

Geo-Political Importance of Tell Ibrahim Awad

Galina A. Belova

Abstract

Tell Ibrahim Awad is located in the Delta in the immediate proximity of Avaris and Per-Ramses, 14 km north of Faqus. Finds made there, during the joint Russian-Dutch excavations since 1995, give us grounds to believe that this centre played an important role in relationship with the Eastern Mediterranean cultures from the Early Dynastic Period through the FIP. Finds made under the foundations of the temple of the latter period indicate that it was also an important religious centre. The author, director of the Russian team, presents the importance of this location with respect to the geo-political boundaries of early Egypt.

I. Introduction

At present the Delta became the subject of close attention by both Archaeologists and Historians because of its monuments connected with the life of this region, where military, economic and cultural contacts with inhabitants of the Eastern Mediterranean region were especially close.

The present province of Sharkiya situated in the northeast of the Delta is the third province of Egypt in population density. From an early period, the easternmost nome of Egypt, *Ibty* (*The Eastern*), was of great political, strategic and economic importance. During the SIP, the capital of the Hyksos Kingdom was founded on its territory. Later, in the New Kingdom Ramses II established his capital there.

The results of the excavations at the archaeological monuments of Tell Ibrahim Awad, located in the immediate proximity to the ancient capitals, were unexpected. They made it possible to suppose that the ancient settlement and sanctuary had existed there since the Late Predynastic Period, and the temple was built at its place since the Early Dynastic Period. The 1993-96 excavations¹ revealed a few deposits of votive objects.

A certain "set" of objects nearly of the same kind as those excavated in Abydos, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine, were detected in Tell Ibrahim Awad. They can be referred to the Early Period and the OK, though some of the objects can be dated back to Predynastic times.

II. Sites Similar in Context?

The find of similar votive objects brought forth the question: is there any connection between such large centres as Abydos, Hierakonpolis, Elephantine and Tell Ibrahim Awad, and if yes why?

Abydos (*3bdw*) was a significant population centre of Naqada I – Naqada II. The cemetery which was discovered near the tombs of Dynasty I kings may contain Predynastic royal graves. It is most likely that there were rulers in Naqada II, centred at Abydos, who controlled the whole country². Abydos was the place where the pharaoh's residence was situated and where the so-called "fortress" was erected³.

Apparently it was the largest administrative centre of the 8th Upper Egyptian nome at least during the OK⁴. At the same time Abydos was a "border city", where trading and military expeditions were formed and started for the oases of the Western desert and Libya along the "Route of the Oasis" (*W3.t Wh3.t*)⁵. The city administration kept the goods there before their distribution. The Egyptian influence was spread over the oases⁶. Later, during the NK, the oases of Dakhla and Kharga were annexed by the 8th Egyptian nome⁷ where Abydos played an important role⁸.

The temple of the local god of the necropolis Khenty-Amentyu (*Hnty-Imnty.w*), who later on became identified with Osiris⁹, was also there. It was an important religious centre in the first dynasties. The MK kings built their cenotaphs there.

Hierakonpolis (*Nhn*) since the times of Naqada II was a significant population centre. The ruins of the "fortress" resembling that of Abydos were preserved¹⁰. Nekhen was the predynastic capital¹¹ and a protodynastic southern limit of Egypt¹². During the NK it was a border between Egypt itself and the South.

² Baines, J. & Málek, J.: *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, Oxford (Equinox) 1992, p. 31.

³ Trigger, B.G., Kemp, B.J., O'Connor, D. and Lloyd, A.B.: *Ancient Egypt: A Social History*, Cambridge 1998, p. 98: fig. 2.5.

⁴ Helck, W.: *Die Altägyptischen Gaue: Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orient*, K.B. N 15, Wiesbaden 1974, p. 91-2.

⁵ *Urk.*, I, 124: 14.

⁶ Giddy, L.: *Egyptian Oases: Bahariya, Dakhla, Farafra and Kharga during Pharaonic Times*, Warminster 1987: p. 202.

⁷ *Urk.*, IV, 963: 14; Helck: *Die Altägyptischen Gaue*, p. 92.

⁸ Adams, B. in *LÄ*, II, col. 1182.

⁹ Hornung, E.: *Les Dieux de l'Égypte: Le Un et le Multiple*, Paris (Editions du Rocher) 1986, p. 62.

¹⁰ Trigger, et al.: *Ancient Egypt. A Social History*, p. 97: fig. 2.4.

