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Title: **Hagar el-Beida 1. Excavations of the "royal" tumulus (No. 10) in 2010**

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Journal: *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 22 *(Research 2010)*

Year: 2013

Pages: 309–319

ISSN 1234–5415 (Print), ISSN 2083–537X (Online)

Publisher: Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW), Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego (WUW)

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Abstract: The complex of tumuli cemeteries around Hagar el-Beida village, including a huge tumulus of unparalleled size in the region (diameter over 30 m), was discovered in 2003. Other tumuli in the complex were explored over the years, but the investigations of the huge mound, dubbed "royal" owing to its evidently elite character, could not be completed until 2010. The burial chamber turned out to be lined with bricks and to be furnished with a brick-lined shaft. A 2 m high kerb surrounded the grave structure, which was subsequently covered with a mound reaching 5 m in height. The main chamber had been robbed in antiquity, but three ceramic pots, three copper alloy bowls — two with a masterful lotus-flower ornament, a ladle-pot and a small cup were still in place, as were a dozen iron arrowheads of different types. Scarce human skeletal remains were found. Other finds from the fill included copper-alloy rings and beads of faience, quartz, agate and glass. The grave could be attributed to post-Meroitic times, but at least part of the equipment was of Meroitic date.

Keywords: Fourth Nile Cataract, Meroitic, post-Meroitic, "royal" tumulus, copper-alloy bowls

SUDAN

HAGAR EL-BEIDA 1 EXCAVATIONS OF THE "ROYAL" TUMULUS (No. 10) IN 2010

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Abstract: The complex of tumuli cemeteries around Hagar el-Beida village, including a huge tumulus of unparalleled size in the region (diameter over 30 m), was discovered in 2003. Other tumuli in the complex were explored over the years, but the investigations of the huge mound, dubbed "royal" owing to its evidently elite character, could not be completed until 2010. The burial chamber turned out to be lined with bricks and to be furnished with a brick-lined shaft. A 2 m high kerb surrounded the grave structure, which was subsequently covered with a mound reaching 5 m in height. The main chamber had been robbed in antiquity, but three ceramic pots, three copper-alloy bowls — two with a masterful lotus-flower ornament, a ladle-pot and a small cup were still in place, as were a dozen iron arrowheads of different types. Scarce human skeletal remains were found. Other finds from the fill included copper-alloy rings and beads of faience, quartz, agate and glass. The grave could be attributed to post-Meroitic times, but at least part of the equipment was of Meroitic date.

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THE SITE AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The complex of tumuli cemeteries around Hagar el-Beida village was discovered in 2003, during a reconnaissance of the 45 km long concession of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, on the left bank of the Nile in the Fourth Cataract region. One hundred or so tumuli were located around a mound that was by far the most spectacular and without parallel on the left bank of the Nile, between el-Ganaet and the Gurgurib mountains (Chłodnicki, Żurawski 2005: 375; Krzyżaniak *et alii* 2005: 42).

The structures were ordered as separate sites, numbered Hagar el-Beida 1, 2 and 4 (Chłodnicki 2010: 36–39). Hagar el-Beida 1 with the huge tumulus is consisted of 14 big and medium-sized tumuli clustered in two groups. These mounds were between 11 m and 20 m in diameter, their height ranging between 0.80 m and 1.40 m. The huge tumulus 10, which had been dubbed "royal" in view of its evidently elite character, was larger than the others: 32 m in diameter and about 5 m in height [***Fig. 1***].

Excavation in 2005–2006 of some of the other tumuli at Hagar el-Beida

established site chronology as late Meroitic/early post-Meroitic (Chłodnicki 2010: 39; Lemiesz 2007; Longa 2007). It was found that the superstructures were built of silt and gravel, sometimes with a stone kerb surrounding the grave. There was typically a rectangular shaft dug into the alluvium, filled with sand and gravel, and an oval or L-shaped chamber blocked with stone slabs. Tumuli with a stone kerb seem to have been better furnished than those without a kerb. Tumulus 9, which was a satellite of the "royal" tumulus, was one of the richest graves, yielding pottery classified as post-Meroitic as well as Meroitic. The furnishings of the other tumuli were, as a whole, typically post-Meroitic (Lemiesz 2007). It should be kept in mind that all the tumuli had been plundered.

