

The Cretans (*Kfti.w*) in Egypt

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Abstract

In 2001 the Center for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CES/RAS) carried out archaeological exploration at the site of Kom Tuman (ancient Memphis). During the season there were found several terracotta figurines, which were presumably produced in Crete. Classical authors mention a small settlement of the Cretans, which already existed in Memphis during the reign of Pharaoh Apries (7th century BCE). The Egyptian records evidence the contacts between Egypt and Crete since ancient times. However, the localization of toponyms reordered in Egyptian inscriptions is rather problematic. In this paper the author presents a new plausible interpretation and identification of toponyms, which were generally considered as corresponding to the island of Crete.

KEY WORDS: Egypt, Memphis, Kom Tuman, Crete, Cretans, Cretan Toponyms, Terracotta Figurines, Cultural Interactions between Cretans and Egyptians.

I. Introduction

The contacts between the Egyptians and the Aegean are known from Dynasty V (c. 2465-2323 BCE), as is evidenced by the finds of several objects and the appearance of certain motives in art as well¹. Egyptian painters of the New Kingdom represented the inhabitants of Aegean islands as persons wearing long hair with a small lock above the front and an apron fixed with an unusual phallus pocket².

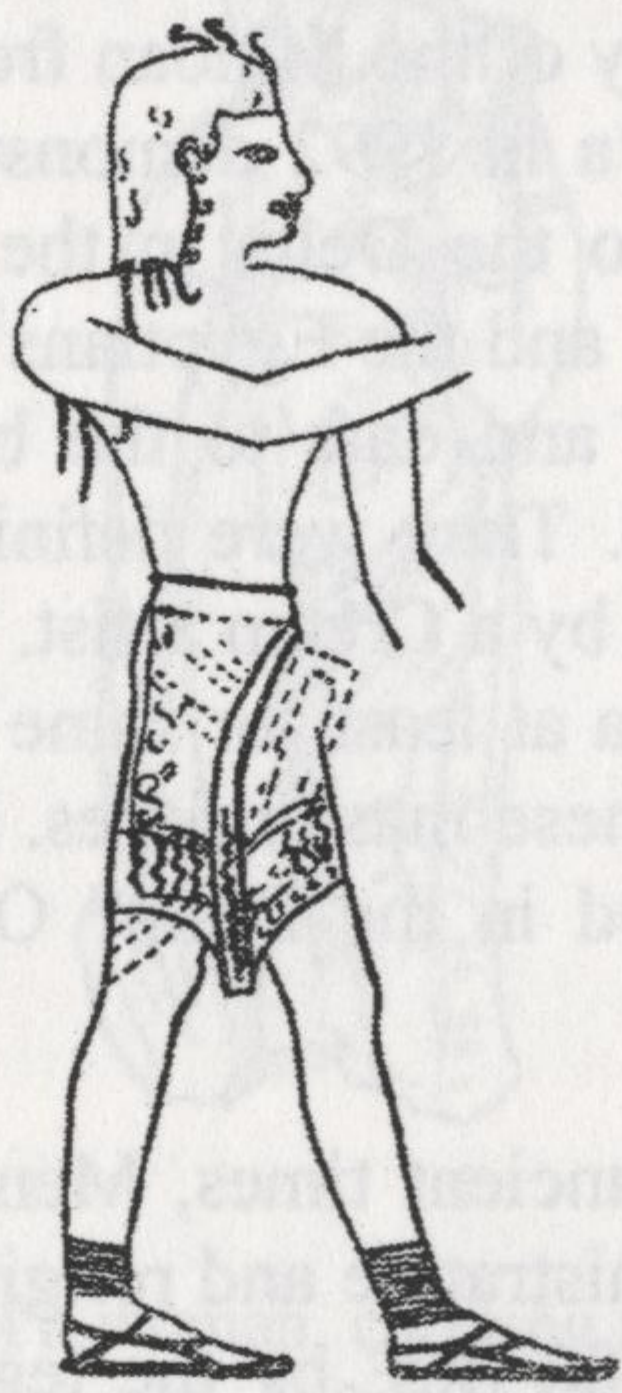
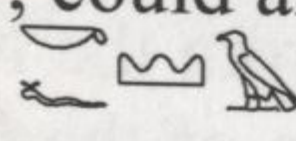


FIGURE 1. *Kftyw* represented in the tomb of Rekh-mi-Rē'.

