

SUDAN & NUBIA

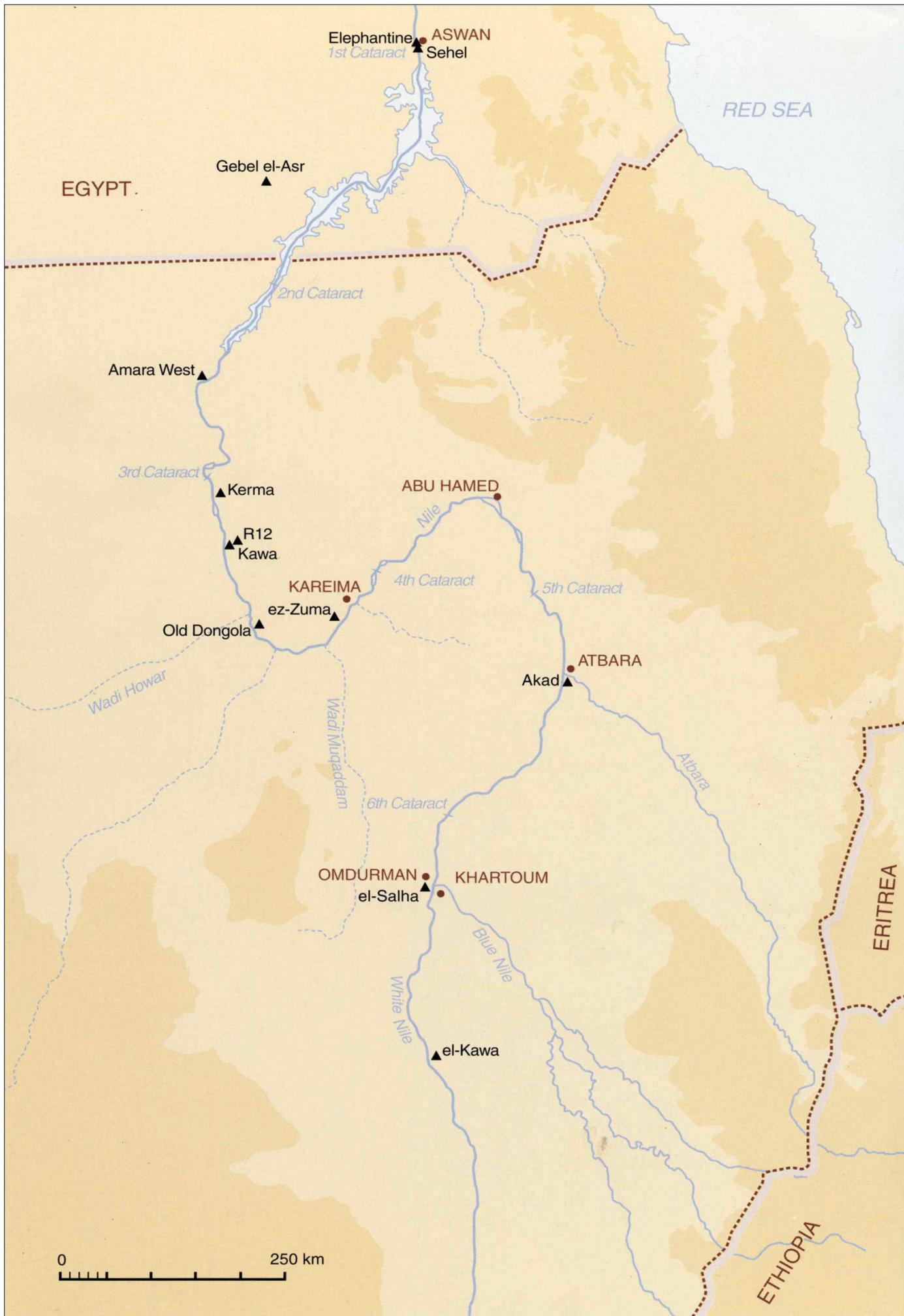
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 6

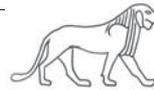
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Contents

Introduction

Vivian Davies 1

Reports

The Second Excavation Season at R12, a Late Neolithic Cemetery in the Northern Dongola Reach 2
Sandro Salvatori and Donatella Usai

Ceramic Traditions and Cultural Territories: the "Nubian Group" in Prehistory 8
Maria Carmela Gatto

