

The Meroitic cemetery¹

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The discovery of the Meroitic burial ground at Kadero was a by-product of the excavation of the Neolithic site which started in 1972 and finished in 2003 (Krzyżaniak 1975b; 1976; 1979a; 1990).

The first Meroitic graves at Kadero were found in the north-western part of the site in 1975 when ditches were excavated there by nearby government personnel, probably for laying down underground wires. These works, which took place well before the start of the excavation season and the arrival of the expedition, were soon stopped by the officers of the Sudan Antiquities Service. In the course of the usual inspection of the site made routinely by the director of fieldwork at Kadero, Lech Krzyżaniak, at the start of the season, human bones were found on the surface of the soil originating from the excavated ditches. Assuming that the bones were the remains of disturbed ancient inhumations, it was immediately decided to excavate this part of the site in order to save the remaining burials from possible further earthworks.

To accomplish this goal, two adjoining pits of a total of 104 square meters were consecutively excavated in 1975. Ten inhumations were found in these pits and it became immediately obvious that they are of a different chronology from the local Neolithic burials found prior to this season. This was indicated not only by their furnishing

and the position and orientation of the human remains in the grave pit but also by appearance of the bones: their surface, texture and state of preservation was clearly different. The few objects found with some of the burials indicate the Meroitic age. Further it was found during this and the next seasons at the site, that graves of Meroitic date occur also at other locations.

Apart from the ten inhumations found in the two pits (19-25, 27, 28, 30), four more Meroitic graves (26, 29, 32, 39) were found exposed on the ground near these pits in the course of the 1975 season. In the next seasons of excavations at Kadero twelve more Meroitic graves were found in the central part of the mound (74, 98, 99, 121, 137, 144, 147, 171, 180, 185, 197). Altogether therefore, 25 graves of Meroitic date have been discovered at Kadero.

All of these inhumations were found just below present ground surface, the state of preservation was therefore mostly rather poor. As a rule the skeletal remains have been found fragmented. Despite this, physical anthropologists were able to determine in most cases the sex and the age at death of the buried individuals. It was found that individuals of both sexes and of different age classes were buried at site (Promińska 1984; Dzierżykray-Rogalski, personal communication; Kaczmarek, personal communication).

1 Most of data from the cemetery were already published by L. Krzyżaniak in *The Meroitic Burial Ground an Kadero* (Khartoum Province), In: C. Berger, G. Clerc & N. Grimal *Hommages a Jean Leclant, IFAO, Le Caire, Bibliothèque d'Étude* 160/2:263-268. In the present paper it was supplemented by recently discovered, unpublished graves and by the catalogue.

Only three graves – 25, 30 and 197 – were found furnished with items shedding some light on the chronology of the burial ground and as such are worth a more detailed description at this stage of the research at Kadero. In the grave no. 25, the remains of probably a man of 25 – 30 years at death were identified (Promińska 1984:328). This relatively well preserved skeleton was resting on the right side with legs bent at knees, arms placed at the front of the upper body, with the head to the south and facing east (Fig. 7-8). The furnishing of this graves was composed of an unidentified object made of white stone, one shell of a Nile bivalve *Aspatharia* spp. (Fig. 12), three bracelets composed of beads made of white quartz (Fig. 11), bone, ostrich egg-shell and faience, and two ceramic vessels.

The vessels, a deep bowl and a small vase, are hand-made and are not decorated. They are made of a coarse, dark-greyish-brown sandy silt, tempered with organic matter (grass particles?). The bowl has a simple, rounded, open form, with a flatish bottom and a simple, rounded rim. Its outer surface is burnished and has a brown to greyish-brown colour; the inner surface of a similar colour is only smoothed. The bowl is 12.7 cm high and the mouth is 22.0 cm in diameter (Fig. 10).

The small vase has a simple, rounded form, flattened bottom and a simple, rounded rim. Its form reminds of a type also known as a deep bowl with a restricted orifice. It has a dark-brown burnished outer surface, perhaps coated, and its interior is burnished only at the rim. The vase is 11.5 cm high, has a diameter of ca 17 cm and an orifice of ca 13 cm (Fig. 9).

Following the classification of the Meroitic pottery proposed by Adams (1964) the deep bowl would fit into the Form Class D consisting of “very large, heavy, deep bowls and tumblers” (Meroitic Domestic Wares) mostly represented by ware VB and occurring chiefly in settlements (Adams 1964: 131 and 135, fig. 3:5). This ware, originating in the Napatan times, occurs in all phases of Meroitic pottery making but seems to be particularly abundant in the Terminal phase of this development (Adams 1964:165, 167, 171 and fig.17).

The small vase does not have parallels in Adams classification. However, as regards the matrix

and surface treatment it fits well into his Meroitic Domestic Wares. Pots of this form are also not known from Old Meroe (cf. Shinnie, Bradley 1980: 97-128, figs. 28-58). The only parallel to the Kadero vase as regards form, although only slightly similar, is represented by a vessel excavated from the grave at Ushara near Khartoum and dated to the time between 270 and 350AD (Shinnie 1953: especially p. 39, fig. 5: 7 and p. 40).

