

Katarzyna Błaszczyk
Artur Buszek

Jagiellonian University
Cracow

FRAGMENT OF A PALETTE WITH A RELIEF DECORATION FROM TELL EL-FARKHA

Elaborated flat stone objects were known in Egypt since the early predynastic period. They were popular already during the Badari culture¹ in the south and the Fayum A or Merimde culture in the north. They were used for pulverization of cosmetic dye such as ochre, galena, malachite, hematite or pyrolusite which were used for body painting after combination with oils. Because of this function they were named cosmetic palettes. They were produced from various sorts of stones starting from limestone on one hand, and basalt or diorite on the other. Yet, a greywacke was the most frequently used material for forming them. It was the most often greenish- grey but sometimes also reddish-grey, dark grey or even black. This material came mostly from Wadi Hammamat.²

Throughout centuries a significant technological development of palettes producing, forming and shaping was noticed. Starting with irregular flat forms of stones through rhombic, zoomorphic, shield-like and geometrical palettes. All of the above mentioned fell on successive stages of the Naqada culture and full-filled utilitarian functions. However, during the Naqada III period, there emerges a new group from the shield-like palettes and it has completely new quality. These palettes are ornamented with a relief decoration and loosing their utilitarian functions they gain on their symbolic functions. This group is called ceremonial palettes. Today, we have discovered about 30 objects and their fragments. Undoubtedly, they were connected with a cult and a ruler. We can divide them into two fundamental groups: the first one is dominated by representations of animals, whereas the second by representations of human.³

¹ Brunton G., *The Badarian Civilization*, London 1928: 30-31.

² Klem R., Klem D.D., *Stones and Quarries in Ancient Egypt*, London 2008: 7, 309-311.

³ Ciałowicz K.M., *La naissance d'un royaume. L'Égypte dès la période prédynastique à la fin de la Ière dynastie*, Kraków 2001: 176.