Nubians on Elephantine Island 20
Dietrich Raue

Survey at Chephren's Quarry, Gebel el-Asr, Lower Nubia: 2002 25
Per Storemyr, Elizabeth Bloxam, Tom Heldal and Abdou Salem

The 2001-2002 Season of Excavation at Kerma: a summary 30
Charles Bonnet

Publishing Amara West: a progress report 31
Patricia Spencer

The Kushite Town and Cemetery at Kawa, the 2001-2002 season 32
Survey and excavations
Derek A. Welsby

Stabilisation and Investigation of the Wall Paintings 38
Claire Heywood

Does Aten Live On in Kawa (Kówwa)? 42
Herman Bell and Muhammad Jalal Hashim

Preliminary Report on Rescue Excavations at Akad 47
Mohamed Faroug A. Ali

Eastern Desert Ware, a first introduction 53
Hans Barnard

Old Nubian Houses of Sehel Island 58
Ossama A. W. Abdel Meguid

Archaeological Discoveries along the East Bank of the White Nile, 1997-2000 64
Khider Adam Eisa

The Is.I.A.O. el-Salha Archaeological Project 67
Donatella Usai and Sandro Salvatori

Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and ez-Zuma 73
Bogdan Żurawski

Miscellaneous 86

Front Cover: An apostle from the mural in the chapel at Baganarti containing the king's portrait.

Introduction

Vivian Davies

At the time of writing (mid-September 2002), the 10th International Conference for Nubian Studies has just finished, generously hosted by colleagues in the Università di Roma "La Sapienza". The large number of papers delivered shows how rapidly the subject of Middle Nile studies is growing, with significant advances in knowledge achieved since the last conference held in Boston four years ago, an encouraging state of affairs, to which the content of this present volume bears further witness. There was, however, one hugely important issue which overshadowed the event: the looming crisis of the new dam at the Fourth Cataract.

As reported by the Sudanese delegation, preparatory work for the dam has now begun and actual building will start in two years. It is expected to take a further seven years to complete. In an unwelcome echo of the Aswan High Dam scheme, the reservoir created will flood over 170km of the Nile Valley between the Fourth Cataract and Abu Hamed, enveloping, as we now know from preliminary surveys, thousands of archaeological sites - artefact scatters, settlements, cemeteries and rock-drawings dating from the Palaeolithic to the Islamic Periods. Very little is known about these sites; for the most part only that they exist. Our Sudanese colleagues are urgently appealing for assistance, so that as much as possible of the record may be investigated and documented before the area is lost to knowledge for ever. In response, SARS is this winter launching a campaign of rescue excavation in a region which we recently surveyed (see *Sudan & Nubia* 4 [2000], 51-7), but an extensive international effort will be required if any serious impact is to be made. Our next international colloquium, to be held at the British Museum on 8 May 2003, will focus on the dam emergency. All colleagues with an interest in helping are invited to attend.

Preliminary Report on Rescue Excavations at Akad

Mohamed Faroug A. Ali

Introduction

Akad is a district in Ed-Damer, a town in the Nile State (Figure 1), and is situated to the south of the Maspio Portland Cement factory at N. 17°38' 11" / E. 33° 58' 51". The area of Akad was selected by the Sudatel Company as the site for a telecommunications station. Human bones and potsherds were recovered during the digging of the foundations for this station. The damage was reported to the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums. The site was visited by myself and the antiquities officer Ali Mirghani, the damage was assessed, and a budget was submitted to Sudatel to cover the salvage and rescue activities, in accordance with Antiquities Protection Ordinance of 1999. Sudatel kindly responded and covered the expenses of two seasons of excavation.

The site consists of a flat area which includes buildings of the modern settlement. It is close to a wadi and the main road to Atbara. No archaeological evidence was observed

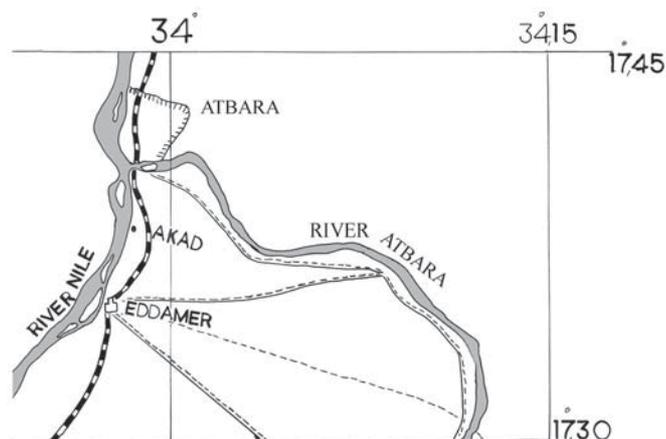


Figure 1. Location of the site of Akad.

