

SUDAN & NUBIA

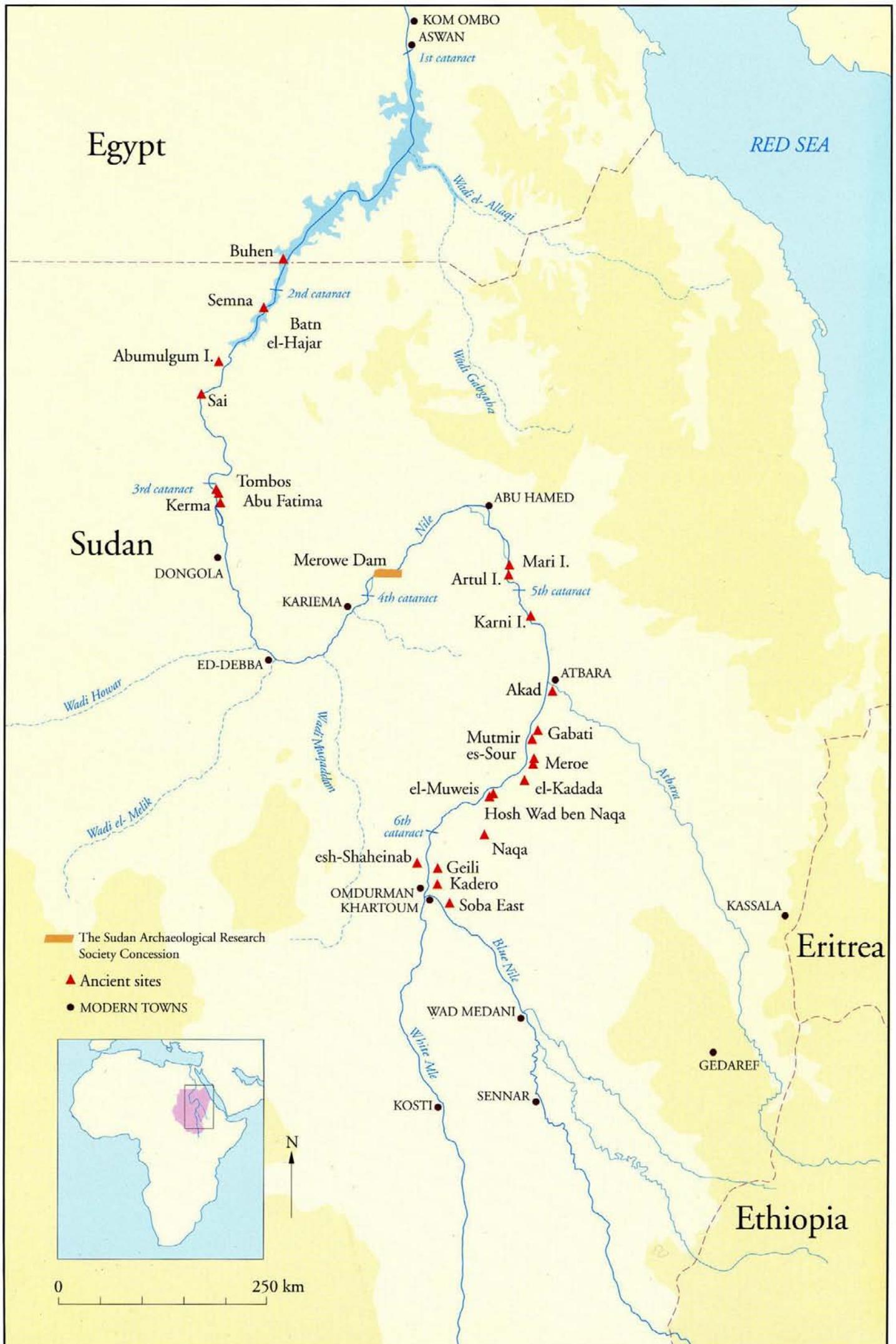
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 9

2005





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Front Cover: Representation of a bound Kushite from the
Mortuary Temple of Amenhotep III at Kom el-Hettân
(photo © Memnon/Amenhotep III Project).



A preliminary report of rescue excavation at Akad: the 2004 season

Mohamed Faroug and Alexandros Tsakos

Introduction

A third season of archaeological rescue work was conducted in the village of Akad between the 5th-24th June 2004.¹ The main objectives of the project were:

1. the excavation of the graves that had been located in specific parts of Areas A and B (Figure 1) during the previous two field seasons in 1999 and 2000 (Ali 2002).
2. surveying the area to the east of Akad as well as between the northern confines of the village and the confluence of the rivers Nile and Atbara.
3. initiating ethnographical research.

Survey

Due to cultivation as well as industrial activities, there have been very few sites recorded in the area surveyed. The most interesting places were immediately north and south of the village, where Medieval and Islamic sherds were collected and mud-brick walls noted on the surface. A very interesting feature was the location of what appear to be grave mounds on the eastern edge of the inhabited area (close to the old airport). Owing to the lack of surface finds, these features could not be dated.

Ethnography

According to the ethnographical work conducted at Akad, not more than 50 years ago there used to be a forest in the area east of the village, which is precisely the location of the archaeological site. The informants from Akad also spoke about the existence of a building called “Kanissa” located under some recent buildings near the confluence of the two rivers and another building near the hospital at Akad west of the road. The importance of the Nile (which might be linked with the use of Nile mud for the construction of

the bricks used to close some graves) has also been noted by the locals for all stages of their life (birth, maturity, marriage, death).

