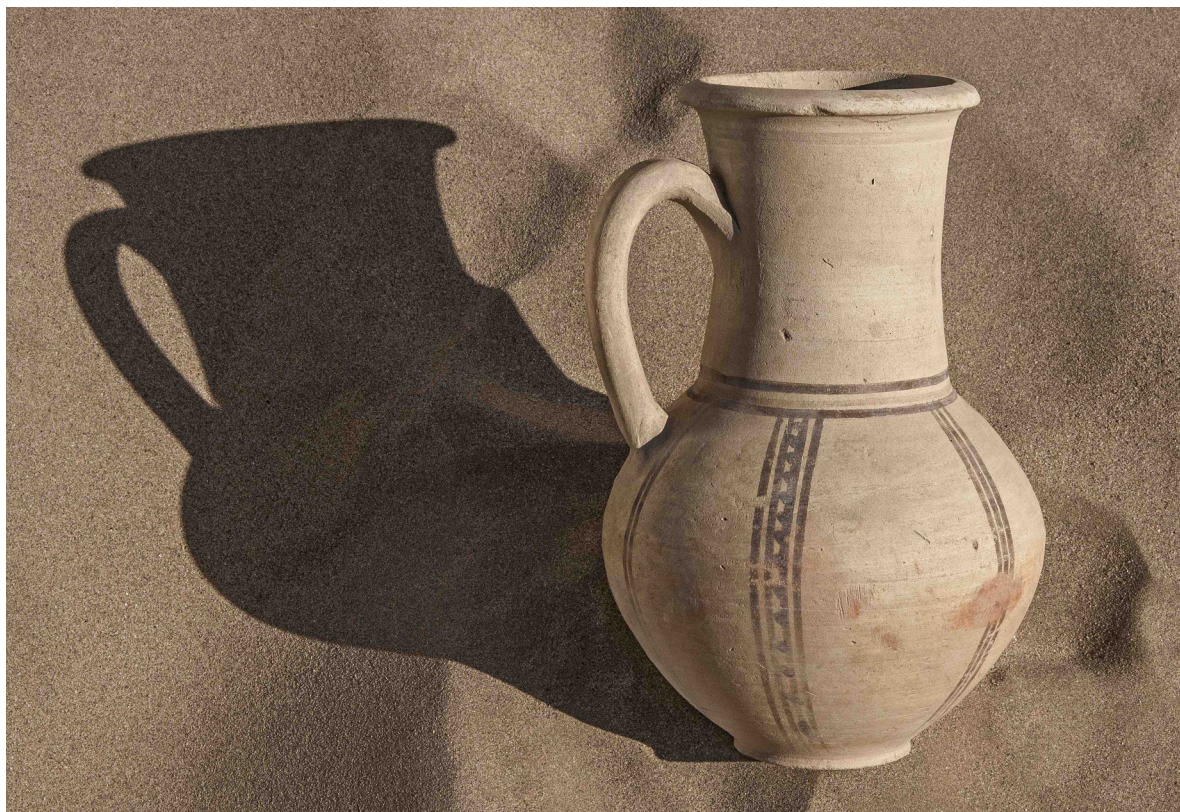


CAHIERS  
DE LA  
CÉRAMIQUE  
ÉGYPTIENNE 11

# CÉRAMIQUES ÉGYPTIENNES AU SOUDAN ANCIEN

Édité par **Romain David**



Institut français d'archéologie orientale

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# CÉRAMIQUES ÉGYPTIENNES AU SOUDAN ANCIEN

IMPORTATIONS, IMITATIONS ET INFLUENCES

*Édité par*  
Romain David



INSTITUT FRANÇAIS D'ARCHÉOLOGIE ORIENTALE

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## The Late Middle Kingdom in the Cemeteries at Mirgissa: Pottery and Relative Chronology<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In a previous article I addressed potential difficulties presented by the standard model for assigning dates to archaeological contexts in Egyptian Middle Kingdom settlements in Nubia based on ceramic assemblages.<sup>2</sup> As argued there, the assumption that assemblages in Nubia may be dated by comparison with assemblages from Egypt whose date are already known requires rethinking in light of recent shifts in the study of Late Middle Kingdom ceramics. In particular, I noted that the theory that Egyptian pottery production remained institutionally controlled throughout Egypt, and thus standardised, from the late 12th to the mid-late 13th Dynasty had been undermined by recent archaeological work that stressed local assemblages with local trajectories.<sup>3</sup> Since that article appeared, a number of studies have now been published that point to extensive direct and indirect evidence for local pottery production at Egyptian colonial settlements in Nubia, contradicting the established model of pottery distribution and production for Nubia that envisaged most (if not all) Egyptian pottery being imported to the colonies from the Egyptian Nile Valley.<sup>4</sup> In light of these advances in knowledge, establishing new sequences of material culture at a local level, rather than simply engaging in the “dating by parallels” game, should be a priority for future research in the archaeology of Middle Kingdom Nubia.<sup>5</sup> Such an undertaking is not only significant for chronological purposes, but also represents an important intellectual step towards reconceiving of Egyptian colonial material culture as not simply a passive reflection of the material culture of the Egyptian “homeland”. The aim of the current article is to present the first steps towards establishing a relative chronological framework of the Late Middle Kingdom – Second Intermediate Period “Egyptian” cemeteries at Mirgissa (ancient *Ikn*, fig. 1) that were excavated by the French mission under the direction of Jean Vercoutter.<sup>6</sup> As the only major Middle Kingdom-Second

<sup>1</sup> The following article builds on research started by the author as a PhD student at Macquarie University/Freie Universität supported by an Australian Postgraduate Award, cf. Knoblauch 2008. The research has now been continued as part of the FWF funded START project “Beyond Politics: Material Culture in Second Intermediate Period Egypt and Nubia” (FWF-Y754-G19) led by Bettina Bader at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>2</sup> Knoblauch 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For example: von Pilgrim 1996; Seiler 2003; Seiler 2005; Bader 2009; Rzeuska 2012. A discussion of the phenomenon of regional production during the Second Intermediate Period (incorporating the Late Middle Kingdom) is given in Bourriau 2010.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Knoblauch 2011; Smith 2012, pp. 389-390; Smith 2014; Reshetnikova, Williams 2016.

<sup>5</sup> This is one of the aims of the Uronarti Regional Archaeological Project, cf. Knoblauch, Bestock 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Vercoutter 1975; Vercoutter 1976a.



Intermediate Period colonial burial ground in Nubia to be recorded in the second half of the 20th century to what were then modern standards – other cemeteries were excavated almost without exception in the first quarter of that century<sup>7</sup> –, the site has considerable significance as it provides excellent data that charts the development of society and culture in the immediate vicinity of an Egyptian colonial settlement. But in order for the data to be understood correctly, it first needs to be spread along a chronological axis. For reasons of space this article considers only material culture which is in the Late Middle Kingdom tradition – thus representing a continuation of forms, fabrics and technologies common in the mid-late 12th Dynasty. The Second Intermediate Period material will be considered in a forthcoming monograph.

## Methodology

The current research builds on the important earlier discussions of the chronology of the Mirgissa Egyptian cemeteries by Jean Vercoutter<sup>8</sup> and Janine Bourriau<sup>9</sup> – both of which utilised the horizontal stratigraphy of burials in subterranean chambers as a guide to relative chronological relationships – but differs from these works in two fundamental ways. Whereas those studies were chiefly interested in assigning absolute dates to specific contexts in order to solve problems of a historical or socio-cultural nature and were thus generalising and synthetic in their method, the current study aims to establish transparent criteria by which contexts may be assigned to a relative phase of material culture.<sup>10</sup> The other major difference is that the ordering of contexts in the current study, in addition to the use of the aforementioned horizontal stratigraphy, is generated chiefly by changes in the development of material culture at Mirgissa, whereas both earlier studies relied on cross-dating and/or broad models that incorporated historical arguments.<sup>11</sup> While the theoretical basis for the application of such methods might be valid for colonial settlements in Lower Nubia, it is now apparent that this must be established through research and not assumed *a priori* to be the case. The linking of these relative phases to absolute and/or historical chronology is of only secondary interest and is discussed briefly in the conclusion.

The relative chronology of grave assemblages discussed here is based on, but not limited to, the analysis of Egyptian ceramics found in these contexts. The methodology utilises the principle of clustering similar *groups* (i.e. assemblages of artefacts associated with individual burials) together based on the combination of pottery types found therein and distinguishing between different *group-clusterings* (*Phases*) by the same criteria. Significance is attributed to the changing nature of assemblages, for example the appearance and disappearance of different type combinations, as well as the qualitative analysis of the typological development of *highly diagnostic* types.<sup>12</sup> As the aim of this paper is establishing the backbone of a robust relative chronological sequence, the procedure adopted here must be restrictive and only includes *groups* that can be ordered in relation to each other on the basis of the *combination* of different types rather than simply the absence/presence of a single *diagnostic* type. The reason for this will become apparent in the course of the discussion. Other graves with *less diagnostic* or only a single *diagnostic* type may be added into the matrix at

7 E.g. Ikkur/Kubban (1910-1911, FIRTH 1927), Aniba (1907-1908, 1912-1914, 1930-31, STEINDORFF 1937), Buhen (1909-1910, RANDALL-MACIVER, WOOLLEY 1911) and Semna (1924-1928, DUNHAM, JANSSEN 1960).

8 VERCOUTTER 1976b.

9 BOURRIAU 2001.

10 J. Bourriau (2001, pp. 5-12), for example, limited her discussion of the pottery from Mirgissa to assigning the ceramics from a grave generally to one of two traditions ("residence style"/Upper Egyptian), but did not give proofs for this with references to specific vessels. While this is understandable when one considers the immense scope of the article and its socio-cultural focus, it restricts the usefulness of the article for chronological purposes.

11 It is imperative to keep in mind that J. Vercoutter (1976b) predated the appearance of significant milestones in the study of Middle Kingdom pottery during the 1980's (i.e. ARNOLD 1982 and BOURRIAU 1988), and is therefore to be treated with caution.

12 Highly diagnostic types are defined as types that occur frequently but exhibit variation that is presumably of chronological significance.

a later point in order to add detail (and uncertainty) to the chronological skeleton pieced together here, but this is beyond the scope of the present paper. The result of this strict methodology is that only a small number of *groups* can be considered, ruling out computer generated seriation and correspondence analysis as useful tools for sorting the data. Instead we are forced to rely on a qualitative comparison of *groups*. In some cases, these qualitative observations can be backed up by reference to quantitative data, and the reader is to judge whether this combined, admittedly subjective, methodology produces results that are convincing or not.

Identifying suitable *groups* is relatively straightforward for the earliest parts of the chronological sequence as the majority of early burials at Mirgissa were made in pit-tombs that were designed and used for a single burial and were frequently found intact.<sup>13</sup> Identifying *groups* from the middle and later parts of the sequence is more problematic. This is because a change in burial customs occurred within a few generations of settlement and resulted in the majority of those dying at Mirgissa after this time being buried collectively in subterranean shaft tombs. The manipulation of these burials during subsequent funeral episodes and other post-depositional disturbances resulted in a comingling of burial assemblages making the identification of coherent *groups* difficult (*infra*). The discussion therefore only includes a discussion of *groups* where a case for coherency seems reasonable to the author. It goes without saying that all *groups* derived from such tombs should be treated with caution.

## Data

The study considers a selection of data from the two “Middle Kingdom” cemeteries at Mirgissa: Cemetery Mx-Tc with 126 burials in 122 separate tombs structures – all pit tombs, and Cemetery Mx with 146 tombs containing the burials of at least 709 individuals (fig. 1) – subterranean shaft tombs and pit tombs. The data includes published data in different formats (e.g. excavation reports, exhibition catalogues, museum catalogues<sup>14</sup>) as well as unpublished data in the form of objects from the excavations now in museum collections as well as museum object registration cards. Particular weight is given where possible to significant contexts containing pottery vessels that were re-recorded by the author in the collection of Charles de Gaulle-Lille III University and in the National Museum of Sudan, Khartoum.<sup>15</sup> Although these are not the focus of the article, coffins, funerary masks and statuary are discussed briefly in order to illustrate the complete nature of particular *groups*.

## Phase 1a

The most common type of closed vessel from the Late Middle Kingdom cemeteries at Mirgissa belongs to the class of vessel known colloquially in the literature as “Beer Bottles”. As noted elsewhere, these vessels undergo continuous changes during the Middle Kingdom, in the Egyptian Nile Valley from ellipsoid vessels with short narrowing necks, to vessels with ellipsoid body with flaring necks to vessels with cylindrical necks with an indent on the rim interior.<sup>16</sup> That the general principle of this development, at least for the latter

<sup>13</sup> I.e. BOURRIAU 2001, p. 4. A thorough discussion of the archaeological problems of identifying *groups* at Mirgissa is given in KNOBLAUCH 2017.