Tumulus 10 started to be excavated by Marek Lemiesz in March 2005. The upper

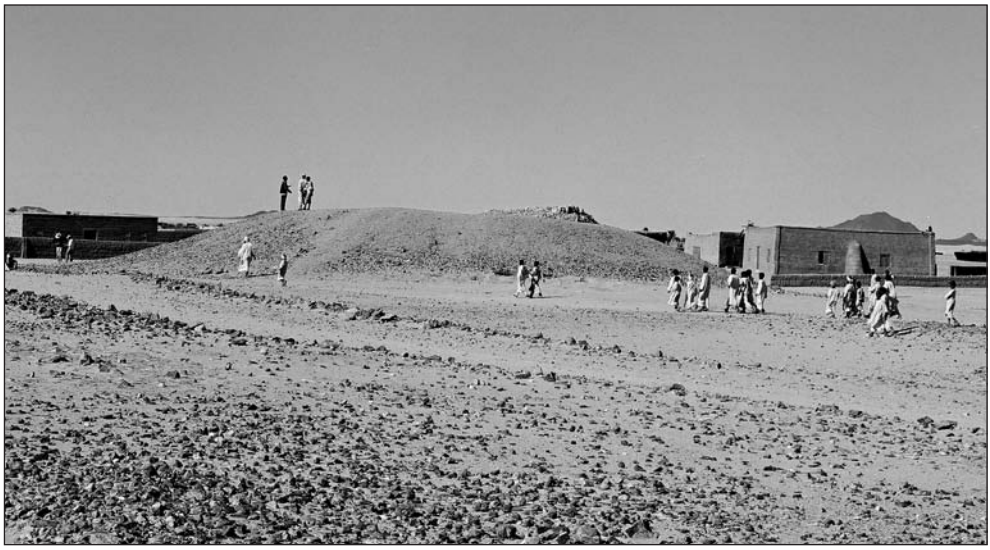

Fig. 1. Tumulus 10 at Hagar el-Beida, view from the east (Photo M. Jórdeczka)

Team

Dates of work: 11 January–18 January 2010

Director: Dr. Marek Chłodnicki, archaeologist (Poznań Archaeological Museum)

NCAM Representative: Dr. Ali Mirghani (NCAM, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)

Archaeologists: Paweł Polkowski (Poznań Archaeological Museum), Dr. Tomasz Stępnik (Pracownia Archeologiczna Uni-Art in Poznań)

Acknowledgments

The financial contribution of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston toward fieldwork is gratefully acknowledged.

part of the eastern half of the mound was removed down to about two-thirds of its height (Lemiesz 2007: 368). Work was resumed in January 2006, but by February the mission had been forced to leave due to the importune political situation in Dar el-Manasir in the Fourth Cataract region. Piotr Osypiński made an effort to begin work again in January 2007, but aborted the mission within a few days, again because of the political situation. The trench in the eastern part was deepened and the stone revetment of the superstructure was cleared (Osypiński 2010: 435, 445–446).

WORK IN THE 2010 SEASON

The last opportunity to complete the excavations came in January 2010. By then, the landscape around the site had changed. Some of the tumuli at Hagar el-Beida were already under water, but Tumulus 10 was still untouched, except for traces of erosion. Work during an extremely brief, week-long mission continued inside a previously opened trench and managed to clear the eastern half of the tumulus together with the burial chamber and most of the stone kerb that surrounded it. The western part of the mound could not be explored.

TUMULUS CONSTRUCTION

The burial chamber turned out to be like the other explored tumuli in Hagar el-Beida. The grave had obviously been robbed in antiquity, as indicated by a robber's pit, filled with earth mixed with stones and pieces of mud-brick, markedly present on the western slope of the tumulus. Three potsherd spades found lying almost at the bottom of the chamber suggested that the robbers had penetrated the tomb, but still it seemed that the western part of the chamber had not been touched.

The looters had destroyed the upper parts of the external walls, as well as the upper part of a wall separating the chamber from the shaft to the east, but enough remained to allow for a reconstruction of the building process. The first step of the builders was to dig a rectangular pit, 5.50 m by 2.30 m, which extended about 0.70 m into the ground until it reached bedrock [*Fig. 2*]. The walls of this pit were then lined with mud bricks and the masonry, which was rather shoddy and demonstrated no clear bonding, extended above ground level to a height of about 1.30 m (14 courses of bricks were recorded) to form the walls of the chambers. The bricks featured no standard dimensions, most being 36 cm long, but some measuring more than 40 cm and a few no more than 30 cm; height and width were more consistent, being 8 cm and 16 cm respectively. Brick fragments were also used in the construction.