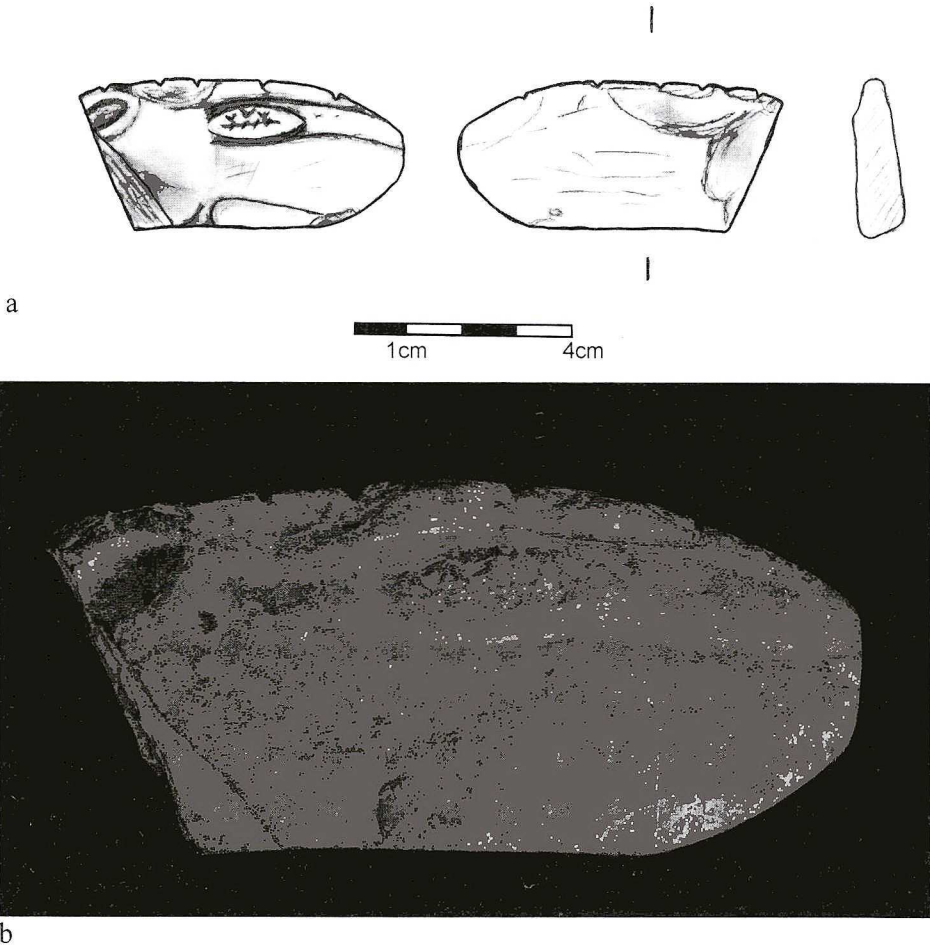


Fig. 1 Fragment of a palette with a relief decoration from Tell el-Farkha (a.drawings by Artur Buszek, b. photo by Robert Słaboński)

In 2009, in the Eastern Nile's Delta, at Tell el-Farkha a piece of palette ornamented with a relief was found (Fig.1)⁴. It is a small fragment measuring 27x57 mm and 8mm thick. Only one side of this piece of palette is decorated with a relief. Additionally, the fragment has defects on its rounded rim and on its surface which appeared as a result of stratification of the material. On the reverse small traces of polishing, impressing and slight scratches are visible. On the obverse we can see a partially preserved animal: a cored almond-shaped eye with

⁴ Inv. no. E09-17, now is stored in Mendes.

slightly outlined pupil, a horn, an ear with an auricle marked by herring-bone pattern ornament, probably a part of knee-joint and blurred fragment a torso and head. Considering smoothing all rims of the palette we can deduce that after its destruction this piece was still used. Unfortunately, the discovered fragment was originated from surface layers of the Eastern Kom in Tell el-Farkha so its precise context is hard to be defined.

As it was mentioned above in the Naqada II period zoomorphic palettes gained great popularity. Hoofed animals appeared rather rarely among animals presented then. The best example is the palette from Abusir el-Meleq.⁵ It is in a quadrilateral-shape. Legs rolled up under a torso, on one of its longer sides, and a tail on the shorter side are visible. The head of the animal has been made very thoroughly. It has greatly curved horns with marked texture, ears and auricle with herring-bone pattern, almond-shaped eye and a furrow from its nose to jaw. This animal illustrates an Ibex (*Capra nubiana*) or an Arui. Similar presentations from London⁶ or Ashmolean Museum⁷ suggests the second animal. The depiction of the head indicates direct adaptation of this motif to representations on ceremonial palettes dated to the Naqada III period.

Herbivorous horned animals on ceremonial cosmetic palettes are presented quite often. Considering the chronology, the oldest analogy to the fragment from Tell el-Farkha is the 'Two Ibexes' palette from London.⁸ Like in mostly such kinds of objects its dating is uncertain and based mainly on stylistic analysis. The London's palette can be presumably dated to the beginning of the gerzean period. Probably it comes from the site of Naqada but its provenience is not also unequivocal. On the shield-like palette there are two ibexes directed antithetic on the shared base. The place between them, under the corpus and the base are decorated with cross-crossed lines forming a kind of a net. Perhaps it is connected to hunting magic and representations of captive animals. The antelopes are standing on four legs adjoin with snouts. Their ears, a small tail and greatly curved horns are rather schematically marked. Round eyes with visibly outlined pupil are marked the most clearly.

⁵ Now in Berlin Museum: Grimm A., Schoske S., *Am Beginn der Zeit*, München 2000: cat. n° 109.

