

SUDAN & NUBIA

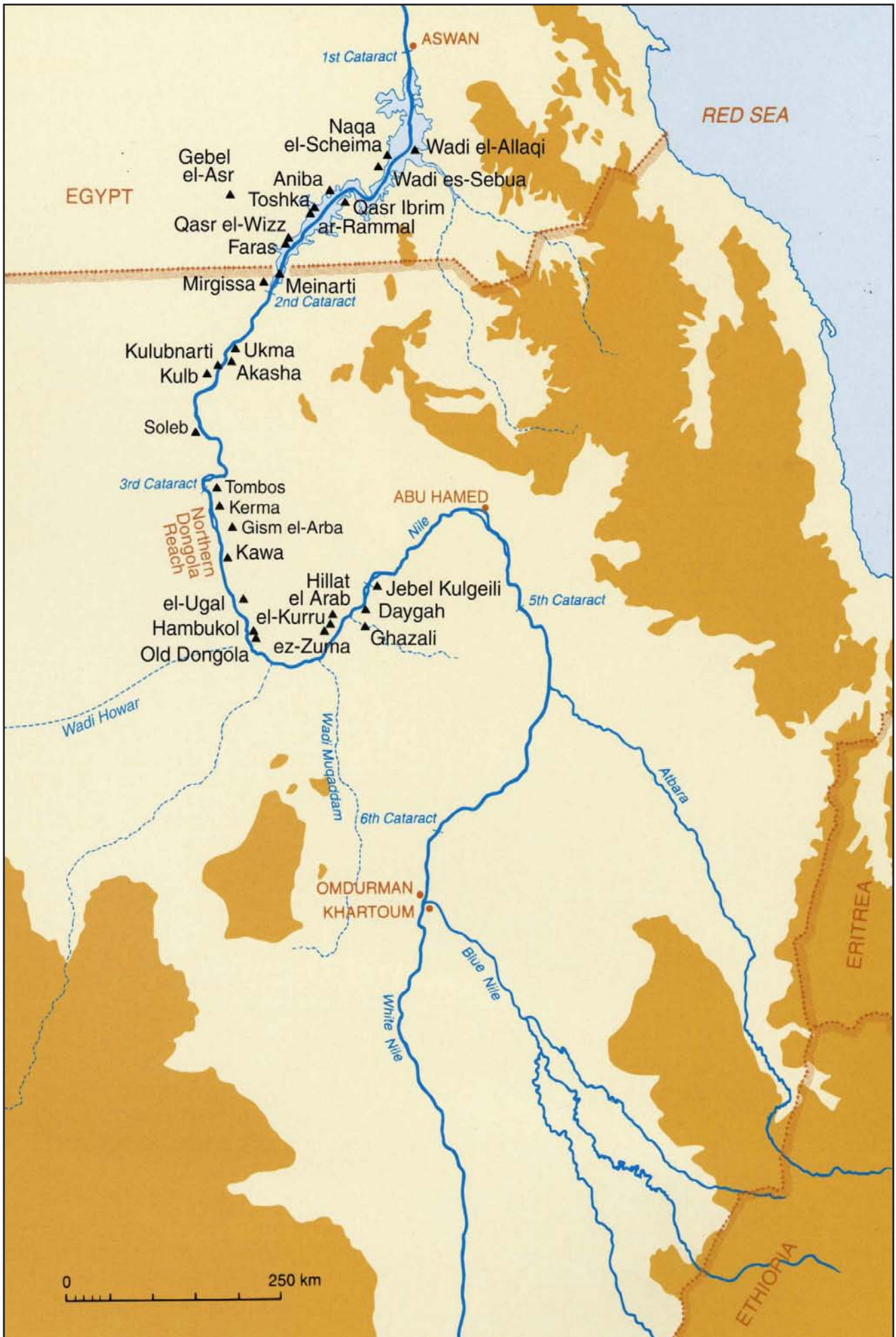
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



Bulletin No. 3

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Front Cover: Temple of Amenophis III at Soleb visited by
F. W. Green in 1909 (Photo D. A. Welsby).

Introduction

As the contents of this year's issue clearly demonstrate, *Sudan & Nubia* goes from strength to strength with a developing international profile. The Society's own work in the Dongola Reach is represented by two papers; the first, based on the analysis of human remains, provides fascinating insights into living conditions during the Kerma Period (Judd); the second outlines progress on the continuing research into the geomorphology of the region (Treves *et al.*). A complementary project, carried out in the same region by a French Expedition, has among other things identified a rare native settlement dating to the period of Egyptian conquest (reported on by Gratien). At Kerma itself, exciting new work, uncovering remains of the Napatan and Meroitic Periods, is dramatically extending the history of the site (Salah Ahmed), while of equal importance historically are the results from Hillat el-Arab (near Gebel Barkal), a cemetery with elite burials of the New Kingdom and very earliest Kushite Period (Vincentelli). Research into quarrying and stones receives fresh impetus from work at Gebel El-Asr in Lower Nubia (Shaw and Bloxam) and in Tombos and Daygah at the Third and Fourth Cataracts respectively (Harrell). Surveys in the latter region, threatened by a new dam, are confirming its great archaeological potential (Abdel Rahman and Kabashy Hussein). Among other possibilities, sites in the Abu Hamed Reach can be expected to shed important new light on Nubian monasticism, until recently a neglected subject (Julie Anderson). Further north, Qasr Ibrim, which has long been partially submerged, continues to repay the Egypt Exploration Society's commitment under difficult circumstances (John Alexander). Far from the Nile Valley, museum basements can also be a source of significant 'discoveries' (Wardley and Davies), as may unpublished archival material and archaeological diaries (Welsby Sjöström).

During the course of the year, SARS suffered a serious blow with the passing of its distinguished President, Sir Lawrence Kirwan. Larry was a source of encouragement, support and inspiration for us all. We salute his memory and his contribution to Sudanese and Nubian archaeology (see Obituary, by Harry Smith). We also regret the loss of Prof. Jack Plumley, a specialist in Christian Nubia, who for many years directed the EES excavations at Qasr Ibrim (see Obituary, by John Alexander).



Two New Kingdom Tombs at Napata

Irene Vincentelli

The highest part of the excavation area in the Hillat el Arab cemetery, about 3km south of the sacred area of Jebel Barkal (Napata), contains two tombs (ARA 1 and ARA 4) that can be dated to the New Kingdom on the basis of their grave goods.

The two tombs clearly differ from the others in both their typology and in the artefacts they contain. They lie close to each other, although they are very different in their structure and importance.