Grave 30 contained the rather well preserved remains of a man some 35 years at death (Promińska 1984:328). The body was resting on the right side, with the head to the south facing north-east, but in a more contracted position than the individual buried in the grave 25 (Fig. 19-20). The furnishing of the grave consisted of an arrow-head, a stone ring and two stone beads.

The stone ring was found on the thumb of the right hand of the skeleton, with the wider end toward the tip of the thumb. It is regularly shaped, trapezoid in section (Fig. 21). The Kadero specimen belongs to the Type II in the classification of Meroitic stone rings proposed by Hayes (1973: 114, fig. 4). Objects of this type are considered by her as “most probably archer’s rings” and are dated to the span of time between 120 BC and 180 AD. They are distributed roughly speaking in the Central Sudan: in the riverain reaches between 3rd Cataract in the north and Sennar in the south, and in the area of Darfur and Kordofan (Hayes 1973:116-121, fig. 7-9). Two stone rings – of a type different from Kadero – were found in the Meroitic graves at Khartoum Hospital site on the right thumbs in association with iron arrow-heads; in one of these graves the remains of a man were found, in the other most probably also the remains of a man (Arkell 1949, 121-123, 127). Thumb rings of the type are generally interpreted as archer’s rings (archer’s looses) (Shinnie 1967:110-111, 164).

The arrow-head found in the Kadero grave was found resting loosely on one of the upper ribs of the skeleton. It was made of iron, now heavily corroded and in a fragile condition (Fig. 21). It has a flat leave-shaped blade and a tang; it is not possible to state whether it was originally provided with the barb. Iron, which occurred sporadically since Napatan times, is thought to have been used in the Central Sudan more frequently from the 1st cen-

tury BC onward (Shinnie 1967:162). Iron arrowheads however come into use more extensively from the 1st century AD (Wainwright 1945:36). It looks, therefore, as if grave no 30 contained the accessories of a Meroitic archer.

In the third grave, 197, a relatively well preserved skeleton was found. It was resting on the right side with legs bent at knees, arms placed at the front of the upper body, with the head to the south (Fig. 33-34). In this grave the remains of probably a woman of 25 – 35 years of age were identified (Kaczmarek, personal communication). The furnishing of this graves was made up of two iron anklets and small fragment of a stone stud (Fig. 35-36).

The iron anklets were found on lower parts of right and left tibia. About similar anklets mentioned Wainwright and dated them to later phase of Meroitic culture or even beginnings X-Group (Wainwright 1945:31).

The furnishings of the graves no 25, 30 and 197 date these burials to the later phase of the development of the Meroitic culture. It seems that each of these inhumations, and perhaps also the rest of the Meroitic graves from Kadero, can be dated to the period between the 1st and 4th centuries AD.

The graves of the Meroitic date at Kadero so far excavated seem to be a part of a larger burial ground of presently unknown size. It is obvious that this cemetery belongs to a class of the Meroitic burial grounds characterized by rather poor furnishing, occurring in the area of Khartoum. As a rule, they have been found on low hills occupied earlier by Early Khartoum and Neolithic settlements such as at Shaheinab (Arkell 1953:91-96), Geili (Caneva 1984:353; 1989) and Khartoum Hospital (Arkell 1949:119-127) situated on the eastern side of the Upper (main) Nile and in the area of the present Khartoum. The Meroitic cemeteries situated on the western side of the Upper (main) Nile are reported to be of a mound type, apparently groups of tumuli, more elaborated and richer in furnishing than the Kadero type of inhumations (Ahmed A. Ali Hakem, Abd al-Rahim M. Khabir 1989:383, fig. 2; cf. also Ahmed M. Ali Hakem 1979).

Despite the small number of Meroitic graves excavated in the area Khartoum and their poor

furnishings, this class of burial grounds should not be underestimated when studying the Meroitic development. They yield important information on the demography, settlement patterns and funerary habits of apparently smaller Meroitic populations leading a mobile way of life, in contrast to the larger and socially more complex human groups living in larger, permanent agglomerations with ceremonial architecture. They can thus contribute not only to the better picture of the Meroitic archaeology but also to a better understanding of the Meroitic society and its culture.

Catalogue of the graves

GRAVE 19

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 15cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: N – S, head to N

Position: left side; Ge

Sex: not identified

Age: 4 years

Number of finds: 2

1. Copper ring (Fig. 2).

Size: diameter 1.3cm; thickness 0.15mm

2. Tubular faience bead.

Size: outside diameter 0.5cm; hole diameter 0.2cm; thickness 0.3cm; length 0.7cm



Fig. 1. Grave 19.