⁶ Baumgartel E.J., *The Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt II*, London 1960: pl. 6.6 ;cf. Petrie W.M.F., *Prehistoric Egypt*, London 1920: pl. 43, 4D=UCL 4704; cf. Quibell J.E., Green F.W., *Hierakonpolis pt. II*, London 1902., pl. 64.17

⁷ Petrie W.M.F., *Naqada and Ballas*, London 1895: pl. 47, 1; Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes égyptiennes aux motifs zoomorphes et sans décoration*, Kraków 1991: 38, fig. 9

⁸ Capart J., *Les debuts de l'art en Egypte*, ASAB 18 (1904): p. 90, fig. 59 (centre); Petrie W.M.F., *Prehistoric Egypt*: pl. 43 (4C); Weill R., *Recherches sur la Ière dynastie et les temps prépharaoniques II*, IFAO 38 (1961): p. 266

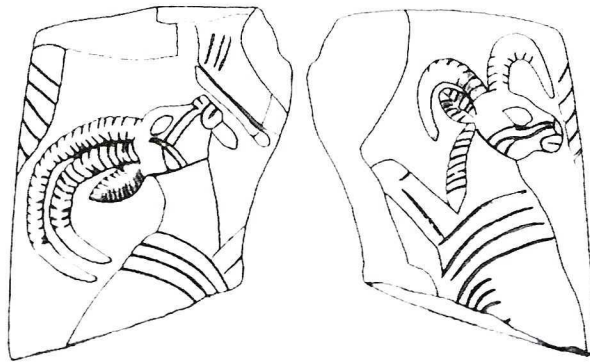


Fig. 2 Fragment of Louvre Palette (Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*: fig. 15 a-b)

The next fragment of a palette similar to the mentioned object from Tell el-Farkha is in the Luvre Museum (Fig. 2)⁹. It is decorated on both of its sides. One of them is represented by an animal's back and a tail, probably a lycaon's body. Behind it there is a fore-part of a herbivorous horned animal. A head facing to the previous animal, a neck and a fragment of corpus and a foreleg are visible on it. Such details as :an eye, a nose and a snout are marked. Additionally, the animal has a beard. Ears and greatly curved horns are well- visible. On its ears we can observe a herring-bone pattern, on its horns the texture in the form of cuts is clearly seen. On the other side of the palette, a horned herbivorous animal is placed, too. In this case, the animal is standing on its back legs or it is jumping with its head turned back. The details of its muzzle are marked in the same way as on the previous animal. The differences are in the lack of beard, a short maze on the whole length of the neck and horns which are depicted en face. The streaks are also clearly seen from the back to the chest on both animals. The described part of the palette probably represents an ibex and an arui with a clearly emphasised maze under the neck.

On the next fragment which is kept in Cairo, on both sides of the palette antelopes oryx are presented. The name of this object derives from these animals and it is called the White Oryx Palette (Fig. 3)¹⁰. The gazelles are standing on their back legs with their front legs put forward. The animals placed in a heraldic way, encircle the palette along longer edges almost touching each other with their noses.

⁹ Fischer H. G., A fragment of a late predynastic Egyptian relief from the eastern Delta, *Artibus Asiae* 21 fig. 3, 4. p. 65, 80 (n.6); Vandier J., *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne. Les époques de formation. I. La préhistorie.*, p. 589 fig. 387.3; Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*: 50

¹⁰ Petrie W.M.F., Petrie H.F., Murray M.A., *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, London 1953: pl. H23, H24 ("White Oryx"); Fischer H. G., A fragment. ...: p.64 ff (n.10); Needler W., *Predynastic and Archaic Objects in the Brooklyn Museum* p. 330; Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*, 51.

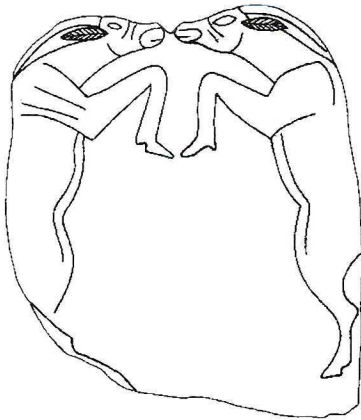


Fig. 3 White Oryx Palette (Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*: fig. 17)



Fig. 4 Fragment of Brooklyn palette (Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*: fig. 18)

They differ with the previous oryx with the horns which are the same length but a bit more curved and they are not tightly rolled up unlike ibexes' horns. On the head an almond shaped eye and a muzzle are clearly visible. The ears covered with an ornament in the form of a herring-bone pattern is clearly seen.