Tomb ARA 1 is richer and more articulated, consisting of eight rooms, some of which are plastered and painted (Fig. 1A), whereas ARA 4 is smaller in both the number of rooms and in its dimensions (Fig. 4). Both tombs have the same type of access with a rectangular shaft opening on to the funerary rooms.

There is no evidence to give any hint of the superstructure as the two tombs are located in a modern village, between and partially below contemporary houses.

Tomb ARA 1

This very large tomb is located under a house which is still occupied by Mr Ali Bodr's family. Its first discovery goes back to the present owner's father who, by trying to drill a water well in his porch, went through the sandstone bank into a large empty chamber. As he realised that it was not possible to make a well, he refilled the hole with stones without entering into the tomb, according to his son's memory.

Many years later, in 1988, the pressure of the stones on the flaked and irregular edges of the hole, as well as constant trampling, caused a collapse of the old, precarious blocking and a hole opened again.

A salvage excavation was hastily made because of the threat of structural collapse. It brought to light some underground rooms and a very deep rectangular shaft. At the bottom of the shaft, two entrances gave access to the rooms, on the eastern and western sides respectively. On that occasion, the complete excavation of the shaft was started, but abandoned, as the heavy perimeter wall of the house was resting on the northern side of the shaft. It was, therefore, decided to enter through the hole made by the partially collapsed ceiling of one of the underground rooms, and to continue the excavation through this opening.

The excavation revealed that the eastern part of the tomb included six white plastered rooms (Leclant and Clerc 1989, 416). The western rooms were just glimpsed before their excavation was abandoned because of the endangered shaft. The eastern and western entrances were sealed with red bricks and cement.

In 1996, the excavation was resumed by the joint mission of the NCAM and the University of Cassino.

The first step was to demolish the perimeter wall of the house lying above the shaft of the tomb in order to excavate safely. It was agreed to rebuild the wall at the end of the work, 200mm further back, in order to leave the access to the tomb available for possible future reopening. The group of eastern rooms was left closed as it had already been excavated and published, although in a preliminary way.

The shaft (A)

The access shaft (A) is rectangular and measures 2.2m in length by 1m in width and is about 2.5m deep from the present surface.

A series of footholds at a distance of 400/500mm from each other were cut into the southern and northern walls in order to descend into the tomb. At about 1.5m from the bottom of the shaft, an irregular band, about 200mm wide, had been smoothed out along about 500mm. of the southern wall, and on the whole western wall, to make a continuous decorative motif. The entire band is decorated with engraved figures (Fig. 2). The interpretation of the figures is extremely difficult as the filling material, made of sand and stones, abraded the decorated surface. Furthermore, the operations of emptying and refilling the shaft, which were repeated through time until our last investigation, destroyed some of the engravings and scraped the delicate surface, adding a number of marks to the original ones.

On the southern wall the figures face to the left. From left to right, two partially destroyed human figures and a third one, only showing his upper part, with his right arm lifted to throw a short weapon (possibly a spear), are visible. Beyond them there is an animal, most likely a horse, followed by a man who seems to be holding it. A fifth standing figure completes the series. The representation on the western wall appears more complex. Some figures proceed from the two sides towards the sitting person facing to the left, that is, towards the south-western corner. In front of the seated figure there are a horse and a man, facing to the right. All the figures behind the seated person are facing to the left. Beginning from the right, it is possible to recognise a standing figure with a bow, a figure with a spear (or a long stick), and three other standing people. The central part of the decoration is completely abraded.

At the bottom of the shaft, two entrances open on the eastern and western short sides. The western entrance (0.70 x 1.1 x 0.2m) was in a very bad state of preservation, showing a series of large cracks and partial collapses, particularly in the upper part. The eastern entrance, which had been sealed with red bricks and cement in 1988, was not touched as it showed a wide crack cutting through the whole rock stratum up to the surface. The rooms in the eastern sector, which had been emptied and recorded during the 1988 salvage excavation, were only visited to ascertain their condition of

stability and will not be presented here, apart from the general plan.

The western sector

The western sector of Tomb ARA 1 comprises two rooms: a first roughly square room (B) and a smaller, rectangular one (C) (Fig. 1B).

The first room (B) is 2.4m long and 2.6m wide, in the centre. All walls are irregular and particularly the front one (to the west) is markedly concave, whereas the eastern wall, which opens to the entrance, is much shorter than the others, being 1.7m in length. The ceiling is at 1.2m from the floor. The door to the second room (C) opens through the western wall, not in the centre but towards the left side. The

