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**KING NEHESY AT AVARIS AND THE LOOTING
OF THE MEMPHITE ELITE NECROPOLEIS DURING THE 14th DYNASTY**

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Research in the last decades has revealed much more about the obscure 14th Dynasty than one could read in Egyptological treaties and textbooks. This is a short account on this subject as an excavator of the site of Tell el-Dab‘a/Avaris in the years 1966-2009 and 2011.

Monuments of king ꜥ-zḥ-Rꜥ Neḥesi were found scattered in Tanis, Tell el-Muqdam, Tell Hebwa and in Tell el-Dab‘a. The monuments at the first two sites were found dislocated, while at Tell Hebwa and at Avaris they most probably originated from local installations of this king. According to Donald Redford and Kim Ryholt, the 14th Dynasty represents the first Asiatic series of rulers in Egypt. They reigned independently from the 13th Dynasty in the north-eastern Nile Delta. Neḥesi seems to have been one of the first of these ephemeral kings, showing up probably at the second position of the 14th Dynasty in the Royal Canon of Turin. Although he reigned for less than a year, Neḥesi is one of two of the 14th Dynasty rulers who has left monuments behind. Despite his name “The Nubian”, popular among the Egyptians for a long time, he presents himself on a logogram accompanying his name on an obelisk, found in Tanis, as a Near Eastern monarch with the prototypical high pointed crown which is an attribute of kings and gods in the Levant. It seems that his mother had a Western Semitic name.

Two door blocks carrying his name were found in secondary contexts at Tell el-Dab‘a c. 70 m apart within a spacious sacred precinct which dates precisely to the period of the 14th Dynasty (Phases F-E/2). It is highly likely that they originate from the main temple, which was one of the biggest Near Eastern broad-room shrines of the Middle Bronze Age. The best parallels for this building are those dedicated to the Syrian storm god in Aleppo, Alalakh and Hazor. Next to the broad-room was a bent-axis temple which is also a typical Near Eastern shrine, mostly dedicated to female goddesses. Tree pits and acorns indicate a shrine holy to Asherah. Both the storm god and Asherah controlled the sea and these kinds of divinities are fitting for an important harbour town, which Avaris had been since its inception in the Middle Kingdom. Another temple (V) of Egyptian design, just east of and parallel to the main temple, but endowed with a burnt offering altar in front as also Temples II and III, could have been dedicated to Hathor, perhaps even to Hathor of Byblos (?) – another divinity with affiliation to harbours.

Another major monument was a palace just under the Near Eastern type of palace of the Hyksos Period at Tell el-Dab‘a, situated c. 500 m to the west of the sacred precinct. The pre-Hyksos palace, which also seems to be of Near-Eastern concept, ended in a conflagration – a sign that the transition from the 14th to the 15th Dynasty probably did not end peacefully. A seal impression found in the pre-Hyksos palace, belonging to a “Ruler of Retjenu” indicates by its personal name and its titles a close relationship to the rulers of Byblos. Also, according to Dominique Collon, the type of seal points to Byblos but the seal impression was made on local clay from the Delta. All evidence seems to indicate a residence of the ‘Ruler of Retjenu’ at Avaris. The connection between Avaris and Byblos is an eye opener regarding the fact that the precious boxes and obsidian vessels with the names of kings of the 12th Dynasty in the Byblos royal tombs date, according to a recent study by Karin Kopetzky, precisely to the time of the 14th Dynasty. As tombs of the 14th Dynasty in Tell el-Dab‘a contain a precious stone vessel and gold jewellery of the style known from the princesses’ tombs in Dahshur and Lisht, this

fosters the suspicion that it was the rulers of the 14th Dynasty who entertained the looting of elite necropoleis in the Memphite area. The more so as in the underground serdab of the Pyramid of Sesostri III graffiti of Asiatic men with their typical mushroom coiffure show that these people had been at this sensitive spot at that time. The appropriation of jewellery and precious items and their dissemination to Byblos and the northern Levant explains the quick boom of imports from the Levant to Tell el-Dab'a in Phase F which started to recede soon afterwards when the potential objects of looting were exhausted. This may have weakened the economy of the 14th Dynasty and possibly brought about the advent of another Asiatic dynasty – the Hyksos.