<sup>14</sup> These are principally: GRATIEN, LE SAOUT 1994; MALEY 1975; RIGAULT-DÉON 2012; VERCOUTTER 1976b; VILA 1975; VILA 1976. The mode of publication is heterogeneous and of varying standards. For the purposes of clarity the present author has standardised the illustrations to the extent that this is possible and does not result in data-loss.

<sup>15</sup> The author wishes to thank Brigitte Gratien (Lille) and Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed (Khartoum) for granting permission to document and publish artefacts curated in those collections. Special thanks are given to Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed for providing access to the Museum Registration Cards in Khartoum which contain many valuable pieces of information.

<sup>16</sup> The literature is extensive. For an up-to-date discussion and bibliography, cf. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 640-683.

two stages, is also applicable to colonial settlements in the region of the Second Cataract in Nubia has been convincingly demonstrated by Smith's analysis of the stratigraphy of the nearby settlement of Askut.<sup>17</sup> For this reason I have allowed this type to be an initial guide in the preliminary sorting of the tombs.

According to this system, the earliest type of Beer Bottle that I have been able to re-record should be a medium-sized jar of Nile C<sup>18</sup> with a round base, ellipsoid body, a flaring neck and modelled triangular-shaped rim from Cemetery Mx-Tc Tomb 69 (fig. 2.4).<sup>19</sup> The height (37-38 cm) is unusual for vessels of this type from Mirgissa and elsewhere which routinely are between 42 and 52 cm high<sup>20</sup> and the vessel has been coated with a red slip and then carefully smoothed. The rope impressions that are almost mandatory for "Beer Bottles" in Mirgissa Cemetery Mx-Tc are absent, and following Maley, it is fair to conclude that we are likely dealing with a finer and rarer subtype of the coarser type of Beer Bottle that is far more common in Cemetery Mx-Tc.<sup>21</sup> An exemplar of the latter type occurred in the same tomb (fig. 2.3) and points to the contemporaneity of the two different types. The published drawings (no doubt simplified) and descriptions indicate a medium to large vessel (height 40-47 cm) with a bag-shaped body, flaring neck and modelled rim, whereby the width of the neck can vary considerably.<sup>22</sup> Rope impressions on the lower half of the vessel body are typical, and according to the publication, most examples were covered with a red ochre slip.<sup>23</sup> The vessel occurs almost exclusively in Cemetery Mx-Tc where at least 12 complete and 20 near complete to fragmentary bottles were recovered.<sup>24</sup> Looking at the remainder of the assemblage from Tomb 69 – an intact single burial – there is unfortunately little evidence that clearly helps to establish a chronological context for this type – we can identify a type of wide-shaped conical Bread Mould (fig. 2.2)<sup>25</sup> and a footed simple bowl with stemmed base (fig. 2.1)<sup>26</sup> – but nothing that is particularly chronologically sensitive.

One of the most common "chronologically sensitive" types that does regularly occur in conjunction with Beer Bottles with flared necks at Mirgissa are so-called Hemispherical Cups – a small open vessel form with direct rim, rounded base and a rim diameter of ca. 10-14 cm (fig. 5.1).<sup>27</sup> As has been discussed elsewhere, the shape of this vessel gradually changed during the Middle Kingdom from shallower to deeper examples (as measured by the Vessel Index (Rim Diameter/Height)\*100),<sup>28</sup> a phenomenon that has also been observed in at least one Egyptian settlement in the Second Cataract region from the last third of the 12th Dynasty onwards, whereby the development towards deeper cups there probably stopped in the mid-13th Dynasty.<sup>29</sup> Up to that point, it could be argued that vessels of similar dimensions were all produced around the same time, while major differences in vessel dimensions might indicate chronological disparity. With regards to Mirgissa, there are 13 tombs that contained both a published example of a Beer Bottle with flared neck and at least one published example of a cup of this type. Four tombs contained more than one example of a cup,

<sup>17</sup> SMITH 1995, pp. 31-32; SMITH 2012, pp. 401-402. The same trend has also now been documented at Uronarti – 30 km to the south of Mirgissa – during the new excavations by the Uronarti Regional Archaeological Project.

<sup>18</sup> According to the Vienna System, NORDSTRÖM, BOURRIAU 1993.

<sup>19</sup> Khartoum SNM 18932, MALEY 1975, pp. 258-259, fig. 25, no. 4.

<sup>20</sup> See SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 652-656.

<sup>21</sup> The only parallel for the Beer Bottle (fig. 2.4) at Mirgissa (Mx-Tc 69) occurs in another tomb in Cemetery Mx-Tc – Grave 112 – an intact burial of an adult that contained a number of pieces of pottery, MALEY 1975, p. 276, fig. 40, no. 4. Among these were two hemispherical "drinking cups" with a Vessel Index of ca. 170-175, MALEY 1975, p. 276, fig. 40, nos. 1, 5. The measurements are based on the published drawings. The tomb is dated to Mirgissa Phase Ia on the basis of the combination of types, see tab. 1.

<sup>22</sup> SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 652-655.

<sup>23</sup> MALEY 1975, p. 282.

<sup>24</sup> MALEY 1975, p. 282.

<sup>25</sup> MALEY 1975, p. 258, fig. 25, no. 2; SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 750-753.

<sup>26</sup> MALEY 1975, p. 258, fig. 25, no. 1. E.g. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 354-355.

<sup>27</sup> For the definition of this type, cf. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 84-87.

<sup>28</sup> There is extensive literature on this. For overviews and further references cf. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 84-87.

<sup>29</sup> As suggested in KNOBLAUCH 2007. Cf. now SMITH 2012, p. 405.

and thus measurements for 20 individual cups could be included in the analysis.<sup>30</sup> The results shown in the middle column of fig. 5 indicate that there was a clear relationship at Mirgissa between Beer Bottles with a flaring neck and Hemispherical Cups with a Vessel Index in the range 160-177 (average: 167.1).

That this combination of different types is chronologically meaningful is suggested by an examination of the Vessel Indices of Hemispherical Cups associated with a different type of Beer Bottle with cylindrical neck and ellipsoid body that probably replaced the type with flaring neck during the course of the Late Middle Kingdom (fig. 5 right hand column, *infra* for the type). Unfortunately, there are only a handful of such combinations and the quantification of this data is therefore admittedly weak.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, by comparison with the cups associated with the earlier type, the cups associated with the new Beer Bottle type are deeper (range 108-160, average: 144.2, e.g. fig. 5.2-4) and there is little overlap between the two *groups*. On the basis of this result, I would cautiously propose that the combination of Beer Bottle type and Hemispherical Cup shape could potentially be employed to identify two sub-phases of the Late Middle Kingdom horizon at Mirgissa. An earlier sub-phase (here called Phase Ia) that can be defined by the combination of Beer Bottle with flared neck and Hemispherical Cup with a Vessel Index above *ca.*160, and a later sub-phase that can be defined by the combination of Beer Bottle with cylindrical neck and Hemispherical Cup with a Vessel Index of *ca.*160 or below (Phase Ib). Tombs which contain only one of these types, but more than one example thereof – such as Tomb 23 discussed above – might be attributed to a particular phase for further analytic purposes, but should not contribute to the definition of a phase.

## Other Phase Ia Combinations?

The proposed chronological sensitivity of the Hemispherical Cup at Mirgissa in the late Middle Kingdom horizon opens up other possibilities for defining relative dating criteria for tombs based on the combination of Hemispherical Cups and other chronologically significant vessel types. One combination which does appear to be meaningful is the association of cups with so-called medium sized Globular Bottles with a tall flaring neck, direct rim and round base that are very common in the Mirgissa cemeteries (fig. 4.1-5).<sup>32</sup> The latter vessels were wheel-made in Nile B1 or 2 and could be partially or completely coated with a red ochre slip (fig. 4.3) or a micaceous slip (figs. 4.1, 4, 5) – a type of surface coating that is only attested in significant quantities in the region of the Second Cataract pointing to its probable place of production.<sup>33</sup> The micaceous slip was sometimes combined with red decorative elements consisting of horizontal lines and hanging petals (swirls) painted over the top of the slip (fig. 4.2).

A review of the published data reveals that Globular Bottles occurred together with Hemispherical Cups (whose dimensions could be measured) in nine separate tombs at Mirgissa. Eight of these tombs were single burials in pit tombs in which there was limited evidence for post-depositional disturbance, while the ninth was a shaft tomb in which there were multiple burials and no undisturbed deposits.<sup>34</sup> Some of these tombs had more than one example of a cup and in total 12 measurable cups were included in the analysis for which

<sup>30</sup> These are Cemetery Mx-Tc Tombs (+ Vessel Index of Hemispherical Cups): 37 (VI: 162), 61 (VI: 166, 166), 58a (VI: 166), 66 (VI: 166), 88 (VI: 164), 90 (VI: 161, 165, 165), 96 (VI: 166), 104 (VI: 164, 166, 169, 170), 107 (VI: 167), 108 (VI: 171), 109 (VI: 175), 112 (VI: 172, 176); and Cemetery Mx Tomb 136 (VI: 166).

<sup>31</sup> These are Cemetery Mx-Tc Tomb (+ Vessel Index of Hemispherical Cup(s)): 36 (VI: 160), and Cemetery Mx Tombs: 130 (VI: 108), 131 (VI: 153), 135 (VI: 156).

<sup>32</sup> E.g. MALEY 1975, pp. 280-281. For the definition of this type, cf. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 400-405 with bibliography.

<sup>33</sup> BOURRIAU 2004, p. 9; KNOBLAUCH 2011; SMITH 2012, pp. 389-390.

<sup>34</sup> These are Cemetery Mx-Tc Tombs (+Vessel Index of Hemispherical Cup(s)): 4 (VI: 162), 30 (VI: 164), 81 (VI: 165), 82 (VI: 171), 90 (VI: 161, 165, 165), 113 (VI: 170, 176), 115 (VI: 174), 116 (VI: 180) (complete contexts in MALEY 1975) and Cemetery Mx Tomb 134 (VI: 173) (compare VILA 1975).



the results are shown in the left-hand column in fig. 5. As is clearly observable, the dimensions of the cups as measured by the Vessel Index falls within a narrow range 160-180 with an average of 166.5. The result is remarkably similar to that for Hemispherical Cups associated with the Beer Bottles with flaring necks and I am therefore inclined to consider the combination of a Globular Bottle with *flared* neck and *direct* rim, and Hemispherical Cup with a Vessel Index of over 160 as a second type combination that may be used to assign a grave or *group* to Phase Ia. According to this strict method, only the Globular Bottle illustrated in fig. 4.3 with red slip can actually be dated (to Phase Ia) by type combination as the other illustrated examples did not occur in combination with a Hemispherical Cup. This however, should not be taken as evidence that the types of surface decoration represented by these examples do not occur in Phase Ia. Four other tombs that could be dated to Phase Ia had examples of a Globular Bottle with a micaceous slip that have not been re-recorded by me, and there was a single tomb dated to Phase Ia with a Globular Bottle that bore the red-painted swirl decoration.<sup>35</sup>

In fact the contemporaneity of the Beer Bottle with flared neck and the Globular Bottle is clear as they occur together in at least one tomb<sup>36</sup> and they occur with the same (common) types – a small corpus of vessels that may hence be considered particularly typical for this phase (fig. 4.6-9). Unfortunately I have not been able to study any of these personally but they include medium to large shallow simple bowls with a direct rim and rounded base made of a coarse fabric<sup>37</sup> (fig. 4.6-7), small (or perhaps miniature?) deep simple and/or conical bowls with direct rim and flat base of a coarse fabric (fig. 4.8),<sup>38</sup> and deep roughly hemispherical miniature cups with flat base that are made of a relatively fine fabric (fig. 4.9).<sup>39</sup>

## A Transition to Phase Ib? Cemetery Mx Tomb T138

Not all Globular Bottles with flaring necks, however, need date to Phase Ia, and in fact this is rather unlikely. Nonetheless it seems that after this point they became less often included in burial assemblages to the extent that they do not occur in any secure Phase Ib contexts, and even those vessels loosely associated with Phase Ib begin to include new features. An example of such a vessel is a globular bottle with a tall flaring neck coated with a micaceous slip from Cemetery Mx (fig. 3.2). Unlike the globular bottles discussed above in Phase Ia only the neck is slipped, it has a modelled rim<sup>40</sup> and the body shape is ellipsoid as opposed to strictly globular and there is a slightly angular shoulder. The provenience of the vessel in question is Tomb 138. The tomb, used for two burials, was badly disturbed and the globular bottle was found placed along with two other complete pottery vessels in the north western corner of the shaft. Of these two vessels, I have been able to locate one in Khartoum. It is a coarse, medium tall Beer Bottle with globular body, short flaring neck and modelled triangular rim made of Nile C2 (fig. 3.1). There is a very shallow indent on the rim interior and the rounded bottom had been coarsely scraped up to the point of the vessel's maximum diameter. While it is related to the Beer Bottles with flared necks just discussed, its reduced size and only modestly flaring neck indicate that it might be better considered as a further Beer Bottle subtype<sup>41</sup> and quite possibly an intermediate

<sup>35</sup> Mx-Tc Tomb 30.