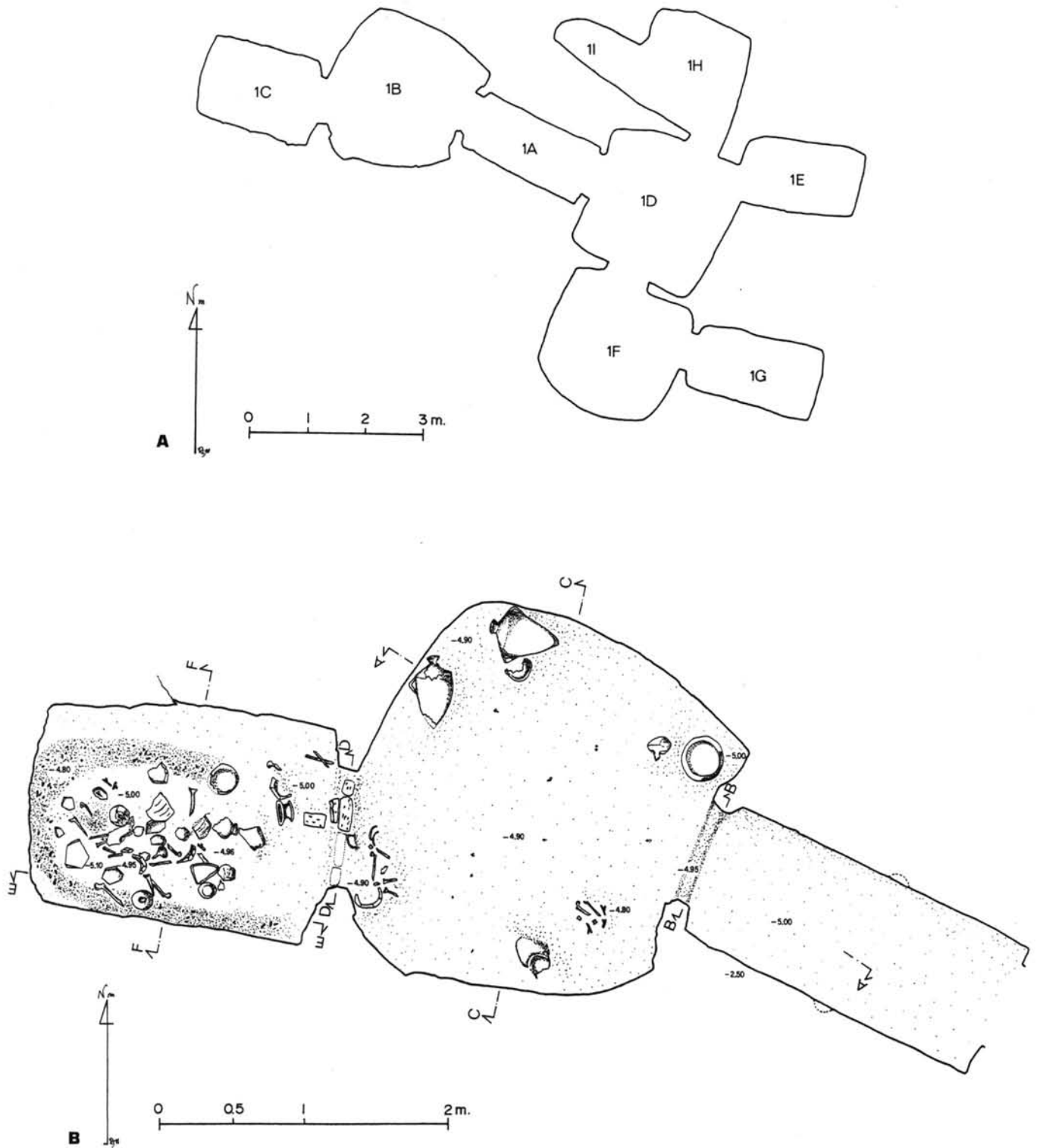


Figure 1. A - Plan of Tomb ARA 1; B - Plan of rooms 1A, 1B, 1C. Napatan level.

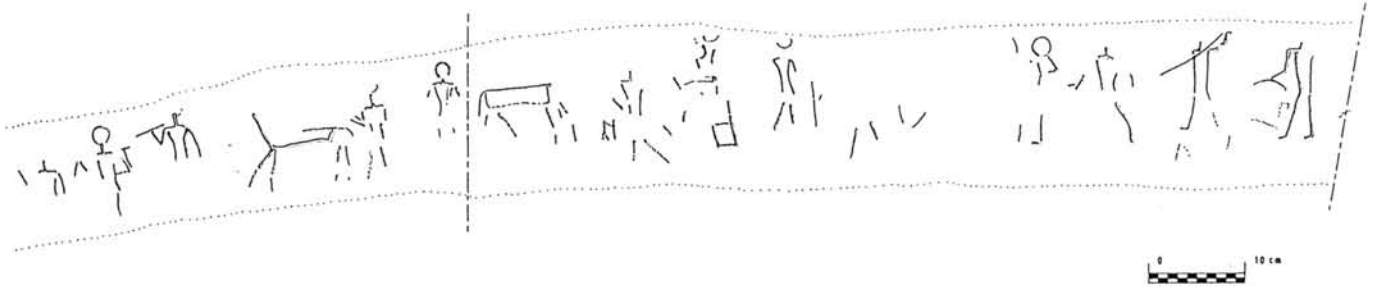


Figure 2. Engravings from the shaft of Tomb ARA 1.

opening of the door is 150-200mm thick. The left jamb shows a red painted, schematic human figure with no arms (Colour Plate XX).

The closing was made with mud bricks, which left some traces on the floor. Only one brick (240 x 100mm) was found intact and still *in situ*.

Room C is rectangular, measuring 2.1 x 1.5m. It has a regular shape and is accurately cut, but it is not painted. The ceiling is 1.1m high.

The decoration

Room B has painted red and black decoration directly on the walls, without any preparation. The decoration is painted within a continuous band bordered on the top and the bottom by three very irregular lines, red-black-red, starting about 500mm from the floor and ending a few centimetres from the ceiling. The two doors, the one at the entrance and the other between Rooms B and C (Colour Plate XVIII), show a frame painted with three lines, red-black-red. On the top, between the upper red line and the central black one, there are vertical alternating red and black marks. The painting on the door between Rooms B and C is well preserved, whereas the decoration on the entrance door has almost disappeared.

The band has an average height of 300mm. The paintings cover the western and northern wall.

a) The western wall

To the left of the door between Rooms B and C, a frontal human figure is painted holding up a snake with his outstretched arms. The snake is kept behind the figure's chest. The human being is painted in red. The head is round with black hair. The lower part of the figure is partially covered by a dark stain which it was impossible to remove.

Below, between the central black line and the upper red one, which are interrupted to leave space for the drawing, there is a figure looking like a hieroglyph painted in red. It is a man with a short stick in his left hand and a sort of small bag in the right one. His two arms are stretched forward and the figure seems to be walking (Colour Plate XXI).

To the right of the door, there is a red painted person with black hair standing on a very small and schematic boat. (Colour Plate XXII). He holds a short stick in his right hand and a small bag or a trap in the left one. Nearby, there is an ostrich kept on the noose by a small man (Colour Plate

XXIII). The ostrich stands with his feet on the red line bordering the decorated band, whereas the man is much higher. The last figure on the wall has partially disappeared, but what remains seems to be in a vertical position and to represent a gazelle.

b) The northern wall

The northern wall shows three animal figures. The first two are facing each other and represent a ram with long flat horns facing right, and a cow with 'lyre'-shaped horns, facing left. The third figure is an elephant, facing right, with long tail and a poorly visible trunk. The ram and the cow are only outlined in red, whereas the elephant is fully coloured in red, apart from a central portion where the colour may have come off.

It is certainly very difficult to suggest a meaning for these paintings which basically seem to refer to a local imagery, even though some echo of the conventional Egyptian painting and imagery cannot be denied.

From a formal point of view, the scenes lack a precise order and organised plan. Various explanations may be considered. Possibly, the scenes were painted at different times and by different people, but it is also possible that stylistic rigour and coherence were not essential elements for the painter. The figures do not seem to conform to a precise narrative scheme. Rather, they are crowded on the western and northern walls, whereas the southern wall is almost completely empty, perhaps to allow for an enlarging the tomb by excavating other rooms. On the other hand, the strange, vertical position of the gazelle is absolutely inexplicable. Clearly, cartoons or models to refer to for the tomb decoration were not available to the painter, who must have been inspired by his own fantasy and by the distant memory of similar subjects that he must certainly have seen and known from other parts of Nubia or Egypt. However, he replaced his evident lapses of memory with his personal solutions, such as the frontal representation of the figures, which clashes with all standards of Egyptian painting. The main purpose appears to have been to represent an important person, possibly the owner of the tomb. The figure on the right side of the door seems to relate to this, while that on the left side seems to have a more sacred or magical value.