direction of Ali Mirghani, two Christian graves were excavated. The first grave (No. 1) had a rectangular shaft with the shallow burial chamber on the northern side. The deceased was orientated east-west and laid on its back with the head to the west. The second grave (No. 2) had similar features, but the burial chamber was deeper. The shaft of grave No. 6 was also discovered during the first phase of the work.

The second excavation season (Akad II) was carried out from June 13th to 21st, 2000 by the author¹ of this article and the results are described below.

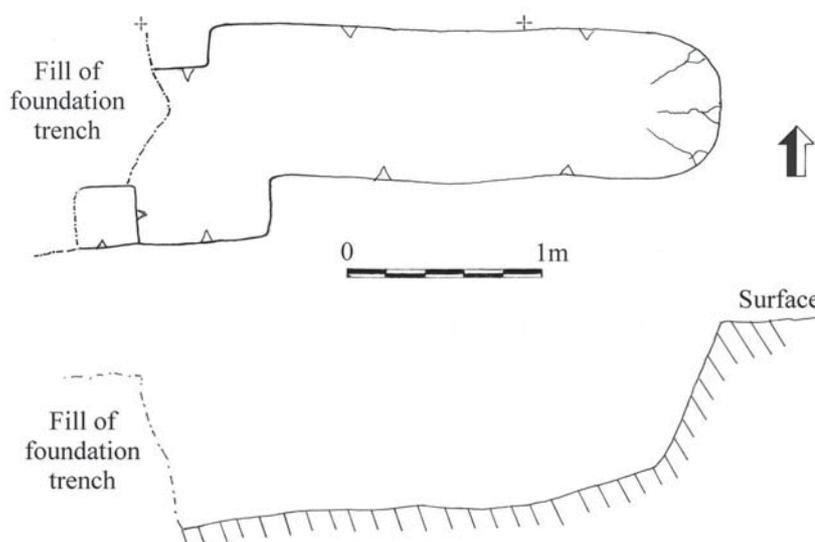


Figure 2. Plan and section of Grave No. 3.

during a survey of the area. Sudatel's foundation trenches had cut through parts of grave Nos 2, 3, 4 and 6. A layer of about 5-10cm of deposit covered the grave cuts, which therefore could not be seen from the surface. The foundation trenches were surveyed as well as the surrounding areas and planned with reference to north-oriented grid systems of 2m squares. The grid and the numbering system of the graves followed that used during the Akad I activities.

During the first excavation season (Akad I), under the

Grave No. 3

After removing a layer of earth 10cm thick from the surface, a rectangular pit was revealed, oriented east-west, and measuring 3.4 x 0.8m. It sloped gradually towards the west to a

¹ The team consisted of Mohamad Faroug (field director), antiquities officers Habab Idriss and Rihab Khidir, assistant teachers Mohammed Ahmed and Faiz Hassan from Wadi el-Niil University - Archaeological Research Centre, graduate students Abdelbagi Ageeb, Nahla Hassan, Salma Eltaib and eight local workers.

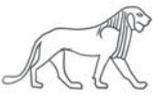


Plate 1. Grave No. 3.

depth of 80cm below the surface and led to a burial chamber (Figure 2). The chamber was disturbed by the foundation trenches and the building activities associated with the construction of the station (Plate 1). It contained only some dislocated fragments of human bones and the rim of a pottery vessel.

Grave No. 4

A square shaft (1.44m), with rounded corners, appeared after the removal of a 20cm layer of earth from the surface. A later cut continued to a depth of about 60cm from the surface (Figure 3). The first step of a mud-brick staircase



Plate 2. Grave No. 4, blocking wall.

appeared at a depth of 95cm. This staircase led to an oval-shaped entrance (1.4 x 0.54m) sealed by a blocking wall. The bricks of the wall were slightly dislocated from their original position, which may have been the result of a reuse of the burial chamber (Plate 2). Part of a black pot-stand was found in the south-west corner of the shaft (Figure 5.3), while fragments of a red pot-stand (Figure 5.4) were discovered on the third step of the staircase.