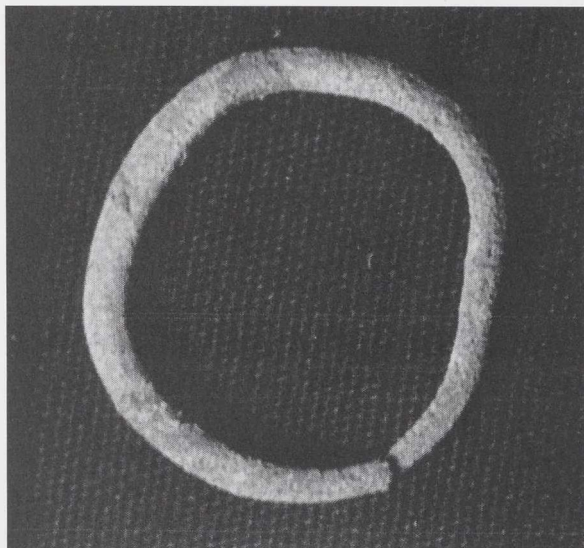


Fig. 2. Grave 19. Copper ring.

GRAVE 20

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: not identified

Position: cluster of bones; not identified

Sex: not identified

Age: not identified

Number of finds: 0

GRAVE 21

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: not identified

Position: cluster of bones; not identified

Sex: not identified

Age: not identified

Number of finds: 0

GRAVE 22

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: N – S, head to N

Position: on the back; A

Sex: female

Age: 18 – 20 years

Number of finds: 0

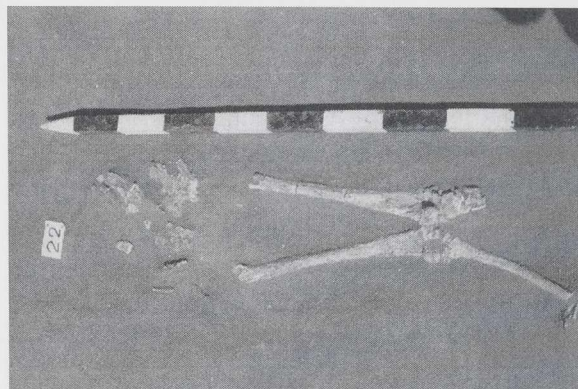


Fig. 3. Grave 22.

GRAVE 23

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: not identified

Position: cluster of bones; not identified

Sex: female

Age: 30 years

Number of finds: 0



Fig. 4. Grave 23.

GRAVE 24

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to N

Position: right side; Fd

Sex: not identified

Age: 15 – 16 years

Number of finds: 0

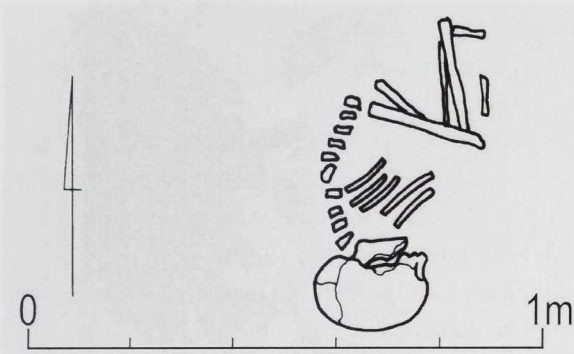


Fig. 5. Grave 24.



Fig. 6. Grave 24.

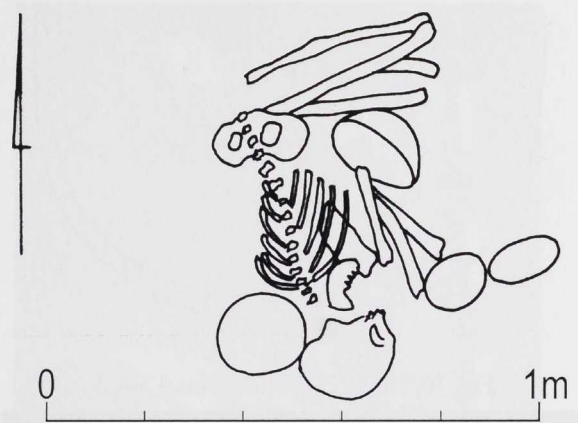


Fig. 7. Grave 25.



Fig. 8. Grave 25.

GRAVE 25

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 10cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

Position: right side; Fd

Sex: male

Age: 25 – 30 years

Number of finds: 7

1. Pottery vessel Fig. 9).

Size: rim diameter: 22.0 cm; height: 12.7 cm;
wall thickness: 0.5 cm

2. Pottery vessel (Fig. 10).

Size: rim diameter: 17.0 cm; height: 11.5 cm;
wall thickness: 0.5 cm

3-5. Three bracelets composed of beads made of white quartz (Fig. 11), bone, ostrich eggshell and faience.

Size: beads of white quartz: average outside diameter 0.5 – 0.85 cm; hole diameter 0.25 – 0.3 cm; thickness 0.23 – 0.62cm; length 0.8 – 1.05 cm

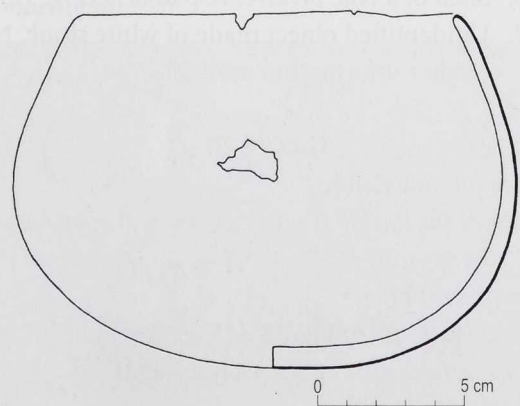


Fig. 9. Grave 25. Pottery vessel No. 1.