<sup>36</sup> Mx-Tc Tomb 90, MALEY 1975, p. 267. The reason that the two types do not occur together in more tombs at Mirgissa is that they appear to have been interchangeable for one another in burial practice. The requirement for burial was for at least one closed vessel. The deceased was generally given an example of one or the other bottle type, but rarely both. The early tombs were also rather poor in pottery, cf. KNOBLAUCH 2008, pp. 291-292.

<sup>37</sup> MALEY 1975, type VIIb, pp. 283-284. The type occurs in the following tombs dated to Phase Ia: Mx-Tc 37, 81, 107.

<sup>38</sup> MALEY 1975, type VIIa, p. 284. For the identification of bowls of this size as "miniatures", cf. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 866-867, 884-887. The type occurs in the following tombs dated to Phase Ia: Mx-Tc 37, 58a, 82 and 90.

<sup>39</sup> MALEY 1975, type VIIb, p. 284. The type occurs in the following tombs dated to Phase Ia: Mx-Tc 37, 66.

<sup>40</sup> According to the definition of this type in SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 400-405.

<sup>41</sup> Perhaps II.H.3.b.2, Class 3b in SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, p. 656.

type between Bottles with flared necks typical for Phase Ia and those with cylindrical necks typical for Phase Ib. The third vessel from this context was apparently very similar to the last, but it is unpublished and has not been relocated.<sup>42</sup> The combination of unique types in this tomb might be indicative of a transitional phase between Phases Ia and Ib, but as the context is disturbed, this must remain the subject of speculation.

## Phase Ib: Cemetery Mx Tomb 130 Group 2

One of the clearest Phase Ib contexts at Mirgissa is a *group* consisting of pottery vessels and two coffins (my T130, *Group 2*) in the southern primary chamber of Cemetery Mx Tomb 130 that represents a continuation of burial activity that started in the southern secondary chamber of this shaft tomb (my T130, *Group 1*; *infra*).

Importantly, this context includes an example of the “new” Beer Bottle type (now in Khartoum; fig. 6.1). The vessel of coarse Nile C fabric has an ellipsoid-ovoid body, narrow cylindrical neck, and modelled rim with pronounced inner indentation.<sup>43</sup> The base is round and coarsely scraped and impressions from ropes tied around the belly to maintain the vessel’s shape before firing are clearly visible. The vessel is distinctly coarse and there was a red slip over the entire exterior surface. This type is found throughout Egypt, but the height of the exemplar from Mirgissa (40 cm) places it alongside other vessels from the Egyptian Nubian forts at the small end of the spectrum.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the vessel shown here was just one of six such vessels found in Tomb 130 – the others are unpublished – and all are of comparable or smaller size<sup>45</sup> as are the vessels of this type from the neighbouring Tomb 131 (*infra*).<sup>46</sup> A question for future research might be whether the size of this type of Beer Bottle varied according to the place of production (should this be scientifically determined) with those from Nubia being generally smaller than those produced elsewhere?

The other pottery vessels from this *group* are types that either do not occur in Phase Ia or exhibit features not associated with that phase. On the whole, they make a later impression than Phase Ia and are the core of my Phase Ib. These include a large, thick-walled bowl with a white painted rim and a cross on its interior that according to the type assigned in the original publication was made of a coarse silt fabric (fig. 6.2).<sup>47</sup> The vessel shape certainly appears earlier at Mirgissa in contexts dateable to Phase Ia (compare fig. 4.7), but this is the first occurrence of an example with white painted decoration and specifically the motif of the cross. With this last vessel was found a deep simple bowl with a modelled rim type (fig. 6.4) that does not occur in association with bowls in tombs dated to Phase Ia.<sup>48</sup> Particularly significant for the characterisation of this *group* is a “Hemispherical Cup” found placed inside coffin C4 that had a slightly restricted aperture and a “Vessel Index” of *ca.* 108 (fig. 6.3).<sup>49</sup> The type assigned it in the publication – I-B1 – usually indicates a vessel made of fine silt roughly equivalent to Nile B1 or 2 in the Vienna system, and the vessel bore a thin band of red paint/slip on the rim. As far as can be determined on the basis of the published records, no cups with such distinctive curvature were found in Phase Ia, and as may be gleaned from consultation with fig. 5, the depth of this vessel as represented by the “Vessel Index” falls far outside the attested range for cups of Phase Ia at Mirgissa which were much shallower.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>42</sup> VILA 1975, p. 208, no. 3.

<sup>43</sup> SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 676–679, type II.H.6.a. Vessels similar to this have also been found in Mirgissa Cemetery MX Tomb 131.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. from Buhen and Askut, SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, p. 676, nos. 9, 11.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. VILA 1975, pp. 186–191, fig. 77b.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. VILA 1975, p. 200, fig. 81, no. 46.

<sup>47</sup> VILA 1975, pp. 189–190, figs. 78–79, no. 18.

<sup>48</sup> VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79, no. 20. For this type, SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 172–173.

<sup>49</sup> VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79, no. 24; SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 108–111, type I.A.14, Group 6.

<sup>50</sup> It should be emphasized that the distinctive curvature of the cup from Mx T130 *Group 2* is also unusual for Mirgissa generally and for this tomb specifically. The only other vessel of this type from Tomb 130 that I have been able to relocate (fig. 5.4, Mx T130, no. 9, Khartoum SNM 18970, VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79, no. 9) has a deep hemispherical contour with a slightly restricted rim that corresponds to Type I.A.12.a, Group 4; SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 100–105. It has a Vessel Index of *ca.* 140.

Happily, the coffin (C4) in which the last vessel was found has been partially published (fig. 6.6) providing a direct link between the pottery and non-ceramic finds.<sup>51</sup> Although the publication is lacking detail, it is possible to make some general remarks concerning the coffin layout. The interior was apparently given over entirely to narrow columns containing funerary texts (e.g. “coffin texts”) in semi cursive script<sup>52</sup> whereas the exterior had spaced text columns that correspond to Type IV as defined by Willems.<sup>53</sup> The exterior of the short ends of the coffin were each decorated with an image of a goddess (Isis and Nephtys) as well as text columns in which the usual phrase for the mid-late 12th Dynasty (*jmꜣh.(w) hr DN*) was replaced by the formula *dd mdw jn DN*.<sup>54</sup> While this context does suggest a contemporaneity of Willems Type IV and Mirgissa Phase Ib pottery, it must be noted that it is likely, that this coffin was used for someone other than for whom it was originally intended as the name on the coffin (probably *Bnry hnt*)<sup>55</sup> differs from the name on a funerary mask (*Bbi*)<sup>56</sup> that was found *in situ* inside the coffin on the head and the torso of the deceased. As in the case of the Coffin (C5) from Group 1 from the same tomb (*infra*), the coffin might have been “reused” at Mirgissa and there is no way of knowing how much time elapsed between this event and its production.

The cartonnage funerary mask associated with this coffin (Mx T130.136) was found *in situ* placed over the head and torso of a stretched supine adult (fig. 6.5). According to the typology of the excavator André Vila, which is largely based on the type of headdress, it was of the so-called *Khat* type and exhibited a plain white-yellow head cloth (or *Khat*)<sup>57</sup> that lay over a striated, green wig with five vertical strands of hair decorated with black circles. The latter reminds one of faience appliques on Late Middle Kingdom coffins and masks that may represent locks of hair.<sup>58</sup> The overall arrangement of the cloth and the striated wig is not entirely dissimilar to the suggested reconstruction of the anthropoid coffin from the tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht.<sup>59</sup>

Judging by the evidence for the earliest use of this tomb – Group 1 from the southern secondary chamber –, the material just discussed from Group 2 represents a continuation of this previous burial activity with only limited time in between. Group 1 included a painted wooden coffin (C5) of Willems’ Type IVba,<sup>60</sup> another cartonnage mask with *Khat* head cloth over a striated wig,<sup>61</sup> a wooden statue,<sup>62</sup> and a deep simple bowl with a modelled rim, rounded base and three lines of rope impressions on the exterior.<sup>63</sup> The group could date to either Phase Ia or Ib.

<sup>51</sup> VILA 1975.

<sup>52</sup> VERCOUTTER 1965, pl. VI, no. 3. For parallels, including the coffins from the late 12th Dynasty “princesses” at Dashur, cf. WILLEMS 1988, p. 191.

<sup>53</sup> WILLEMS 1988, pp. 136-161.

<sup>54</sup> VILA 1975, p. 188, fig. 77b. For parallels from “fairly late sources”, cf. WILLEMS 1988, p. 171.

<sup>55</sup> Now in Khartoum. GEUS 2004, p. 19; GRATIEN 1991, p. 74; VERCOUTTER 1976b, p. 290, no. 114, fig. 12.a, fig. 13.6; VILA 1975, p. 187, figs. 77.b and 78.a-b.

<sup>56</sup> VERCOUTTER 1976b, p. 290, n. 114. Listed twice, once incorrectly as *nbt pr* in GRATIEN 1991, p. 71.

<sup>57</sup> EATON-KRAUSS 1977.

<sup>58</sup> ROGGE 1986, p. 138, n. 366, and p. 216. See also the recently discovered coffin of *Sebekhat* from Dahshur, BABA, YOSHIMURA 2010, p. 11.

<sup>59</sup> MACE, WINLOCK 1916, frontispiece and pp. 42-46.

<sup>60</sup> GRATIEN, LE SAOUT 1994, pp. 138-139 (“XIII<sup>e</sup> Dynastie”); RIGAUULT-DÉON 2012, pp. 205-206, figs. a-b. For the type cf. WILLEMS 1988, pp. 136-137. Type IVba is defined by the positioning of the text columns, *Wdj.t* eyes with the depiction of the false door and the use of the phrase *jmꜣh.w hr DN* (the so-called standard formulation) in the vertical text columns on the coffin sides. The coffin nonetheless shows some anomalies such as the naming of Anubis in the horizontal line of text on the coffin front rather than Osiris and the unusual positioning of the four sons of Horus in the vertical text columns, e.g. WILLEMS 1988, p. 138, fig. 11. The type is dated by H. Willems from the reign of Senwosret II until the late 12th Dynasty. The coffin is dated alongside most of the other coffins from Mirgissa to the 12th Dynasty (without comment) in GRAJETZKI 2010, p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> GRATIEN, LE SAOUT 1994, pp. 135-136; VILA 1976, p. 245, fig. 36, no. 114, and fig. 39, no. 115, pl. H.T., 1-4; RIGAUULT-DÉON 2012, pp. 208-211.

<sup>62</sup> VILA 1975, p. 187, no. 23, and p. 189, fig. 78e; and discussion in VERCOUTTER 1976b, pp. 285-286.

<sup>63</sup> VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79, no. 27. For the type and parallels consult SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, p. 172.

## Further Evidence for Phase Ib: Cemetery Mx Tomb 131 Group 4

The combination of types from *Group 2* in Tomb 130 is similar to an assemblage of pottery found in the southeastern corner of the primary chamber and the western secondary chamber of Tomb T131 (my Tomb 131 *Group 4*). The material is clearly disturbed and might belong to any one of the five burials that were originally made in the southern chambers of this tomb. Of the vessels of this *group*, I have been able to locate a large deep simple bowl of Nile C fabric with direct rim and a scraped, rounded base from the western sub-chamber in Lille (fig. 7.1).<sup>64</sup> The vessel was decorated with a band of white coating around the rim, and there are faint traces of what appears to be two crossed bands on the interior.<sup>65</sup> As can be clearly seen in fig. 7.1 (upper), the white coating was unstable and has partially been worn or washed away pointing to its probable application post-firing. Interestingly, there is also a neatly incised spiral on the centre of the vessel interior created using a sharp implement while the vessel was still turning on the wheel (fig. 7.1, upper). Given that the remainder of the vessel interior was carefully smoothed, one can only assume that this latter effect was the result of a deliberate action by the potter and that the spiral was a decorative feature.<sup>66</sup> A second bowl of similar type found in the primary chamber is now in Khartoum.<sup>67</sup> Like the vessel just discussed, it is made of Nile C and there is a carelessly applied band of white coating on the rim and a cross on its interior (fig. 7.2). The centre of the vessel interior exhibits coarse and deep wheel turning marks, but not the incised spiral of the former example. With this last bowl was a large “Beer Bottle” (fig. 7.3) which is outwardly similar to the Beer Bottle type discussed from Tomb 130 (*supra*), whereby the body shape is more ovoid. Unhappily, the published photo does not allow a comment regarding the morphology of the rim. The relatively short, wide neck, however, might indicate that the vessel belongs to a different subtype.<sup>68</sup> With these last two vessels was an unpublished Hemispherical Cup with a Vessel Index of 153, thus of a deeper shape than any cups associated with Phase Ia (fig. 5).<sup>69</sup> To the same general convolute (*Group 4*) belongs a circular shaped object of blue-green faience decorated with a lotus flower in black – probably a lid with a small central handle (fig. 7.4),<sup>70</sup> as well as a pair of wooden sticks *ca.* 55 cm in length and 4 cm in diameter (fig. 7.5).<sup>71</sup> One of these is weighted towards one end and straight and appears to be a type of staff or baton, while the other is curved and reminds one of the “throwing sticks” found by Reisner at Kerma.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Lille IM862/L9; VILA 1975, p. 200, no. 50 (unpublished).

