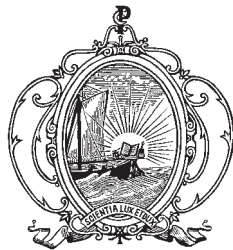


THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD
(THIRTEENTH–SEVENTEENTH DYNASTIES)

Current Research, Future Prospects

edited by

MARCEL MARÉE



UITGEVERIJ PEETERS and DEPARTEMENT OOSTERSE STUDIES
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TOMBS AND BURIAL CUSTOMS AT TELL EL-DAB^a DURING THE LATE MIDDLE KINGDOM AND THE SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD

Irene FORSTNER-MÜLLER

Introduction

Area A/II at Tell el-Dab^a (Avaris) is well known for its sacred precinct with temples of Egyptian and Near Eastern type as well as cemeteries¹ (Plate 7 and Fig. 1). From the beginning, the tombs in these cemeteries have been characterised by a mixture of both Egyptian and Asiatic elements. There was no abrupt break in the material culture; developments were slow-paced, at times barely recognisable today. It is through such gradual

evolution that a distinct east Delta culture emerged during the Second Intermediate Period.² However, the process occurred in a far more dynamic climate than is attested for the preceding Middle Kingdom, when the area had not yet slipped from the centralised control of the Egyptian government in Lisht.³ It would seem that the east Delta populace, closely connected to the Middle Bronze Age culture of the Levant, was now stimulated to adopt new forms and concepts into the native Egyptian cultural repertoire.⁴