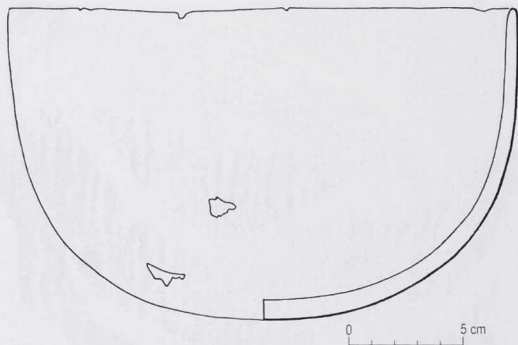


Fig. 10. Grave 25. Pottery vessel No. 2.



Fig. 11. Grave 25. Bracelet composed of beads made of white quartz.



Fig. 12. Grave 25. Shell of a Nile bivalve.

6. Shell of a Nile bivalve. *Aspatharia* (Fig. 12).
7. Unidentified object made of white stone. No further information available.

GRAVE 26

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: not identified

Position: cluster of bones; not identified

Sex: not identified

Age: 4 – 5 years

Number of finds: 2

1. Fourteen barrel shape of white quartz beads (Fig. 13).

Size: average outside diameter 0.7 – 0.9 cm; hole diameter 0.25 – 0.3 cm; length 0.6 – 1.15 cm

2. Four faience beads.

Sizes: average outside diameter 0.4 cm; hole diameter 0.1 cm; length 0.5 – 0.7 cm



Fig. 13. Grave 26. Bracelet composed of beads made of white quartz.

GRAVE 27

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: SE – NW; head to SE

Position: right side; Fd

Sex: male

Age: 30 – 35 years

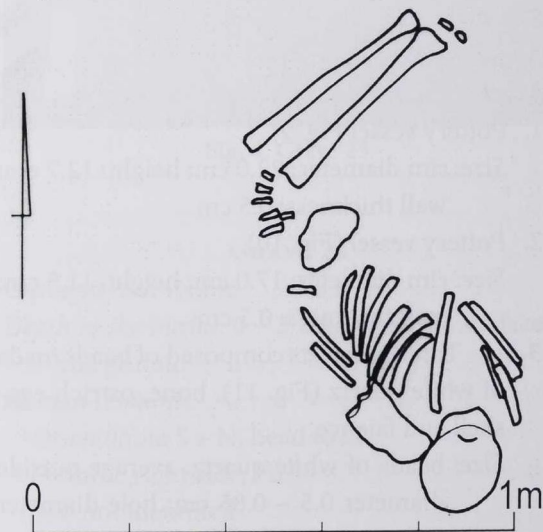


Fig. 14. Grave 27.

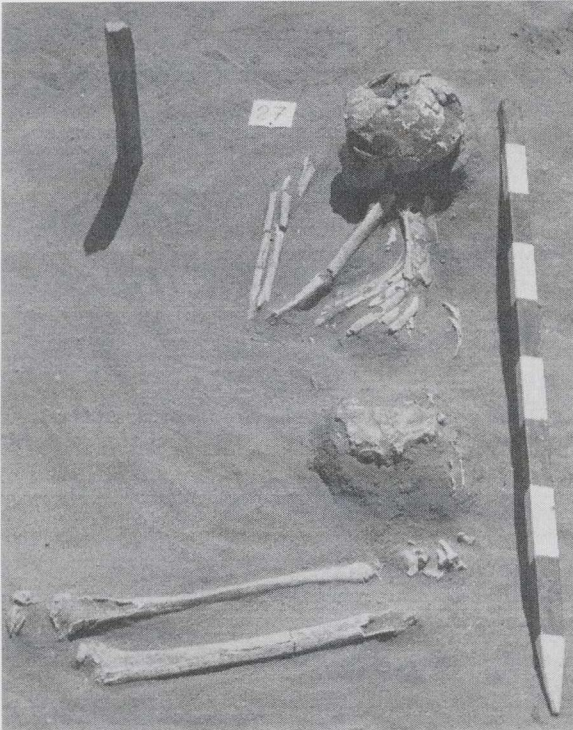


Fig. 15. Grave 27.

Number of finds: 1

1. barrel shape stone bead.