A wall separated the burial chamber from another, smaller chamber to the east, which was also brick-lined and which appears to have served as a shaft. Strewn around the top of this smaller chamber were some 20 small stone slabs, the biggest 40 x 25 cm, others not exceeding 25 x 20 cm. Individual stones appeared to lie on top of well-preserved parts of mud-brick walls, hence the supposition that they were somehow connected with the vault over the entrance to the grave rather than having been part of the blocking. The upper part of the shaft was filled with coarse gravel and pebbles.

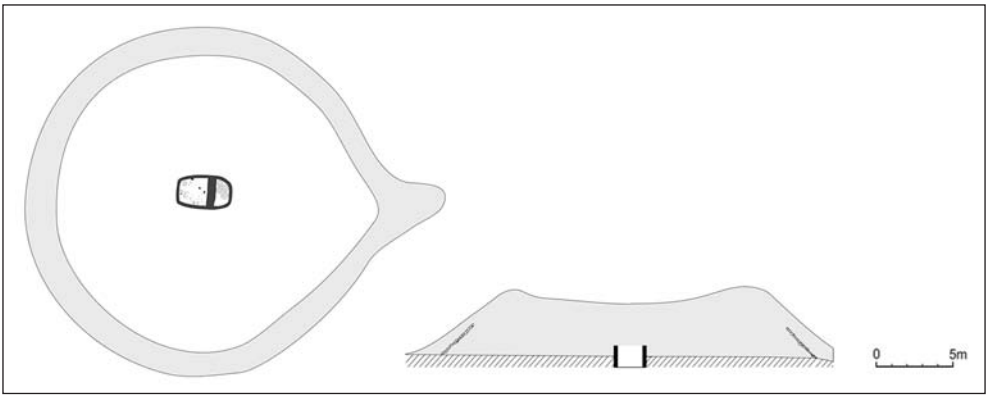

Fig. 2. Reconstructed plan and section through Tumulus 10 at Hagar el-Beida (Concept and reconstruction drawing M. Chłodnicki, T. Stępnik)