In addition to this, there are the wild animals, the ostrich on the noose, the gazelle, the elephant, and the figures of the ram and the cow which could be the animal represen-

tations of Amon and Hathor. Nothing, besides the facing position of the ram and the cow, suggests that they refer to the sacred domain. The two figures are neither bigger than the others, nor are they isolated or in a prominent position. Nevertheless, the possibility that they are divine images cannot be ruled out.

From an iconographic and stylistic point of view, there is a remarkable difference between the paintings in the western rooms and the boats in the eastern sector and, in general, between the two parts of the tomb. In fact some of the rooms in the eastern sector are plastered and painted in white and the doors show a very regularly-made frame, whereas the paintings in the western rooms are made with no preparation, directly on the rock, in an irregular and rough way. The two boats in Room D, with their simple elegance and the lively representation of the round-headed figures bring us back to the fully Nubian tradition of representing boats (Colour Plate XIX). The painted boats in the cemetery at Kerma, which attest to the connection between boats and funerary ritual at a much earlier time, may be recalled for a reference that is chronologically distant, but for this reason more interesting.

It may be suggested that the eastern and western rooms were dug out at different times. The tomb may have begun more modestly with the two rooms in the western sector and was later more widely and carefully enlarged with the six rooms of the eastern sector, when the family's wealth and ambitions had increased.

The fill

When it was opened, Room B appeared partially filled with sand which had evidently come in from the entrance after the tomb was plundered.

The filling sand was sloping from the door towards the inner part of the room, reaching a height of 900mm at the door. On the surface, it was possible to see a large fragment of a stone slab, probably part of the closing of the room lying to the left of the door. Towards the back of the room, in front of the access to the second room, there was a secondary burial from the Late Meroitic period with a large globular jar laid near the head, as a funerary offering (Colour Plate XVIII). The neck of the jar was broken and it was not possible to find the missing sherds.

The skeleton was laying on its back with slightly flexed legs. It was south-north oriented with the head facing west. The bones were articulated and did not seem to have been disturbed. It was attributed to a 20-25 year old female.

The lower, 400mm-thick, layer consisted of the usual black, fine, humid soil mixed with organic matter and small fragments of bones and potsherds. In the north-western corner, two apparently well preserved Levantine jars with flat shoulders protruded from the layer. One of the two, the right one, was broken on the shoulder and a series of sherds were scattered nearby as if it had been intentionally broken to look at the content. The second one was very fragile as

humidity had threatened its solidity, and it could not be completely reconstructed.

The filling in Room C was only 150mm thick and the room had been clearly plundered particularly in the area where the body must have been laid. A specific dig in search of the deceased's ornaments seemed to have been made in that part of the room. The bones were scattered and only very partially preserved. We did not find any trace of coffins or funerary masks, and the fragments of wood were not enough to assume that they ever existed. Moreover, remains of decomposed wood were preserved in the mud soil, which appeared reduced to powder or in very small fragments. They marked on the soil the rectangular shape possibly of an *angareb* (bed), having the long side leaning against the southern wall. This seems to confirm the existence of the Nubian tradition of bed burials.

In Room B, apart from the well preserved Meroitic skeleton, human remains were reduced to very small fragments of bones, among which we could recognise remains of 4 adults (over 20 years old), of a young individual (between 13 and 21 years old) and of a child (between 7 and 12 years old). It was impossible to ascertain the position of burials; the only possible observation was that bone fragments were denser along the walls of the room.

In Room C there were remains of 3 adults and of a young person. They were only scattered fragments and they may not be in their original position.

The finds

The difficult access and the depth of the tomb made us hope that the lower layers could have been substantially intact, as did the occurrence of the undisturbed Meroitic burial which was on the surface in Room B and could have protected the lower layers. The hope vanished when the finds were examined. In addition to the natural state of deterioration due to the water infiltration and to the abrasion of the filling material, like sand and gravel, the objects, even the roughest and less valuable ones, were mostly reduced to small pieces. Almost none of them could be completely reconstructed. Moreover, some of the sherds belonging to the few pots that could be reconstructed were found in the filling of the shaft and, in one case, even in one of the rooms in the eastern sector. This suggests that the tomb had been not only plundered, but also filled and emptied several times. Consequently, even the fragments of the objects which were not desirable to the plunderers were lost.

Small objects and jewellery, including faience necklaces, must have been stolen when they were still complete and not even one bead was found. The grave goods that remained in the tomb almost exclusively comprised pottery (Plate 1).

Only two jars and a pilgrim bottle were imported (Fig. 3: 10), the rest of the pottery being of a modest quality and locally made. The fabric is made of Nile silt tempered with straw and sand. Surfaces are mostly uncoated. Firing is inaccurate and sections often show a grey or black core where