Most likely, the common expression 'the sea island', which is in particular recorded in the Middle Kingdom *Tale of Sinuhe*,³ could also refer to Crete. The first text evident of the name  *Kftyw* that is usually identified with Crete is found in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer*⁴, but its dating—the second half of Dynasty XII—is not certain⁵.

¹ Helck, W.: art. 'Ägäis und Ägypten', *LÄ*, I, 69-70.

² Helck: *op. cit.*, 71.

³ Gardiner, A.H.: *Die Erzählung des Sinuhe und die Hirtengeschichte*, Leipzig 1909.

⁴ Gardiner, A.H.: *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*, Leipzig 1909, 6-10.

⁵ Seters, J. van: 'A Date for the *Admonitions* in the Second Intermediate Period', *JEA*, 50, 1964, 13-23.

II. The Cretans in Egypt

One century has now elapsed since the identification of the *Kftyw* with the Cretans⁶. E. Brugsch was very likely the first who proposed this identification, which was later supported by Hall and Vercoutter⁷. The latter made a fundamental research on this problem: *L'Égypte et le monde égéen préhellénique*⁸. Vercoutter's point of view nowadays is generally accepted. The evidence is based on the reliefs of the vizier Rekh-mi-Rē', who flourished during the reign of Tuthmosis III (1479-1425 BCE). On the roof of the Rekh-mi-Rē' tomb (TT 100) there is a representation of a procession, some of the persons of which show Aegean features and physiognomies. Moreover their clothes and offerings permit us to suppose that they were Cretans. The accompanying inscription says⁹:

Ti.t m ḥtpw in wr.w n.w Kftyw, iw.w ḥryw-ib n.w W3d-Wr, m ks.w, m w3ḥ tp n b3.w Ḥm=f, Nsw-Bity Mn-ḥpr-R' [...].

Which is translated as follows:

Coming in peace by the chieftains of Kftyw, and of the islands in the midst belonging to the Sea, (humbly) bowing down (and) bending the head, because of the might of His Majesty, the King of Upper and Lower Egypt Menkheper-Rē' (Tuthmosis III) [...].

According to J. Vercoutter's opinion, the texts of the tomb of Rekh-mi-Rē' give us incontrovertible proof that the term '*Kftyw*' should be linked with the islands of the sea, and this sea must be the Aegean.

A more striking argument to identify Keftiou with Crete is the base of the statue, found in the temple of Amenophis III (c. 1350 BCE) in Kom 'el-Heitan in Luxor¹⁰. On its front side there is a representation of two captives lying back to back and supporting the cartouche of Amenophis III

The royal cartouche is flanked by the topographical names, in such a way the Egyptians usually expressed their conceptions of symmetry and duality. Indeed we can see two rows of the topographical cartouches with the busts of captives on their tops. The left list is as follows: Amnisos, Phaistos, Kydōnia, Mycenae, Messēnē(?), Nauplia, Kythēra, Ilion(?), Knōssos, Amnisos (again), Lyktos. Some of these identifications are uncertain (only Kydōnia is localized definitely), but the geographical orientation of the lands is quite clear. On the right there are only two toponyms: *Kftyw* and *Tinawi*.

⁶ Panagiōtopoulos, D.: 'Keftiu in Context: Theban Tombs—Paintings as a Historical Source', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 20, 2001, 264.

⁷ Vandersleyen, C.: 'Keftiou=Crète? Objections préliminaires', *GM*, 188, 2002, 110-11.

⁸ Vercoutter, J.: *L'Égypte et le monde égéen préhellénique: Étude critique des sources égyptiennes (du début de la XVIII^e à la fin de la XIX^e Dynastie)*, (*BIE*, 22), Le Caire (IFAO) 1956.

⁹ Davies, N. de G.: *The Tomb of Rekh-mi-Rē' at Thebes*, II, New York 1943, Tab.16-23; cf. also *Urk.*, IV, 1098-99.

¹⁰ Edel, E.: 'Die Ortsnamenlisten aus dem Totentempel Amenophis III', Bonn (*Bonner Biblische Beiträge*, 25) 1966.



FIGURE 2. Kom Tuman: a general view of the site.

For many Egyptologists the order of the toponyms demonstrated that *Kfty.w* coincides with Crete: the Aegean lands are limited by *Kfty.w*.

