected to the tombs, many skeletons of dogs were buried in a separate oval pit 70 cm deep.

Donkey burial (Fig. 6)

A complete donkey burial was discovered within this cemetery in a round pit which measures 1.40 m in diameter and 60 cm deep. The body of the

animal pointed south-south west to north-north east.⁸

Small objects

Many small objects were discovered during the excavation, some were registered while the incomplete objects were put to study, the registered

⁸ *Loc.cit.*



Fig. 5 Abd El Fatah Ahmed cleaning a dog's skull next to a human burial



Fig. 6 Donkey burial in a round pit

objects being kept at the great magazine at Tell Basta till the time of writing this paper.⁹ These include pottery objects, coins, flint, faience objects and many faience beads of different shapes and colours now restring on modern thread as necklaces. Those objects are entered in the Qalubia register book, registration numbers 227–299. Amongst the more important pieces are:

Pottery jug (Figs. 7, 8)

Reg.no.: 227

Source: Tell el Yahudia

Material: decorated pottery

Measurements: : h. 36 cm, rim diam. 11.5 cm

Date: Early New Kingdom

Description: big ovoid jug, with one handle, long neck, wide rim and flat base, the body is decorated

⁹ During my work in photographing the small objects at the great magazine at Tell Basta, preparations were taken to move all the monuments discovered from the

Qalubia Governorate to the newly built magazine at Tell el-Yahudia.

with pendent lines dark brown in colour on a white surface, whilst the handle is decorated with horizontal lines of the same colour. It is likeliest to have been used as a ceremonial vase. A similar vase was discovered by Petrie at Meidum in addition to the lower part of a vase from Tell el Yahudia itself. It was dated to the 18 dynasty by Petrie¹⁰ and to the 17th dynasty by Kelly¹¹

Ring stand (Fig. 10)

Reg.no.: 234
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: local pottery
Measurements: h.6 cm, rim diam. 9 cm, Base diam. 11 cm
Date: SIP
Description: complete ring stand

Small Bowl

Reg.no.: 236
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: pottery:
Measurements: h. 7 cm, rim diam. 11.5 cm, base diam. 6.5 cm
Date: Ptolemaic
Description: bowl with incurved rim and ring base, the exterior is treated with an orangey cream slip till the middle of the bowl

Coin (Fig. 13)

Reg.no. 265
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: Bronze
Measurements diam. 3.5 cm
Date: Roman
Description: *obverse*: head of the Emperor facing right; *reverse*: representation of a triumphal arch

Coin (Fig. 14)

Reg.no. 266
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: Bronze
Measurements: diam. 2.5 cm
Date: Ptolemaic
Description: *obverse*: head of Alexander facing right, with elephant's skin; *reverse*: Eagle with wings open to the left

Jug (Fig. 9)

Reg.no. 246
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: import
Measurements: h. 16 cm
Date: SIP
Description: Jug, with flat base, part of the rim is missing

Tell el Yahudia Juglet (Fig. 11)

Reg.no. 238
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: decorated pottery
Measurements: h. 6.5 cm
Date: SIP
Description: biconical juglet, neck and handle are missing. The body is decorated with black horizontal lines. Earlier examples discovered by Petrie at the site.¹² A similar example was discovered at Tell el Dab^ca where it is dated to the 13th dynasty¹³

Ushabti (Fig. 15)

Reg.no. 267
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: faience
Measurements: l. 4.2 cm
Date: Late Period
Description: middle part of ushabti, colour green

Scarab (Fig. 12)

Reg.no. 299
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: faience
Measurements: l. 1.5 cm
Date: SIP
Description: on the back, the head and the eyes are represented. There are two notches on the sides. The legs are not represented
The obverse is decorated with *rdi re* motif

Faience amulet (Fig. 16)

Reg. no. 268
Source: Tell el Yahudia
Material: faience
Measurements: h. 3.5 cm
Date: late period
Description: amulet of god Bes standing on a pedestal, wearing a plumed head dress

¹⁰ PETRIE, W.M.F., *Meidum and Memphis (III)*, 37, pl. 27;
PETRIE, W.M.F., *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, pl. 12 D.

¹¹ KELLEY, A.L., *The Pottery of Ancient Egypt*, part 3, pl. 55.1.