Size: outside diameter 0.7cm; hole diameter 0.2cm; length 0.9 cm

GRAVE 28

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

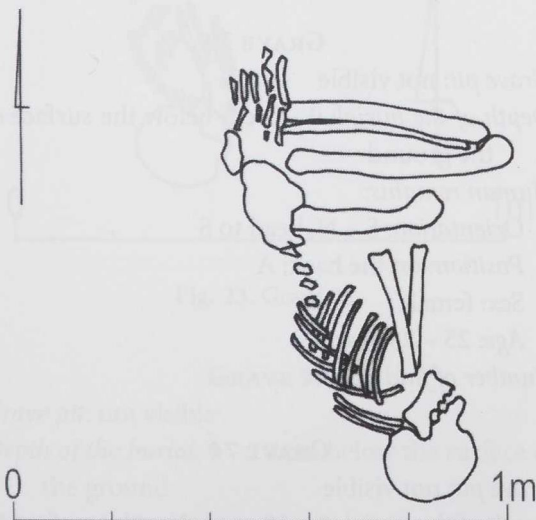


Fig. 16. Grave 28.

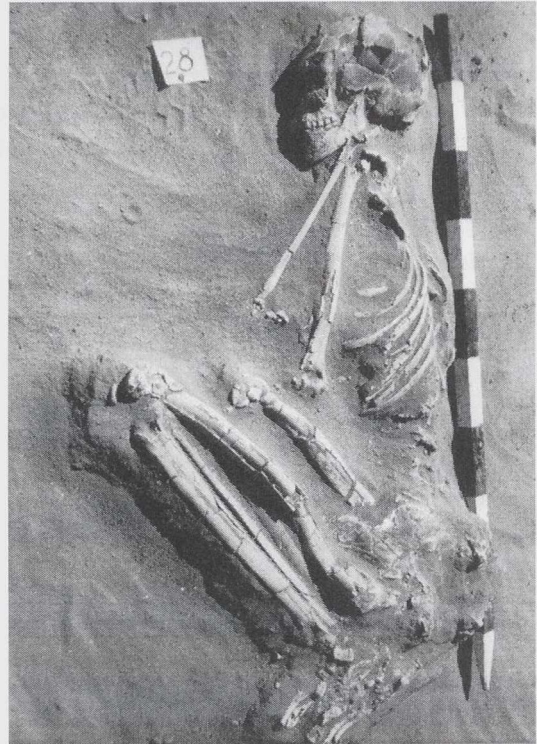


Fig. 17. Grave 28.

Position: right sight; Gd

Sex: male

Age: 26 – 28 years

Number of finds: 0

GRAVE 29

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

Position: right side; Fd

Sex: not identified

Age: 3 – 4 years

Number of finds: 0



Fig. 18. Grave 29.

GRAVE 30

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

Position: right side; Ge

Sex: male

Age: 35 years

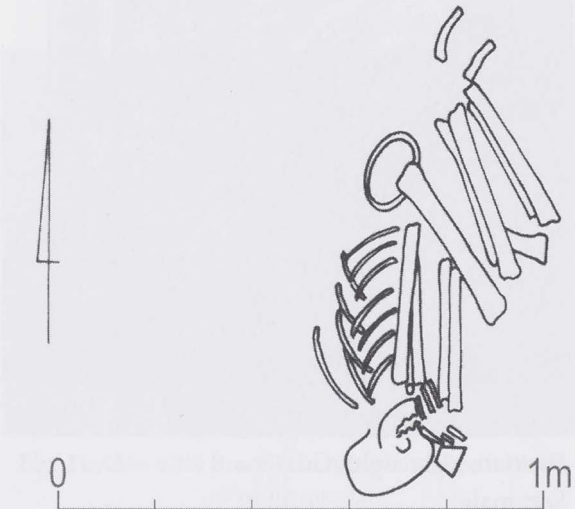


Fig. 19. Grave 30.



Fig. 20. Grave 30. Archer's ring *in situ*.

Number of finds: 3

1. Archer's ring. Regularly shaped, trapezoid in section (Fig. 21).
2. Iron arrow head with flat leaf-shaped blade.
3. Two barrel shape stone beads.

Size: average outside diameter 0.7 – 1.0 cm; hole diameter 0.2cm; length 0.8 – 1.0 cm

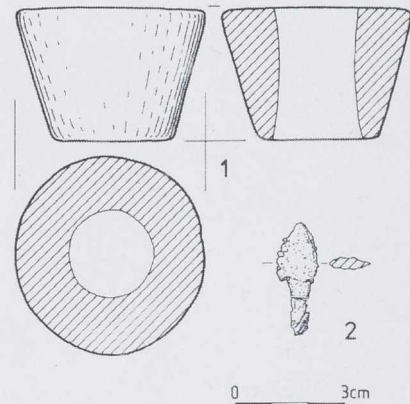


Fig. 21. Grave 30. Archer's ring and iron arrow head.

GRAVE 32

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: not identified

Position: cluster of bones; not identified

Sex: male

Age: 17 – 18 years

Number of finds: 0

GRAVE 39

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

Position: on the back; A

Sex: female

Age: 25 – 28 years

Number of finds: 0

GRAVE 74

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: W – E, head to W

Position: left side; Gc

Sex: male

Age: 20-30 years

Number of finds: 0

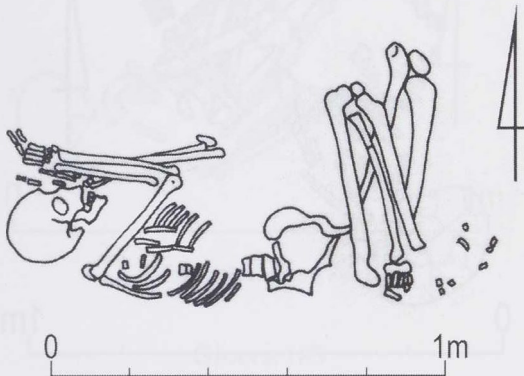


Fig. 22. Grave 74.