Though, recently Vandersleyen studied thoroughly the texts mentioning the expression $\text{w}^3\text{d} \text{wr}$ ('the Great Green', that was usually interpreted as 'the sea'), and has discovered that phrase 'the islands of the sea' can be also (should it be?) translated as 'the islands of the Delta'¹¹. This interpretation is rather well in agreement with the color of the Delta during annual Nile flood. A large number of branches generated from the Nile give life to numerous islets covered by bright green plants. According to Vandersleyen, the limitation of the right list of the above-mentioned base by two toponyms (*Kfty.w* and *Tinawi*) sums up preceding Asiatic names and has no connection with Crete¹².

So, we face two contradictions: (i) *W3d-Wr* is 'the sea' \neq *W3d-Wr* is the Delta; (ii) *Kfty.w* were the inhabitants of Crete \neq *Kfty.w* populated Asia. Only one thing we know for sure: the *Tinawi* were in very close contacts with *Kfty.w*: under the 42nd year of Annals of Tuthmosis III one can read that the *Tinayou* offered to the court of the Egyptian king 'a vase of silver made in *Keftiu*'¹³.

There are many known lists of foreign toponyms from Egyptian sources of the New Kingdom. Their identification always faces the problem of the order of toponyms and ethnonyms in these lists. There are some names, which look like superfluous, i.e.: they have no place to be localized or identi-

fied with. We have a habit to explain their appearance 'by a mistake of Egyptian writer', but in reality the Egyptians were very precise in their word-lists.

The striking discovery of the Minoan frescoes by an Austrian team in Tell 'el-Dab'a in 1992 demonstrated that we should pay more attention to the Delta in the field of relationship between the Aegeans and the Egyptians¹⁴. These frescoes are of pure Cretan style and date to the beginning of Dynasty XVIII (c. 1530 BCE). They were definitely made not by an Egyptian painter, but by a Cretan artist. This means that Cretans lived in the Delta at least for some time before, in order to be able to create these masterpieces. Perhaps some Cretan colonies were situated in the Delta? One of these colonies might be Memphis¹⁵.

Beginning from the ancient times, Memphis was one of the most important administrative and religious centers of Egypt. It was founded in 3000 BCE by the legendary King Menes, who is traditionally considered to be the first king of Egypt. The city was called *The White Wall* (*Inb-hd*), during Dynasty XVIII it got the name *Men-nefer* (*Mn-nfr*), the Hellenic form of which (*Memphis*) is assigned to the place until nowadays.

King Menes built a dam that protected the city from the Nile floods. The successor of Menes erected here one of the first Egyptian palaces. Bounding the Upper and Lower Egypt this city was never losing its political, economic and religious importance. Foreigners often associated Memphis with the whole Egypt, and the name of the main Memphite temple *Hw.t-k3-Pth* was transformed by the Hellenes to *Aigyptos*, that

became the name of the entire country. Memphis was always one of the main residences of Egyptian rulers; beginning with 197 BCE it became the place of coronation of the Macedonian/Ptolamaic kings.

Today Memphis is an almost completely destroyed city, the ancient ruins of which are disappearing under the pressure of growing villages and agricultural activity. Unlike the necropolis of Saqqara the biggest part of Memphis is not well investigated. The important quarters and constructions were only localized; at the same time most of the buildings that are known by numerous sources are not found yet.

According to Strabon¹⁶, Memphis During the Helleno-Roman times was considered in the second position after Alexandria. In the southern part of the city there were many temples; in the northern part, the royal palaces were erected. His description is very similar to the modern landscape of the site. The palace structures of Helleno-Roman time were situated close to the palace of Apries, and they were not studied by Archaeologists yet.

According to other Classical sources, the palaces were surrounded by living quarters, including settlements of foreigners (Hellenes, Persians, Syrians, Phoenicians, & c.), and they had their own shrines and civil infrastructure.

An unexcavated hill about 20 m high in Kom Tuman to the north of Memphis drew the attention of the hunters for treasures (or maybe they were persons who have had a high interest of history from the early beginning).



FIGURE 3. Figurine of a woman, carrying a jug in her right hand and a monkey on her left shoulder (terracotta).

In 1900–1901 A. Daninos Pasha¹⁷ made a test cut in the northern part of a ruin field at a site which cannot be exactly determined today. He revealed a mud-brick building and a pit with a cache of bronze objects dated to Dynasties XXIII–XXVI.