¹¹ Adams, *op. cit.*

¹² Helck: *Die Altägyptischen Gaue*, p. 74.

¹ Since 1988 the Netherlands Foundation for Archaeological Research in Egypt (since 1988 E. van den Brink had headed it, and since 1993 its director has been W. van Haarlem) started the excavations of the site. Since 1995 Russian scholars have been taking part in the excavation. The project got the status of a Russian-Dutch expedition thanks to the support of the State Committee of the Russian Federation for Science and Technologies (G.A. Belova became the co-director of the excavation).

Hierakonpolis played the pivotal role in south-north contacts during those times¹³. There are desert routes for trade and mining expeditions to the East and West that were significant during most periods.

The 1985-86 excavations conducted by the Hierakonpolis expedition at the place marked as Locality HK 29 A allowed to conclude that a large ceremonial complex had been here in the midst of Gerzean settlement remains¹⁴. Hierakonpolis was a large religious centre, playing an important part in Egyptian mythology. The votive objects were found in a cache of the temple. Many of them date back to the two Early Dynastic kings.

Elephantine (*3bw*) was inhabited since Naqada II. The site was strategically important because the first cataract formed a natural barrier to the South. As far back as the beginning of the Early Dynastic Period, Elephantine had been a part of the Egyptian state and was considered as the Egyptian Southern border. The ancient fortress was built at the times of the First Dynasty¹⁵. Later Elephantine became the capital of the 1st Upper Egyptian nome.

From here the "Route of Elephantine" (*W3.t 3bw*) led to the South¹⁶.

On the rocks of Aswan, opposite Elephantine, there was the place where the chiefs of foreign countries swore allegiance to the Egyptian pharaoh¹⁷.

The temple dedicated to the goddess Satis was founded at the times of the early First Dynasty at the ancient "holy place", i.e.: there remained a succession since the time of the sanctuary of the Protodynastic Period onwards¹⁸.

III. Tell Ibrahim Awad

Tell Ibrahim Awad is another place where the temple of early Middle Kingdom grew from the sanctuary of the Protodynastic Period. It is very important that the temple had not been excavated before. Further excavations are hampered as the most ancient layers are under the orange-tree grove. But nevertheless, at this point it is possible to draw some important conclusions.

Tell Ibrahim Awad was situated in the most inhabited region of Delta, beginning as early as the Predynastic Period. Tell Ibrahim Awad is located on the bank of the channel which in ancient times connected the Tanisian and

Pelusian branches of the Nile¹⁹. Thus, its location was very advantageous in terms of contacts with "Asian" tribes. It is most likely that the "Route of Hor" (*W3.t Hr*) started from there²⁰ and led to the Eastern Mediterranean region, being the route along which military and trading expeditions were moving. The finds of imported objects confirm the existence of rather brisk contacts with foreigners.

Moreover this very site was located on the north-eastern boundary of Egypt, in the east of the easternmost province of Egypt and very likely played a role as an Egyptian eastern border. During the 1999 excavations it became clear that the temple of Tell Ibrahim Awad was erected on the place of an ancient ceremonial complex which resembled the complex discovered in Locality HK 29 A²¹. Hence, the temple complex of Tell Ibrahim Awad was also significant for the religious life of the region.

Thus, all these previous sites, connected chronologically, were major urbanization centres. Places that were situated at the borders of Egypt and were dealing with trade and military routes to east and west. Three of them, Abydos, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine, were administrative centres with "fortresses" as a nucleus. All sites were large religious centres. In the Protodynastic and Early Dynastic Periods there appeared temples at the places of ancient sanctuaries. The link between these places becomes stronger due to the presence of the same kind of votive objects in the caches of temples, which were carefully kept there.

Probably votive objects were put into the temple caches in Dynasty 0 for the first time. Later all early votive offerings were put together and repeatedly "reburied". They were placed in temple deposits during the IV-V Egyptian Dynasties for the last time.

IV. Comparison of Finds

And now let us compare the objects found in all deposits without any exception in the temples of the above mentioned sites (Abydos, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine), with those at Tell Ibrahim Awad²².

First of all, there are faience decorative tiles of various shapes. No doubt, originally they decorated the facade of the king's palace. Similar tiles can be seen on the facade of Djoser's palace reconstructed and kept in the Cairo Museum. It is generally known that one of the earliest king's names—the name of Horus—was inscribed on the so-called *serekh* (*srh*) on the palace facade, and it symbolized the king's power. The signs of serekhs of the Predynastic kings were inscribed on pottery vessels and

upon their fragments²³. According to some scholars they were marks of possessions.