GRAVE 98

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 6 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: S – N, head to S

Position: right side; G?

Sex: not identified

Age: adult

Number of finds: 0

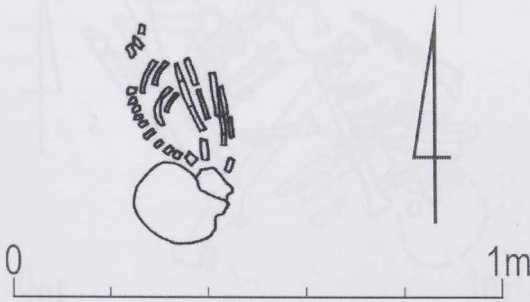


Fig. 23. Grave 98.

GRAVE 99

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: SE – NW, head to SE

Position: right side; Ge

Sex: male

Age: 35 – 45 years

Number of finds: 0

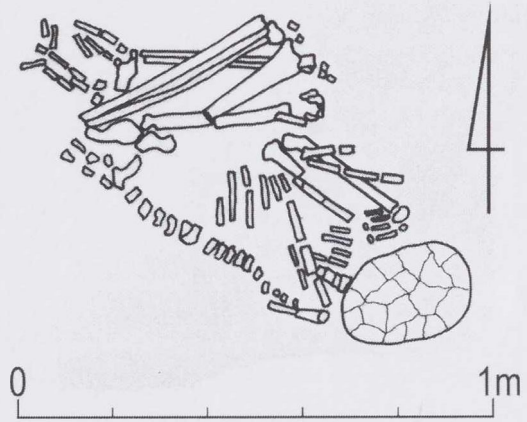


Fig. 24. Grave 99.

GRAVE 121

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 45 – 65 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: W – E, head to W

Position: left side; Ge

Sex: female

Age: 19 – 23 years

Number of finds: 1

Faience bead. Dimension of bead: outside diameter 0.5 cm; hole diameter 0.2 cm; thickness 0.3 cm

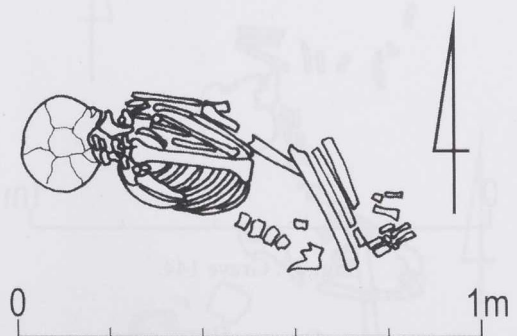


Fig. 25. Grave 121.

GRAVE 137

Grave pit: not visible

Depth of the burial: 75 – 85 cm below the surface of the ground

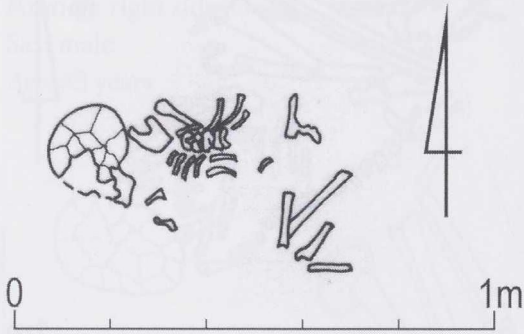
*Human remains:**Orientation:* W – E, head to W*Position:* right side; ?d*Sex:* not identified*Age:* 9 – 10 years*Number of finds:* 0

Fig. 26. Grave 137.

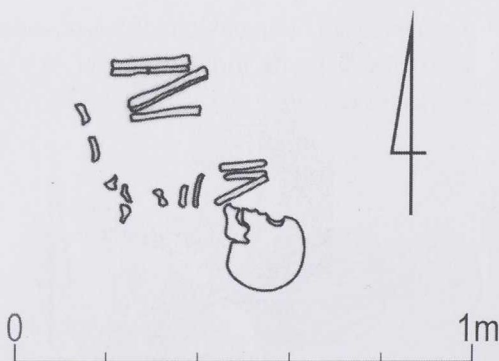
GRAVE 144*Grave pit:* not visible*Depth of the burial:* 1 – 12 cm below the surface of the ground*Human remains:**Orientation:* SE – NW, head to SE*Position:* right side; Fd*Sex:* not identified*Age:* 7 – 14 years*Number of finds:* 0

Fig. 27. Grave 144.