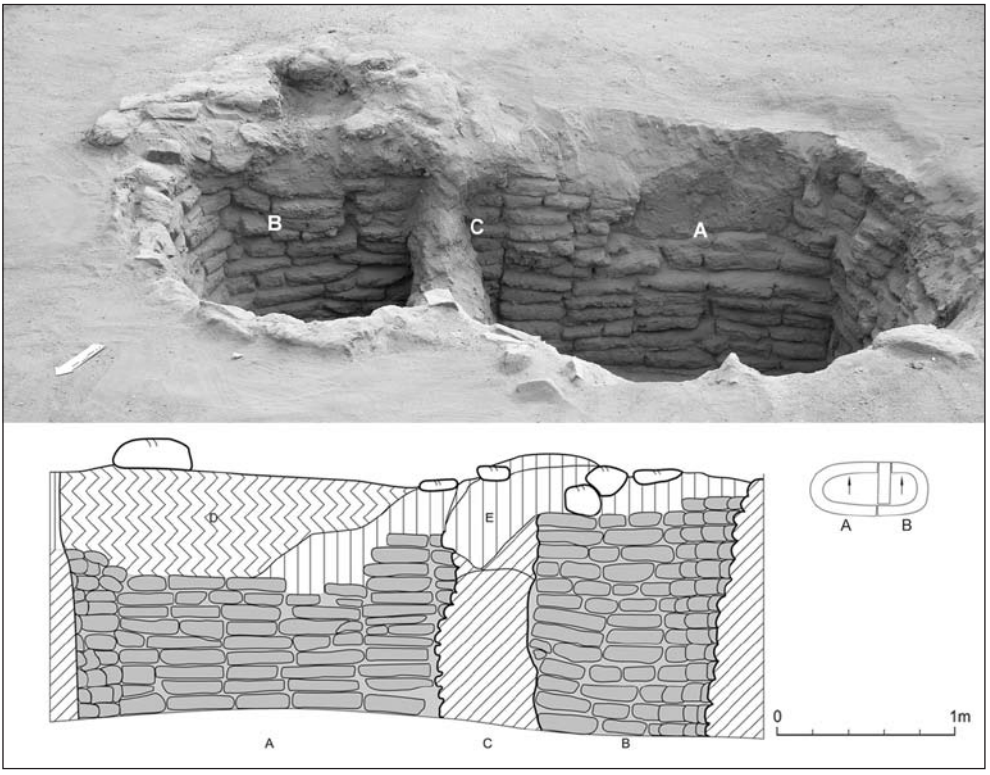

Fig. 3. Mud-brick walls of the burial chambers: view of the southeastern side and drawing of the north-western side, A – grave chamber, B – shaft, C – wall between the chambers, D – robber pit, E – backfilling (Photo M. Chłodnicki; drawing T. Stępnik)

An analysis of the remains suggested a certain building sequence, which merits note. The walls of the main chamber, the shaft and the entrance were not bonded, suggesting three separate stages of construction. The first stage involved the building of a U-shaped wall around the main chamber [*Fig. 3*]. Stone slabs placed at the top of the walls were probably intended to lend support to a wooden roof or to stabilize a vault [*Figs 3–4*]. The actual burial took place when the entrance shaft was not yet lined with bricks and the larger entry possibly facilitated internment. The entrance to the burial chamber was subsequently walled off. The roof over the chamber was certainly constructed before the walls of the main chamber were lined with bricks and the deceased interred. This sequence of events is indicated by the fact that the wall that closes off the main chamber is evenly sealed only from the outside (from the shaft), while from the inside (from the main chamber) the bricks do not form a smooth surface. The lining of the shaft was introduced probably at the time of the sealing of the main chamber. The sealing began from the northern side, while the shaft was walled from the south. This sequence can be established from the fact that the wall blocking the entrance in the north comes between the chamber wall and the shaft wall, while the wall blocking the entrance in the south joins with the connected walls of the shaft and the chamber.

Fig. 4. Burial chamber, view from the south (Photo M. Chłodnicki)

Since the mud-brick facing survives only in the lower parts, it is difficult to say what the vaulting of the main chamber had been like. There is a fragment of wall in the northeastern corner of the chamber that could suggest a vault. In other graves in Hagar el-Beida mud bricks were used only to block the entrance to burial chambers. This kind of blocking was noted in just two of 30 excavated graves in Hagar el-Beida 1 and 2, stone slabs being used for the same purpose in the other tombs (Lemiesz 2007: 370; Longa 2007: 376).

In the last stage of the building sequence, the grave chamber was surrounded by a 2 m high kerb and then covered with a mound that attained 5 m in height [see ***Fig. 2***].

GRAVE GOODS

The shaft on the east contained four big beer jars grouped in the northern part of the space (the southern end was empty) [***Fig. 5***]. The pots were crushed. They were about 45 cm high and had a red-polished neck and mat-impressed body. One of the pots had two horizontal red-polished bands separating the mat-impressed surfaces on the body, another features relief barbs on the upper part [***Fig. 6***, top row].

The main burial chamber had been looted, but a collapse of earth during the plundering may have protected the rest of the grave goods, which were perhaps of insufficient value for the robbers to continue their efforts. Remains of a human skeleton, determined to be most probably that of an adult male, were found on the southern side of the chamber. The bones were fragmented and not in anatomical position.

Three ceramic beer-jars were discovered. One was 36 cm high and had a long, narrow neck and mat-impressed body with burnished zigzag band [***Fig. 6,*** bottom left]; decoration of this kind is quite common