<sup>65</sup> For the same type of vessel with a white painted rim, the reader is referred to SEILER 2005, p. 62.

<sup>66</sup> E.g. from the tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht, MACE, WINLOCK 1916, pl. XXXVE and p. 112: “The insides of the dishes were sometimes ornamented with a spiral grooving, effected by some sharp instrument while the dish was still on the wheel [...]”.

<sup>67</sup> Khartoum, SNM 18924; VILA 1975, p. 199, no. 44.

<sup>68</sup> SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, p. 672. Three fragmentarily preserved “Beer Bottles” of this type probably also occur in Cemetery Mx-Tc although the published drawings are rather simple.

<sup>69</sup> VILA 1975, p. 199, no. 45.

<sup>70</sup> VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 81, no. 51a-b. The decoration type was very common at Kerma, e.g. REISNER 1923, pl. 47, nos. 5, 8.

<sup>71</sup> VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 81, no. 53a-b.

<sup>72</sup> REISNER 1923, pp. 245-246, pl. 51, no. 3.



## Late Phase Ib? Cemetery Mx Tomb 131 Group 5 and Group 3

Vessels and objects belonging to Tomb 131 Group 4 either predate or are broadly contemporary with a final phase of burial in the southern primary chamber (Tomb 131 Group 5) in which two coffin burials (both unpublished) and associated grave goods were placed near the entrance to the shaft essentially blocking off the southern chambers for further burial use. Inside one of these coffins (C5) next to the knee of the occupant was a black stone (“gabbro/serpentine”?) female statuette now in Lille that bears an offering inscription for the Mistress of the House *nb.t wsh.t(?)* born of *im.t* (fig. 8.1).<sup>73</sup> The only piece of pottery of the many vessels associated with these two burials that I have been able to locate is a small squat-shaped jar of Nile B2 with a trimmed flat base placed next to the second coffin (fig. 8.2).<sup>74</sup> A band of white coating was applied to the interior and exterior of the rim sometime after firing over the top of a prefiring red slip. A medium large shallow bowl with folded rim (fig. 8.3) was found touching the same coffin.<sup>75</sup> Like some examples of this type from Thebes and elsewhere, the vessel bore traces of burning on its interior that likely resulted from its use as incense censer during the burial.<sup>76</sup> To judge by a published photo of this vessel it was coated entirely with a white substance on top of which the traces of burning can be observed. Neither of the two vessel types discussed occurred in Phase Ia and do not appear in the *groups* discussed so far from Phase Ib, possibly indicating the presence of a slightly later *group* within Phase I which would fit the archaeological situation quite well. This impression is further supported by other vessels associated with this *group*, unfortunately all unpublished and so far not located by me. Particularly intriguing are two “Hemispherical Cups” found placed between Coffins C5 and its unnumbered companion. According to their description in the published report they fall outside the standard parameters for decoration of this vessel type at Mirgissa in Phase Ia and Phase Ib. The first has a dark red slip superimposed on top of an orange slip, whereas the second had no slip at all.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately their broken state precludes calculating a Vessel Index for either vessel.

A second *group* from Tomb 131 that might be attributed cautiously a later relative date in Phase Ib comes from the northern primary chamber near the entrance to the northern secondary chamber (Tomb 131 Group 3). The deposit consisted of nine small open-shaped vessels one of which one is now in Lille.<sup>78</sup> This small, deep bowl of Nile B2-C with a flat, string-cut base with decentralised spiral showed two interesting post-firing modifications: a drilled hole just below the rim which may have functioned as a spout, and a carelessly applied band of white paint around the rim (fig. 9.1). Five more bowls of the same type came from this assemblage but photographs have only been published for two of these (fig. 9.2-3). Like the vessel from Lille, both had a coarse white band on the rim, but in addition to this they also had a new type of “decoration” in the form of splashes or flecks of white paint all over the interior surface. The only other vessels published from this *group* are a red-slipped carinated cup with a flat-base and direct rim (fig. 9.4), apparently of a medium fine silt fabric,<sup>79</sup> and a small cup with a flattened base and restricted aperture (fig. 9.5).<sup>80</sup> An unpublished Hemispherical Cup from the same deposit has a “Vessel Index” of 166, which is rather high and more typical for Phase Ia

<sup>73</sup> IPEL Louvre Dépôt E.25618; VILA 1975, p. 198, no. 38; VERCOUTTER 1976b, p. 284, fig. 10, no. 3. The reading of the inscription follows the catalogue entry in GRATIEN, LE SAOUT 1994, pp. 141-142, no. 193. A different reading for the otherwise unattested name *nb.t wsh.t*, such as *nb.t h3.t*, e.g. RANKE 1935, p. 188, no. 26, would fit just as well and is possibly to be preferred.

<sup>74</sup> Lille IM566/L129, Mx T131, no. 21. VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82, no. 21, and p. 199, no. 21.

<sup>75</sup> VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 81, no. 40, and p. 197, fig. 83, no. 40.

<sup>76</sup> SEILER 2005, pp. 111-112. The type itself is typical for the late 12th and 13th Dynasties and continues into the Second Intermediate Period, SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 158 and 172. See also BADER 2009, p. 349, type 56D.

<sup>77</sup> VILA 1975, p. 199, nos. 25 and 33.

<sup>78</sup> Lille IM620/L45. VILA 1975, p. 192, fig. 80, nos. 10-18, and pp. 193, 199, nos. 10-18.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, p. 300, type I.F.21 This type is in turn probably a variant of type of carinated cup with ring base that also dates from the late Middle Kingdom Horizon into the Second Intermediate Period, e.g. SCHIESTL, SEILER 2012, pp. 292-293, type I.F.19; BADER 2009, p. 252, type 6b.

<sup>80</sup> VILA 1975, p. 199, no. 15.

(fig. 5).<sup>81</sup> If the identification of the vessel as a Hemispherical Cup is correct, it is a clear demonstration of why contexts should not be dated by a single type.

Tomb 131 *Group 3* was effectively sealed in place by burial activity in the northern primary chamber with which it was most likely broadly contemporary. Particularly important for the relative dating of *Group 3* within the Phase I horizon is a partially published wooden coffin (C3, fig. 9.7a-b). Although the coffin obviously had a similar exterior layout design to the coffins from Tomb 130 *Groups 1* and 2 (*supra*), it exhibited a number of anomalous features that might point to a slightly later production date for this particular coffin. Most conspicuous is a style of painting and execution that indicates a considerable distance from the workshop traditions of the Middle Kingdom embodied by the two coffins from Tomb 130. Fragments from a plaster mask with a *Khat* headdress and a wooden false-beard were also found in this coffin and both appear to be similar to those from the mask from Tomb 130 *Group 2*.<sup>82</sup> The mask was recently subject to a <sup>14</sup>C analysis, the results of which are discussed below. In terms of correlations with *Group 4* from the southern primary chamber of Tomb 131, it may be pointed out that the placement of Coffin C3 from *Group 3* sealed a single vessel against the wall of the tomb chamber (fig. 9.6)<sup>83</sup> which is more or less identical to fig. 8.2 from *Group 4* despite the absence of a white coating on the former's rim.

Another indication that some of the *groups* from Tomb 131 should be placed relatively late in the Phase I sequence is the association of this tomb with the first instances of cartonnage masks with a feathered (or *rishi*) headdress at Mirgissa.<sup>84</sup> This style of headdress eventually replaced the *Khat* and other earlier headdress types at Mirgissa during the late Middle Kingdom broadly paralleling contemporary mask and coffin production in the Egyptian Nile Valley.<sup>85</sup> Apart from two intact *rishi* masks found *in situ* with burials in the bottom of the shaft of Tomb 131,<sup>86</sup> a further three unpublished fragments from one or more masks were in fact found and it is possible that they originally were associated with one (or more) of the burials in the subterranean chambers of the tomb.<sup>87</sup>

## Summary of Late Middle Kingdom Phases in the Mirgissa Cemeteries

The material-culture from Mirgissa that is in the Late Middle Kingdom tradition has been divided into two main sub-phases (Ia and Ib). The presence of a transitional phase between these two phases was postulated, as were *groups* of material that by virtue of horizontal stratigraphy within subterranean tombs and their combination of types may represent a later relative date within Phase I. Whether this warrants the identification of an additional sub-phase (i.e. Phase Ic) is left open for the time being and the relevant *groups* are simply identified as *Phase Ib (late?)*. The definition of Phase Ia is based on the data from 20 tombs (tab. 1). These are almost exclusively pit tombs built and used for a single deceased and the definition of this phase is therefore relatively straightforward. Diagnostic for this sub-phase are Beer Bottles with flaring necks, Globular bottles with flaring necks and direct rims, Hemispherical Cups with a Vessel Index of above 160, medium to large simple bowls and small cups with flat bases. Unfortunately there was very little associated non-ceramic material with the graves dated to this phase, for example masks or coffins.

<sup>81</sup> VILA 1975, p. 199, no. 17.

<sup>82</sup> See RIGAULT-DÉON 2012, pp. 217-218.

<sup>83</sup> VILA 1975, p. 192, fig. 80, p. 196, fig. 82, no. 27, and p. 199, no. 27.

<sup>84</sup> This issue is also discussed in BOURRIAU 2001, pp. 11-12; RIGAULT-DÉON 2012, pp. 55-56, 216-231.

<sup>85</sup> For “*rishi* masks” during the Second Intermediate Period generally, cf. DODSON 1998; DODSON 2011; MINIACI 2011, pp. 136-138.

<sup>86</sup> For the *in situ* masks from intact burials in the tomb shaft of Tomb 131, see T131 F3 and F4, VILA 1975, p. 194, fig. 80b; VILA 1976, pp. 255-258.

<sup>87</sup> The attribution of the mask fragments to the coffins in the subterranean tombs was first suggested by VERCOUTTER 1976b, p. 299; BOURRIAU 2001, pp. 11-12. The mask fragments in question are discussed in VILA 1976, p. 258.

The data for Phase Ib is comparably weaker. It is based so far on the evidence from just four separate tombs, two of which are pit tombs, and two which are subterranean shaft tombs that were used for multiple burials (tab. 1). The definition of this latter sub-phase and the precise composition of the *groups* belonging to that phase as presented here should be considered a matter of interpretation. Nonetheless, the assemblages differ enough from those of Phase Ia and are internally homogeneous to the extent that the core types that define Phase Ib are readily identifiable. These include Beer Bottles with cylindrical necks, relatively deep hemispherical cups with a Vessel Index of 160 or below and large-medium simple bowls with modelled rims. Simple bowls with direct rims, a continuation from the previous phase, were sometimes specially prepared for burial by the application of white paint around the rim and a white cross on the interior. Typical for Phase Ib (late?) was the use of white paint to decorate a larger corpus of forms, in particular an array of small open vessels. Beyond the pottery assemblages, the early part of Phase Ib is associated with Coffin Types still within the 12th Dynasty tradition (i.e. Willems Exterior Type IV) and highly plastic and detailed plaster funerary masks with *Khat* headdresses and striated wigs. The postulated later part of Phase Ib in comparison is associated with a coffin that while still preserving aspects of the earlier tradition, evinces many anomalous features, as well as with both *Khat* masks and (probably) the earliest examples of so-called *Rishi* masks with a feathered headdress.

Phases	Tombs
Phase Ia	Mx-Tc: 4, 30, 37, 61, 66, 81, 82, 88, 90, 96, 104, 107, 108, 109, 112, 113, 115, 116. Mx: 134, 136.
Phase Ia-Ib?	Mx: 138.
Phase Ib	Mx-Tc: 36. Mx: 130 <i>Group 2</i> , 131 <i>Group 4</i> , 135.
Phase Ib (late?)	Mx: 131 <i>Group 3</i> , <i>Group 5</i> .