Notes on the topography

Akad is situated 5km south of the River Atbara and 1km from the River Nile (co-ordinates: 17° 38.184' N - 33° 58.824' E). The site is a flat area surrounded by a settlement (Figure 1). It covers an area of 250 x 200m², which was divided by a grid system. The site reference is given by a Temporary Bench Mark (TBM), assigned a height of 100m, and is set in the middle of the site near the north-western corner of the Sudatel Office, east of the road connecting ed-Damar and Atbara. At the southern end of the site runs the Khor Fileifla which causes flooding during the rainy reason.

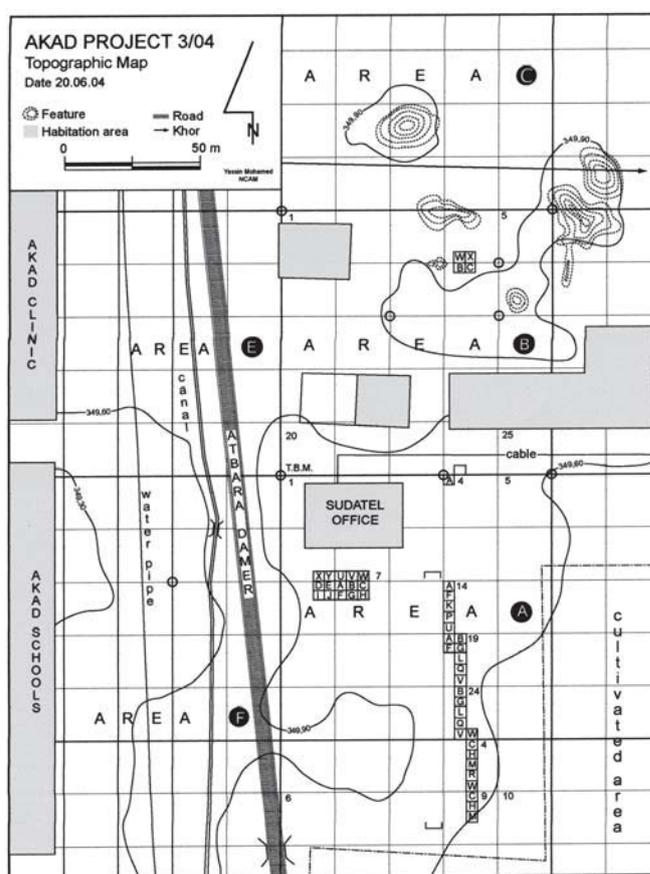


Figure 1. Akad Project 03/04. Topographic map.

Excavation

The excavation of Areas A, B and E revealed 10 (or perhaps 11)² graves, which fall into three distinct categories:-

A) Post-Meroitic shaft and double-shaft graves (Area A). For the dating of such funerary monuments cf. Anderson and Ahmed 2002; Edwards 1998, 74-94; Lenoble 1994; Török 1997, 263-271.

² Grave 14 cannot be identified as such with any certainty.

¹The team consisted of Mohamed Faroug Abdelrahman (field director/inspector (NCAM)), Alexandros Tsakos (assistant field director/archaeologist), Mohamed Ahmed Abd Elmajeed (Director of the Archaeological Research Centre, Wadi el-Nil University), Hossam Eldien M. Ahmed (ethnographer) and Yasin M. Saeed (Surveyor) (NCAM). Special thanks are offered to the Minister of Social and Cultural Affairs of the Wad el-Nil State, the Director of the Tourism Office in Wadi el-Nil State, the personnel of the Archaeological Research Center in the Wadi el-Nil University (Damer) and the Public Committee of Akad village. Last but not least, to Dr Pawel Wolf and the Greek Community for their help in the management of the logistics for the project.

B) Early Medieval graves with shaft and side niche for the burial (Areas A & E) (cf. Säve-Söderberg 1981, 19).

C) Late Medieval shaft graves (Area B) (cf. Säve-Söderberg 1981, 19).

None of these graves had superstructures, except the scattered pebbles on the surface of Area B. The grave substructures and the related burials can be described as follows:

AKAD 7

Post-Meroitic (?)

Location: Area A, Square 7V

Recently, due to the collapsed of part of the roof and the entrance of the grave, the grave goods were completely robbed, and only unidentified fragments of bones were scattered in the burial chamber.

The excavation of the substructure of the grave revealed a trapezoidal shaft oriented NE-SW, 2.16 x 1-1.38 x 1m in size (Plate 1), rounded at the western end and gently sloping towards the SW, with narrow shelves *c.* 80-100mm wide along the north and south sides and rectangular rounded raised shoulders of about 600mm on either side of chamber entrance. The disturbed blocking of mud seals an oval entrance with dimensions 0.45 x 1m beyond which is a steep drop to the oval chamber measuring 1.3 x 1.1m.

AKAD 8

Post-Meroitic

Location: Area A, Squares 6Y, 7U, 1 1E, 12A & B

(Colour plates XXXI-XXXIII, Figure 2)

The excavation revealed two parallel trapezoidal shafts oriented W-E (3.62 x 0.98 x 1.2m), rounded at the western end for the southern shaft and with three steps leading to the bottom of the northern one, both sloping towards the east. At the eastern ends of the shafts are red-brick door blockings (bricks 340-360 x 180 x 80mm). The northern one is masked by mud bricks and mortar (Plate 2), while the other is coated with a hard mortar and large pieces of limestone (Plate 3). These walls sealed the oval entrances of *c.* 0.4 x 1m. Beyond, the shafts dropped steeply to large burial chamber (4.2 x 2.18 x 1.5m) where the three adults burials and their grave goods were located.

The main burial is located largely in the northern half of the burial chamber. It is in a S-N contracted position, laying on its right side, head to the N, facing W and with the hands flexed in front of the face. The deceased was wearing an archer's loose on a finger of his left hand. The grave goods are located towards the north of the burial.