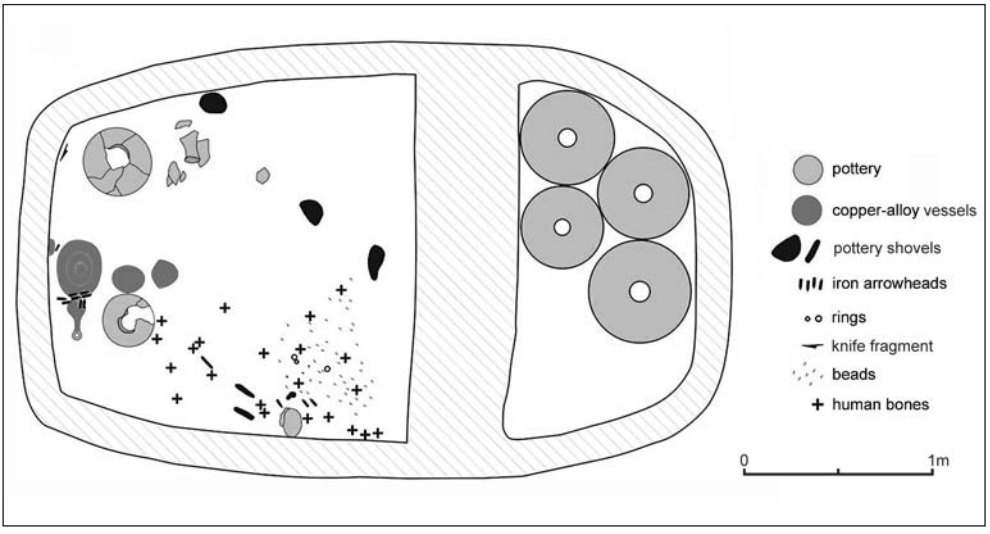

Fig. 5. Location of grave goods inside the burial chambers of tumulus 10 (Drawing T. Stępnik)

on post-Meroitic pottery. Another jar of the same height as the first was decorated on the shoulder with diamonds engraved with a comb; a group of six small holes (repair holes) could be seen on the lower body [***Fig. 6,*** bottom center]. The third bottle, only 26 cm high, was unique owing to its linear, painted decoration [***Fig. 6***, bottom right].

No ceramic bowls, so common in the other graves in Hagar el-Beida, were found. Instead there were five different-sized vessels made of a copper alloy: three copper-alloy bowls and a ladle-pot between the ceramic jars and a small cup pressed into the wall. The biggest bowl was 27 cm in diameter. It had a concave bottom and modeled triangular rim, and it was undecorated [***Fig. 7***, bottom left]. The ladle-pot, which had been repaired in antiquity, was the best preserved. The bottom was decorated with concentric circles. Concentric lines also surrounded the hole in the handle. Three horizontal lines ran under the rim. The ladle was 10 cm in diameter and 6 cm deep [***Fig. 7***, top left]. A small cup, 9 cm in diameter and 3 cm deep, was perhaps the most damaged. It was made of very thin metal sheet. The base fragment is the best preserved and