¹² PETRIE, W.M.F., *Hyksos and Israelite Cities*, pl.8.

¹³ BIETAK, M., HEIN, I. *et al.*, *Pharaonen und Fremde Dynastien im Dunkel*, Exhibition Catalogue, 227 cat.no. 270.



Fig. 7 Decorated pottery jug (reg.no. 227)



Fig. 8 Decorated pottery jug (reg.no. 227) details



Fig. 9 Jug (reg.no. 246)



Fig. 10 Ring stand (reg.no. 234)

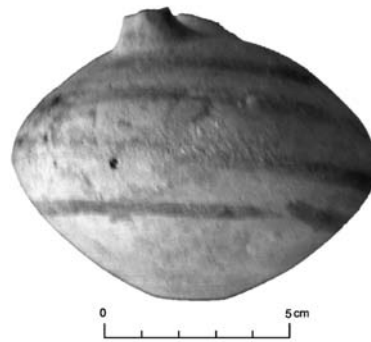


Fig. 11 Decorated Tell el Yahudia juglet (reg.no. 238)

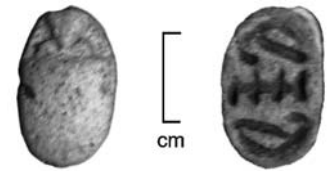


Fig. 12 SIP faience scarab (reg.no. 299)



Fig. 15 Ushabti fragment (reg.no. 267)



Fig. 13 Roman bronze coin (reg.no. 265)



Fig. 14 Ptolomaic bronze coin (reg.no. 266)



Fig. 16 Faience amulet of Bes (reg.no. 268)

COMMENTS

Dating of the cemetery

All the tombs were dated by the excavator to the Graeco-Roman and late period except three tombs which were decorated with projecting bricks which were dated to the SIP, but it is noticed from the small objects that the children's tombs should also be dated to the SIP since a scarab decorated with the *ndi re* motif was discovered in one of them. Burials in silos are also very common in the SIP. Some tombs are dated to the early New Kingdom, this being confirmed by the discovery of a relatively large juglet with line decoration.

Donkey burials

Donkey burials are found in many SIP sites, in Egypt at Tell el-Dabca,¹⁴ Tell el-Maskhuta,¹⁵ Tell el-Ku^c,¹⁶ Tell Basta,¹⁷ Tell Om Brdi¹⁸ (25km west of Ismalia) and Anshas.¹⁹ It is also found at different sites in Palestine²⁰ but it is the first donkey burial discovered at Tell el-Yahudia. The identification of the skeleton has been confirmed after being examined by the specialist Dr.vet. Mohamed Ahmed El Meligy who was invited to the site by the team leader.

As for the donkey burials at Tell Frasha²¹ there has been no confirmation until now. The publication of Yaqoub about the tell did not refer to donkey burials at the site.²² The only reference to donkey burials at Farash came from the excavator's report which mentioned that he had discovered animal bones inside tomb No.11 near the feet of the deceased and which he interpreted as offerings or donkey or horse bones. He added that it had been sent to the lab for further analysis. In tomb 12 he had found also parts of bones around the head of the deceased inside the tomb which he considered as horse bones.²³ It is clear that those bones are part of an offering meal since it had been discovered inside the tomb. It may belong to a cow. One may say that there is no donkey burials discovered at Tell Farasha until now.

Mud-brick tombs decorated with projecting bricks

It is also the first time that mud-brick tombs decorated with projecting bricks were discovered at Tell el Yahudia. This type of tomb is common on the delta in the SIP having been discovered at Tell el-Dabca,²⁴ Tell Farash,²⁵ Tell el-Maskhuta,²⁶ Tell el-Sahaba,²⁷ Tell el-Ku^c²⁸ and Tell Om Brdi.²⁹

¹⁴ BIETAK, M., *Avaris the Capital of the Hyksos*, 25; ID., *Avaris and Pi-Ramesses*, 245f; ID., *Egypt and Canaan During the Middle Bronze Age*, BASOR 281, 34; WILLIAMS, B., *Archaeology and Historical Problems of the Second Intermediate Period*, 66.