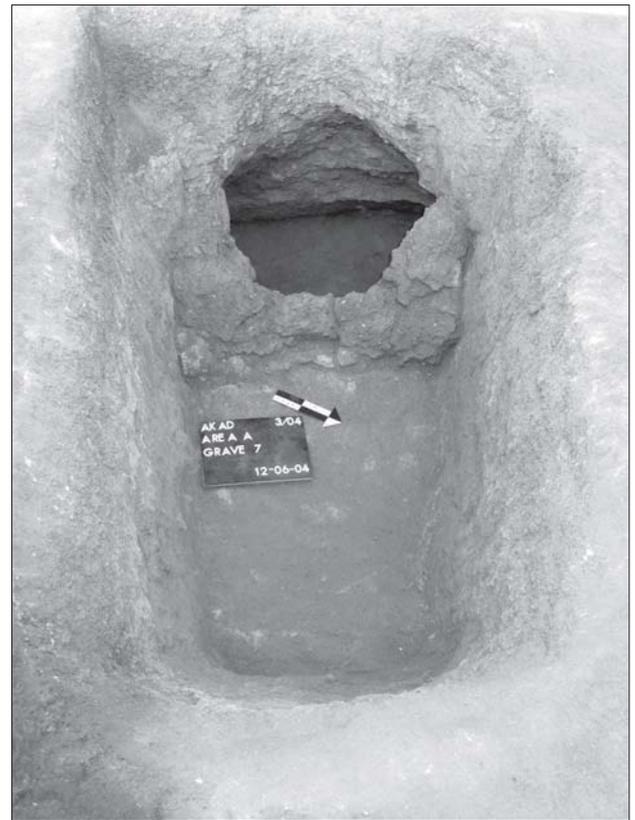


Plate 1. Akad 7. The grave shaft and burial chamber.

The central burial was very fragile with some bones missing. Those that remain suggest that the burial was in N-S semi-contracted position, head to the S facing W (?); the grave goods were located towards the south and southwest of the body.

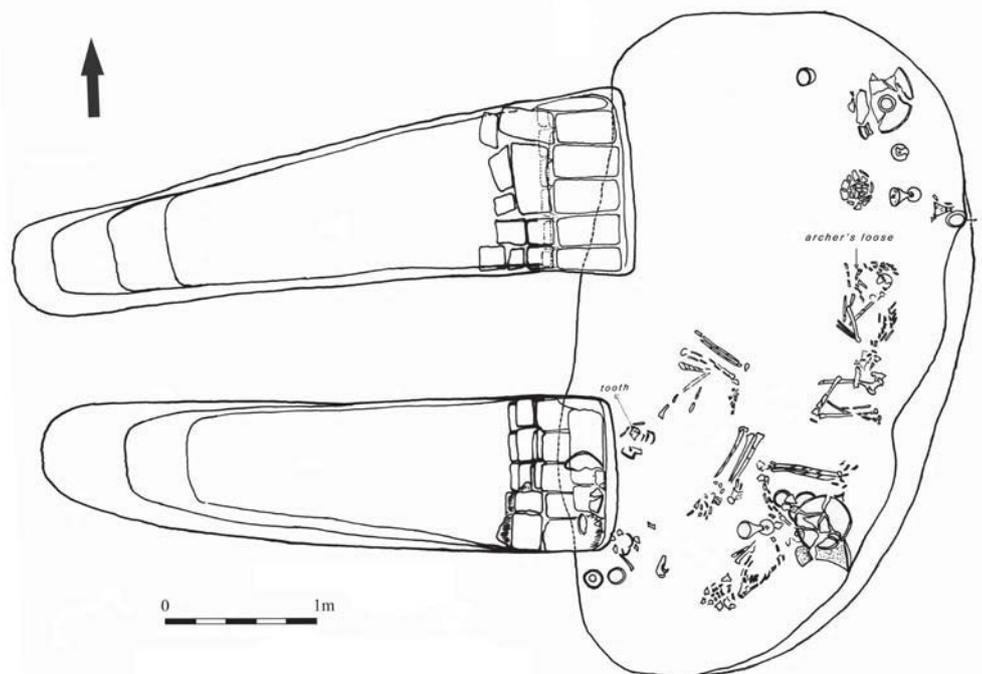


Figure 2. Akad 8. Plan showing the multiple burials and the distribution of the grave goods. (scale 1:50).

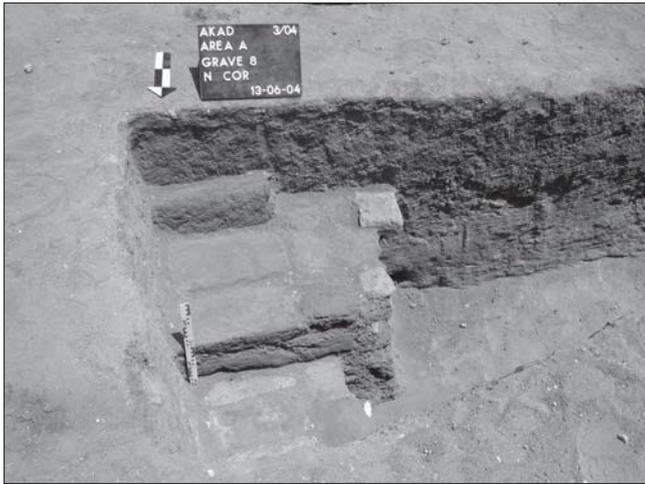


Plate 2. Akad 8. The blocking wall in the northern descender.



Plate 3. Akad 8. The blocking wall in the southern descender.

The southern one was in a contracted NE-SW position, head to the SW facing W with the hands flexed towards the face. A spindle whorl and some of the other grave goods are located in front of the burial, while the rest are located behind the burial.

Finds: Beads, one archer's loose, one spindle whorl, 19 pottery vessels.

Description of the finds (see Table 1, Colour plates XXXII and XXXIII, Figure 5):

Numbers 04-PL-001 – 008 & 032 are the grave goods of the main burial.