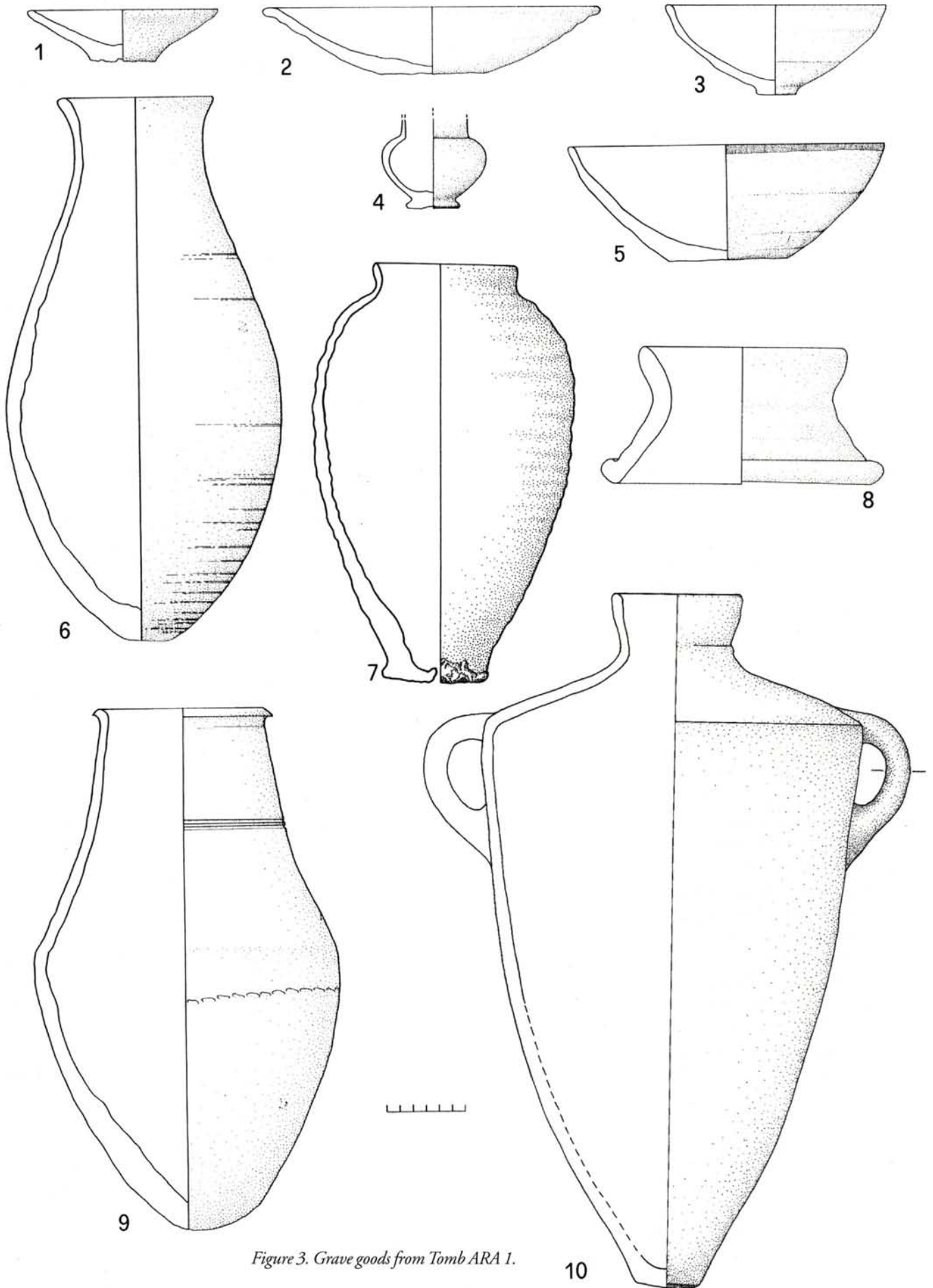




Plate 1. Tomb ARA 1 - Pottery.

the vessel walls are thicker. Most common forms are flat-based dishes with red-washed rims (7) (Fig. 3.5), miniature dishes (7) (Fig. 3.1) and the so called 'beer jars' (15) (Fig. 3.7). Beer jars often are asymmetrical due to the careless modelling and finishing and show the typical finger prints near the bases. We also found 'drop'-shaped storage jars with round bases, (Fig. 3.6 and 9) one small, fine-textured plate with red washed rim (Fig. 3.3), one large plate (Fig. 3.2) and one pot stand (Fig. 3.8). Small sherds are numerous and do not refit, confirming once again a long-lasting devastation.

Small copper-alloy fragments randomly scattered in the fill were the only evidence for the metal objects which must have been in the tomb. Of stone vessels only a small alabaster vase was found, appearing almost decomposed and with a spongy texture (Fig. 3.4).

Tomb ARA 4

The tomb consists of three rooms of different shapes and dimensions and a rectangular access shaft approximately east-west oriented (Fig. 4). At present the tomb is so close to the surface that it has partially collapsed on the western side and shows dangerous cracks and there is a hole in the ceiling of the eastern room. This tomb is located on the highest place in the entire cemetery area, which is not occupied by modern buildings. For this reason, erosion must have severely affected the tomb resulting in it being close to the surface, although even when it was built it must have been not very

deep.

The strange and irregular shape of the underground rooms, as well as their extremely poor state of preservation, suggest that the builders must have encountered several problems in cutting this tomb. In fact, the sandstone in this area is friable and variable, becoming almost sandy at a depth of a few metres.

When it was found, the shaft appeared full of rocks and stones almost cemented together. Only rare potsherds confirmed that it contained artificial fill and was not simply a layer of loose sandstone.

The shaft (1.7 x 0.8m) shows carefully and regularly-made vertical walls and has an average depth of 1m from the surface. The underground rooms have openings through the western (B), eastern (C), and southern (D) walls with doors located just below the present ground surface.

Room B The door to Room B lies in the eastern wall of the shaft, just 200mm below the ground surface. It measures 850mm in height, 600mm in width and 160mm in thickness. Room B is a tunnel about 2m long, with a slightly oblique axis with respect to the shaft. The height of the ceiling decreases towards the end, becoming only 400mm high. A small square niche, roughly shaped, appears at the end of the tunnel. It contained a large black-topped bowl of Kerma-type. A kind of shelf was intentionally made by an irregular cut into the northern wall. Large pieces of stones were stuck