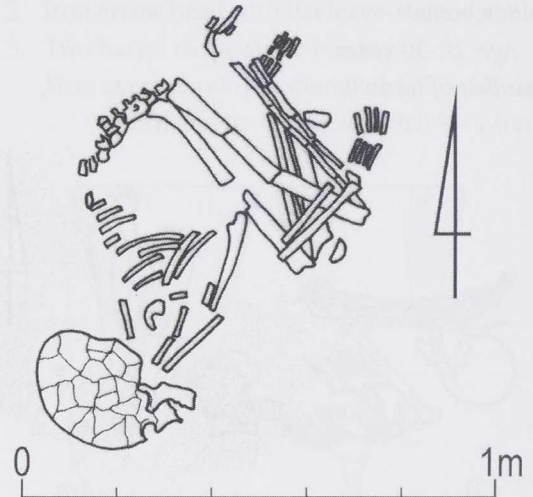
GRAVE 147*Grave pit:* not visible*Depth of the burial:* 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground*Human remains:**Orientation:* SW – NE, head to SW*Position:* right side; Ee*Sex:* female*Age:* 20 – 25 years*Number of finds:* 0

Fig. 28. Grave 147.

GRAVE 171*Grave pit:* not visible*Depth of the burial:* 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground*Human remains:**Orientation:* SW – NE, head to SW*Position:* right side; Gd*Sex:* not identified*Age:* adult*Number of finds:* 0

Fig. 29. Grave 171.

GRAVE 180*Grave pit:* not visible*Depth of the burial:* 0 – 5 cm below the surface of the ground*Human remains:**Orientation:* W – E, head to W

Position: right side; Ge
Sex: female
Age: 35 – 45 years
Number of finds: 0

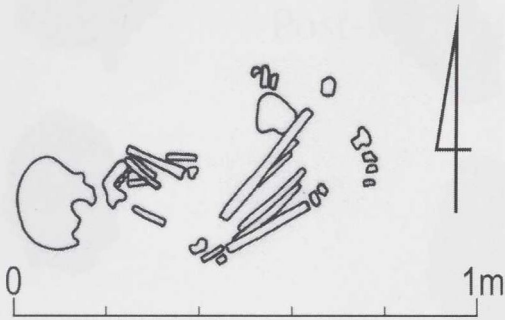


Fig. 30. Grave 180.

GRAVE 185

Grave pit: not visible
Depth of the burial: 0 – 10 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: NW – SE, head to NW

Position: right side; Ed

Sex: male

Age: 20 – 30 years

Number of finds: 0

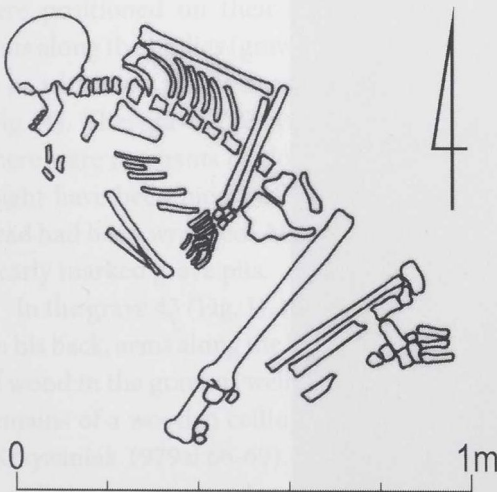


Fig. 31. Grave 185.

GRAVE 197

Grave pit: not visible
Depth of the burial: 5 – 35 cm below the surface of the ground

Human remains:

Orientation: SW – NE, head to SW

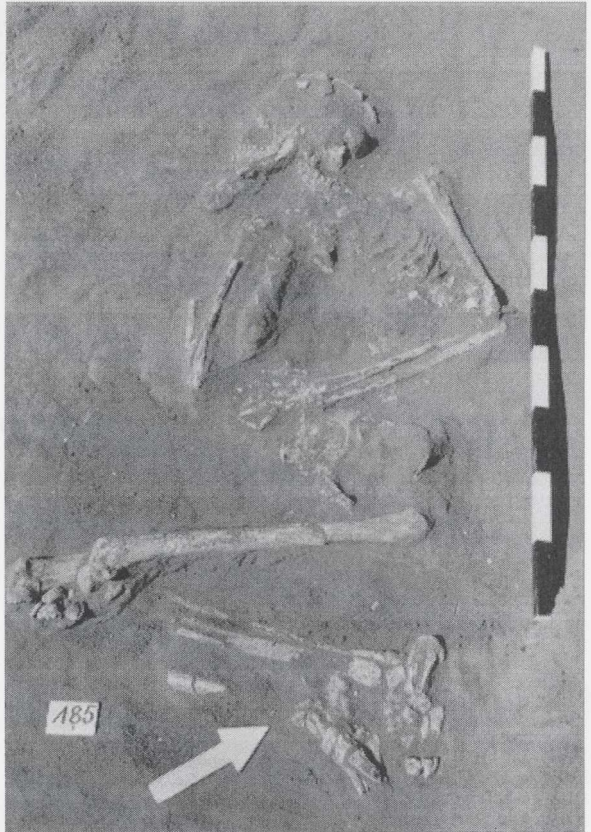


Fig. 32. Grave 185.