Numbers 04-PL-015-019 are the grave goods of the central burial

Numbers 04-PL-009-14 & 33 are associated with the southern burial.

AKAD 9

Medieval

Location: Area B, Square 9C (Figure 3)

The superstructure was a very shallow mound of scattered pebbles. The grave structure is an irregular trapezoidal shaft oriented E-W (2.96 x 3.8 - 0.7 x 0.7m), gently sloping from the E towards the bottom. Wooden sticks probably formed a sealing for the burial chamber underneath.

The burial of an adult was heavily disturbed by the collapse of the roof. It is in an extended position, oriented E-W, head to the W facing S.

Finds: none

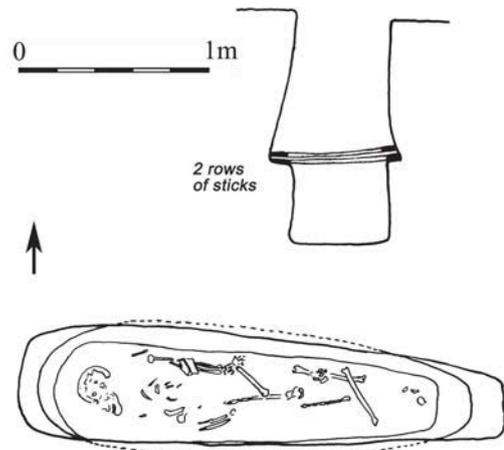


Figure 3. Akad 9. Top plan and north-south section (scale 1:40).

AKAD 10

Post-Meroitic

Location: Area A, Square 12B

The grave structure is a trapezoidal shaft oriented ENE-WSW (3.6 x 0.86 - 1.88 x 1.22-1.5m), gently sloping towards the SW end with narrow shelves c. 180-240mm wide along the north and south sides, and rectangular rounded raised shoulders on either side of chamber entrance. The intact blocking of mud bricks (200mm square or 400 x 200mm) bedded in a silt and gravel mortar, sealed the oval entrance 1.3 x 0.32m in size. The entrance drops steeply to an oval chamber (2.8 x 1.6m).

The burial of a contracted adult, oriented S-N, head to the N facing E, was undisturbed. Beads and a spindle whorl were found in front of the body (Figure 4, Colour plate XXXIV). The grave goods were located towards the southern part of the burial chamber.

Finds: Faience beads, spindle whorl made of fired clay, 12 pottery vessels, and traces of blue colour.

Description of finds (see Table 1):

Numbers 04-PL-020-031 (Figure 9).

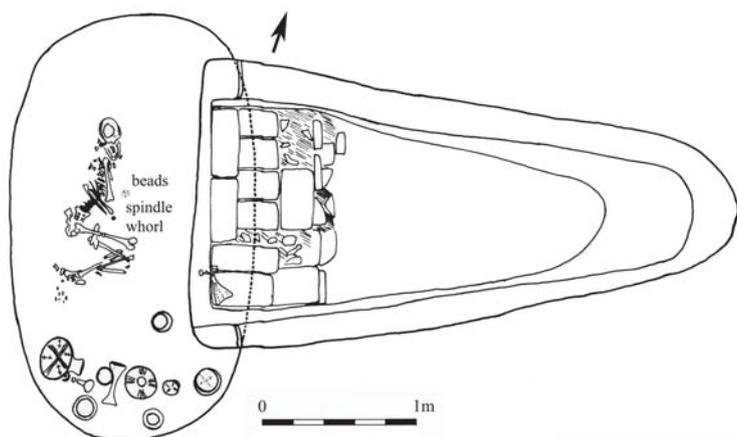


Figure 4. Akad 10. Top plan showing the burial, wall blocking and grave goods (scale 1:50).

tom. A simple kind of door blocking 2.2m long made of mud bricks and mortar covered the entrance to the burial chamber. It appeared at a depth of 900mm from surface but could not be revealed along its total width because the penetration of water had caused the collapse of the burial chamber's ceiling. The oval burial chamber (2.28 x 0.6m) was cut some 450mm below the bottom of the shaft. The intact adult burial is extended, oriented E-W, with the head to the W facing E (?), and both hands over the pelvic area. Parts of the skeleton were missing (fingers, lower part of pelvis), others were broken (skull and ligaments) or disintegrated very

AKAD 11

Medieval

Location: Area B, Square 4V

The grave structure is an irregular trapezoidal shaft oriented E-W (2.48 x 0.22-0.43 x 1m), gently sloping from the E towards the bottom. The very narrow burial chamber was confined even more by two steps on its W and E rounded ends.

The burial, of an extended adult, oriented E-W, head to the W facing N, with both hands at its sides, is intact. It is placed face down in a ventral position.

Finds: none

AKAD 12

Medieval

Location: Area B, Square 4W

The grave structure is an irregular trapezoidal shaft oriented E-W (2.34 x 0.74 x 1m). Shelves 100-180mm in width had been constructed along the north and southern sides of the grave with wooden sticks probably forming a sealing for the burial chamber, which measured 2 x 0.26 x 0.44m in size (Figure 6).

The intact adult burial is extended, oriented E-W, with the head to the W facing N, and both hands at the pelvic area.