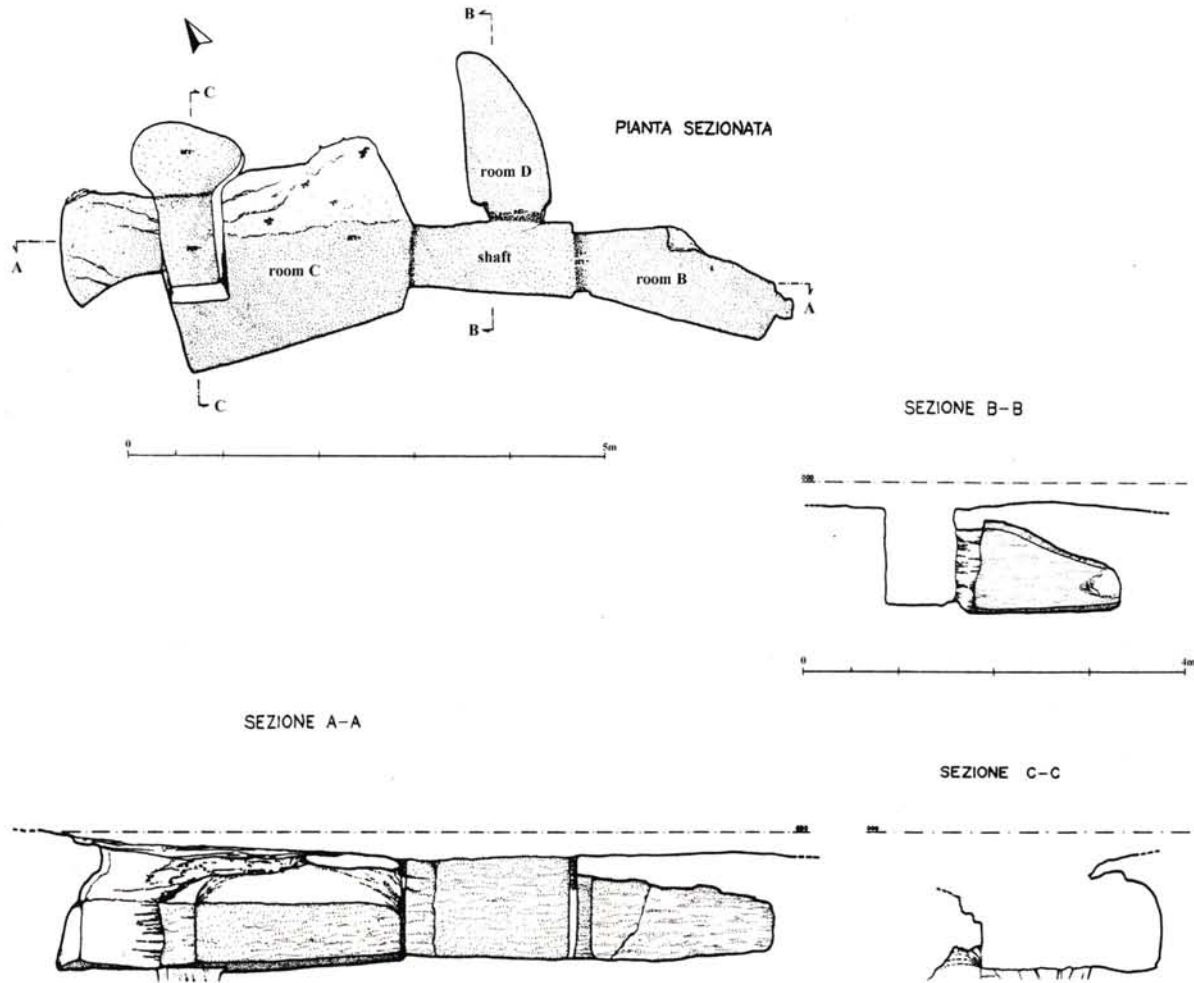


Figure 4. Plan and sections of Tomb ARA 4.

in the outer part of the fill, attesting that the closing had been violated. Moreover, the state of the burials, in addition to a practically complete child skeleton lying at the entrance, suggests that the room was opened, but not plundered as it did not contain anything interesting for the robbers. Human remains were randomly piled up together with a few grave goods. There was no complete skeleton and many bones did not belong to the burials we found.

The fill was very hard and was compacted by moist silt and crumbling sandstone. Both the bones and the objects were found in no order or layer. The smallest objects penetrated to the bottom of the deposit and were found on the floor. This burial may represent a secondary use of the tomb, although it is difficult to say when and why it occurred. Bones could have been more easily removed to create space in the larger room. Alternatively, it could also have been made in an emergency when the western room collapsed. This would explain the poor and incomplete conditions of the skeletons.

Room C Room C has a rectangular shape (2.6 x 1.9m by 1m in height) and a rectangular niche on the back (western) wall, measuring 1 x 0.9m. A rectangular pit, 1.2 x 0.6m in size

and 0.7m deep, was cut just in front of the niche. It cut through the northern wall making a sort of small cave. Pick marks are clearly visible on the upper part of the cave, but they disappear where the sandstone strata becomes loose with a sandy matrix. Thus, it is likely that the chamber was intentionally cut, but abandoned due to the poor quality of the rock.

When the room was excavated, only a part of the ceiling was preserved and was not supported on the northern side as that wall had collapsed. The northern half of the room, including the corner of the entrance room, was in a very bad state of preservation and only a few centimetres of the lower layers remained *in situ*. It is uncertain whether the niche and the cave were functional or were abandoned attempts to enlarge the room.

Very few bones, among them a skull and some long bones, were found. It can be imagined that the bones found in Room B were placed there when Room C collapsed. Moreover, a part of the content in Room C was displaced into the shaft, as some potsherds from the shaft belonged to objects in Room C.

The small amount of fill in this room, which had been

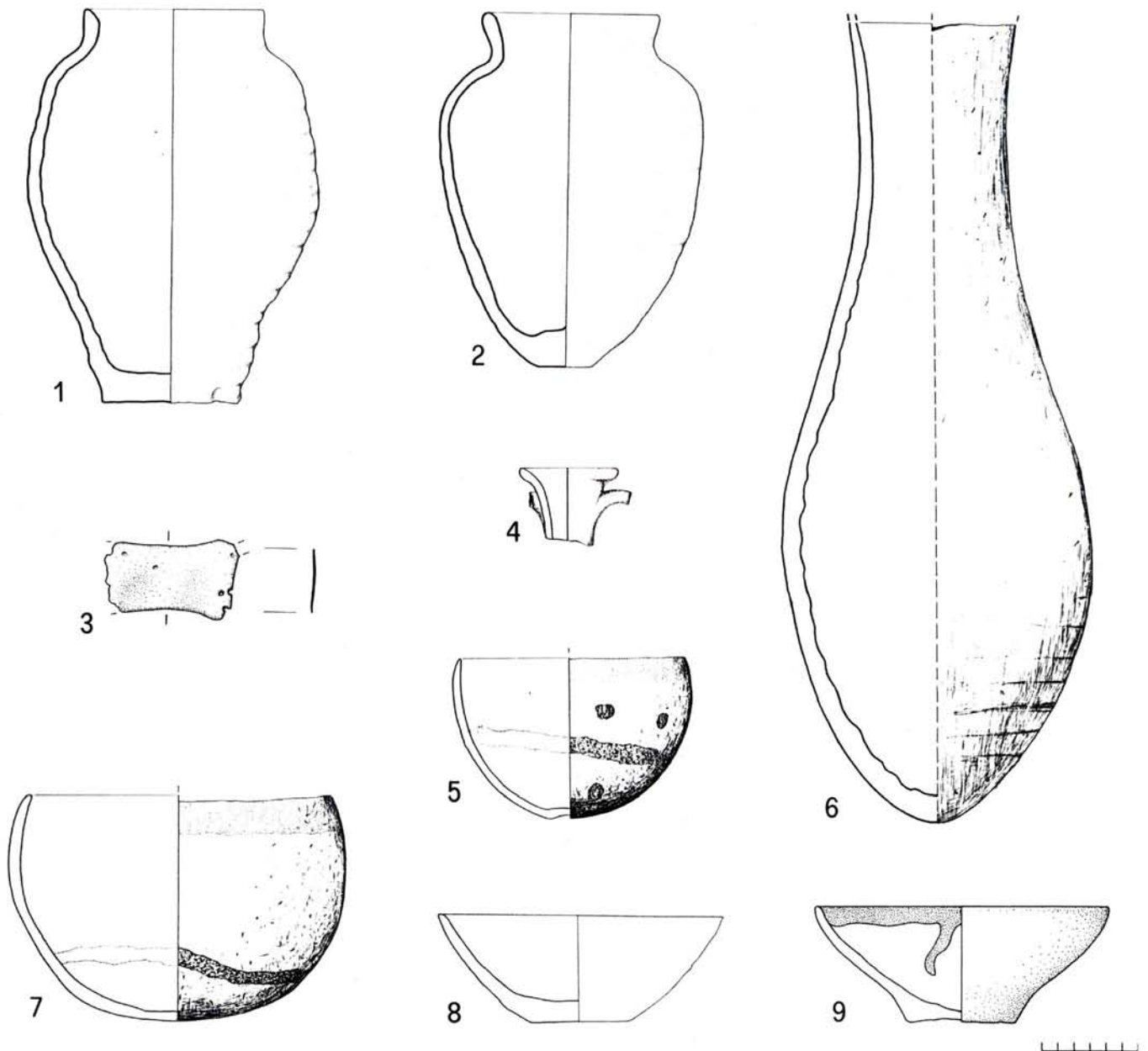


Figure 5. Grave goods from Tomb ARA 4.

