

Delta Reports 1



ARCHAEOPRESS EGYPTOLOGY 51

Delta Reports 1

Research in the cultural history of the
Ancient Egyptian Nile Delta

Edited by
Eva Lange-Athinodorou
and Penelope Wilson

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

First and Second Floors
13-14 Market Square
Bicester
OX26 6AD
www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-977-0

ISBN 978-1-80327-978-7 (e-Pdf)

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In memory of our esteemed colleague Donald Redford





The Delta Reports series is dedicated to the publication of archaeology, geography, history and heritage relevant to the Nile Delta. One of the most important aims of the publication is to make fieldwork reports from the North of Egypt (including Alexandria, Wadi Tumilat, Wadi Natrun and North Sinai) available soon after the fieldwork has been completed. Each volume will contain about 10-15 reports from fieldwork, in order to make the material immediately accessible to other archaeologists and interested readers. In addition, we welcome research articles on other aspects of the Nile Delta's ancient cultural history. There is no limit on time-period and historical and heritage material will also be accepted. The volumes will be edited by the editorial board and another academic reviewer.

Contents

Editorial	ii
Eva Lange-Athinodorou, Penelope Wilson	
Vineyards and Winemaking in Tell Heboua II (<i>p3 htm n t3rw</i>) During the New Kingdom: Archaeological and Textual Sources	1
Elsayed Abd El-Alim	
The Ancient Townscape and Hinterland of Kom Trugi during the Graeco-Roman Period	15
Ahmed Rezk Al Arabi, Bassem Morsi, and Alaa Ragab	
Second Preliminary Report on the Excavations in the Ka-temple of Pepi I in Tell Basta/ Bubastis, Seasons 2022-2024	25
Eva Lange-Athinodorou, Veronika Appel, Daniel Elcoat, Dina Faltings, Ashraf El-Senussi	
In Search of Individual Pottery Production: A Study of Small, Bag-Shaped Jars from the Predynastic Graves at Minshat Abu Omar (Eastern Nile Delta, Egypt)	49
Agnieszka Mączyńska	
Remains of the Processional Way of the Amun-Ra Temple at Naukratis	64
Bassem Morsi, Ahmed Rezk Al Arabi, and Walid Nosir	
Mapping Wadi Tumilat Archaeological Sites	73
Mustafa Nour el-Din, Laura Penzesova	
Early Evidence of a “Jar-Killing” Ritual from Predynastic Sites in the East Delta	81
Ashraf El-Senussi and Zeinab Soliman	
New Research on Predynastic and Early Dynastic Pottery from Dakhalia	86
Zeinab Souliman	
Calculating Ancient Human Population Distributions in the Egyptian Delta: A Preliminary Examination of Methods and Available Evidence	95
Juliet V. Spedding, Steven Snape, Salima Ikram, Ignacio A. Lazagabaster and Jakob Bro-Jorgensen	
Taposiris-Magna (Abusir-Mariout): Gleanings from Ancient Historical Sources	108
Abdou A. Youssef	

Editorial

Eva Lange-Athinodorou, Penelope Wilson

Ancient Egypt is unthinkable without the Nile Delta. The alluvial plain, animated by the waters of mighty branches of the river Nile and its capillaries like a blood circulation, contained the major part of Egypt's arable land and formed the backbone of Egypt's agriculture and sustenance. The Nile Delta was the home of prehistoric cultures which added their essentials to the emerging Egyptian character – without the Nile Delta, the ancient Egyptian culture could not have emerged. Although always deeply rooted in and inseparable from the ancient Egyptian world, the Nile Delta was also the contact zone between Egypt and the Mediterranean world, a function that added to its complex cultural character. However, the Delta's ancient cultures and people have been difficult to access because of the dynamics of the floodplain and the way that it has developed over the last six millennia. Moving Nile branches have accumulated thick deposits, oftentimes burying settlements under sediments, destroying monuments and putting an end to the lives of cities and villages likewise. The long history of human occupation sometimes did the rest – stone blocks and statues were removed from large temples to be used elsewhere, grand buildings and tombs fell into ruins, which today cannot match the grandness of temples and tombs much better preserved on the desert fringes of the Nile valley. What we see now is but a weak reflection of what was once – the monumentality, beauty and magnitude of the Delta cities, Amongst which we find such capitals of Egypt as Pi-Ramesse, early centres such as Buto, and important cult centres including Bubastis.

After many years of neglect, the efforts of several long-standing and recent missions have amassed an amazing archaeological record and in the process rediscovered the people and history of the Nile Delta: the German Archaeological Institute and IFAO at Tell el Fara'in/Buto, Durham University at Sa el-Hagar/Sais, the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes at Tanis, the Austrian Archaeological Institute Cairo at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris, the Institut français d'archéologie orientale at Tell el-Iswid and Samara, the Polish Archaeological Expedition at Tell el-Farkha and Tel el-Murra, the University of Wuerzburg at Tell Basta/Bubastis, the University of Pennsylvania at Mendes, University of Hawaii at Tell Timai and the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim at Qantir/Pi-Ramesse. Over the years, the number of missions is growing and that is good news.