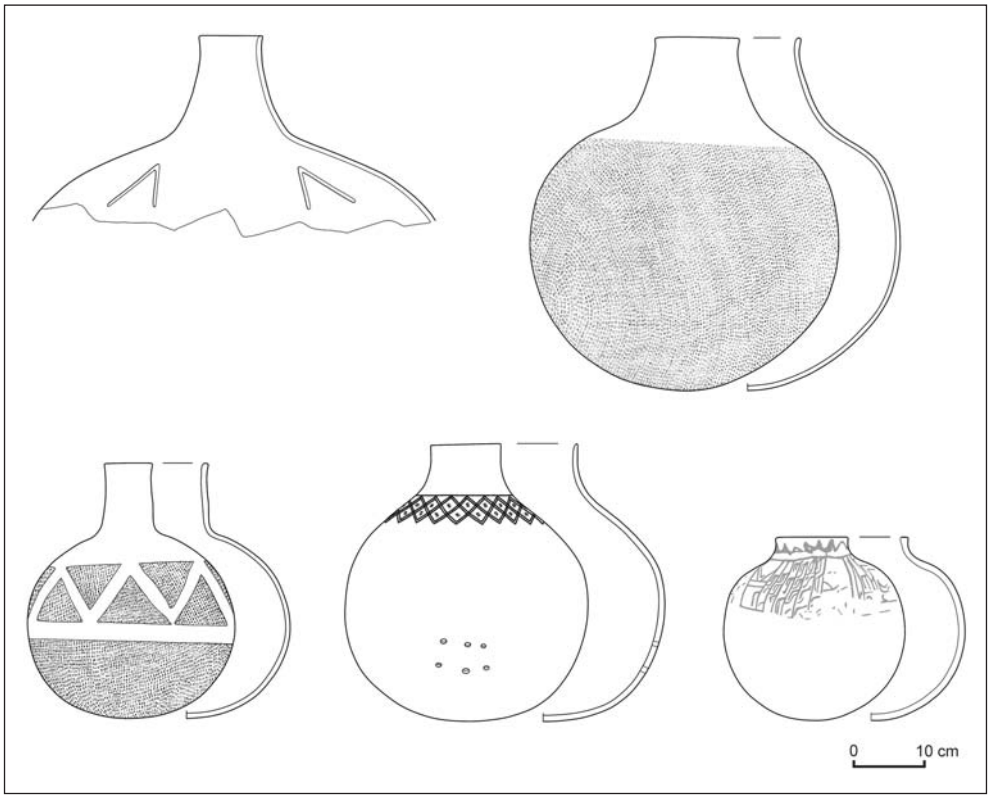

Fig. 6. Pottery from the burial: top row, two of four beer jars from the shaft; bottom row, beer jars from the burial chamber (Drawing J. Stępnik, J. Kędelska)

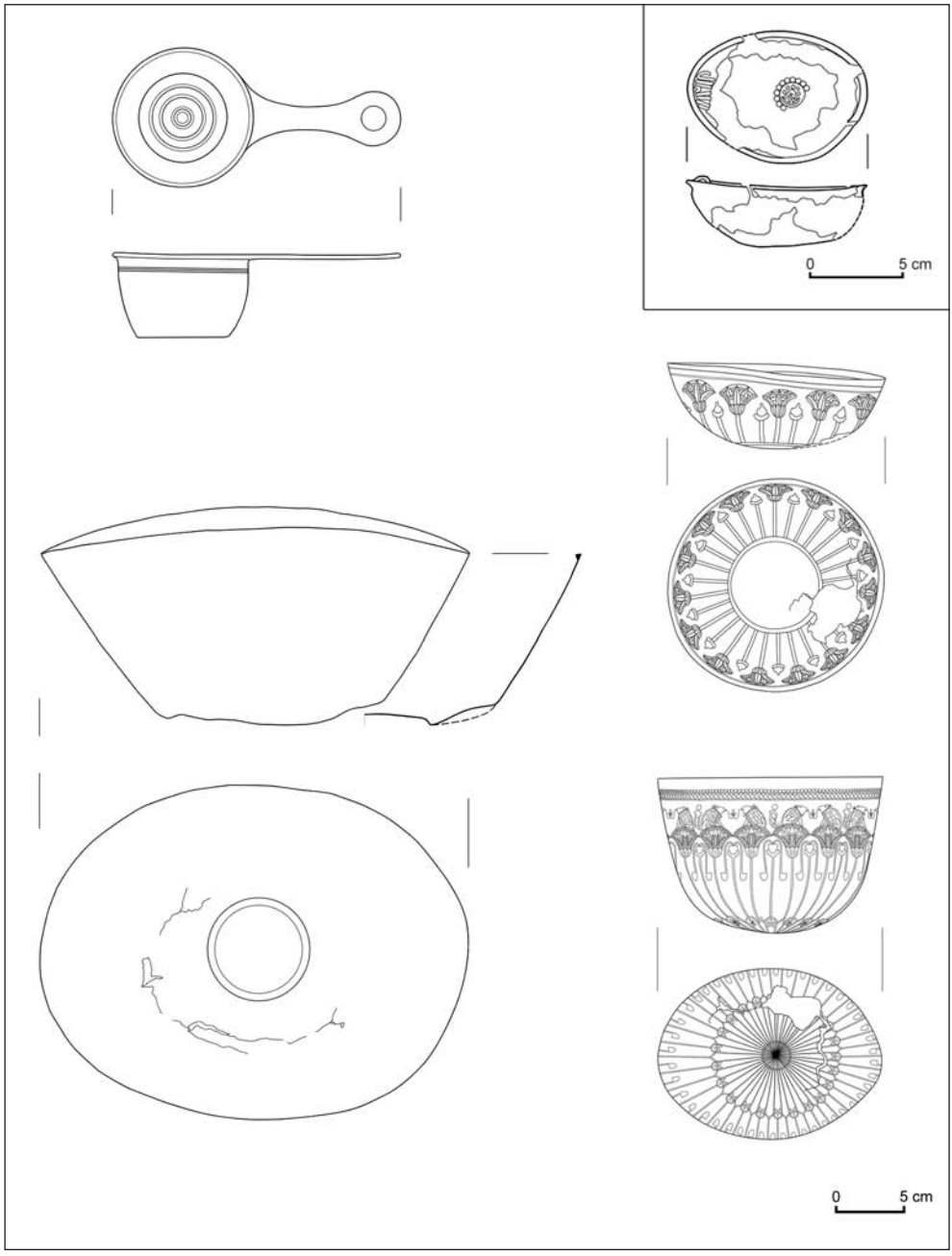

Fig. 7. Copper-alloy vessels from the burial chamber (Drawing J. Stępnik, K. Molga, J. Kędelska)