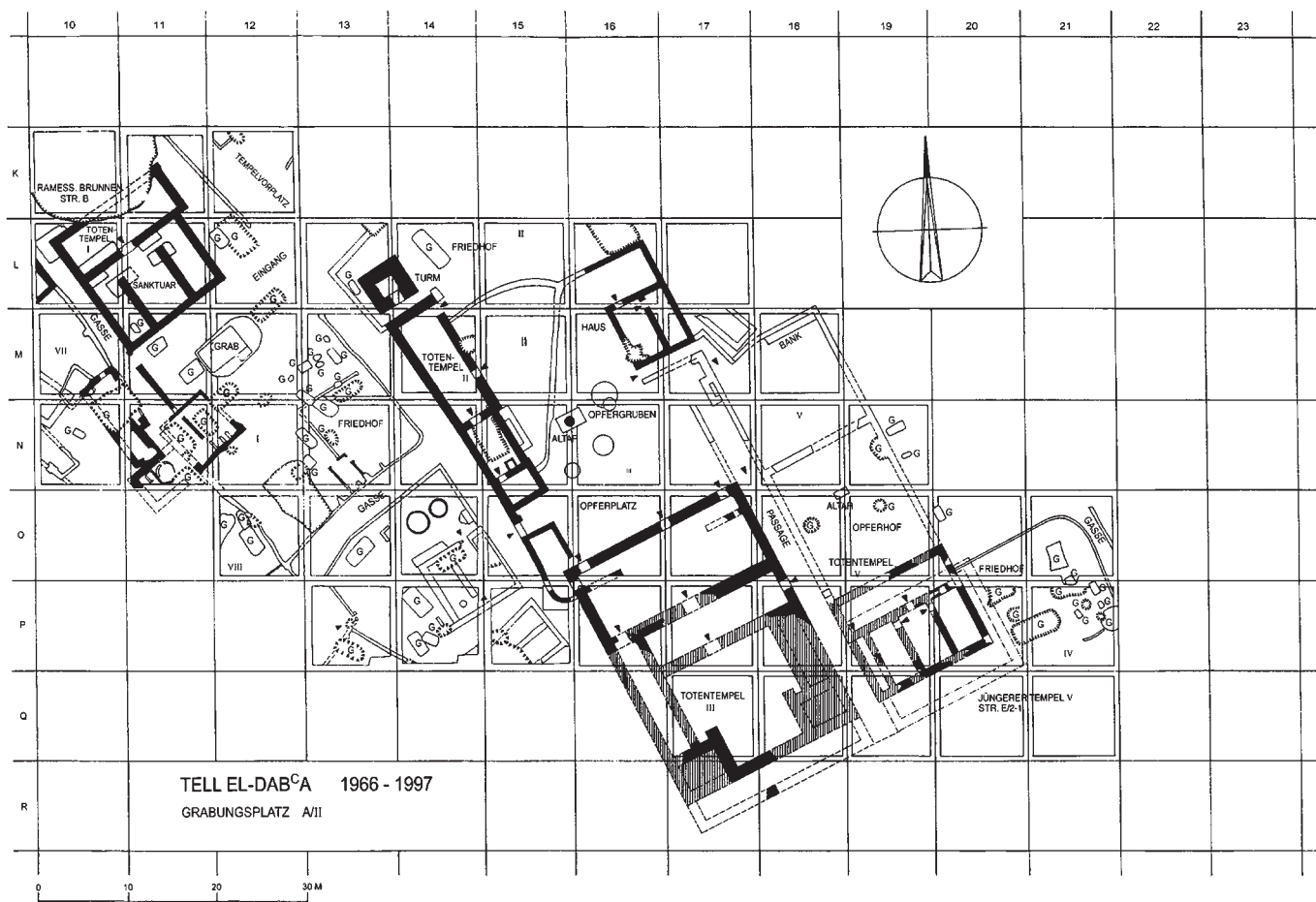


Fig. 1: Plan of the sacred precinct in area A/II.

¹ Bietak 1986; 1991b; 1994a; 1994c; 1996; 2003a; 2003b; Forstner-Müller 2008; and in print.

² Cf also Bietak, Forstner-Müller and Mlinar 2001.

³ Cf. Czerny 1999, 130; Seidlmayer 1990, 397.

⁴ These ideas resulted from a lively discussion with Ernst Czerny.

MB-PHASES	B.C.	EGYPT RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY	TELL EL-DAB'a		GENERAL PHASES
			EASTERN TOWN		
	1410	Dyn.	A / I-IV		
LB I	1440	AII	TEMPLE OF SETH		C / 2
	1470	XVIII H TIII			
	1500	TII ITI			C / 3
	1530	AI			D / 1
MB II C	1560	AHMOSE	D / 2	PHASE 4	D / 2
	1590	XV HYKSOS	D / 3	PHASE 3	D / 3
MB II B	1620	KING- DOM OF AVARIS NEHSY	E / 1	PHASE 2	E / 1
	1650		E / 2		E / 2
	1680		E / 3		E / 3
MB II A-B	1710		F		F
MB II A	1740	XIII	G / 1-3	PHASE 1	G
	1770		G / 4		G / 4
	1800	ISO A IV	H		H
	1830	A III			I
?	1860	XII S II S III			K
	1890	A II			L
	1920	S I			M
	1950	A I			N
MB I	1980				N / 2-3
	2000	XI			
	2050	X			

Fig. 2: Table of the chronology of the eastern town of Tell el-Dab'a.

Chronology of the site

In the funerary culture at area A/II, four main phases of development are distinguishable, as indicated in **Fig. 2**:

Phase 1: The earlier Thirteenth Dynasty: stratum G.

Phase 2: The later Thirteenth Dynasty: strata F to E/2.

Phase 3: The earlier Hyksos period: from the middle of stratum E/2 to the end of stratum D/3.

Phase 4: The final decades of the Hyksos period: stratum D/2, and partly starting already in D/3.

During *phase 1*, in stratum G, the site was a settlement area with tombs constructed nearby or in domestic courtyards. In *phase 2*, the area was reorganised and land plots were partly redistributed. The temple precinct became the centre, dominated by Temple III. This temple, with a Near Eastern layout, remained apparently in use even after the end of the Hyksos period, well into the early Eighteenth Dynasty.⁵ Around the main temple, several smaller structures were built, some similarly with a Near Eastern layout, and others

⁵ During the Thutmoside age, offering pits were created in the courtyard of the main temple (Müller 2001, 175, n. 3). This is further proof of continuity in the material culture between the Hyksos Period and the New Kingdom at Tell el-Dab'a, as is also

attested, for example, by the seal impressions in the magazine of the palace of Thutmose III at 'Ezbet Helmi (Bietak 2004), or by the continued use of "Hyksos" pottery well into the New Kingdom (Aston 2003; Hein 2001).

in the shape of traditional Egyptian mortuary chapels.⁶ Cemeteries developed on the edges of this district. All the sub-districts were surrounded by enclosure walls, which separated them from each other and from streets that remained in use until the site was ultimately abandoned. During the second half of the Hyksos period, from stratum D/3 onwards (*phases 3-4*),⁷ the living quarters of the town expanded into the funerary area, and houses were built over the tombs and chapels. Only Temple III remained untouched. However, as the distribution of plots remained the same, it is clear that this involved the same land owners.