Finds: none

AKAD 13

Medieval

Location: Area A, Square 12C

The grave structure is an almost rectangular shaft oriented E-W (2.3- 2.4 x 0.8-0.9 x 1.2m) and gently sloping towards the bot-

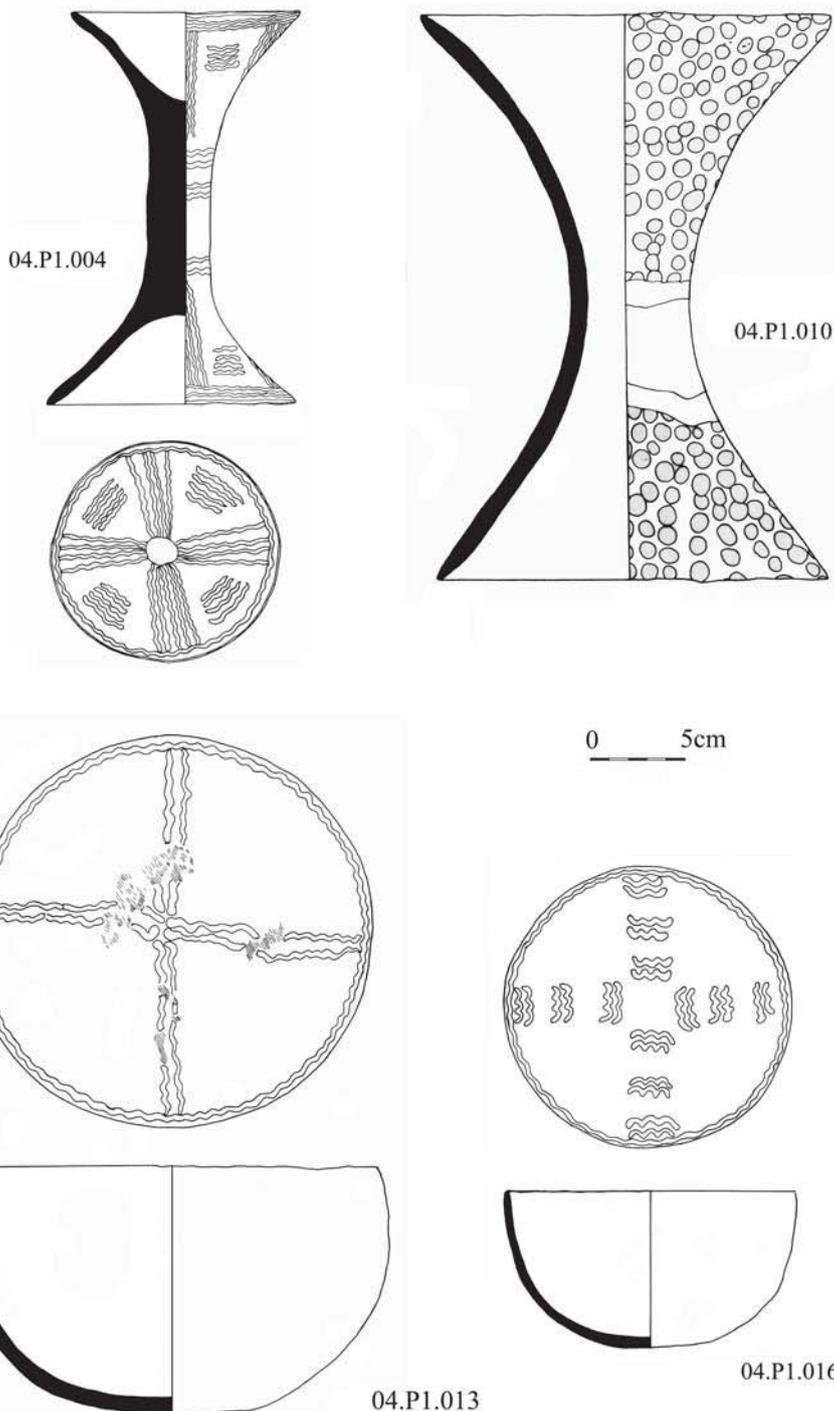


Figure 5. Akad 8. Selection of decorated vessels from amongst the grave goods of the main burial (scale 1:4).



easily (front part of ribs).

Finds: none

AKAD 14

Identification made only on the basis of ethnographic data.

Location: Area A, Square 1 1C.

The grave substructure is a N-S rectangular shaft ($4 \times 0.70 \times 0.35\text{m}$).

There was no clear burial found, although some fragments of bone were located at a depth of 150mm in the middle of the eastern side of shaft. According to the ethnographical work these bones were dug out during the construction of the road in 1950s, and reburied in small or large trenches made by the locals at that time

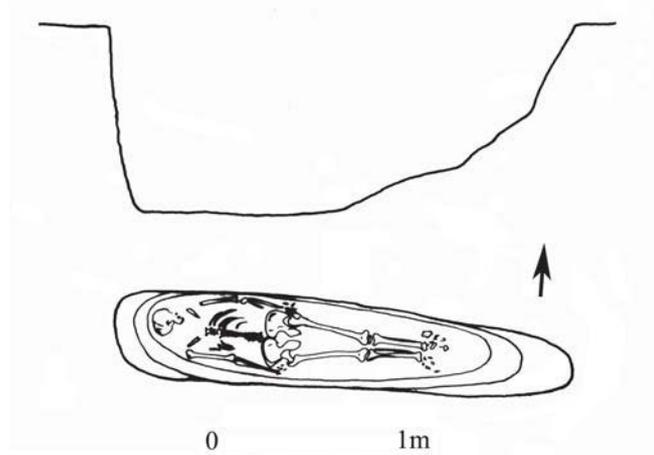


Figure 6. Akad 12. Top plan and east-west section (scale 1:40).

AKAD 15

Medieval

Location: Area A, Square 11D.

The grave structure is an almost rectangular shaft oriented E-W ($2.2 \times 0.74\text{-}0.94 \times 1.2\text{m}$) gently sloping towards the bottom. At the northern part of the bottom a kind of door blocking for the entrance to the burial chamber was revealed. It was constructed of mud bricks and mortar. The oval burial chamber ($1.92 \times 0.64\text{m}$) was cut some 400mm below the bottom of the shaft (Figure 7).