bears a medallion on the floor inside, composed of a lotus surrounded by small attached nodules. A small spring seems to have been fitted on the rim edge [*Fig. 7*, top right]. Fragments of a similar spring were found nearby, as well as a piece of copper wire.

The other two copper-alloy bowls are masterpieces of the engravers art, preserving an intricate decoration of lotus flowers on their outside surfaces. The first one is shallow, 6 cm deep, and has a diameter of 15 cm. The decoration consists of a register of lotus flowers and buds between double lines at the top and bottom [*Fig. 7*, center right]. This kind of decoration is known from Meroitic art. A similar design can be seen on a ceramic bowl from Kawa, dated to the 2nd–3rd century AD (Macadam 1955: 230, Pl. CV.ii). The second, deeper

Fig. 8. Jewelry from the burial in tumulus 10: top row, copper-alloy rings; bottom, collection of beads (Drawing J. Stepnik, J. Kędelska; photo T. Skorupka)

bowl (14 cm in diameter and 11 cm deep) bears a much more developed iconographic program [***Fig. 7***, bottom right]. The bottom is decorated with an engraved rosette of narrow petals with rounded tops, a winged *ankh* at the top of each one, the petals alternating with pointed tips. Stemming from this rosette are lotus flowers, alternating with bowls on pedestals with ladles suspended on either side. Frogs sit on the lotus flowers; each pair of facing frogs has entwined tongues forming a winged *ankh* symbol. Behind the left frog in each pair there is an *uraeus* growing from the tail of the amphibian. A freeze of schematic *uraei* runs below the rim. Frogs and lotus flowers were popular motifs in Meroitic iconography and individual elements of this decoration can be traced in Meroitic art, but as a whole, the bowl is unique. Bowls decorated in this way were used as libation vessels. There can be no doubt that they were produced for use by the elite (Lenoble, Nigm el Din Mohammed Sharif 1992: 630).

A dozen single- and double-barbed iron arrowheads were found inside one of the copper-alloy bowls and in the ladle-pot. Their condition did not allow for a precise reconstruction of the type. Small fragments of iron appeared to belong to a bigger object, a knife or a spearhead, and there were also fragments of an iron ring and wire.

The deceased had been buried with at least three finger rings. The most splendid one is a signet, heavy, made of silver-gilt copper. Traces of the decoration, a kind of rosette, are still visible [***Fig. 8***, top center]. A ring made of a piece of copper wire had the ends in the shape of viper heads [***Fig. 8***, top left]. The third ring had a flat oval disk as a gem [***Fig. 8***, top right]. Sieving of the grave fill produced also 200 beads of different shape, made of diverse materials: faience, quartz, agate, glass [***Fig. 8,*** bottom]. Most likely, the beads were lost during the looting. The assemblage consisted of about 100 tubular beads of greenish-faience, 3.5–4.5 mm in diameter and 5–17 mm long, as well as 39 small glass, barrel-shaped and gold-in-glass beads, 29 dark red tubular stone beads and 21 other beads of different shapes made of quartz, agate and carnelian. Only two beads were made of ostrich eggshell. The jewelry from the burial included also an amulet of faience in the shape of a ram's head.

DISCUSSION

The burial chamber in tumulus 10 at Hagar el-Beida has proved to include unique features. The use of mud-brick in grave construction brings to mind Tabo or Ballana and the so-called Tanqasi Culture (Jacquet-Gordon, Bonnet 1971–1972: 79–80). The furnishings are of a quality comparable to that from el-Hobagi (Lenoble 1997). Most of the elite tumuli have been found not far from power centers of the Meroitic kingdom. The Hagar el-Beida tumulus, however, was built in the Dar el-Manasir, far from any known center of power. It may have been constructed for a member of the ruling family from the 4th century AD.

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