Position: right side; ?c

Sex: female

Age: 25 – 30 years

Number of finds: 2

1. Two iron anklets (Fig. 35).

Size: inside diameters 7.2 – 7.5 cm; band ca. 2.3 – 2.5 cm wide

2. Fragment of a stud (Fig. 36).

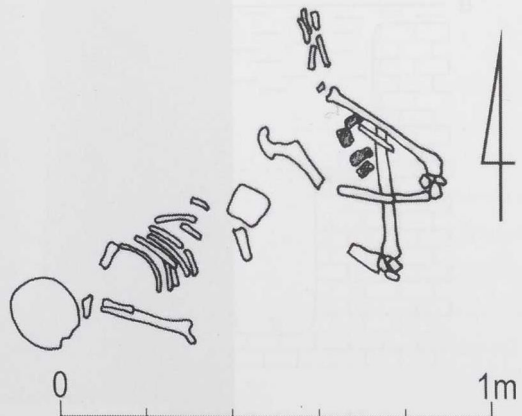


Fig. 33. Grave 197.

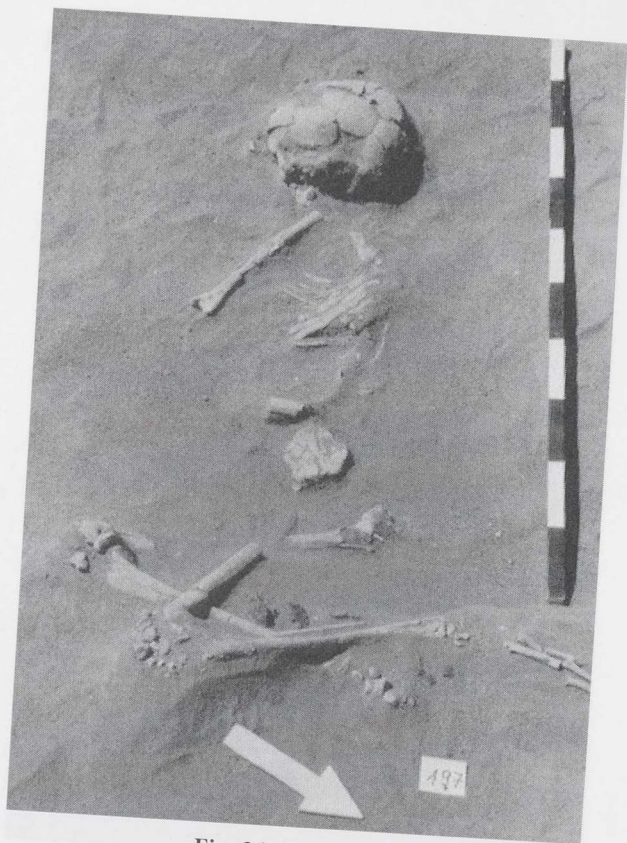


Fig. 34. Grave 197.



Fig. 35. Grave 197. A pieces of iron anklets.

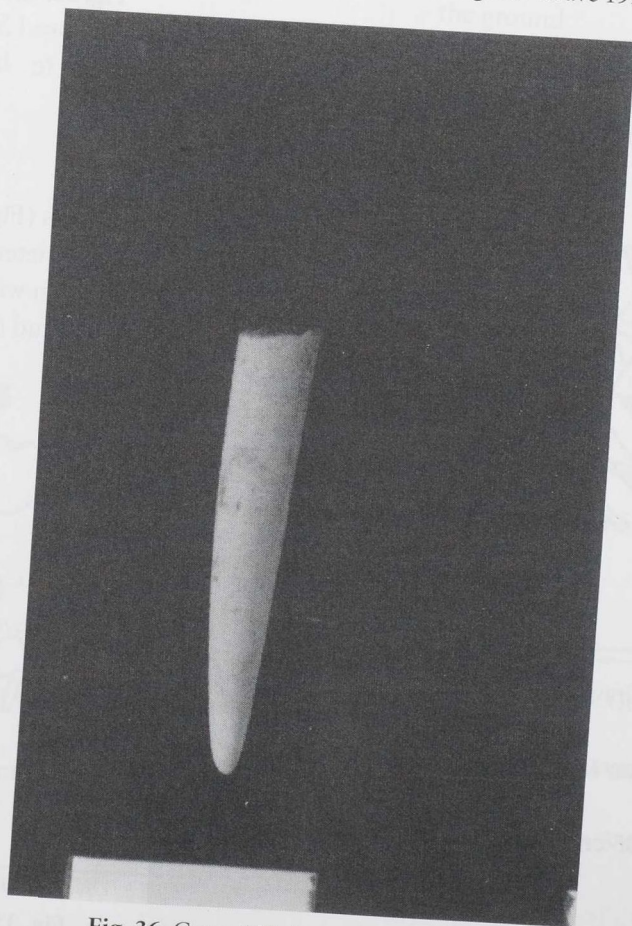


Fig. 36. Grave 197. Fragment of a stud.