In 1902 G. Daressy¹⁸ reported that the objects must have come from Thebes, as only Theban deities are represented. In eight years G. Maspero¹⁹ (1921) stated that Daninos' fragments were parts of decoration of several palanquins belong-

¹⁶ Strabon: *XVIII*, § 32.

¹⁷ Daninos Pasha, A.: 'Note sur le fouilles de Metrahneh', *ASAE*, 5, 1904, 142–43.

¹⁸ Daressy, G.M.: 'Une trouvaille de bronzes à Mit Rahneh', *ASAE*, 3, 1902, 139–50.

¹⁹ Maspero, G.: *Art in Egypt*, London 1921, 288.

ing to one of the last kings of Dynasty XXVI. It is possible that they were buried to save them from the Persians.

Memphis could also be the very place of the first Egyptian capital, the exact position of which was never defined. Some finds from the surface, like the cylindrical seal of Tuthmosis III, an offering table with the names of Tuthmosis IV, an embalming table of Amenophis III's time, found at a different time, prove that this region of Memphis was also rather important during the New Kingdom.



FIGURE 4. Fragment of vessel in the form of a cock (terracotta).

In the north-western part of Kom Tuman is situated the massive palace. It was built by the king of Dynasty XXVI Apries (VI century BCE) In 1909–1912 it was excavated by the English Archaeologist W.M.F. Petrie²⁰, who dated the palace to the Ptolemaic time (4th–1st centuries BCE). Unfortunately the high level of the water table stopped his excavation.

Thus, systematical studies on the territory in question were never carried out. In November 2001 the Center for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CES/RAS) started its work at the site (Kom Tuman, to the north of Memphis). The result of the previous survey and the analyses of surface material are very promising.

The first season at Kom Tuman was concentrated on the topographical, geological and geophysical survey, which combined several methods: high-accuracy survey of the surface with the help of a satellite navigation system (GPS), magnetic geoelectrical and georadar study. The latter three methods allow for studying the geological structure of the site, determining the architectural structures and detecting possible ancient objects, covered by the soil. The high-accuracy topographical survey makes it possible to draw the details of landscape, which are not visible.

The surface area of 80 m by 100 m (Kom Tuman–West, central part) was thoroughly studied. The size of the cultural layer was defined to be approximately 12 m. The geophysical survey has detected the existence of subterranean structures, orientated from North to South and resembling the plans of palace structures and living quarters.

²⁰ See *PM*, III², 831.

¹¹ Vandersleyen, C.: *Ouadj Our W3d Wr: Un autre aspect de la vallée du Nil*, Bruxelles 1999.

¹² Vandersleyen, *op. cit.*, 110–11 (see n. 7).

¹³ Sethe, K.: *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, Leipzig 1906–09, 731–32.

¹⁴ Bietak M.: *Avaris, the Capital of the Hyksos: Recent Excavations at Tell 'el-Dab'a*, London (BMP) 1996, 74–83 & pls. 4–7.

¹⁵ See for instance and *LÄ*, IV, 1982, 24–41: art. 'Memphis'.