Tab. 1. Mirgissa Phases and the tombs/*groups* used to define them.

## Cemetery Development

A possible confirmation for the relative chronology proposed here is the spatial distribution of the Phases across the cemetery landscape which followed a distinctly patterned, as opposed to a random model of cemetery development.

The population living at Mirgissa used two areas west of the fortress to bury their dead during Phase I of cemetery activity at the site (fig. 1b); a sandy valley (Cemetery Mx-Tc) where there were only pit tombs, and a granite plateau that bordered the former (Cemetery Mx) to the north and (to a lesser degree) the south which had a combination of pit tombs and subterranean shaft/staircase tombs. Of the 20 tombs dated to Phase Ia in the current article, 19 come from the “valley” Cemetery Mx-Tc and only one comes from the “hill top” Cemetery Mx. Of the six contexts discussed under Phase Ib, just one comes from Cemetery Mx-Tc and the remainder, representing at least 30 burials, come from the “hill top” Cemetery Mx. The one “transitional” tomb is in Cemetery Mx (north). In broad brush strokes this then confirms the results of earlier studies that proposed that Cemetery Mx-Tc was substantially earlier in date than Cemetery Mx.

Nonetheless, the details derived from the current study allow us to propose a more nuanced hypothetical model of cemetery development at Mirgissa (fig. 10) – although this is only possible for Cemetery Mx, there being no cemetery plan of Cemetery Mx-Tc. According to the current study, the earliest tomb in Cemetery Mx is of Phase Ia – Tomb Mx-T135 (data in fig. 5). This tomb belonged to a small cluster of architecturally similar shaft tombs with small subterranean chambers on the western edge of Cemetery Mx. It is noticeable

that nearly all the good parallels for Phase Ia material culture in Cemetery Mx comes from this group of tombs – although the contexts are mostly too poorly preserved to be included as *groups* – and it might be argued they are all roughly of the same date and contemporary with the majority of pit tombs in Cemetery Mx-Tc.<sup>88</sup> Included in this cluster is Tomb 138 which I have tentatively postulated might represent a transition to Phase Ib. Part of this cluster, but architecturally more complex, is Tomb 130, which includes what I consider to be probably the earliest material dateable to Phase Ib (T130 *Group* 2). Tomb 131, which includes burials that were roughly contemporary to the last as well as possibly later material Phase Ib (late?) belongs to a separate cluster of subterranean shaft tombs further towards the central portion of the hill-top cemetery. Material typical for Phase II – the Second Intermediate Period – early New Kingdom (not discussed here), occur in subterranean staircase tombs on the eastern edge of the plateau as well in pit tombs that were built into the building debris of Tomb 23 on the eastern slope of a small elevation on the eastern most edge of the cemetery.

Taking this together I would suggest the following model. Cemetery Mx-Tc and Cemetery Mx were founded around the same time, but the majority of burials at this time were made in pit tombs for single burials in Cemetery Mx-Tc. Only a very small number of burials were made in Cemetery Mx at this early stage, and all of these were probably in a small cluster of tombs on the edge of the cemetery. These tombs were simple subterranean shaft tombs intended for single or double burials. It is significant that this part of the cemetery was directly “above” Cemetery Mx-Tc and one could perhaps speak of a single cemetery with an upper and lower section. By the beginning of Phase Ib, the focus of burial has shifted significantly to the hill-top of Cemetery Mx which began to grow out from the Phase Ia nucleus towards the flat central portion of the plateau. At this time the subterranean tombs became larger and architecturally more complex but were still probably originally intended for a small number of burials. Over time these tombs became the focal point for large groups of people who were buried collectively in the subterranean chambers. During Phase Ib, Cemetery Mx-Tc continued to be used, but only for a small minority of pit burials containing single burials. Seen in this light, the shift from the “valley cemetery” to the “hill top” cemetery did not only have chronological dimensions – for example an “earlier” and “later” cemetery – but also reflected a fundamental change in burial custom in the Mirgissa community that materialised social relationships between adult members of the colonial society through the shared use of tomb space.

Although not discussed in this paper, the development of both cemeteries during the Second Intermediate Period followed the trajectories established in the Late Middle Kingdom. The use of Cemetery Mx continued unabated, and the cemetery grew accordingly out in all directions towards the eastern edges of the plateau in order to facilitate the construction of large subterranean tombs with staircases purpose built for multiple burials and repeated entry, whereas Cemetery Mx-Tc was abandoned as a burial area. Finally, a new concentration of pit tombs accumulated on the eastern edge of Cemetery Mx near Tomb 23 in the late Second Intermediate Period indicating yet another change in burial customs for some members of the Mirgissa community.

## Absolute chronology and Synchronisms

As stated at the beginning of the paper, linking the relative chronological sequence to dynastic chronology was not an aim of this paper and will be the subject of future research. In any case, the absence of any royal names in any of the *groups* discussed here would make this a rather difficult undertaking that relied on interregional synchronisms and/or stylistic analysis. Given that the archaeology of the late 12th-13th Dynasties throughout the Egyptian Nile Valley is still very poorly defined, this latter method is probably best avoided at this stage of research as it would only build more uncertainty and error into the model. The advantage of

<sup>88</sup> Apart from Tombs 134 and 138, the cluster includes Tombs 129, 133 and 136.

a local relative chronology of the type presented here, of course, is that it can be shifted up and down the dynastic ladder if new data appears or existing data changes. It suffices to conclude that the assemblages dated to Phase Ia and Ib represent a local variant of the Egyptian Late Middle Kingdom funerary pottery tradition which had become established *throughout* the Egyptian Nile Valley during the last third of the 12th Dynasty.<sup>89</sup> This tradition consisted of a core of key forms supplemented by an individually contingent choice of vessels informed by social and/or regional factors.<sup>90</sup> How long this tradition endured in colonial Nubia is unclear and can only be defined once more late Phase I and early Phase II material has been restudied. Certain indications, for example the presence of clearly Phase II pottery alongside a Levanto-Egyptian III Tell el-Yahudia Ware juglet<sup>91</sup> – a type that occurs at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> in Phases b/2, E/2-E/3 (late 13th–early 15th Dynasty (at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>) –, suggest that the transition must have occurred before the time frame represented by these strata, but this matter requires more study. Similarly unclear is when the transition from Phase Ia to Ib took place. The results from recent <sup>14</sup>C analyses conducted on a mask found in Coffin C3 from Tomb 131 *Group* 3 – which has been assigned above to Phase Ib (late?) are not overly helpful in this regard. The date range for the mask provided by the study, unfortunately, is rather broad – *ca.* 200 years (3535 BP ± 30 or 1950–1759 calBC (95.4% probability)).<sup>92</sup> If we were so bold as to take 1759 as the latest possible date for T131 *Group* 3 – Phase Ib (late?), this would indeed mean that the transition from Phase Ia to Ib occurred earlier than this, but how much earlier? A date during the first third of the 18th century at the latest seems reasonable but this is simply a guess – it could also have been considerably earlier. Irrespective of which dynastic chronology for the Middle Kingdom one accepts,<sup>93</sup> this purported transition falls broadly in the late 12th–early 13th Dynasty horizon. Attempting any more precision than this based a single radiocarbon sample from a non-secure context is not warranted.

<sup>89</sup> See SCHIESTL 2012, p. 85; BOURRIAU 1991, pp. 8–11. For Thebes, see for example SEILER 2012, pp. 314–316.

<sup>90</sup> SCHIESTL 2012, pp. 85–87.

<sup>91</sup> Lille L1036/Mx Tomb 3:4. Cf. ASTON, BIETAK 2012, pp. 169, 353–359; VILA 1975, p. 48, fig. 11, no. 4.

<sup>92</sup> QUILÈS 2012, p. 287, SacA 25290.

<sup>93</sup> Specifically BRONK RAMSEY et al. 2010; DEE 2013; SCHNEIDER 2006; SHAW 2000.



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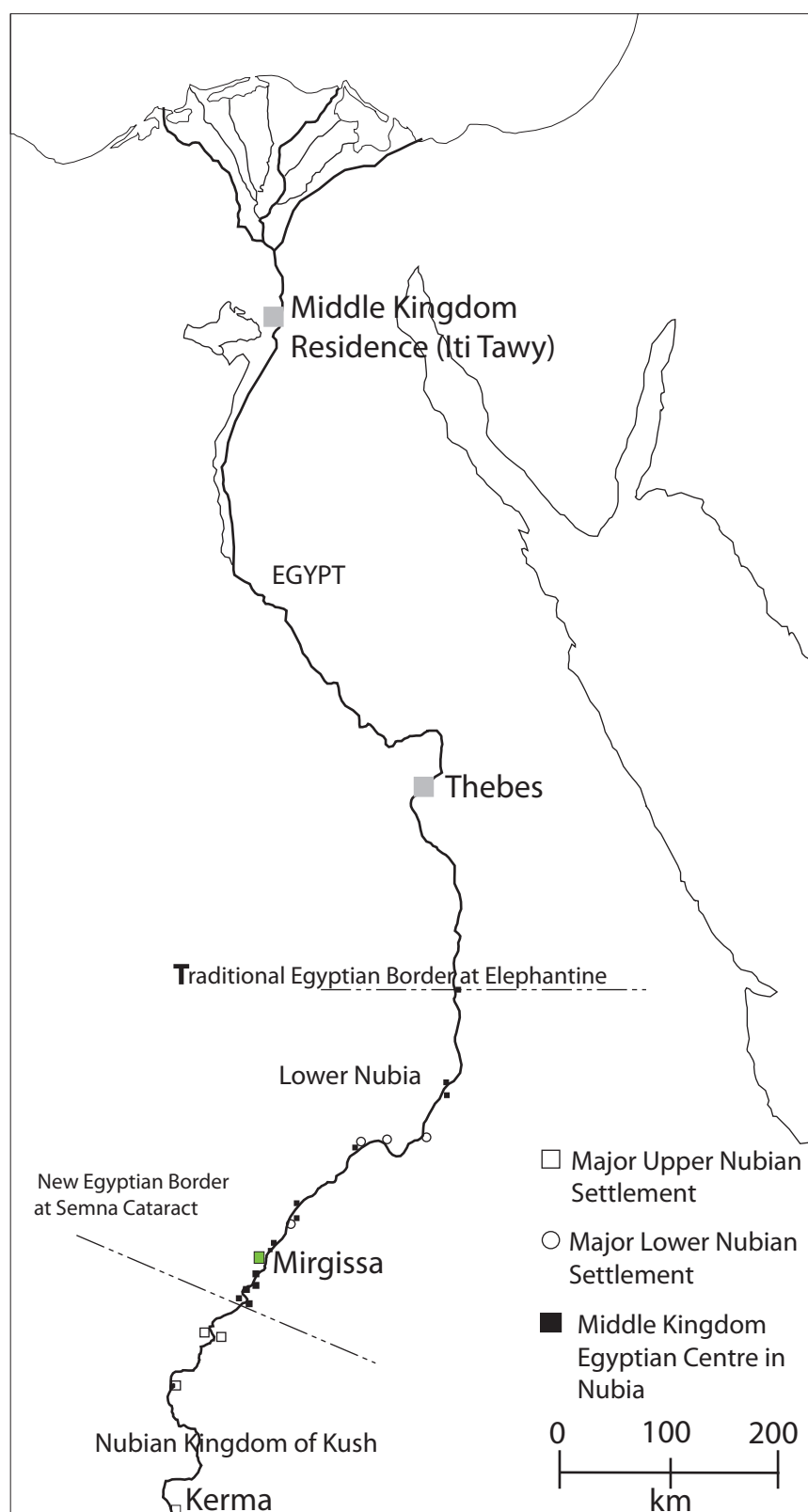


Fig. 1a. Egypt and Nubia in the Late Middle Kingdom.