The intact adult burial is extended, oriented E-W, with the head to the W facing E (?), and with both hands at its

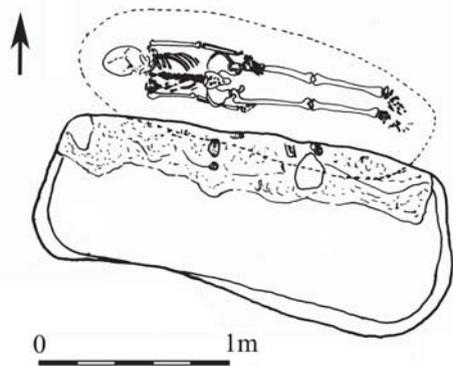


Figure 7. Akad 15. Top plan showing the blocking wall and burial (scale 1:40).

sides.

Finds: none

AKAD 16

Medieval

Location: Area A, Square 11C.

The grave structure was an almost rectangular shaft oriented E-W ($2.48 \times 0.82\text{-}1 \times 1.4\text{m}$) gently sloping towards the bottom. A door blocking made of mud bricks and mortar sealed the entrance to the burial chamber. The oval burial chamber ($2.24 \times 0.54\text{m}$) was cut 340mm below the bottom of the shaft (Figure 8).

The adult burial was intact. It was extended, oriented E-W, head to the W facing E (?) and had both hands at its sides.

Finds: none

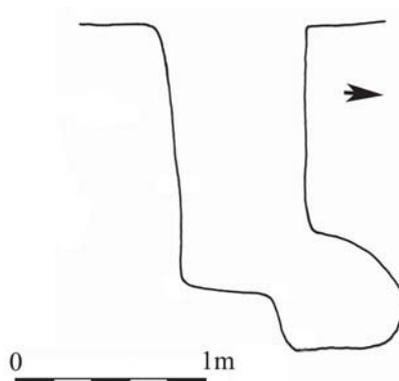


Figure 8. Akad 16. North-south section with the shaft and side niche (scale 1:40).

AKAD 17

Medieval

Location: Area E, Square 1 8T.

The grave had an almost rectangular shaft oriented E-W ($2.5 \times 0.7\text{-}0.8 \times 1.20\text{m}$) gently sloping towards the bottom. At the northern part of its bottom a simple kind of door blocking for the entrance to the burial chamber was revealed. It consisted of mud bricks and mortar. The oval burial chamber ($2.04 \times 0.6\text{m}$) was cut about 450mm below the bottom of the shaft.

The adult burial was extended, oriented E-W, head to the W facing E (?) and with both hands at its sides.

Finds: none

Finds

Four categories of grave goods were revealed during excavation in Akad in the 2004 season:

a) Personal ornaments: one archer's loose, and hundreds of beads of different types.

b) A blue residue was collected from the burial chamber of Grave 10. This residue might be connected with a rite that consisted of colouring the face or other parts of the