The burial chamber was filled with a hard deposit due to penetration of water into the grave. It contained two inhumations. The first was an adult, oriented east-west, laid in a contracted position on its left side, head to the east, facing south. The arms were flexed in front of the face. The second individual was buried 30cm to the north of the first body. It was laid in an extended position (east-west), head to the west and the arms were found beneath the body. The skeleton was in a very bad state of preservation. The grave goods found *in situ* on the eastern side of the grave, consisted of a broken pot-stand (Figure 5.1) holding a black bowl (Figure 5.2).

The grave goods

Pot-stand (B5-14-1)

Dimensions: H:20.6cm, Dia:14 and 12.7cm

Burnished hand-made vessel. The interior and exterior surfaces are painted with vertical wavy lines and crescent shapes in white paint on a reddish-brown background (Figure 5.1). A similar object was found at Gabati (Site 159-2) in Tumulus No. 5. Smith has described and dated this type of ceramic to the 5th century AD (Smith 1997, 258, fig. 20a).

Bowl (B5-14-2)

Dimensions: H:8.6cm, Dia:11.8cm

A black coarse hand-made vessel with a rounded base. It has a thin slip. The decoration consists of incised irregular crossed lines on the body (Figure 5.2).

Pot-stand (B4-10-4)

Dimensions: H:7cm, Dia:11.7cm

Hand-made with black slip, undecorated (Figure 5.3).

Pot-stand (B4-12-1)

Dimensions: H:7.3cm, Dia:12.7cm

Half of a burnished hand-made vessel. The exterior is decorated with irregular horizontal wavy lines in white paint on a reddish-brown background, while the internal decoration consists of four radially arranged groups, each of two parallel rows of white painted hearts (Figure 5.4). A similar external decoration has been recorded on a pot-stand recovered from a grave in Berber (Lenoble 1991, 171).

The plan of the grave and its ceramic offerings are typical of post-Meroitic burials excavated elsewhere in central Sudan.

Grave No. 5

The sloping shaft, 2.75m long by 1.5m wide and oriented approximately east-west, appeared after the removal of 10cm