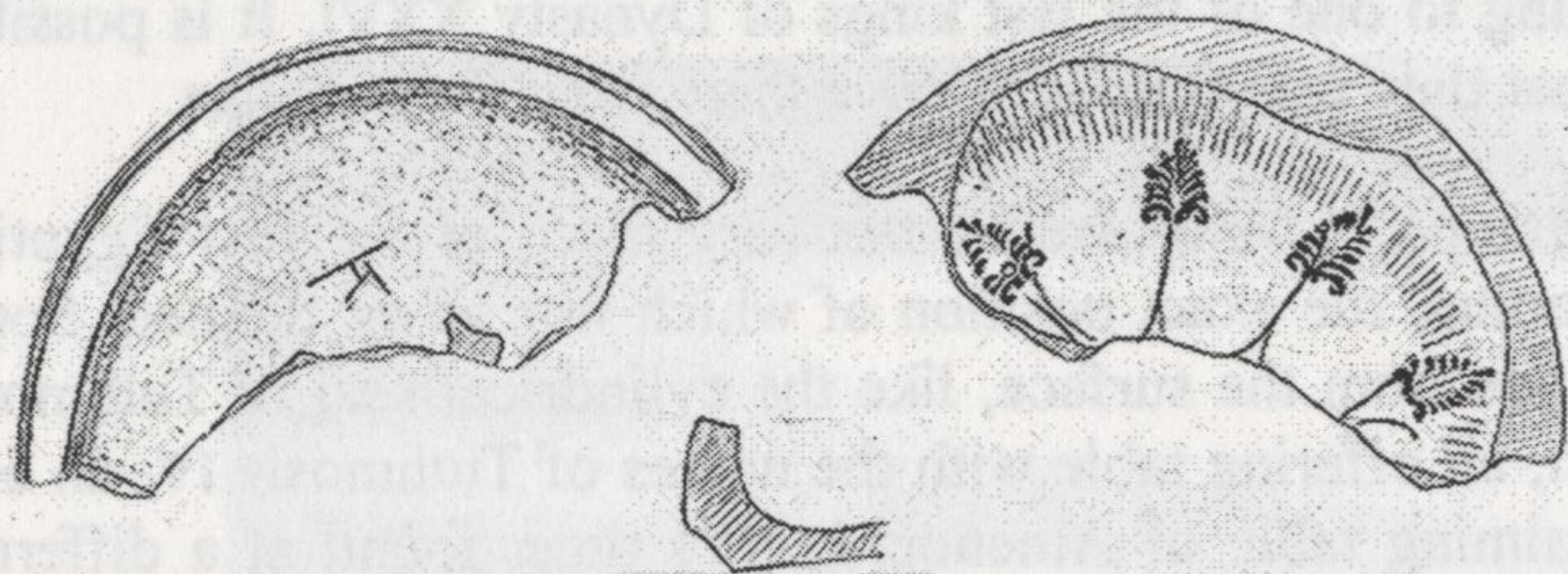


FIGURE 5. Fragment of a black polished vessel, decorated with palmettos and inscribed with a graffito.

Numerous accumulations as well as separate architectural fragments, spread all over Kom Tuman, Tell Aziz and Kom Dawbabi were examined and described. They include mud-brick and brick walls, limestone blocks, fragments of limestone cornices; bases, capitals and drums of columns made from granite and limestone; door-jamb, slabs, & c.



FIGURE 6. Fragment of a vessel, with a production mark (pottery).

The most important accumulations are situated at the south-eastern corner of Kom Tuman, which may be the remains of a large temple. This suggestion is proved by a number of fragments of cult vessels found there. Some of the limestone blocks bear the traces of reliefs. One of them contain the representation of a king (fragment of a royal kilt with uraeus decoration). The other important accumulations are located at the south-eastern part of Kom Dawbabi and along the eastern edge of Kom Tuman.

The central part of Kom Tuman is marked by a 1.8 m wide road, which was oriented from the east to the west. Its remains, 7 meters long, still have molded borders and a kind of drainage system (?).

In the central and northwestern parts of Kom Tuman, two ovens were discovered. One of them was detected because of a local magnetic anomaly; another one because of the characteristic vaulted top, which was partly unearthed at the time of our survey. There is a layer of charcoal in both ovens. Around the sites there were found numerous pieces of slag of different sizes, pieces of oxidized copper alloy and fragments of pottery covered by the same substance. These by-products may indicate that there were metallurgical activities.

A fragment of an amphora, damaged during firing, and pieces of coked mass of glaze, point to the existence of ceramics and faience production at this region. There were also found samples of unfinished alabaster vessels, of the kind that was found here by W.M.F. Petrie during 1909-12, and pinpoint to the existence of an alabaster workshop located at Kom Tuman in Antiquity.