destroyed by the collapse of the roof, was mainly compacted soil. The majority of the potsherds were found in the shaft. Three complete beer jars occurred in the north-eastern corner, in the sediment about 500mm above the floor. Another beer bottle was found in the western niche, at about the same height. A long-necked jar in good conditions, even though the rim was missing, was located on the floor, against the southern wall, near the only skull left in this tomb.

Room D This is a very irregular tunnel, 1.7m long, narrowing towards the end. Its height is 900mm at the entrance and 400mm at the end, and the width at the front is 800mm and 400mm at the back. The fill consisted of soil with a few tiny fragments of bones and no pottery.

The finds

Little material was found in Tomb ARA 4. A lot of it was lost as the tomb was close to the surface and the western area, which was the largest, had collapsed. A little pottery, all in fragments, was found in the fill of the shaft and some of it came from Room C.

By contrast, although the material in the eastern room is not of great quantity, it is generally complete or with only occasionally missing sherds. In addition to the pottery, two scarabs, a few red beads, a copper-alloy blade and a razor (Fig. 5.3) were found, as they were protected by a heap of bones which must have discouraged the robbers (Vincentelli 1997, 166).

Seen as a whole, the material is not rich, but it is inter-



Plate 2. Tomb ARA 4 - Beer jars, grinding stones and copper-alloy blade.

esting as it provides good indicators for dating. The fabric is largely Nile silt characterised by the presence of straw and quantities of fine sand. The vessels mostly have uncoated surfaces or a red wash, with a black core where the wall is thicker. Beer jars are prevalent, comprising 50% of the pottery assemblage (Fig. 5.1, Plate 2). They always have finger prints around their bases. There were only four dishes. They have a flat base and uncoated surface with red-washed rim (Fig. 5.8 and 9). There was also a short-necked funnel jar (Fig. 5.2), a drop-shaped jar with long neck (Fig. 5.6) and miniature dishes. The only imported vessel seems to be a pilgrim flask with remains of cream slip (Fig. 5.4), most probably coming from Egypt. The two 'Kerma' black-topped bowls, found in Room B, belong to the local hand-made production (Fig. 5.5 and 7). The surface is burnished red and black with a whitish band on the exterior. Although their appearance resembles the Kerma pottery, their manufacture is rougher and the ware coarser, being very far from the thin, almost metallic fineness of the Kerma pottery (Plate 3).

The two tombs, although they are very different from each other, belong to the same period and may be dated to the New Kingdom on the basis of their contents. Their typology is not unusual in Nubia as it is similar to the rock-cut tombs at Mirgissa, the so-called "Hypogées" (Vercoutter



Plate 3. Tomb ARA 4 - Kerma bowls.

1975) and to the tombs of Aniba (Steindorff 1937). It may not be too daring to suggest that Tomb ARA 1 belonged to one of the Nubian chiefs in charge of this southern, extremely peripheral region of the Egyptian empire.

The engraved scenes on the shaft walls are significant in this sense: the presence of horses, of armed men, and particularly of the seated person in the middle of the western wall may represent one of those Nubian princes, owners of warriors and horses. With regard to the decoration of the tomb, the style, while simple, was rich and ambitious.

The occurrence of the little ointment jar of alabaster and the two Levantine jars is particularly meaningful. They represent the luxury goods that Nubians imported in exchange for valuable goods from the south. The animals from the desert and the savannah, such as the gazelle, the ostrich, and the elephant represented on the tomb, may hint at the products that generated wealth in the region, among them ivory, ostrich feathers and egg-shells, and valuable meats and leather. The figure of the man with the serpent and the one without arms, a kind of djin, are the only recognisable reference to magical-religious beliefs. However, a precise connection between the ram and the cow and Amon and Hathor may be hazardous at this point.

None of the 18 tombs in the cemetery recalls the Nubian use of the pit with side chamber, attested in Kurru in the burials of the so-called ancestors of the 25th Dynasty. The influence of Egyptian models from the north appears to have reached Napata and to have pervaded the elite of the population during the whole period up to the Kushite Dynasty. This seriously poses the question of reconsidering the role of the earliest tombs at Kurru and the possibility that Piye's ancestors, that is, the Nubian chiefs that had such an important role in Nubian politics, were buried at Hillat el Arab.

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Plate XVIII. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - The door between room B and C.