At the same time, on the date of the manufacture of vessels (Dynasties 0-I = Naqada III), the pharaohs' names were written on them (*Ni-Hr*, *H3.t-Hr*, *Trγ-Hr*, Horus *K3* and Horus *N5r-Mr*). All of them were buried in the Abydos cemetery). On the other hand, the previous fact and the location of the vessels (from Abydos to Lower Egypt)²⁴ allow us to conclude that they were the first attempts of kings to confirm their power over Egypt by means of the magic of letters. The vessels with serekhs can be placed in the time of intense struggle for the unification of Egypt. Later, the king's power over the unified state was reflected in the serekh sign and objects of this shape.

The mace heads discovered in abundance at deposits of Tell Ibrahim Awad symbolized the pharaoh's might that was very important for border cities. Some of the above mentioned vessels bear the pictures of *maces* (*hd*) near the facade of the king's palace²⁵.

The way of writing of hieroglyph A23 (*EG*, Sign List: p. 444) representing the king with a mace in one hand, the symbol of military might is indicative in this respect. The New Kingdom tale *The Capture of Joppa* demonstrates that it was a great honor to have a look at the king's mace; it is the mace that helps the pharaoh to finish off the enemy. The encroachment on a mace was equivalent to the encroachment on the military power. The tale says that an Asiatic, the pharaoh's guest and messenger of an alien country who showed particular interest for the mace was killed by it²⁶.

In one of the Tell Ibrahim Awad deposits there was also revealed a mineral, resembling in shape a few phalli brought together. In all probability it symbolized the pharaoh's physical power. Two stones of similar shape were found in Elephantine²⁷. The find of symbols of this kind in nature was probably very valuable: the pharaoh's physical power was also natural and imperishable. We may assume that maybe such a kind of objects revealed during the disorderly excavations in Abydos and Hierakonpolis were thrown away, or considered not referring to the historical context.

It looks as if these objects were the first manifestation of the king's cult and as if even in the Early Dynastic Period one of the temple chapels should be devoted to the pharaoh

as a protector of the Egyptian state border. It is known that the Egyptians considered the cult of the king not only as a mortuary cult. Especially in early temples it was focused on performing ritual duties and on festivals in honour of a ruling king. Logically then, the cult of the king should be performed in all temples of the sites we are interested in. Unfortunately one cannot expect any written sources at that time, which could possibly confirm this point. Nevertheless, in one tomb at Tell Ibrahim Awad connected with the temple, there are traces of royal presence: fragments of vessels bearing the name of Pharaoh Narmer, and serekh signs referring to Pharaoh's Aha-Den reign (Area B, sp. 210/160). Faience, stone and ivory figurines of Horus, protector of king's power, were also found in the deposits.

Perhaps some figurines of children represented Horus—the Child as a future protector of king's power. In the NK, Tell Ibrahim Awad was included in the 18th nome²⁸ which was called *Child*, and beginning from Dynasty XXV onwards the *King's Child*²⁹. In all probability one of the Tell Ibrahim Awad temple chapels was intended for the statue of the pharaoh.

The king's presence in the Hierakonpolis temple is confirmed by several monuments of Khasekhemwy, beginning from Dynasty II³⁰.

The king's administration of *pr-nisw.t* was present in Elephantine beginning from the second half of the 3rd Dynasty. Of interest is a specific find: three dockets inscribed on jars dating to years of the "Follower of Horus" and the "Appearance of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt" there³¹.

It is likely that certain objects from the temple deposits of border cities were associated with the king's cult, namely with the confirmation of the pharaoh's power and strength. After some magic rituals the consecrated objects were used as a substitute of the pharaoh's personal presence. They had to scare away hostile tribes from the borders of the Egyptian State and to promote trading and military expeditions. A similar practice is well attested in Egypt by the "excretion sherds". Fragments of alabaster and pottery as well as stylized figurines of "enemies", with some inscriptions calling to the death of enemies, were buried in the places of the possible approach of enemies to the borders of Egypt, near fortresses, & c. This practice had been known since the Early Kingdom. With this in view, it should be noted that the Hierakonpolis expedition (1979-80) found in tomb 11 an anthropomorphic clay figurine with broken legs. The hands were tied behind the back, in the classical manner pertaining to captives³².

²⁸ van den Brink, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

²⁹ Helck, *Die Altägyptischen Gawe*, p. 195.

