

PREFACE BY THE EDITOR

Excavation of, and research at the site of Tell el-Dab^a, ancient Avaris, started under the auspices of the University of Vienna in July 1966 and continued later with the backing of the Austrian Archaeological Institute and consequently has so far lasted over half a century. It is therefore an old excavation with a long history, which makes the processing of the evidence no easy task. The excavations had to start without an archaeological institution and the necessary staff behind it. All this had to be developed slowly in a time of austerity but this eventually led to the foundation of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Cairo during the years 1971–1973 and since then the Tell el-Dab^a project has developed into one of the most successful archaeological enterprises of Austria abroad. But for this there was a long way to go.

This publication deals with documents and materials of the earliest phase of the excavations at Tell el-Dab^a. Many things happened at that time. The Six-Day-War 1967 and its aftermath led to difficult situations such as interruptions to the fieldwork and finally to a closure from 1969 to 1975 when, for security reasons, foreigners had no access to the Delta. In these years, we had no control over our installations at the site. Winter rains brought about the collapse of the roof of the excavation house and magazines. They were filled with the sherd collections in rubber baskets which had accumulated because of a lack of ceramic specialists who were anyway very rare at that time. The repair works in our absence made emptying the magazines necessary and brought about disorder and loss in the sherd collections, besides losses of find tags, eaten by rodents (s. *Tell el-Dab^a*,

vol. V, p. 8). Other misfortunes struck our organization in Cairo. As we had at that time no base, therefore all the archives of Tell el-Dab^a were accommodated at the premises of the Cultural Section of the Austrian Embassy. Between 1970 and 1971 from each of the files of the documentation, several batches of excavation diaries, of find drawings, sketches and of photograph plates disappeared. The loss was noticed by my collaborators Dr. Elfriede Haslauer and DI Helga Singer when complementing the files with new material. An investigation for which I asked the Ministry of Science and Research of Austria could not bring about an official clarification for this loss. It was clear, however, that nobody from the Tell el-Dab^a team was responsible for this strange incident. The find drawings could be later redone and the photographs could be replenished as the negatives were kept in Austria but the losses of excavation diaries and analytical sketches of the excavation were irreplaceable.

Under these circumstances, the author did a painstaking detective work of reconstructing the evidence of the excavations, for which she has to be congratulated. She focused on the earliest settlement remains on the main Tell (A, Area II) at Tell el-Dab^a which go back to the late 12th Dynasty and shows the settlement development in a holistic approach with the available evidence of the find circumstances. It is an important part in the publication of the Tell el-Dab^a excavations.

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