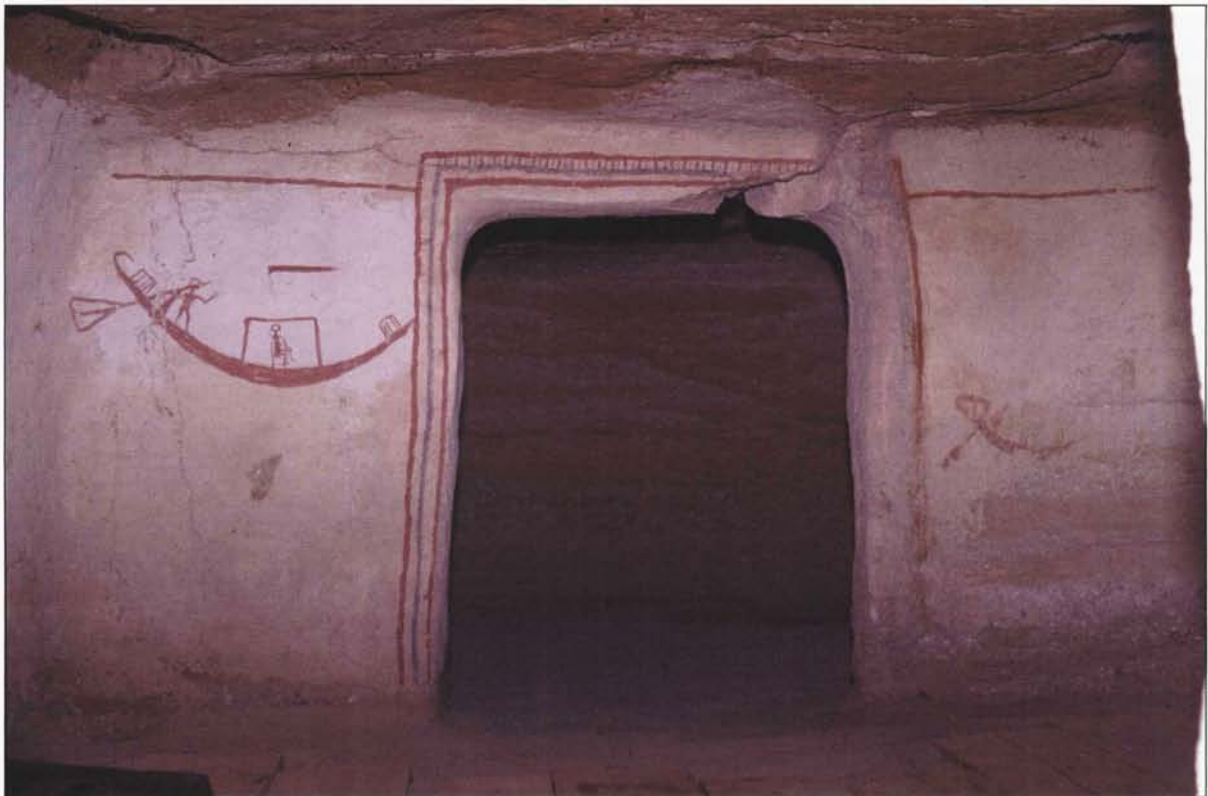


Plate XIX. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - Two boats in Room D.



Plate XX. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - The figure on the door jamb between Room B and C.

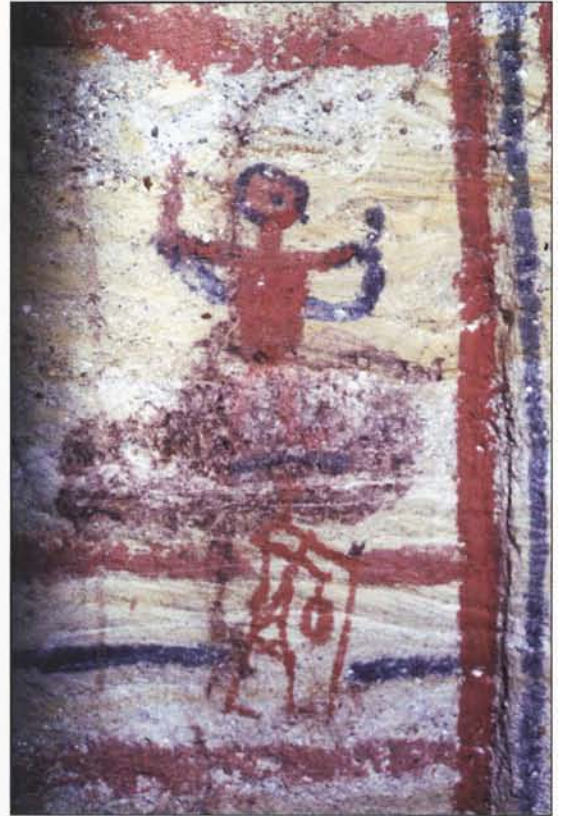


Plate XXI. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - Human figures in Room B.

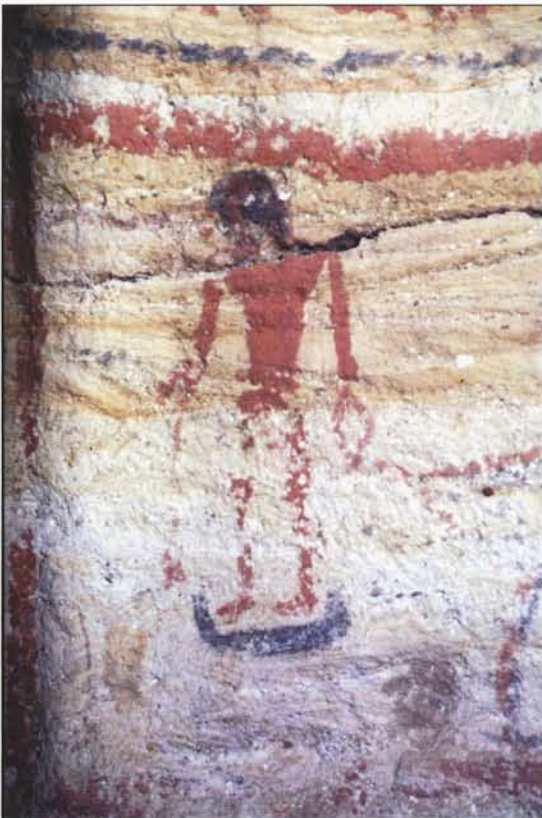


Plate XXII. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - Standing man on a boat in Room B.

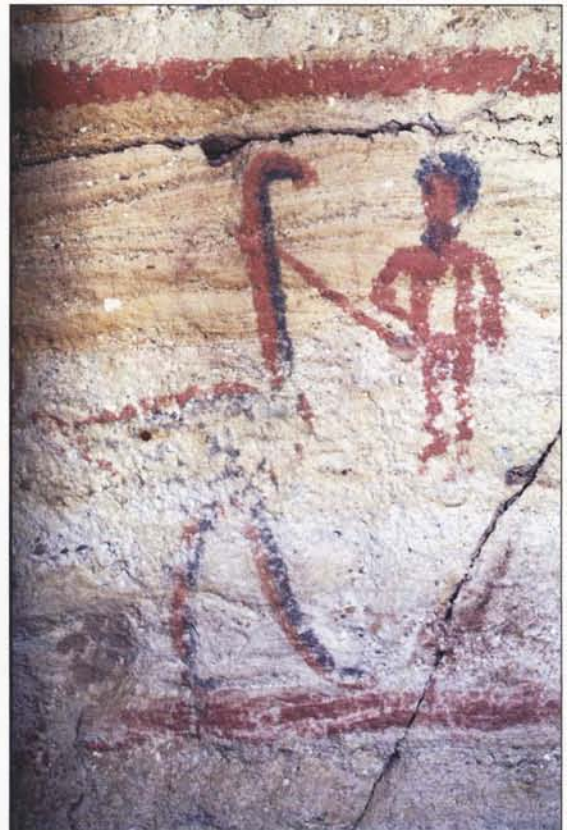


Plate XXIII. Hillat el Arab. Tomb ARA 1 - Ostrich kept on the noose by a man in Room B.