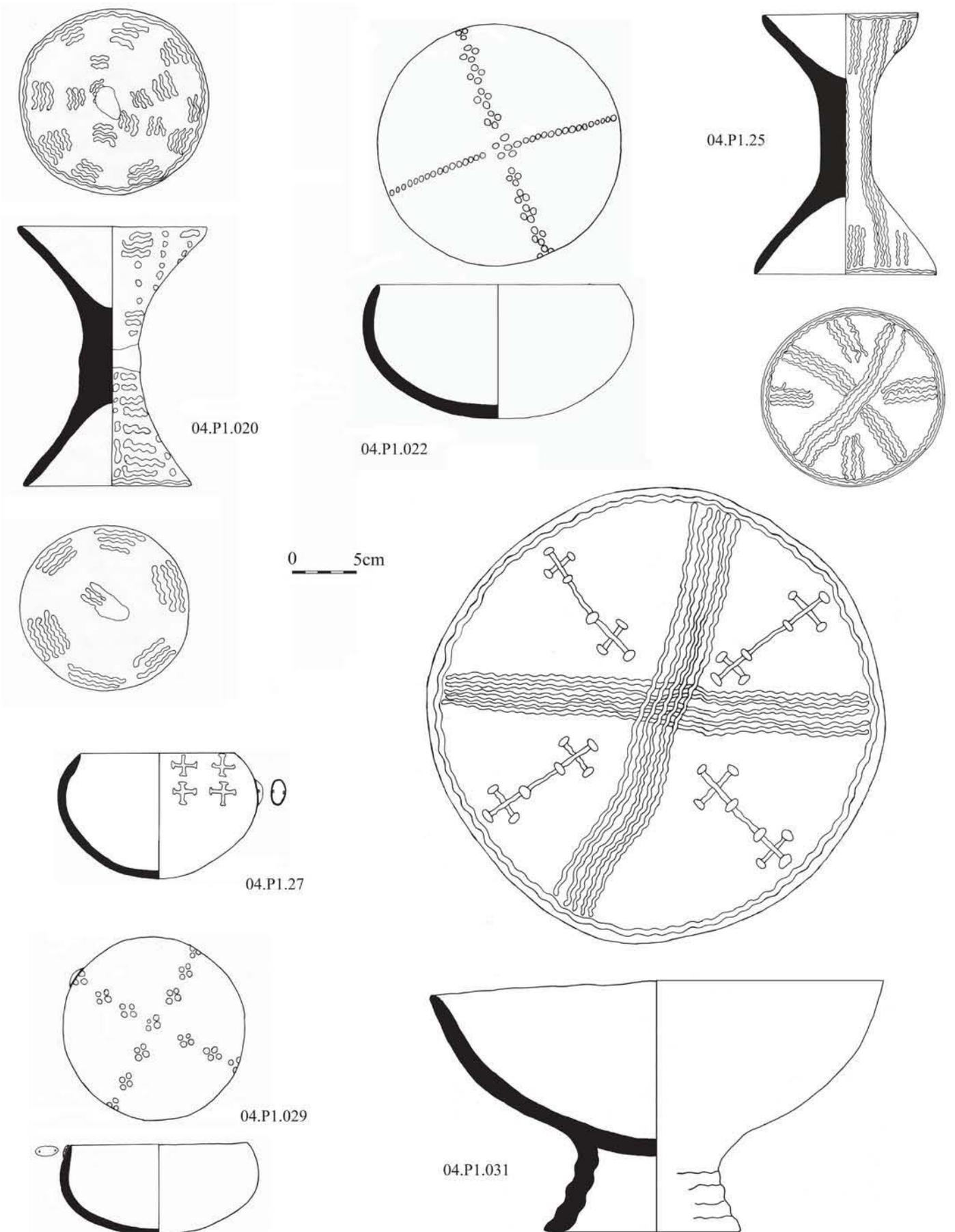


Figure 9. Different types of vessels and decoration from grave no. 10 (scale 1:4).



body of the deceased (cf. Geus 1993, 58).

c) Two spindle whorls were found in the burial chambers of Graves 8 and 10.

d) Pottery, which constitutes the bulk of the finds. Table 1 lists the pottery found in 2004 at Akad.

All these vessels were found in the post-Meroitic Graves 8 and 10 and seem very similar to the post-Meroitic pottery found at Gabati (Smith 1998). There were 14 pot-stands or incense burners, three basins, one cup, one footed bowl and 12 other bowls. The main interest of the assemblage lies in the large number of pot-stands, which might throw new light on the function of this specific type of vessel (for an almost complete list of similar finds cf. Anderson and Ahmed 2002) in the burial customs of the post-Meroitic period, especially in relation to libation and incense burning (for a lengthy discussion on this matter cf. Lenoble 1994, 62-64). It may also shed light on the significance of the cross decoration on the bowl and footed bowl (04-021 & 031) which seems to be related to Soba Ware (cf. Welsby 1998, 170-171 and fig. 91) dating from the later phases of the post-Meroitic period. The decoration, utilizing groups of three, four, and sometimes five dots (04-006, 011, 022 and 029), was found both at el-Fereikha and on Soba Ware, which might indicate the continuation of the pottery decoration tradition in that region.

Discussion

The project at Akad is proving very fruitful for the understanding of the burial customs during the periods from late Meroitic to late Medieval times. Further investigations in the cemeteries should produce additional material for the study of the attitude of the local people towards death; and the excavation of the monuments located during the survey could shed light on life in this locality of the Middle Nile Region.

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Table 1. Area A, Pottery inventory.

CODE	TYPE OF VESSEL	DECORATION	M.F.	DIMENSIONS (in cm)			DESCRIPTION
				DIA.	HT	TH.	
04-PL-001	Bowl	Undecorated	H/M	10	8	0.5	Burnished dark brown, slipped, slightly carinated and with a nozzle.
04-PL-002	Pot Stand	Stripes of vertical and horizontal wavy lines, of different number (4-8), both internal and external walls; bottom of bases with irregular circles; rims decorated with wavy line	H/M	15 / 13.2	21.4	0.4 – 0.5	Burnished light brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-003	Pot Stand	Vertical stripes of wavy lines on the body divided by ring of three straight lines in the middle; four groups of horizontal stripes of wavy lines on the inside of the lower base; vertical stripes of wavy lines interchanged with group of four dots on the inside of the upper base.		13 / 14.5	22.2	0.5 – 1.3	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-004	Bowl	Undecorated	H/M	11.6	9.2	0.3 – 0.4	Burnished dark brown, slipped, slightly carinated and with a nozzle.
04-PL-005	Pot Stand	Overall double short wavy lines (irregular pattern).	H/M	13 / 15.4	24.4	0.8 – 1.5	Burnished, light brown, slipped, white painted, with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-006	Bowl	Five lines of three groups of four dots merging towards the bottom on the internal surface.	H/M	15.8	10.4	0.7	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint.
04-PL-007	Goblet	Undecorated	H/M	7.9	6.7	0.4	Black, slipped, slightly carinated.
04-PL-008	Basin	Undecorated	H/M	36	13.6	1 – 1.2	Black, slipped, badly preserved.
04-PL-009	Basin	Rim decorated with incised lines.	H/M	36	12.8	1 – 1.2	Black, slipped.
04-PL-010	Pot Stand	Irregular dots in two groups separated in the middle by two diagonal lines in both internal and external surfaces.	H/M	20.4 / 21.6	30	0.8 – 1	Dark brown slipped, white painted, hollow.
04-PL-011	Bowl	Four lines of three groups of four dots merging towards the bottom on the internal surface.	H/M	14	7.8	0.6 – 1	Dark brown slipped, white painted.
04-PL-012	Pot Stand	Irregular double short horizontal wavy lines on the remaining surface of the whole vase.	H/M	12.2 / 14.8	17.2	0.5 – 0.8	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle. Badly preserved.
04-PL-013	Bowl	Four stripes of double vertical wavy lines forming a cross on the bottom of the internal surface; below the inside rim a continuous horizontal wavy line.	H/M	21.4	18	0.7 – 0.9	Burnished dark brown, slipped, orange painted, eroded on both sides.
04-PL-014	Basin	Undecorated	H/M	29.4	12	0.7 – 0.8	Black, slipped.
04-PL-015	Bowl	Four lines of three groups of double short horizontal wavy lines merging towards the bottom and a wavy line on the rim of the internal surface.	H/M	15	8.3	0.4 – 0.6	Burnished red brown, slipped, white paint.
04-PL-016	Pot Stand	Continuous horizontal wavy lines on the lower part of the main body; four groups of irregular horizontal wavy lines divided in four sectors by a cross formed by double lining in the internal surface of both bases.	H/M	12.6 / 13.2	18.6	0.6 – 1.3	Light brown, slipped, white painted, with closed tubular handle.