The next piece is kept in Brooklyn and its name derives from the museum (Fig. 4)¹¹. On the bifacial ornamented palette a piece of a head (without a front part of a muzzle), a neck and a piece of a front leg was preserved. Limb arrangement resembles the similar position of animal presented on the White Oryx Palette. On the head, an outline of the skull is stressed with wavy flutings as well as an almond shaped eye. The ornament presenting the texture of the horn survived on its fragment, whereas the ear was emphasised with a typical herring-bone pattern¹¹. Taking its styling into consideration, this part resembles the fragment from Tell el-Farkha.

The next fragment of the palette, is currently placed in Berlin. On the one side one can see a bottom part of a palm-tree and legs of a giraffe which are depicted opposite each other on both sides of the tree. On the other side, two ibexes standing on their back legs were presented. The animals placed opposite each other have tough rolled-up horns and a little marked beards¹². It seems, that the presentation from this side is not original and was created after breaking the

¹¹ Fischer H. G., *A fragment...*: p.64 ff (n.10); Asselberghs H., *Chaos en beheersing. Documenten uit aeneolithish Egypte*, Leiden 1961: 131, 132; Needler W., *Predynastic and Archaic Objects in the Brooklyn Museum*, New York 1984: 330

¹² Needler W., *Predynastic...*, 330 ; Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*, 51

palette¹³. The animals are perfectly matched into the fragment and the technique of making the relief seems different from the previous side. The exact analyse implicates, the relief was made after its breaking.

The next fragment is known as the palette of ibexes or a lion. On one side we can observe two ibexes standing on their back legs.¹⁴ The scene is exceptional because the animals are standing back to each other but with their heads turned to each other. On the other side, a lion is visible on the same line of the base of an antelope, although depicted upside down¹⁵. It can be treated as evidence for presenting a scene of fighting or hunting.

It is necessary to mention the fragment of the Oryx palette from Munich, where the front part of an animal has survived, that is a head, a fragment of thorax and a piece of a front leg.¹⁶ It is worth mentioning, the palette is made of steatite. The shape is also very important in this case as the animal is not only presented on the palette, but also constitutes it, as the edges of the animals create the edges of the described palette.

Horned herbivorous animals appear also on the more complex scenes on ceremonial palettes. The best example is the palette from Hierakonpolis also known as the Oxford Palette or the Two Dogs Palette¹⁷. Both real and fantastic animals such as serpopards appear on it. Lycaons placed in a heraldic way encircle the palette. On its both sides there are horned animals, really interesting for us. Both sides can be recognised as scenes of hunting. On the obverse, serpopards devouring a dead gazelle appear. Beneath domestic dogs (as we can notice from dog-collars) hunting for herbivorous animals.¹⁸ This example is extremely important as in this case we have on one representation three different types of species of hoofed animals. They can be distinguished by the shape of horns. On the right we can see one walking oryx with long and straight horns, the next one is shown with tight rolled up horns, the last herbivorous animal is attacked by dogs and has a typical lira-curve horns. On the opposite side of the palette, all the mentioned above herbivorous animals also appear.

¹³ Scharff A., *Die Altertümer der Vor- und Frühzeit Ägyptens II*, Berlin 1929: 74-5, fig. 51, pl. 22,107; Vandier, *Manuel I.*: 386; Kaiser W., *Die Vorzeit. Reichseinigung und Frühdynastische Zeit*, Ägyptisches Museum Berlin 1967: 17, cat. 150;

¹⁴ Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*, 54-55

¹⁵ Müller H.W., *Ein neues Fragment einer reliefgeschmückten Schminkepalette aus Abydos*, ZÄS 84 (1959), 68-70; Asselberghs, *Chaos ...*: 215, fig. 162-163; Ciałowicz K.M., *Les palettes ...*: 57;

¹⁶ Grimm A., Schoske S., *Am Beginn...*: 38 (cat. n. 51)

¹⁷ Quibell J.E., Green F.W., *Hierakonpolis II*: 41, pl. 28; Legge G.F., *The carved slates from Hierakonpolis and elsewhere PSBA*: 22, pl.3; id., *PSBA* 31 pl. 43; Needler, *Predynastic ...*: 329; Strandberg A., *The Gazelle in Ancient Egyptian Art. Image and Meaning Uppsala Studies in Egyptology* 6 (2009): 40-42.