Clearly, there were distinct changes in the ideological and conceptual significance of area A/II over time. It first changed from living quarters to a funerary site in stratum F (*phase 2*). It then changed back to (at least a semblance of) living quarters in strata D/3 and D/2 (*phases 3-4*). To what degree the ancient users of the area were aware of these changes is uncertain. What probably mattered most to them was that these developments did not affect the existing partitioning of lots.

In *phase 3*, right from the beginning of the Hyksos period, one also notes a clear change in material culture: distinctive Delta types emerge. This is not confined to tomb artefacts but noted throughout the archaeological evidence.⁸ These types were inspired by Egyptian as well as Syro-Palestinian cultural elements. In addition, an increase in Cypriot imports shows that relations with Cyprus intensified (**Plate 8**). In weapons, the alloys employed changed from copper (arsenic-copper alloy) to bronze (tin-bronze alloy). It may be postulated that these developments were linked to the formation of the Hyksos state. Significantly, there is no unity in material culture with Southern Palestine. A spread – if ever there was one – of the Hyksos empire into Palestine is thus not traceable in the archaeological record.

In *phase 4*, during the final part of the Hyksos Period, there seem to have been major cultural changes, to judge from the funerary evidence. These include:

- A new type of tomb architecture: large shaft tombs connected to the architecture of the house (**Fig. 3**). Men and women were buried together in what seem

to have been real family tombs.⁹ The appearance of this tomb type appears to have resulted from population growth and urban sprawl during the later Hyksos period; as was noted above, the distribution of plots had not changed.

- The custom of including weapons in burials disappeared by stratum D/3.¹⁰ A tomb owner's status and hierarchical position was thus no longer expressed by items of this kind. This seems to have been linked to an increasing defeudalisation, whereby relations of direct clientship made way for greater social unity. Wasting valuable military resources such as weapons did moreover not serve the interests of the central administration. This new phenomenon was not confined to Tell el-Dab'ā;¹¹ it is attested throughout the Levant by the Late Bronze Age.¹² However, while the end to burials with weapons was closely associated with the cosmopolitan culture of Egypt and the Levant,¹³ the findings at Tell el-Dab'ā show that this development began much earlier than previously thought.
- Imports from Syria-Palestine in D/2 are virtually non-existent; trading concentrated on Cyprus.¹⁴

Spatial organisation, orientation and architecture of the site

Three kinds of burial location can be distinguished in area A/II. The tombs are sited in the courtyard of a house, under its floor or in the cemetery. These different forms may occur simultaneously.

The orientation of the tombs changed through the phases (**Plate 9**). Stratum G (*phase 1*) displays no standard pattern; tombs were laid out according to spatial exigencies. However, in *phase 2*, after Temple III had been built and the site rearranged, funerary precincts became aligned with the main axis of the temple, i.e. SSE to SE. In stratum F this lay-out was rigidly adhered to. The later strata show greater flexibility but little overall change.

Within any one stratum, tombs are typically aligned to some major tomb, either parallel or at an angle of 90 degrees. As a rule, the central tombs came first; these

⁶ Bietak 1991b, 39-75; 1996, 36-48.

⁷ Bietak 1986, 264; 1991b, 245-6.

⁸ Aston 2004; Kopetzky 2004.

⁹ Tombs with multiple burials used over several generations can generally be identified as family tombs; see Bloch and Parry (eds) 1982.

¹⁰ Philip 1995.

¹¹ The latest of these weapon burials at Tell el-Dab'ā, tomb A/II-n/15 no. 1, can be dated to stratum E/1.

¹² Philip 1995, 153.

¹³ Philip 1995, 154.

¹⁴ See also Kopetzky 2004, 276.