The first *Delta Reports* was published as the idea of Professor Donald Redford, through Oxbow Books, in 2009 as part of the scholarly effort to promote the archaeological research of the Nile Delta in Egypt. It came following three successful conferences that brought together archaeological projects in the Nile Delta, published their contributions (Nibbi 1989, Van den Brink 1992; Van den Brink and Levy 2002) and sought to raise awareness both of the important contributions of the Nile Delta to our understanding of ancient Egyptian culture and civilization in general, but also to show the wealth of archaeological material in the Delta and some of the ground-breaking techniques that were used to analyse and interpret it. One of the other most significant contributions was the connection between 'foreign' missions working in Egypt and colleagues from Universities in Egypt, often in the Delta itself and the Ministry of Antiquities/Supreme Council of Antiquities/Egyptian Antiquities Organisation. In publishing the work together in the same volume, the conferences and Delta reports aimed to focus on the raw data and, making it available to all, to put the information into a widely accessible form, to provide cross-communication between colleagues and to ensure a 'space' where the Delta could be explored, highlighted and analysed from different perspectives.

Since 1999, the Delta Survey Project of the Egypt Exploration Society, initiated by Jeffrey Spencer, has continued the interest of the EES in the Delta begun in the 1880s through the work of William Matthew Flinders Petrie and Edouard Naville, but building on the reports of the Inspectors of Lower Egypt. Archaeologists such as Georges Daressy, Howard Carter, Edvardo Breccia, Evaristo Adriani and others collected data about chance finds, saw off bandit raids on sites and collected some of the material that was being looted or recorded the industrial removal of mounds of earth and some of the archaeological material that was found during those processes. Increased threats from urbanisation, industrial and economic expansion, the building of the Aswan dam, climate change and revolutions have had a huge impact on archaeological sites. The call of Gaballa Ali Gaballa in 2000 at the ICE in Cairo to work in the Delta because many sites continued to be lost before investigation, was already noted before by Amelia Edwards and Labib Habachi amongst others. The recording of the data from Delta sites and its reporting is all the more significant in 2024. Some sites are the last remnants of cities that supplied Alexandria in Ptolemaic times or reflect the Eastern Delta 'empire' of the Naqada expansion in the third millennium BCE or the were capitals of Egypt from Ramesside through Tanite, Saite to the Mendesian and Sebennytic kings.

Donald Redford graduated, if we may be allowed to say this, to the Delta through his directorship of the Mendes-Tell el Roba concession. During the course of his work there he discovered the cemetery of the Dynasty 29 kings, early levels from the Predynastic Period, the sacred-ram cemetery and, as is the case with many Delta sites representing ancient settlements, countless pottery sherds in many levels and phases. *Delta Reports* was to be the start of a series of reports allowing the fast publication of fieldwork reports, articles developed from the preliminary reports submitted to the Supreme Council of Antiquities and specialist reports (especially on the pottery) that created a focus on the Delta. The Delta was a nucleus of connectivity, interactions, governance and power for at least six millennia and a significant contributory factor to the character and success of the Ancient Egyptian state.

Manfred Bietak had instigated the journal *Egypt and Levant (E&L)* publishing significant research between the areas of the Delta and its neighbours, bringing them closer together and focussing often on the links along the Eastern Delta, especially the site of Tell el Da'ba, Wadi Tumilat, Sinai and into Gaza and Palestine. A regular Delta and Sinai conference organised by the Polish Centre in Egypt also continues the long tradition of survey and excavation of Polish and Czech colleagues.

The eighth Delta Survey Conferences of the EES had shown, however, that there was a great deal of work going on in the Delta, widely as the area from the North Coast to the north coast of Sinai, that could be made accessible. The publication of the proceedings from the conferences at Alexandria in 2017 and then Mansoura in 2019 (Wahby & Wilson 2022) was meant to be the first of its kind to test the waters for a rolling series of publications on the Delta. It made perfect sense to 'make live again' the *Delta Reports* series as a medium for continuing both the Redford series, adding to the *E&L* and *Delta Survey Proceedings* and providing a rolling means of the publication of reports by those working on archaeological projects in the Delta. It could include new or established projects.

The suggestion of Eva Lange-Athinodorou to bring the series together was endorsed by Donald Redford before his passing and Penelope Wilson, and we hope that the new series of *Delta Reports* Volume 1 will be the first in a long series of 'Travers à les site du Delta' as begun so many years ago in the *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*.

For the future, we would like to encourage our colleagues to use this series for studies on all aspects of the archaeology, geoarchaeology and history of the Nile Delta, from concise excavation reports to in-depth analytical studies, drawing from the archaeological and written record likewise.

The following volume includes reports from sites that have been intensively cleared but have little published from them such as Tell Trugi, Barnugi and Naukratis. There are also specialist pottery studies to allow cross-comparison of 'killed pots' and vessels from Early Dynastic Dakhla. Established projects in Plinthine, Tell Basta and Wadi Tumilat continue to add to our basic data. Analytical overviews such as that on demography by the BEAST project and the Predynastic bag-shaped vessels show what can be done by bringing the data together and applying multi-disciplinary approaches to advance research. We are hoping this refresh of the *Delta Reports (DR)* will find the interests of many scholars and will help to disseminate new knowledge coming from a multitude of research projects in this fascinating area.

For the production of this volume we are very grateful to Daniel Elcoat, Ahmad Mohamed El-Sayed and our Editorial Committee for their support and comments. In addition, thanks are also due to Archaeopress for supporting the publication of reports and research papers and the continuance of a vehicle for making the Delta more accessible.

Our sincerest thanks are due to the authorities of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt, especially the Secretary General Dr Mohamed Ismail Khaled, the General Director of the Department of Foreign Mission Affairs Dr Hany Abdallah Eltayeb and the former Director Dr Nashwa Gaber, the former Head of the Egyptian Archaeological Sector Dr Aiman Ashmawy, as well as many officials in the inspectorates of the Nile Delta, working tirelessly to preserve the threatened heritage of this unique area. Without the friendly and supportive collaboration of our Egyptian colleagues and friends over so many years, no work in the Delta could be carried out so successfully.

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