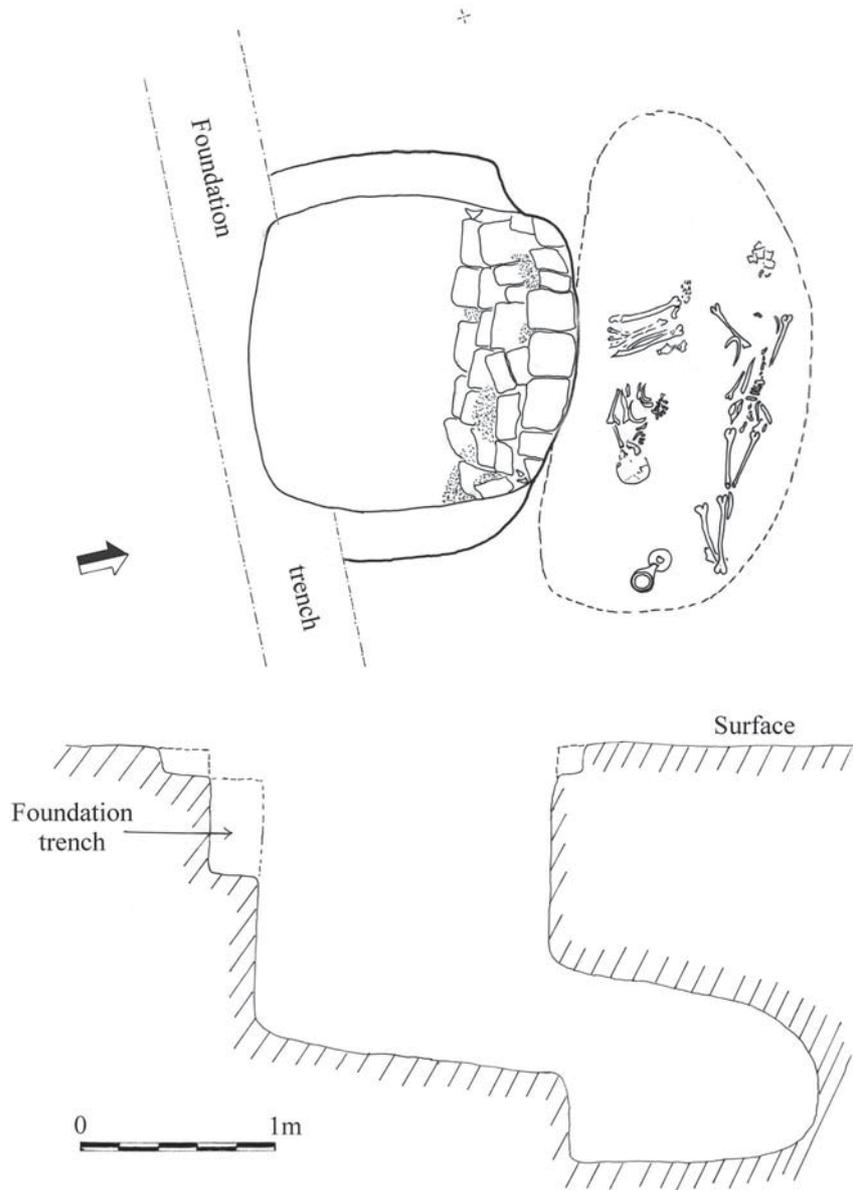


Figure 3. Plan and section of Grave No. 4.

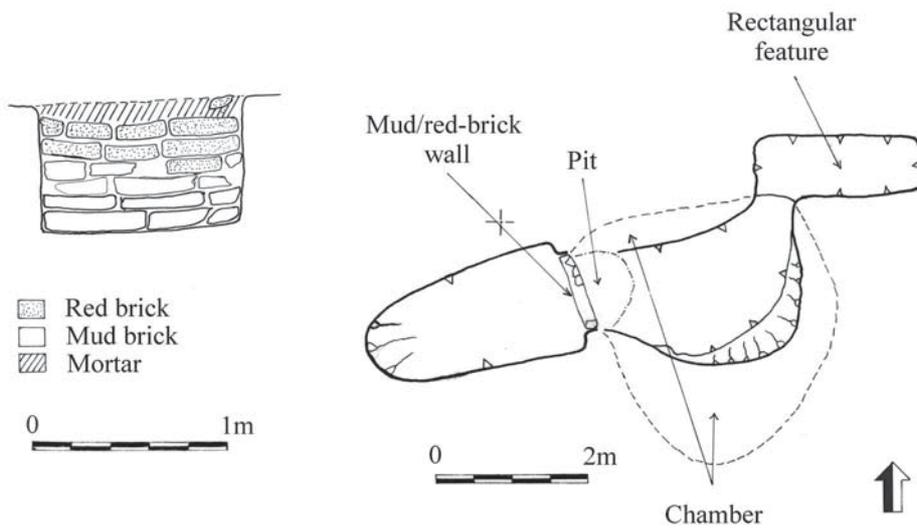


Figure 4. Plan, and elevation of blocking wall, of Grave No. 5.



Plate 3. Grave No. 5.

of the surface deposit. The red and mud bricks sealing the entrance, which was about 62cm high, appeared at a depth of 1.46m. The roof of the chamber had collapsed due to water penetration into the grave through a pit. The removal of the hard deposit within the chamber revealed that it was of irregular shape (Figure 4, Plate 3).

Some pottery sherds were found at a depth of 1.2m in a rectangular pit (2.1 × 0.75m), which had been cut vertically, at a later date, into the north-east side of the grave (Figure 4). Total excavation of this part of the grave has not yet been completed.

Grave No. 6

A rectangular shaft measuring 1.7 × 1.1m and 1.36m deep is oriented west-east (Figure 6). The red-brick sealing of the entrance appeared on the eastern side and leads to two connected chambers. Due to penetration of water into the grave, the chambers were filled with a hard deposit. The first chamber was an oval shape and measured 3.1 x 1.95m and was 90cm high. The second chamber, which contained the burial, was rectangular with rounded corners, measuring 2.44m in length by 1.5m wide. The contracted individual was found on the eastern side, orientated north-south, laid on its right side, head to the south, facing east, with the arms folded over the chest. Perhaps as a result of water penetrating into the grave the bones became disarticulated. The grave goods were deposited near the legs and consisted of three bowls.