¹⁸ Needler W., *Predynastic ...*: 329; Davis W., *Masking the Blow*, Berkeley - Los Angeles - Oxford 1992; Strandberg, *The Gazelle ...*, 40-42.

Presentation of horned animals are existing in the Egyptian art from its beginning and are not only represented by curved palettes. We can see oryxes, ibexes and gazelles with lira curved horns among others on a famous painting from tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis¹⁹. These animals are presented on decorated knife handles, combs or earlier on the pottery of the D-class²⁰. In case of these representations appears excellent observational sense and reflection of real fauna in Egypt in the Pre- and Early Dynastic periods.

On account of its characteristic features (especially on account of horns shape) we can distinguish representations of some hoofed animals living in this region. The Ibex (*Capra ibex nubiana*) is the first of them, a wild goat with long thin horns which extend up and then backwards and down, used to live in the Mount Sinai and the Eastern Desert. This animal can be mistaken for the Arui (*Ammotragus lervia*) known as the Barbary Sheep, which also has curved horns but slightly smaller and found naturally in an entire rocky- desert area of northern Africa²¹. It has some shaggy hair on the throat and a sparse mane, unlike the ibex characterized by a small beard. As contrasted with them, the Oryx has long, slightly curved or almost straight horns and no beard. In that case, there are two species: the Oryx dammah, which can be found from Morocco to Egypt and Sudan and its Asian variety - the Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) native to areas such as Syria and the Sinai²². Much most difficulties we find in the case the animals with lyre - shaped horns. There are several species fitting to such horns shape. One of these and with a close correspondence with such representations is the Dorcas gazelle (*Gazelle Dorcas*)²³. However, this animal can be easily mistaken for the Addax antelope (*Addax nasomaculatus*) found on the Western desert²⁴.

In case of the fragment from Tell el-Farkha (Fig. 5), on account of its condition it is difficult to qualify the presented species. A piece of horns suggests that it is an oryx. Possibly, at least two animals heraldically ordered were originally presented on the palette. For stylistic reasons and on account of the general arrangement of details, the fragment from Brooklyn and the White Oryx Palette described above, appear to be the closest analogies.

It is worth mentioning that the fragment from Tell el-Farkha suits well to the character of discoveries from this excavation site. The representations of

¹⁹ Quibell J.E., Green F.W., Hierakonpolis II (1902) 20f., pl 67, 75-79; Capart J., Primitive Art in Egypt, London 1905: 206 i n; Crowfoot-Payne J., Tomb 100: the Decorated Tomb at Hierakonpolis, in: JEA 48 (1962): 5-18.

²⁰ Strandberg A., The Gazelle ..., 35-38.

²¹ Nowak R.M., Walker's mammals of the World, Baltimore 1999: 1229-1231.

²² Nowak R.M., Walker's..., 1175-1178.

²³ Strandberg A., The Gazelle ...; 9.

²⁴ Saleh M.A., Egypt [in:] Mallon D.P., Kingswood S.C., (eds.) Antelopes Part 4: North Africa the Middle East and Asia, Cambridge 2001: 48 - 54.

gazelles appeared here on vessels (including the vessel with the deposit discovered in 2006²⁵), on cylindrical seals or jewellery (the amulet made of serpentine in the shape of a gazelle). Although the connection between these representations and particular beliefs cannot be clearly stated, the monuments discovered within the boundaries of the Shine on the Western Kom , might suggest symbolic meaning of these animals, they might have even been connected to one of the deity worshipped in this area²⁶. The fragment, discussed here was found on a cemetery and probably comes from a plundered tomb, like other objects such as decorated stone vessel, a tag or a bone human figurine. It might have been secondarily used in a poor settlement from the same Kom.

²⁵ Sobas M., Tell el-Farkha 2006-2008 Pottery from Cult Room No. 211, *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 13, 2009: 24 -41.

²⁶ Ciałowicz K.M., Gazelles and ostriches from Tell el-Farkha, *SAAC* 12 (2008), 30-31.