³⁰ Quibell, J.E. & Green, F.W.: *Hierakonpolis*, II, London 1902; Quibell J.E. *Hierakonpolis*, I, London 1900.

³¹ Seidlmayer, *Town and State in the Early Old Kingdom*, p. 121.

³² Adams, B.: "Elite Graves at Hierakonpolis", *Aspects of Early Egypt*, p. 13. For some excretion practices in fortresses, see König, Y.: "Les textes d'envoûtement, de Mirgissa", *Revue d'Égypte*, 41, 1990, pp. 101-

²³ Helck, W.: "Thinitische Topmarken", *ÄgAbh*, 50, Wiesbaden 1990: Tf. 272f, 154c, & c.; van den Brink, E.C.M.: "The Incised Serekh—Signs of Dynasties 0-1", *The Nile Delta in Transition: 4th–3rd Millenium BC* (Proceedings of the Seminar held in Cairo, 21-24 October 1990 at the Netherlands Institute of Archaeology and Arabic Studies), Tell Aviv 1990; Adams, B. & Porat, N.: "Imported Pottery with Potmarks from Abydos", *Aspects of Early Egypt*, p. 33.

²⁴ van den Brink, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

²⁵ van den Brink, *op. cit.*, pl. 26f; fig. 2.7; 2.11, 12, 13; 3.18.

²⁶ Gardiner, A.H.: "The Taking of Joppa", *Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca*, I (Late Egyptian Stories), Brussels 1932, pp. 82-5.

²⁷ Dreyer, G.: *Elephantine VIII: Der Tempel der Satet*, Mainz am Rhein (Archaeologische Veröffentlichungen, 39) 1986, Taf. 8e.

¹³ Smith, H.S.: "The Development of the A-Group "Culture" in Nothern Lower Nubia", *Egypt and Africa: Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (Davies, W.V., ed.), London 1991, p. 108.

¹⁴ Friedman, R.: "The Ceremonial Centre at Hierakonpolis Locality HK 29 A", *Aspects of Early Egypt* (Spencer, J., ed.), London 1996, p. 16.

¹⁵ Ziermann, M.: *Elephantine 16: Befestigungsanlagen und Stadtentwicklung in der Frühzeit und in frühen Alten Reich*, Mainz 1993.

¹⁶ *Urk.*, I, 125: 1.

¹⁷ *Urk.*, I, 110.

¹⁸ Seidlmayer, S.J.: "Town and State in the Early Old Kingdom: A View from Elephantine", *Aspects of Early Egypt*, p. 112.

So the goal of the first Egyptian pharaohs was to determine the State's borders, to lay claim for frontier territories, and then again to decide tasks of the economic, political and religious reorganization through the whole country.

Predynastic and protodynastic monuments are restricted to some places connected with the very presence of a king: Abydos, Hierakonpolis, Elephantine, Tell Ibrahim Awad. In principle, one can expect to find analogous deposits in one of the temples of *The Western nome* (the 3rd Lower Egyptian province). It is probable that Buto was important since the early Period. The fact that two guardian deities of the Egyptian king, Nekhbet and Wadjyt, belong to Hierakonpolis as well to Buto confirms this proposal.

It seems very likely that the temples must have been erected as one single project, as a result of the unification of Egypt. The vicinity of Tell Ibrahim Awad, near the capitals of later historic periods evidences indirectly its great significance. The character of the monument itself, the find of deposits of the same kind, together with votive objects, as those found in Abydos, Hierakonpolis and Elephantine, offer firm grounds to assume that it was not only the city from where trading and military expeditions to the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean region started, but an important religious centre consecrating this type of enterprises as well.

V. Conclusions

Tell Ibrahim Awad is located in the Delta in the immediate proximity of Avaris and Per-Ramses, 14 km north of Faqus. Finds made there, during the joint Russian-Dutch project of excavations since 1995, give us grounds to believe that this centre played an important role in relationship with the Eastern Mediterranean cultures from the Early Dynastic Period through the FIP. Finds made under the foundations of the temple of the latter period indicate that it was an important religious centre as well. To sum up, the monument under study is of great importance in terms of religion and ancient politics. Perhaps the given conjectures and ideas will be confirmed in due course of further excavations, thus clarifying the nebulous history of the rise of a unified kingdom not only in Egypt, but also elsewhere.

25; cf. also Posener, G.: *Cinq figurines d'envoûtement*, Le Caire (IFAO, *BiEtud*, 101) 1987.