The grave goods

Bowl (D5-0-1)

Dimensions: H:7cm, Dia:14.5cm

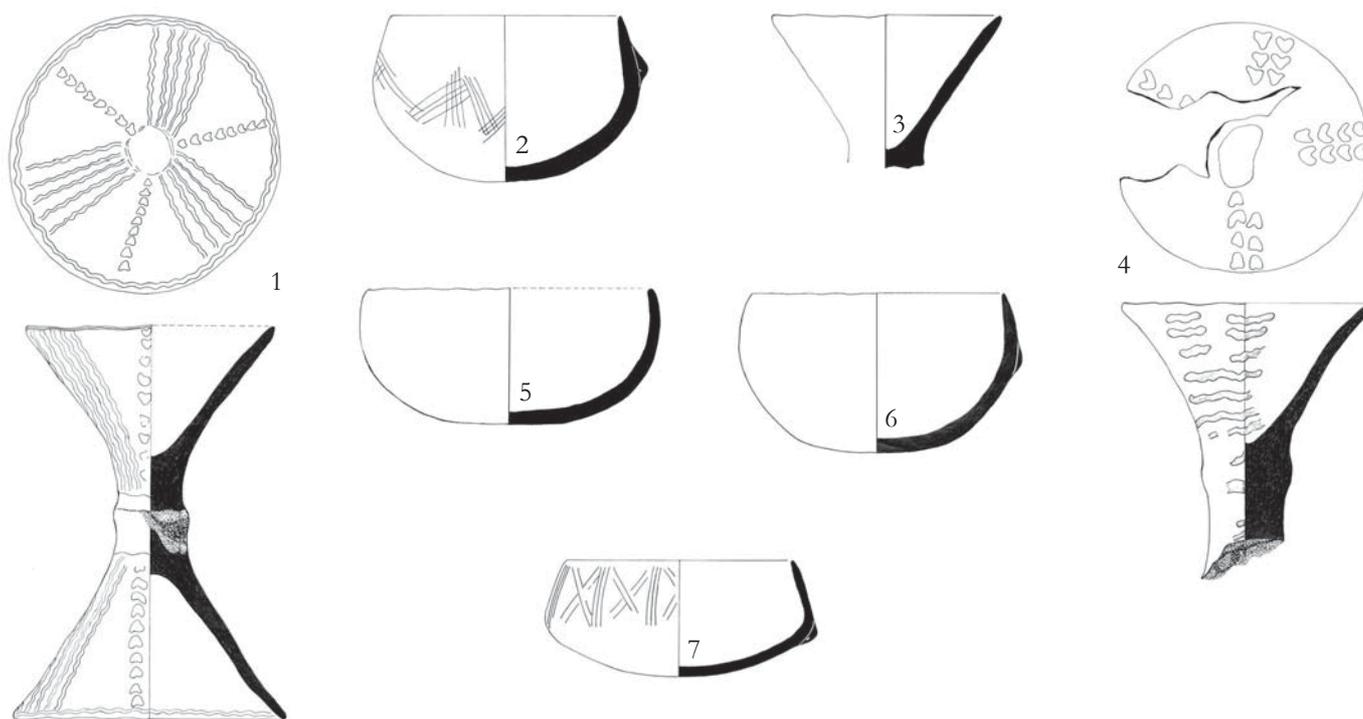


Figure 5. Pottery: nos 1-4 from Grave No. 4, nos 5-7 from Grave No. 6 (Scale 1:4).