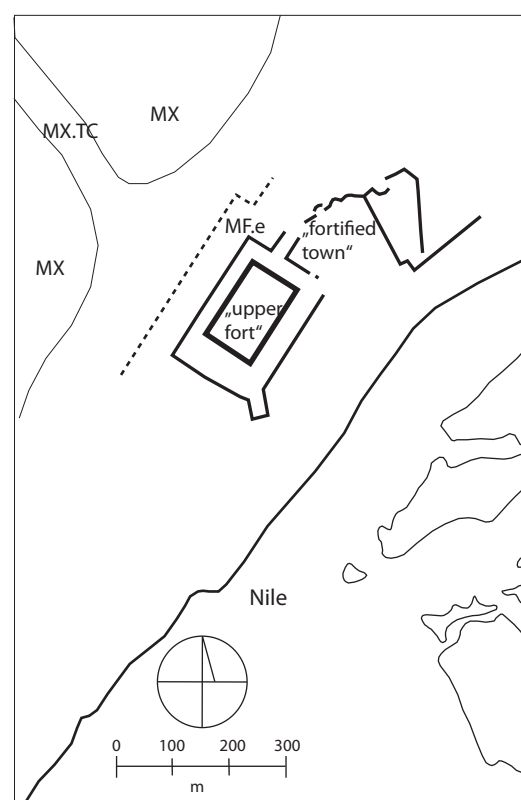
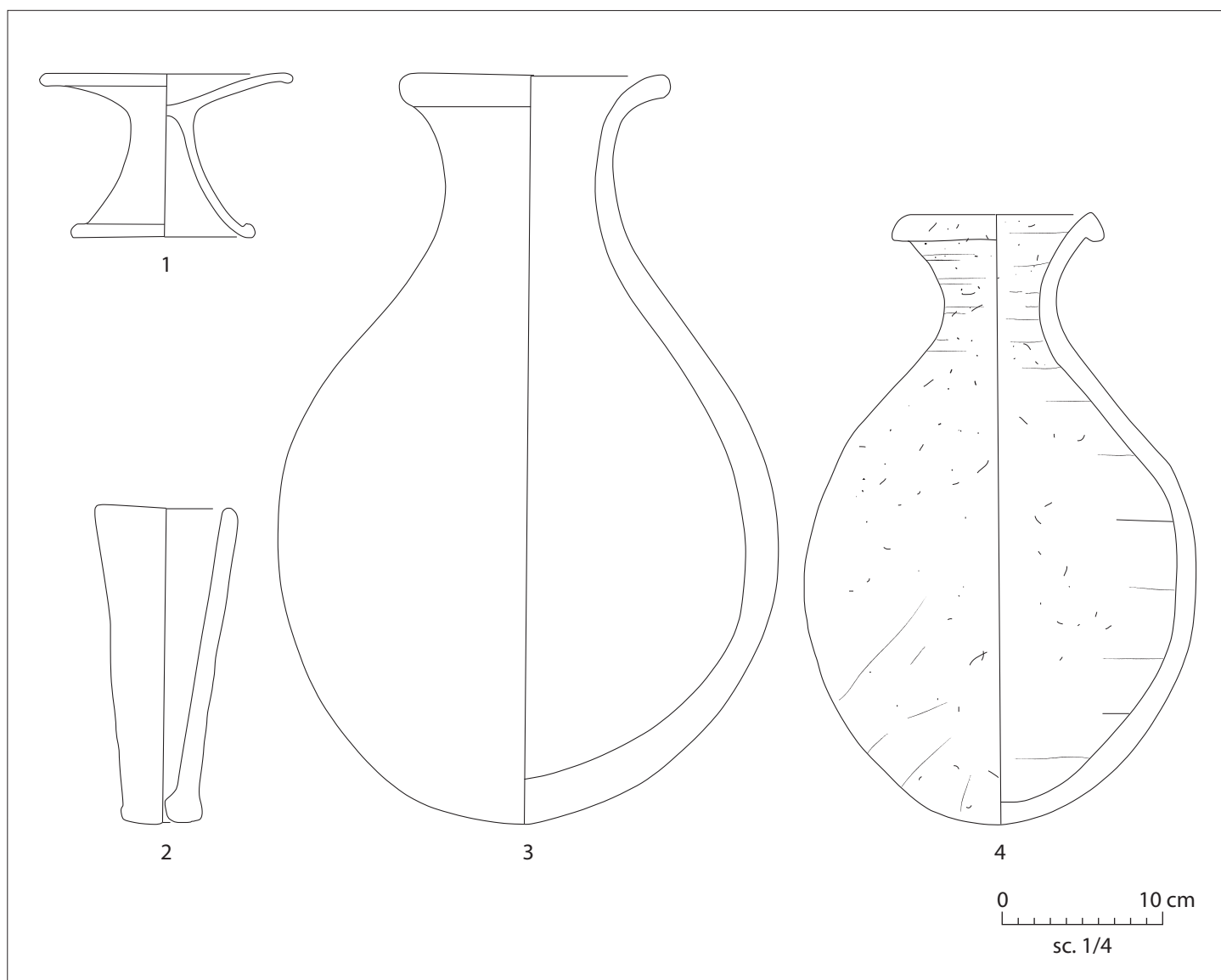
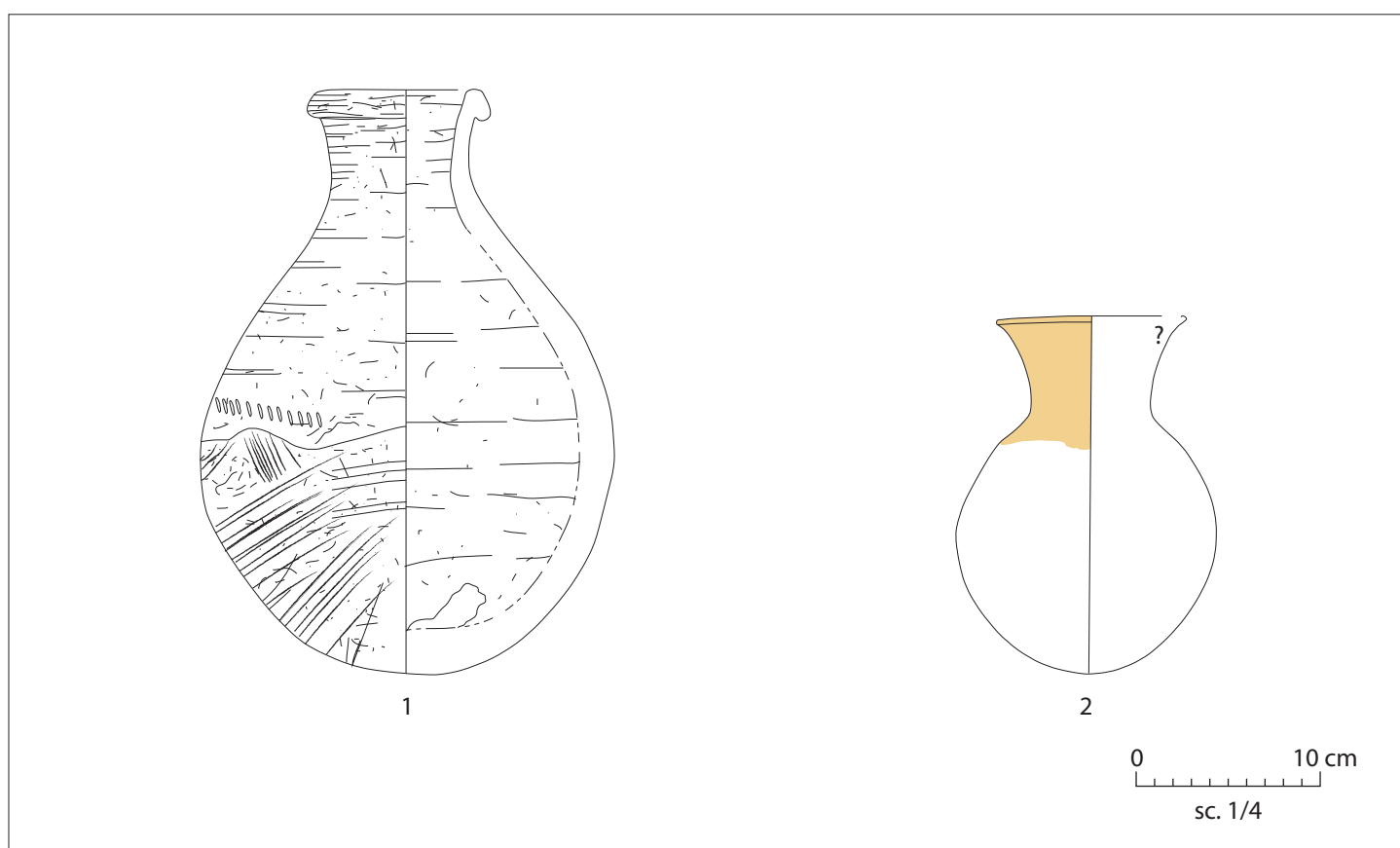


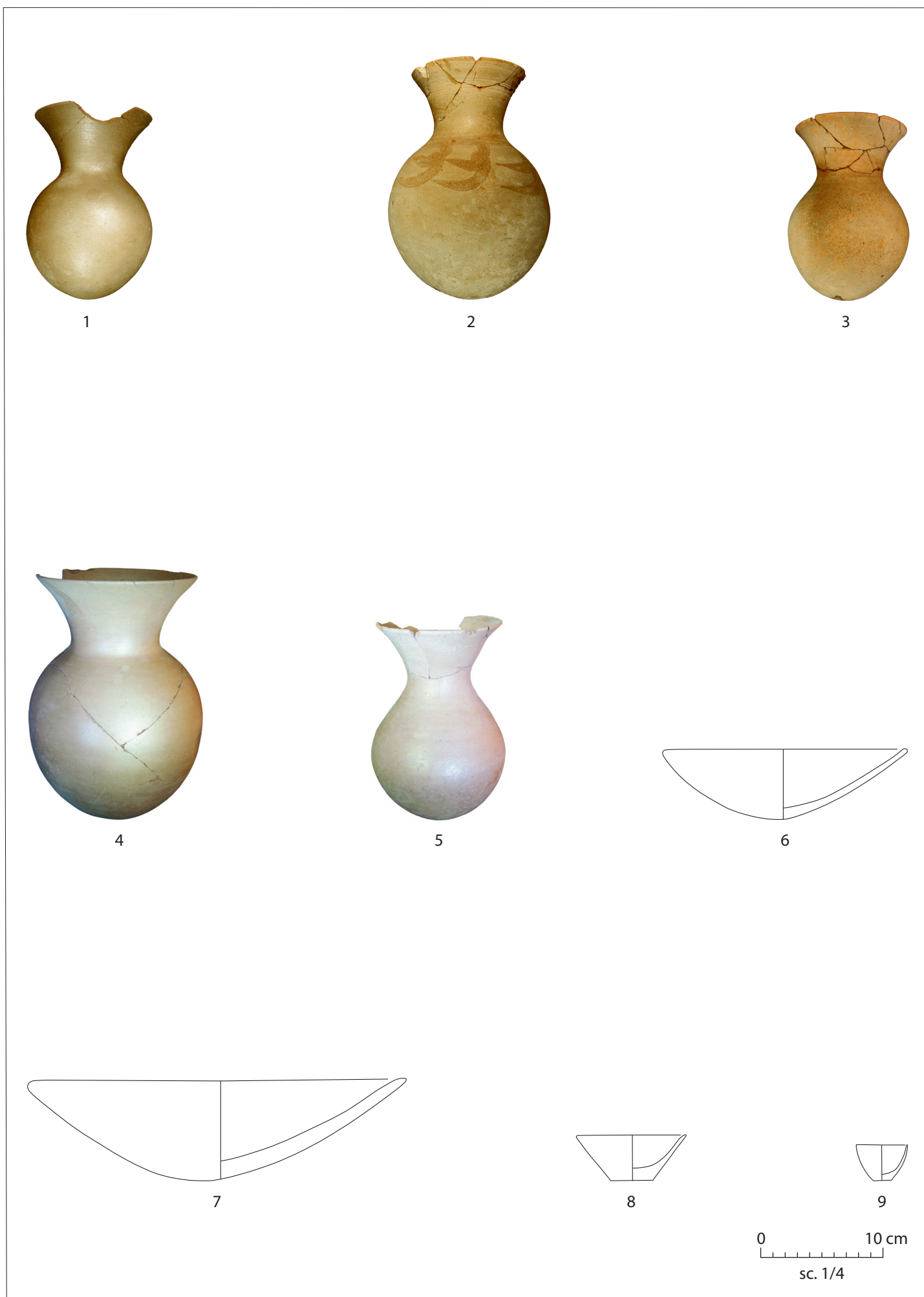
Fig. 1b. Plan of Mirgissa (after VERCOUTTER 1975, p. 10, fig. 10).



**Fig. 2.** Cemetery Mx Tc Tomb 69. 1: Tc69:1 (after MALEY 1975, p. 258, fig. 25.1); 2: Tc69:2 (after MALEY 1975, p. 258, fig. 25.2); 3: Tc69:3 (after MALEY 1975, p. 258, fig. 25.3); 4: Tc69:4/Khartoum SNM 18932 (drawing by author).



**Fig. 3.** Cemetery Mx Tomb 138. 1: Mx T138:1/Khartoum SNM 18982 (drawing by author); 2: Mx T138:2 (after photograph in VILA 1975, p. 208, fig. 87.2).