Table 1. Area A, Pottery inventory (cont.).

CODE	TYPE OF VESSEL	DECORATION	M.F.	DIMENSIONS (in cm)			DESCRIPTION
				DIA.	HT	TH.	
04-PL-017	Bowl	Undecorated	H/M	8.9	10	0.5	Burnished dark brown, slipped, slightly carinated.
04-PL-018	Pot Stand	Continuous horizontal wavy lines on the upper part of the main body and six lines of irregular double short wavy lines on the lower part, the two groups separated by a horizontal line in the middle of the main body. The internal surface of the bigger base is filled with parallel horizontal wavy lines divided in four Sectors by double vertical lines. On the internal surface of the smaller base irregular grouping of double short horizontal wavy lines. Both rims decorated with straight horizontal line.	H/M	10.7 / 12.8	18.5	0.6 – 1.1	Burnished light brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-019	Pot Stand	Continuous horizontal wavy lines on the upper part of the main body and lines of irregular groups of three short wavy lines on the lower part. the two groups separated by a thick wavy line in the middle of the main body. The internal surface of the bigger base is filled with irregular horizontal wavy lines divided in two sectors by double vertical lines. On the internal surface of the smaller base irregular grouping of triple short horizontal wavy lines.	H/M	11.9 / 13.7	24	0.6 – 1.1	Burnished light brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle, not well preserved.
04-PL-020	Pot Stand	The main body is decorated with vertical dotted lines except for a sector in the upper part that is left undecorated. Next to this the first two zones of the dotted lines are filled with vertical short wavy lines. Below the rim of the upper part there is a continuous horizontal wavy line. The middle of the main body has a ring of a thick horizontal wavy line. Next to the lower outside rim are three groups of three horizontal wavy lines. The inside of the smaller base is decorated next to the rim with four groups of three short horizontal wavy lines. one of four lines and one of two lines; a circle with another similar group lays at its bottom. The inside of the bigger base is covered with irregular grouping of triple horizontal wavy lines and a circle at its bottom.	H/M	12.8 / 14.6	20.5	0.6 – 1.2	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle
04-PL-021	Bowl	Two horizontal lines of 11 (?) crosses on the upper half of the external surface.	H/M	11.8	10	0.5 – 0.6	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint slightly carinated, with a nozzle, external surface partly eroded
04-PL-022	Bowl	Two lines of single dots and two lines of five groups of three and four dots merging towards the centre where there is another group of four dots.	H/M	18.8	10.5	0.8 – 1.0	Burnished dark brown, slipped and white painted

Table 1. Area A, Pottery inventory (cont.).

CODE	TYPE OF VESSEL	DECORATION	M.F.	DIMENSIONS (in cm)			DESCRIPTION
				DIA.	HT	TH.	
04-PL-023	Pot Stand	Continuous horizontal wavy lines on the lower part and regular grouping of groups of three short horizontal wavy lines on the upper part of the main body. Irregular (?) grouping of seven groups of three short horizontal wavy lines on the internal surface of the small base and two groups of horizontal wavy lines covering the whole surface of the bigger one, divided into two sectors by double lining.	H/M	11.6 / 13	24.2	0.6 – 0.9	Burnished dark brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-024	Bowl	Undecorated	H/M	9.8	9.5	0.3 – 0.7	Burnished dark brown, slipped with a nozzle
04-PL-025	Pot Stand	Interchanging longer and shorter vertical groups of two or three wavy lines decorating the whole surface of the vessel (inside and outside). Horizontal wavy lines decorating three of the inner and outer rims.	H/M	11.8 / 14	20.8	0.6 – 0.8	Light brown, slipped, white painted, with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-026	Pot Stand	Vertical lining of groups of four wavy lines covering the whole surface of the vessel and continuous horizontal wavy line decorating the inner and outer rims.	H/M	17.4 / 20	35.2	1.9 – 2.8	Burnished, dark brown, slipped, white paint hollow.
04-PL-027	Pot Stand	Vertical groups of three or four wavy lines covering the whole surface of the vessel (inside and outside). Continuous horizontal wavy line decorating inner and outer rims.	H/M	12 / 14.8	25	0.8 – 1.5	Burnished, dark brown, slipped, white paint with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-028	Bowl	Vertical groups of three incised lines of different lengths decorating the upper half of the external surface of the vessel.	H/M	15	8	0.4 – 0.6	Black, slipped with a vertically pierced nozzle.
04-PL-029	Bowl	Four groups of four dots forming a cross merging in the centre towards another such group of dots.	H/M	13.6	7.2	0.4	Burnished, light brown, slipped with a horizontally pierced nozzle next to the rim.
04-PL-030	Pot Stand	Parallel horizontal zones of triangles filled with diagonal incised lines covering the whole surface of the main body. One such zone below the rim of the internal surface of the small base, and two decorating the interior of the bigger one.	H/M	11.2 / 13.6	20.6	0.7	Burnished black, slipped, with closed tubular handle.
04-PL-031	Footed Bowl	Eight crosses connected by a line in a decorative group of two and divided into four sectors by two groups of five vertical wavy lines forming a cross at the bottom of the internal surface of the vessel.	H/M	35.2	19.2	1 – 1.4	Light brown, slipped, burnished on the interior surface, white painted, with a short footed base.



*Colour plate XXXI.
Akad 8. The double
shaft after surface
cleaning.*



Colour Plate XXXII. Akad 8. Vessels from the tomb.



Colour plate XXXIII. Akad 8. Potstands.



*Colour plate XXXIV. Akad 10. The
burial chamber with the grave goods in
situ.*