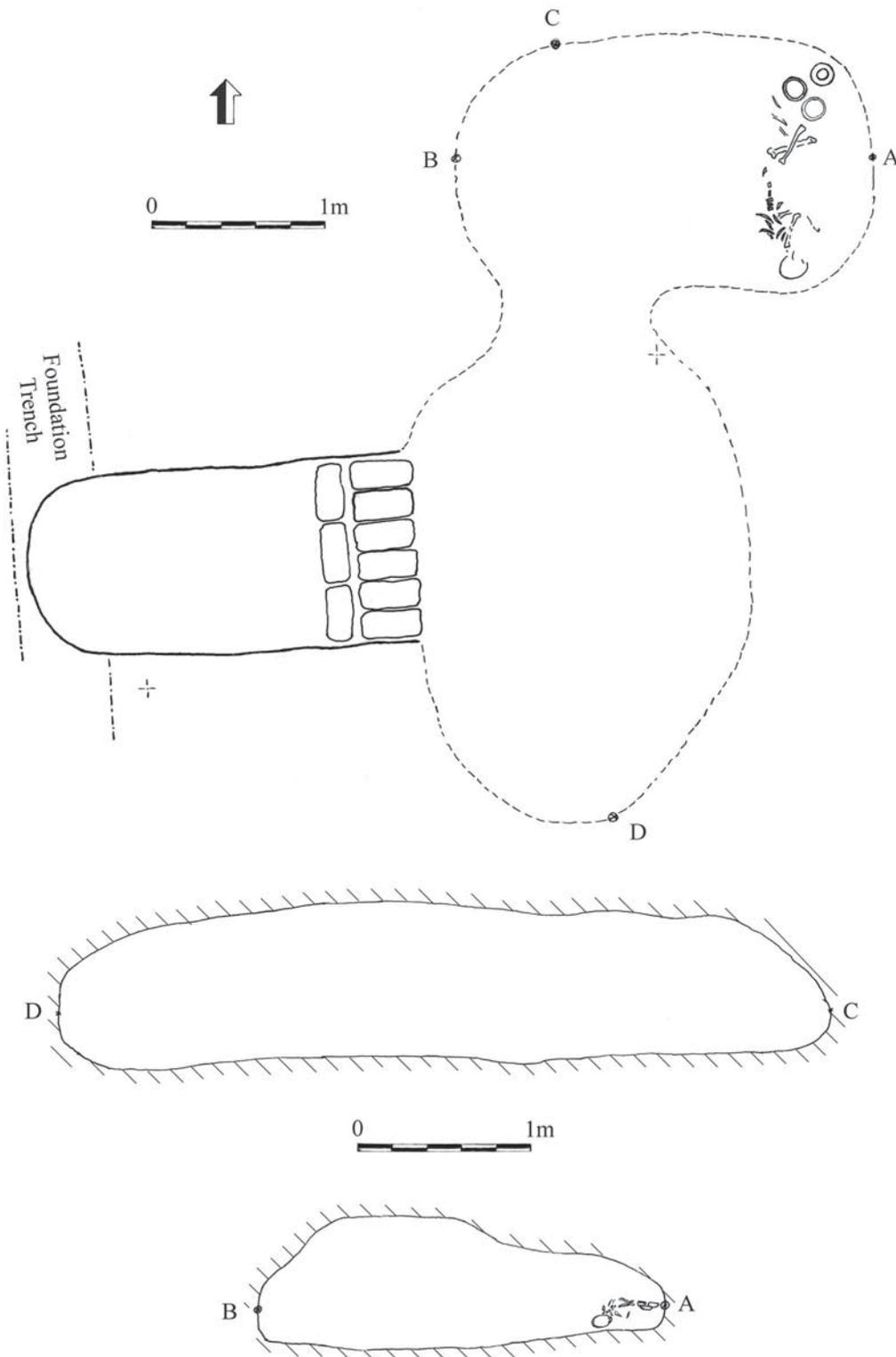


Figure 6. Plan and sections of the chambers, north-south (C-D), east-west (B-A) of Grave No. 6.

It has a flat base (Figure 5.5) and is similar in shape to that of bowl (D5-0-2) but has a dull black surface. The form of the two bowls is paralleled by vessels of Adams' Ware H9 in Group D1 dated by him to AD 200-350 (Adams 1986, 418-19, fig. 246).

Bowl (D5-0-2)

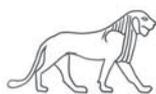
Dimensions: H:8.3cm, Dia :13cm

Burnished hand-made vessel with a thick red slip covering the external surface (Figure 5.6). It has a single, small, oval lug on the exterior, but there is no hole in it.

Bowl (D5-0-3)

Dimensions: H:9cm, Dia:11.7cm

A hand-made vessel with a black burnished surface. The wall is decorated with frieze panels formed with double lines and



incised 'X'-shaped design elements. There is a single small oval lug on the exterior (Figure 5.7). The form, decoration and surface treatment of this vessel can be paralleled among Adams' Style DIII (element 11,6-2) (Adams 1986, 257-58).

In view of the sub-structure, burial customs, and the grave goods, this grave can be dated to the Meroitic period (Adams 1986; Arkell 1949).

Conclusion

No superstructures were found on the surface, probably the result of the recent human activities, some associated with the construction and use of the modern buildings scattered across the area. The archaeological results were obtained from salvage excavations, and indicate that this area was used as a cemetery, within which were several types of temporally diverse tombs.

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