¹⁵ REDMOUNT, C.A., *On an Egyptian /Asiatic Frontier: An Archaeological History of the Wadi Tumilat*, 254, fig. 165; HOLLADAY, J.S., *The Eastern Nile Delta During the Hyksos and Pre-Hyksos Periods: Towards a Systemic /Socioeconomic Understanding*, 188; MACDONALD, B., *Excavations at Tell El-Maskhuta*, BA 43, 53f, 56; VAN DEN BRINK, E., *Tombs and Burial Customs at Tell el-Dabca*, 56.

¹⁶ EL SHRIF, N., *Final scientific report of the excavation at Tell El Ku^c near El-Kasasin Markz el Tell El Kebir from 8/9/1990–28/11/1990*, 12, in Arabic, unpublished; ID., *Final scientific report of the excavation at Tell El Ku^c near El-Kasasin Markz el Tell El Kebir from 10/10/1989–13/12/1989*, 3, in Arabic, unpublished; EL-HANGURY, M.S., *The eighth nom of lower Egypt in the second intermediate period, an archaeological study*, 78ff, 173.

¹⁷ Ibrahīm Bakr, M., صفحات مشرفة من تاريخ مصر القديم، المجلس الأعلى للآثار سلسلة المائة كتاب رقم 18، القاهرة 1994، ص 244، 235.

¹⁸ EL-HANGURY, M.S., *The eighth nome of lower Egypt in the second intermediate period, an archaeological study*, 180f.

¹⁹ DESROCHES-NOBLECOURT, CHR., *Présentation des résultats déjà obtenus, au début de l'hiver 1948–1949 sur les différents chantiers de fouilles*, BSFE 1, 1949, 12; WILLIAMS, B., *op.cit.*, 83; VAN DEN BRINK, *op.cit.* p. 47; WAP-

NISH, P., *Middle Bronze Equid Burials at Tell Jemmeh and a Reexamination of a Purportedly "Hyksos" Practice*, 354.

²⁰ STIBING, W., *Hyksos burials in Palestine: A review of the evidence*, JNES 30, 115; WAPNISH, P., *op.cit.*, 337, 349ff; PETRIE, W.M.F., *Ancient Gaza I*, 4, pl. 8–9.

²¹ VAN DEN BRINK, E., *Tombs and Burial Customs at Tell el-Dabca*, 47; BIETAK, *Avaris and Pi-Ramesses*, 246.

²² WAPNISH, P., *op.cit.*, 354

²³ EL-MOSALAMY, M., *Report on the Excavation at Tell Farash 1972*, 3–4.

²⁴ VAN DEN BRINK, E., *Tombs and Burial Customs at Tell el-Dabca*, figs. 18–23; BIETAK, M., *Egypt and Canaan During the Middle Bronze Age*, BASOR 281, 40.

²⁵ EL-MOSALAMY, M., *Report on the Excavation at Tell Farash 1972*, 3.

²⁶ REDMOUNT, C., *On an Egyptian /Asiatic Frontier: An Archaeological History of the Wadi Tumilat*, 903, figs. 158,159; HOLLADAY, J.S., *Cities of the Delta, part III, Tell El-Maskhuta*, 44ff,pl.47, fig. 75.

²⁷ ABD EL HAK RAGAB, M., *scientific report of the excavation at Tell El Sahaba from 10/12/1972–21/12/1972*.

²⁸ EL SHRIF, N., *Final scientific report of the excavation at Tell El Ku^c near El-Kasasin Markz el Tell El Kebir from 8/9/1990–28/11/1990*, 3–4.

²⁹ EL-HANGURY, M.S., *The eighth nom of lower Egypt in the second intermediate period*, 175,176, 179, pls. 34, 38, figs. 46, 49. REDMOUNT, C., *On an Egyptian /Asiatic Frontier: An*

Both Bietak and Van den Brink attribute a Mesopotamian origin to this tomb style since it was found only at SIP sites on the eastern Delta and opined that it had been introduced into the eastern Delta by the harbingers of the MB age culture.³⁰

This tomb style possibly represents a local tradition which appeared during the SIP as the result of the dilapidation of the brick structure and of the lack of professional builders. It is always during such periods that new ideas and styles appear.