**Fig. 4.** Globular Bottles from Cemetery Mx Tc (1-5) and pottery types found in contexts assigned to Phase Ia (6-9). 1: Tc23b:2/Lille IM498 (photograph by author); 2: Tc118:1/Lille IM718 (photograph by author); 3: Tc113:3/Lille IM719 (photograph by author); 4: Tc23b:1/Khartoum SNM 18937 (photograph L. Hulková); 5: Tc2:2/Khartoum SNM 14031 (photograph L. Hulková); 6: Tc81:4 (after MALEY 1975, p. 26, fig. 30); 7: Tc37:12 (after MALEY 1975, p. 246, fig. 14); 8: Tc37:1 (after MALEY 1975, p. 246, fig. 14); 9: Tc37:8 (after MALEY 1975, p. 246, fig. 14).

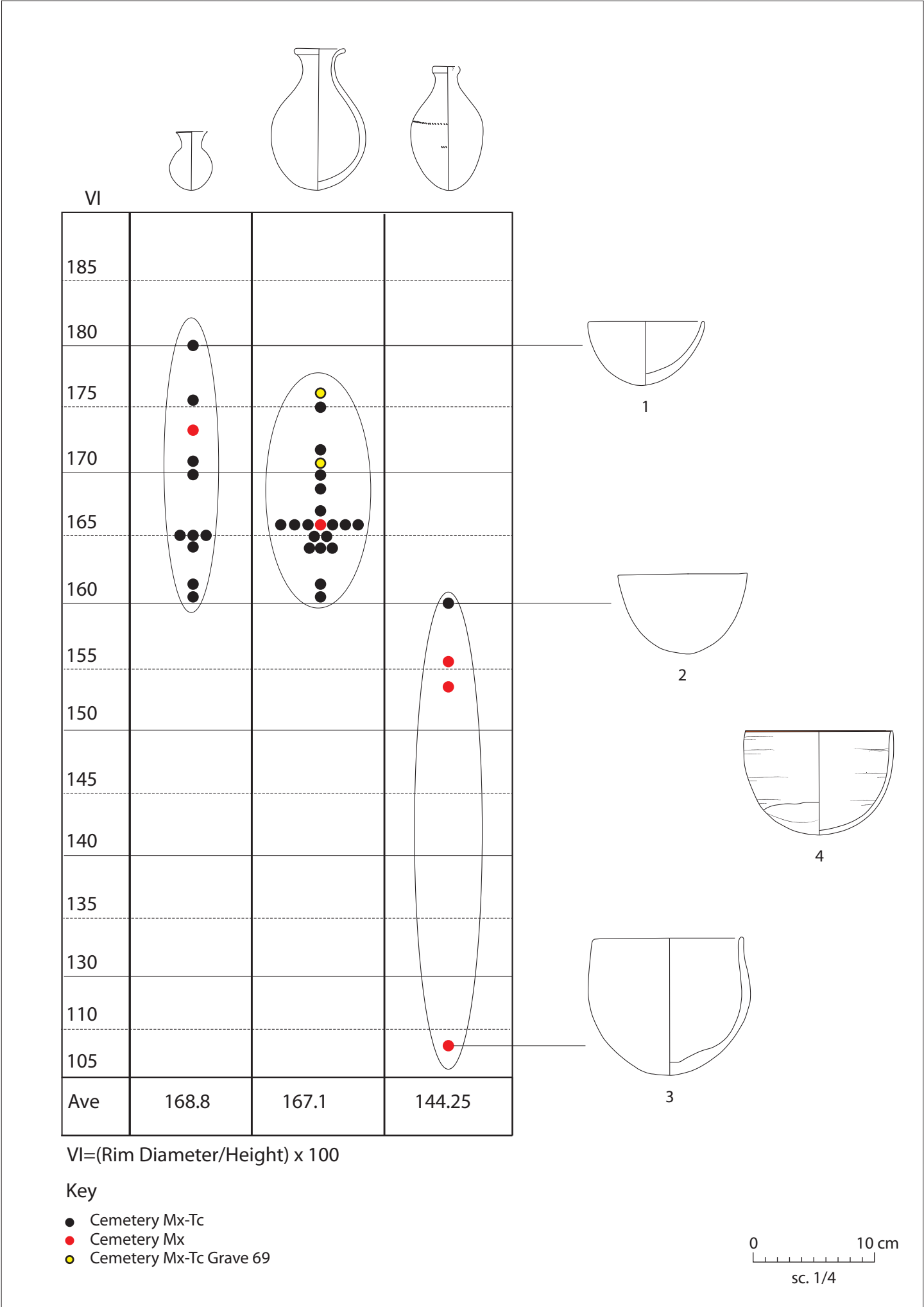
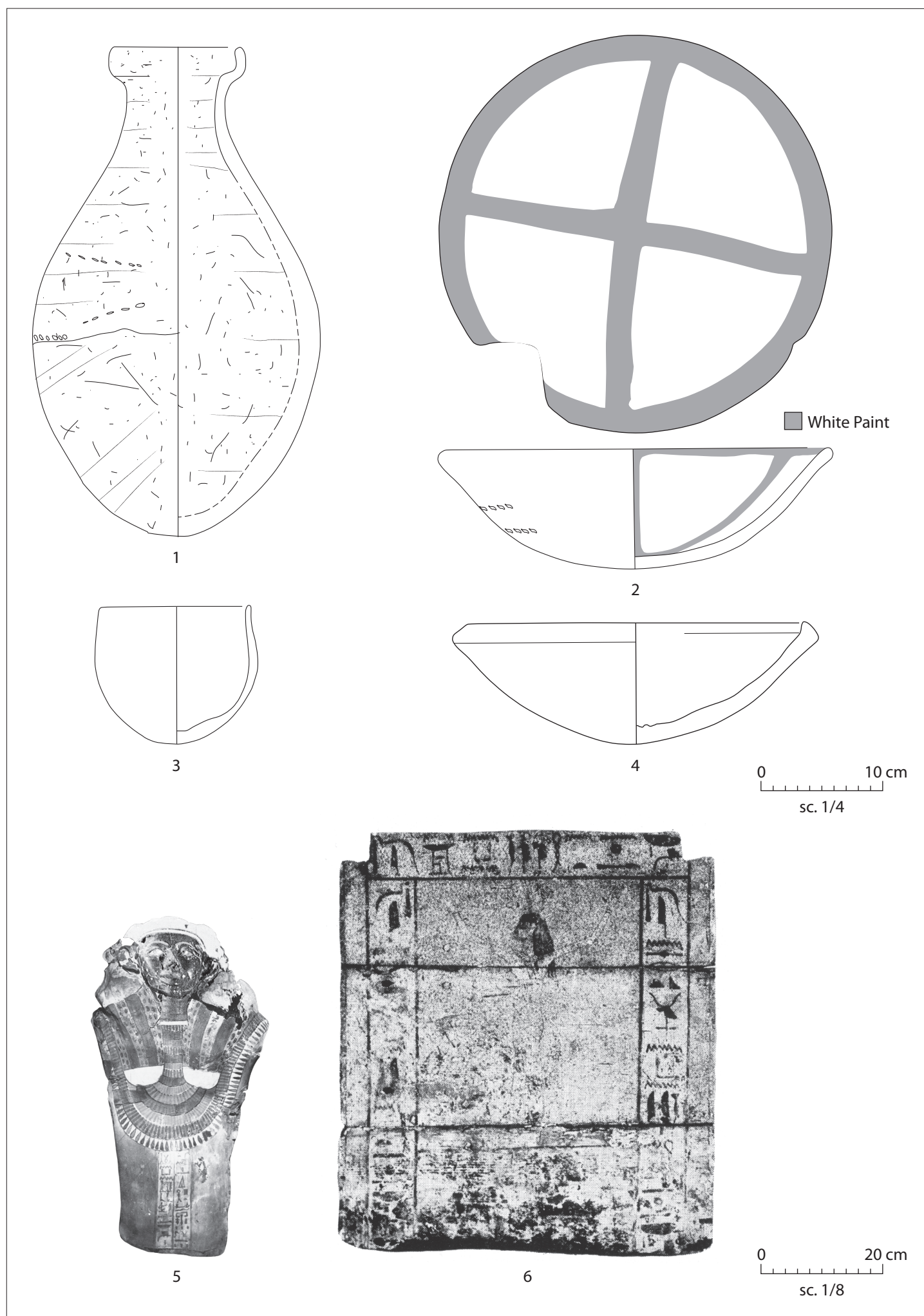
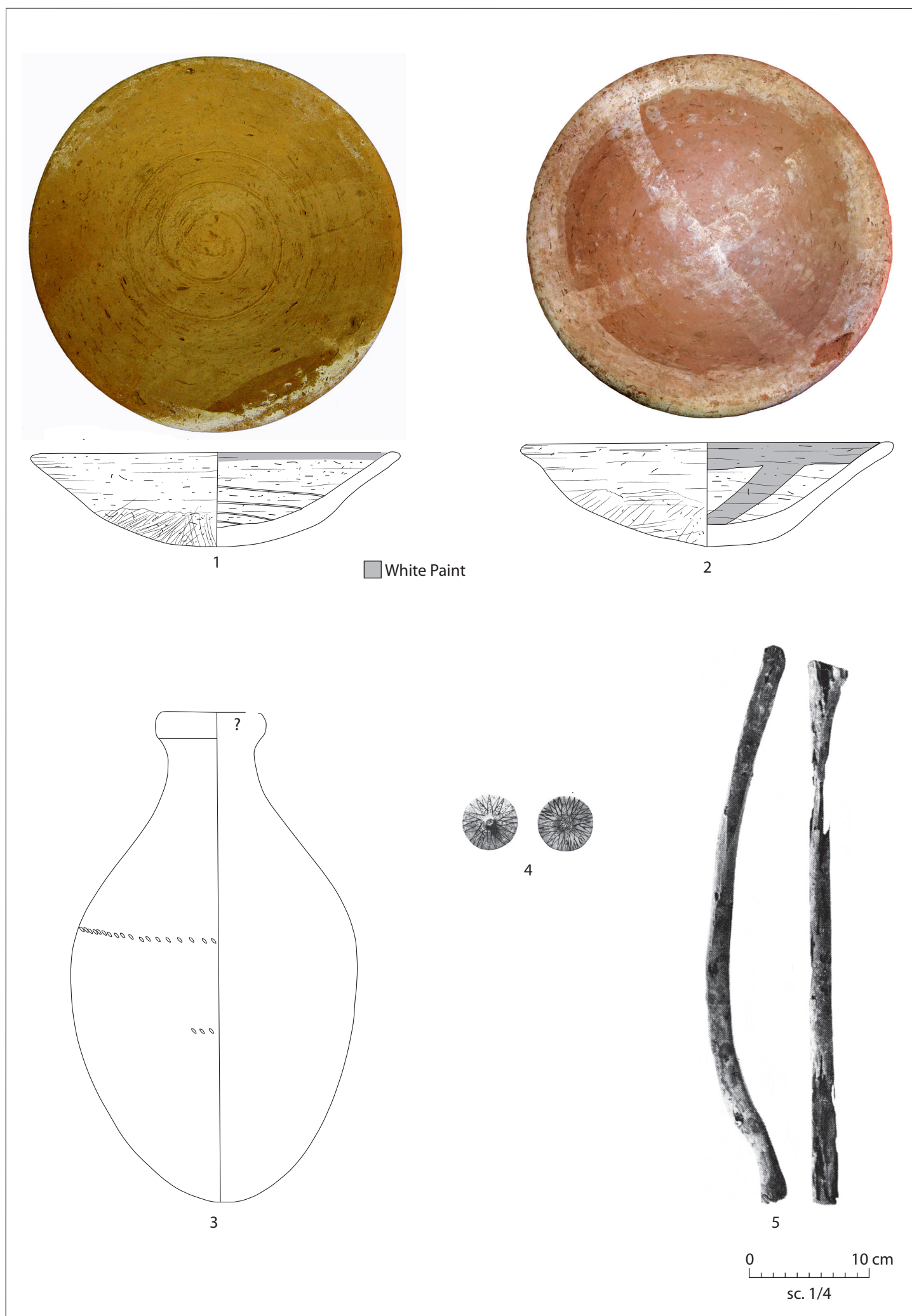


Fig. 5. Comparison of the Vessel Indices (VI) of “Hemispherical Cups” found in combination with different closed vessel types. Left: small to medium Globular Bottles; center: “Beer Bottles” with flaring neck; right: “Beer Bottles” with cylindrical neck. Hemispherical Cups: 1: Tc116:1 (after MALEY 1975, p. 278, fig. 42); 2: Tc36:1/2 (after MALEY 1975, p. 244, fig. 13); 3: T130: 24 (after VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79.24); 4: vessel from the same tomb as last, T130:9/Khartoum SNM 189770 (drawing by author).