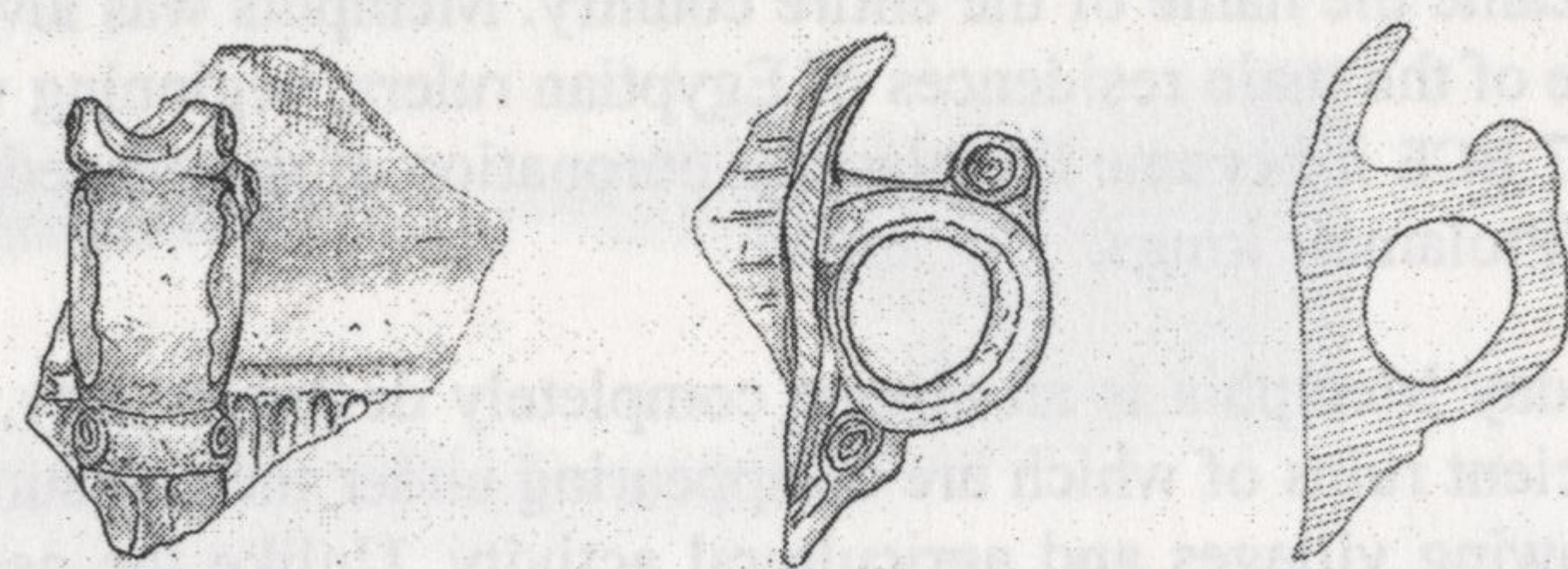


FIGURE 7. Fragment of a red-polished vessel.

Different kinds of ceramics dated to the Helleno-Roman Period were found here: amphorae, jugs, pots [Fig. 6], lids of vessels, several fragments of faience; black-varnished [Fig. 5] and red-polished [Fig. 7] pottery, as well parts of sandstone, limestone and granite dishes.

Some finds are pieces of round sculpture, the most significant of which is the unfinished head of a king of Dynasty XXV (a trial piece?) made of limestone. The others are: a terracotta figurine of a woman with a vessel in her right hand and a monkey on the left shoulder [Fig. 3]; and a fragment of a clay figurine of a naked woman (both dating to the Roman Period). Another interesting find is a fragment of a vessel in the form of a cock [Fig. 4], part of an Apis figurine.

Among the rest material is a fragment of home altar made of limestone; several weights of different values made of limestone and calcite, and a bronze Hellenic coin bearing the representation of an owl on the obverse and the profile of a king on the reverse.

To finalize the results of the previous survey we should agree with W.M.F. Petrie's conclusion that there were foreign quarters in Memphis, including the Hellenic one.

III. Conclusions

To sum up the archaeological data and the data of written sources, we can suppose the following:

- (i) A Hellenic colony existed in Memphis during the time of Dynasty XXVI. (ii) Probably it was developed on the place of the Aegean settlement of Dynasty XVIII. (iii) There is no need to correct Egyptian topographical lists, if we agree that the foreign colonies were also included there; sometimes the Egyptians represented the names of foreign countries in cartouches decorated by fortified walls, which could be either small captured countries or colonies. (iv) The Egyptians had a habit to play with geographical names given to the places of similar significance: for instance, *3bw* was the name for Elephantine at the first Nile cataract and for the Egyptian fortress at the second cataract; both places definitely marked the frontiers of Egypt. (v) The name of the Aegean colony in the Delta might be *Kfty.w*; in this case this agrees concerning the localization of this toponym: it could define *both*, the metropolis at one of the Aegean islands and the colony in the Nile Delta.

We do hope and wish that the future excavations at Kom Tuman shall throw more light on this fascinating issue.