In my opinion, the adoption of this style of tomb construction was due to two factors:

1) practical: The builder did not want to use half-bricks during the vault construction. He had to keep using a complete brick all the time to stop the vault collapsing. Since the space at the end of the row would need half a brick only, he had to put this complete brick in a sloping position instead of using a half-brick which might have caused the vault to collapse. He also used them in alternating positions along the vault courses in order to brick up the joints between the courses, thereby giving much more strength.

It is important to mention that modern builders still use only complete bricks during vault construction.

2) decorative: the shape of the tomb may have attracted the people on the Delta when they noticed that it looked like the sarcophagus of the

Middle Kingdom³¹ so, besides its practical use, it was adopted as a decorative element. In one of the tombs at Tell Om Brdi (tomb no. 17) both sides were decorated with two projecting bricks. Such bricks were for decoration only with no practical use since the vault was built in a gabled form of two bricks only.³²

Dog burials

Dog burials were found in connection with most of the tombs at Tell el Yahudia including the SIP tombs and another SIP dog burial was discovered at Tell El Maskhuta.³³ The dog burials at Tell el Yahudia can, in my opinion, be interpreted as a local custom, which would explain the continuity of this tombs custom throughout the whole period. This custom is known in this region since the Pre-Dynastic Period whilst burials of dogs were discovered connected with the tombs at Heliopolis from the Archaic Period.³⁴ The individuals buried in those tombs could be their owners, or their trainers. The location of the 13th nome of Lower Egypt at the edge of the eastern desert reflects the importance of the dogs as hunting animal.

Jug

Despite being common in most SIP sites in Egypt³⁵ and Palestine³⁶ this is the first time a SIP jug was discovered at Tell el Yahudia. Since there another one was discovered by H. Abd El Moamen in 1992.³⁷

Archaeological History of the Wadi Tumilat, 903, figs. 158,159; HOLLADAY, J.S., *Cities of the Delta, part III, Tell El-Maskhuta*, 44ff, pl. 47, fig. 75; ABD EL HAK RAGAB, M., *op.cit.*

³⁰ VAN DEN BRINK, E., *Tombs and Burial Customs at Tell el-Dab'a*, 93; BIETAK, M., *Egypt and Canaan During the Middle Bronze Age*, *BASOR* 281, 42; ID., *Avaris the Capital of the Hyksos*, 45.

³¹ J. SPENCER, *Death in Ancient Egypt*, 173, fig. 69.

³² EL-HANGURY, M.S., *op.cit.*, fig. 49.

³³ REDMOUNT, C., *On an Egyptian /Asiatic Frontier*, 256, 903 figs. 173, 174; MACDONALD, B., *Excavation at Tell El-Maskhuta*, *BA* 43, 54, 57; HOLLIDAY, *Cities of the Delta, part III, Tell El-Maskhuta*, 44f, figs. 72–74; NAVILLE E., *The Store City of Pithom and the Route of the Exodus*, 12.

³⁴ HOULIHAN, P.F., *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, 77; YOUSSEF SAAD, Z., *Royal Excavation at Helwan, (1941–1945)*, 166f, pl. 73; ID., *Royal excavation at Helwan*

(1945–47), 37 pl. 46a; RIZKANA, I., and SEEHER, J., *Maadi IV, The Predynastic Cemeteries of Maadi and Wadi Digla*, 27, 94.

³⁵ SEILER, A., *Hebua I, Second intermediate period and early new kingdom pottery*, *CEE* 5, 27, fig. 6; ABD EL-MAKSOU, M., *Tell Heboua (1981–1991)*, 193–196, figs. 15–16.; BIETAK, *Avaris and Pi-Ramesses*, fig. 7; BIETAK, M. HEIN, I. *et al. Pharaonen und Fremde Dynastien im Dunkel*, 180; EL SHRIF, N., *Final scientific report of the excavation at Tell El Ku' near El-Kasasin Markz el Tell El Kebir from 8/9/1990–28/11/1990*, fig. 15; EBTSAM, H., *Preliminary report on the trenches for the telephone line at Tell Farash from 1/9/2003–8/10/2003*.

³⁶ PETRIE, W.M.F., *Ancient Gaza I*, pl. 47, fig. 26

³⁷ ABD EL-MOAMEN, H., *Report on the excavation carried out in the field of Mohamed Mohamed Rashed at Tell El Yahudia from 15/2/1992–26/2/1992*.

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