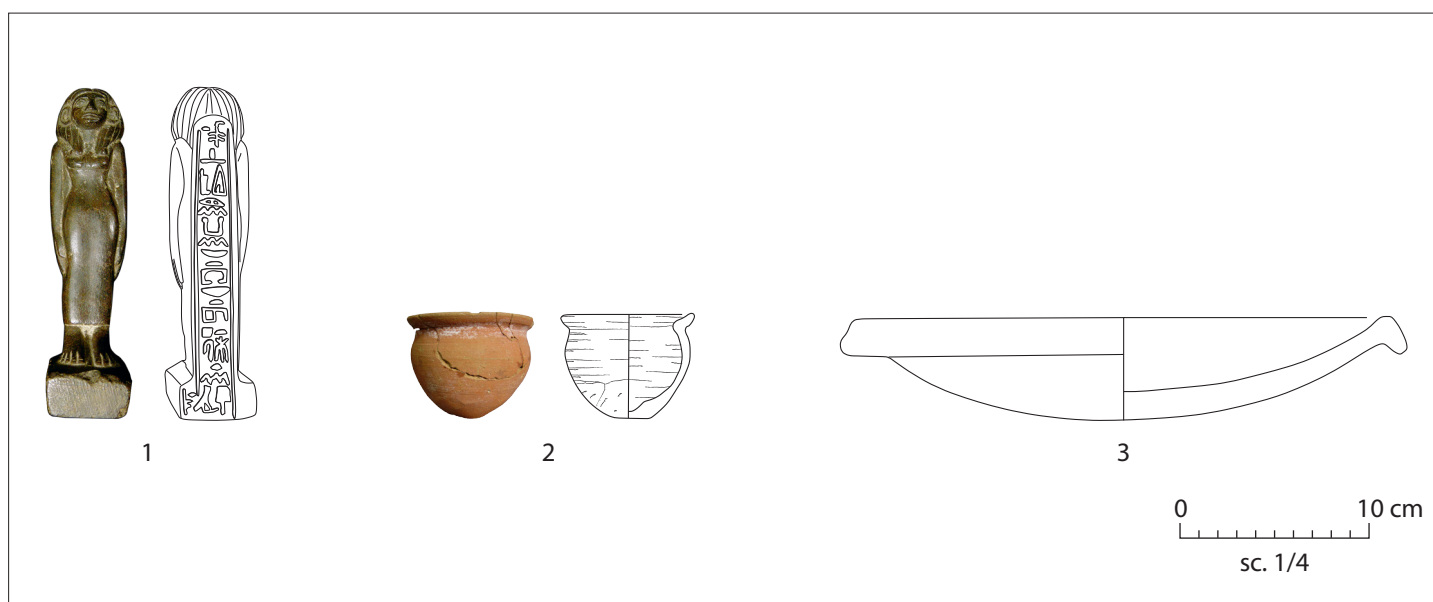


**Fig. 6.** Cemetery Mx Tomb 130 “Group 2”. 1: Khartoum Mx T130:12 /Khartoum SNM 18958 (drawing by author); 2: Mx T130:18 (after VILA 1975, p. 189, fig. 78.18, and p. 190, fig. 79.18); 3: Mx T130:24 (after VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79.24); 4: Mx T130:20 (after VILA 1975, p. 190, fig. 79.20); 5: Mx T130:36 (composite illustration by L. Hulková (after VILA 1976, p. 248, fig. 37, pl. H.-T. II, bottom right); 6: Mx T130:C4 (after VERCOUTTER 1976, p. 291, fig. 12a).

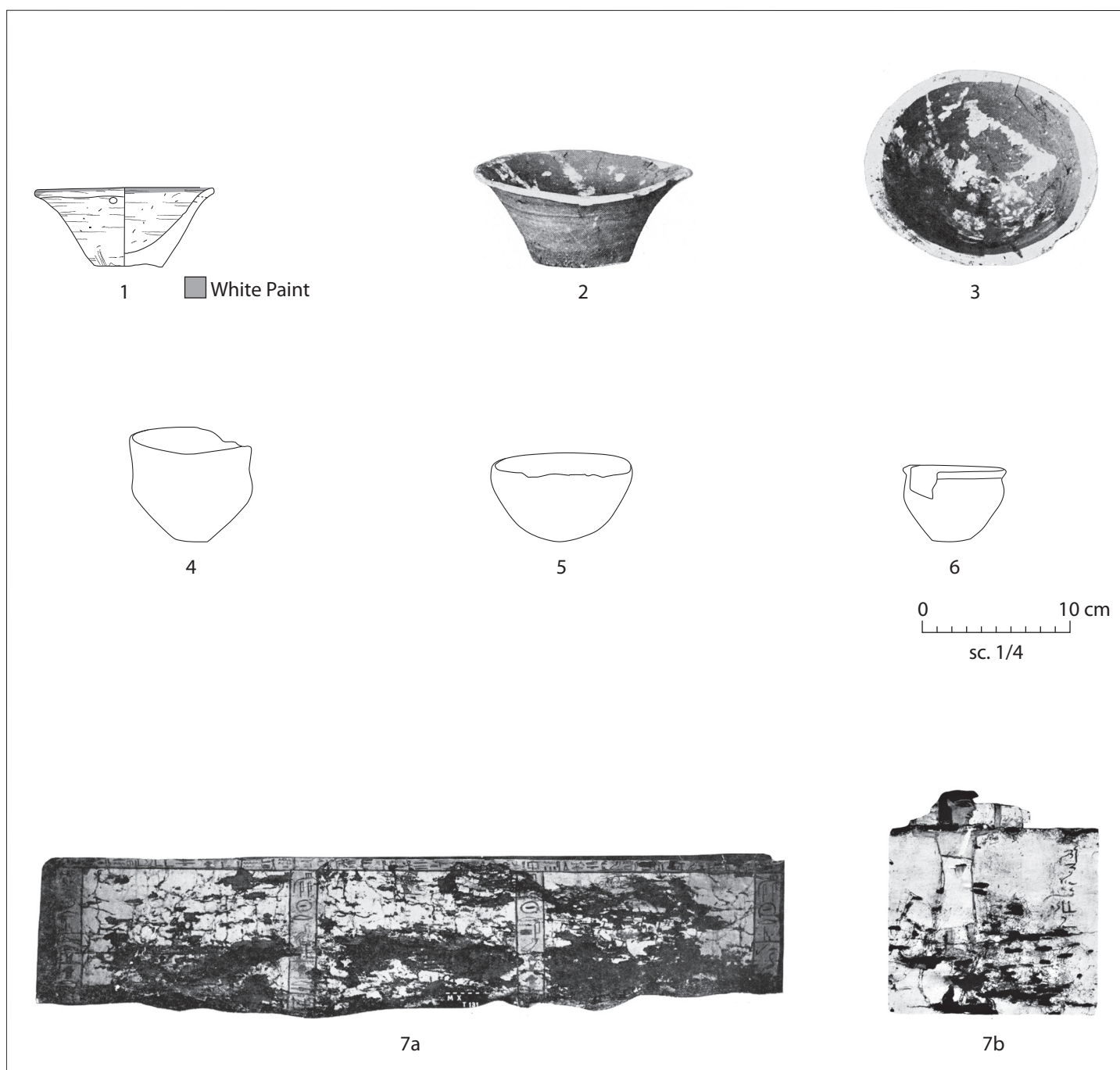




**Fig. 7.** Cemetery Mx Tomb 131 "Group 4". 1: Mx T131:50/Lille IM862 (photograph and drawing by author); 2: Mx T131:44/Khartoum SNM 18924 (photograph and drawing by L. Hulková); 3: Mx T131:46 (after VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 79.46); 4: Mx T131:51a-b (after VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 81.51); 5: Mx T131:53 (after VILA 1975, p. 195, fig. 81.53).



**Fig. 8.** Cemetery Mx Tomb 131 “Group 5”. 1: Mx T131:38/IPEL Louvre Dépôt E.25618 (photograph and drawing by author); 2: Mx T131:21/Lille IM566 (photograph and drawing by author); 3: Mx T131:40 (after VILA 1975, p. 197, fig. 83.40).



**Fig. 9.** Mx Tomb 131 “Group 3”. 1: Mx T131:21/Lille IM 566 (drawing by author); 2: Mx T131:12 (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.12); 3: Mx T131: 10 (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.10); 4: Mx T131:16 (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.16); 5: Mx T131:15 (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.15); 6: Mx T131:27 (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.27); 7a: Mx T131:C3 long side (after VILA 1975, p. 196, fig. 82.C3), length: 200 cm, not to scale; 7b: Mx T131:C3 short end (after VERCOUTTER 1976a, p. 291, fig. 12b).



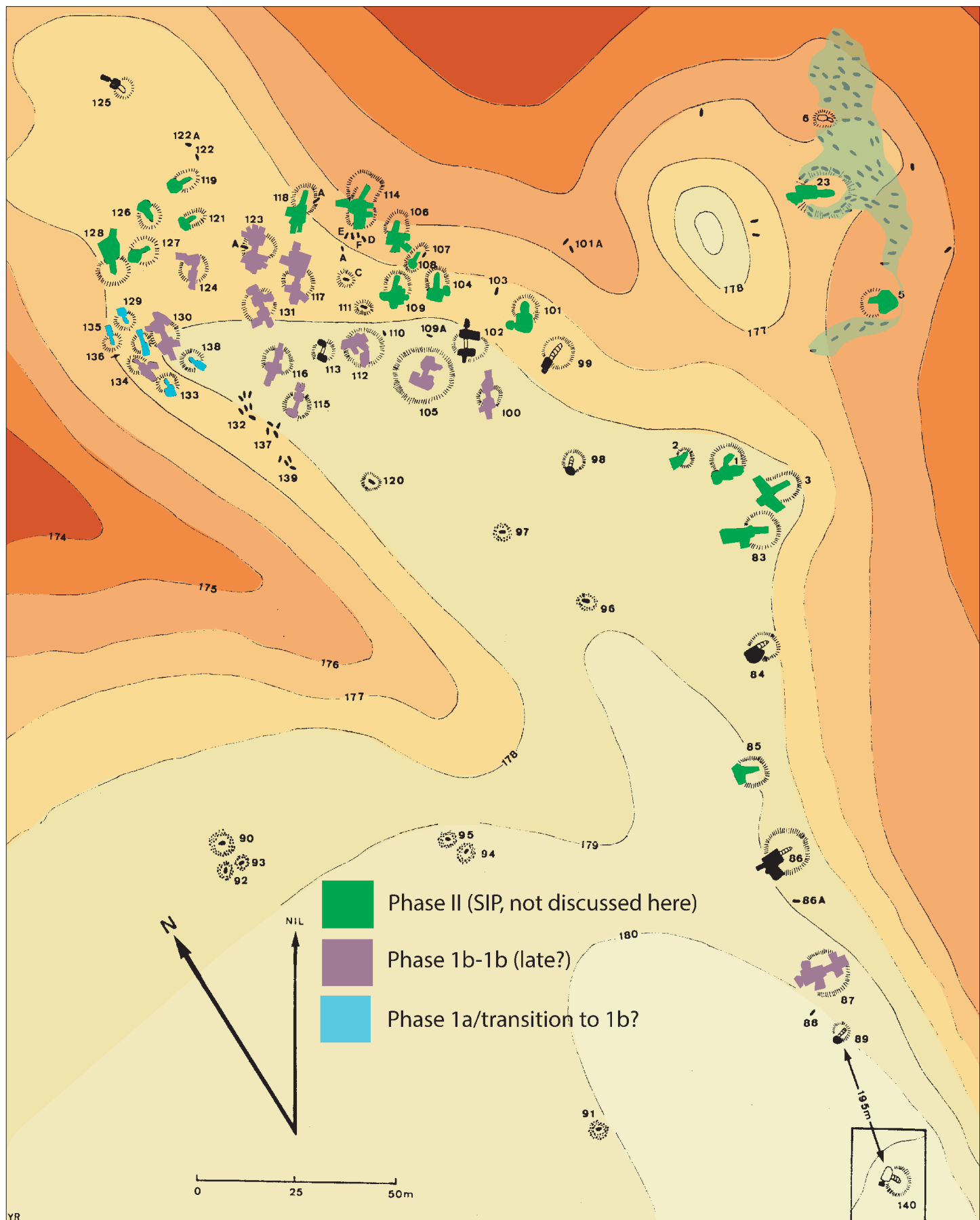


Fig. 10. Hypothetical reconstruction of the development of Cemetery Mx (drawing by author after VILA 1975, p. 41, fig. 7).