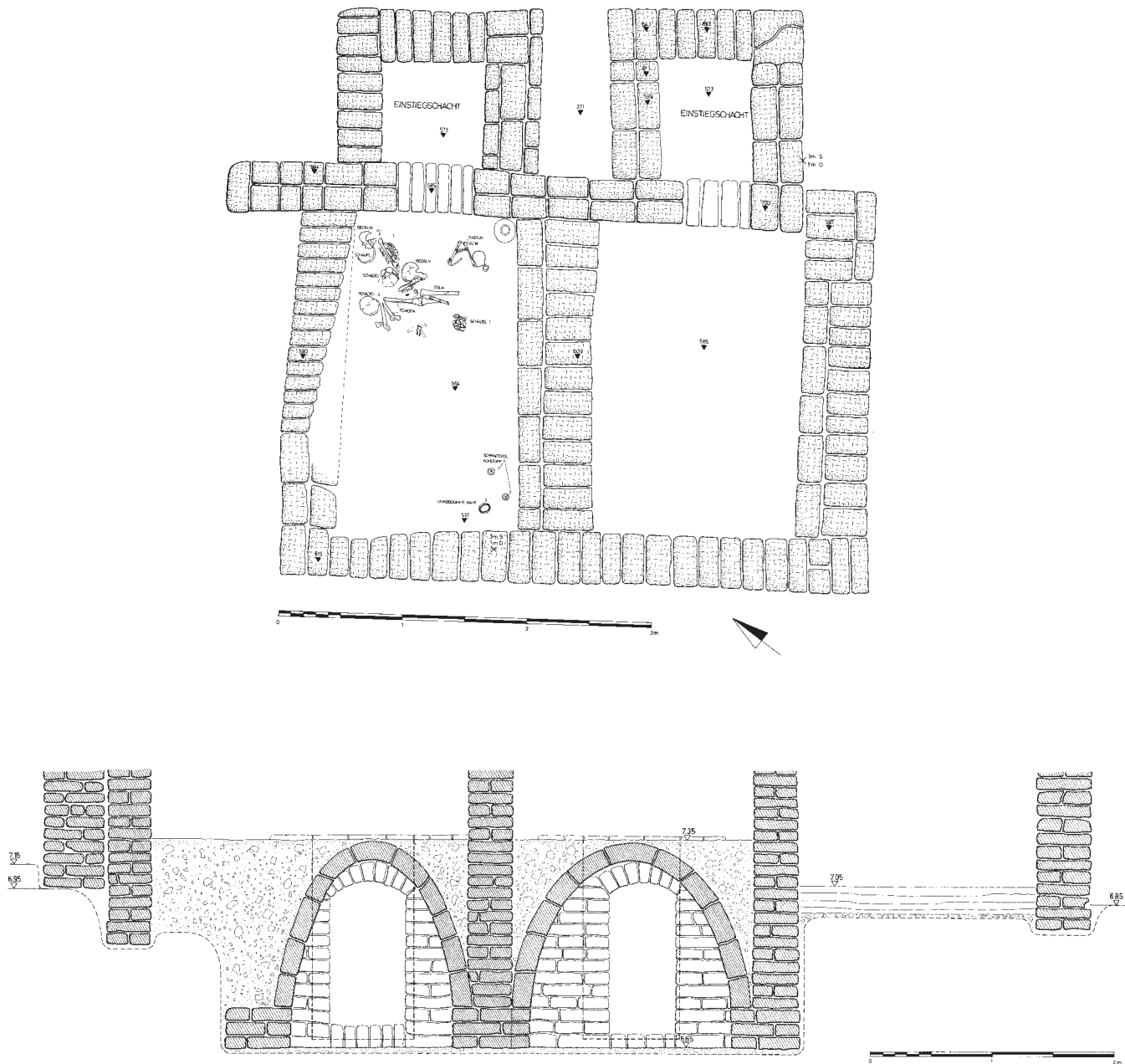


Fig. 3: Tomb with entrance shaft (A/II-n/13, nos. 1 and 2, stratum D/2). After Bietak 1991b, figs. 277-8.

are also the largest and best equipped in terms of quality and quantity. One can further distinguish between burials without any tomb architecture, such as pit and jar burials, and those involving mud-brick architecture.¹⁵

Near the tombs we find buildings of various types and importance. Most of these were only in use during one stratum. All are of Egyptian architectural style, and

their function is not clear.¹⁶ A close connection with the funerary cult seems probable, but they could also be small temples or ritual dining places.¹⁷

A curious feature is a clear and consistent lack of superstructures above the tombs. This is also found with larger, well-provided tombs. Superstructures do not seem to have been deemed necessary as a status

¹⁵ As the tomb architecture has been published *in extenso*, it suffices here to mention the basic types.

¹⁶ Bietak 1991b; Forstner-Müller 2001.

¹⁷ Bietak 2003a; Forstner-Müller in print.

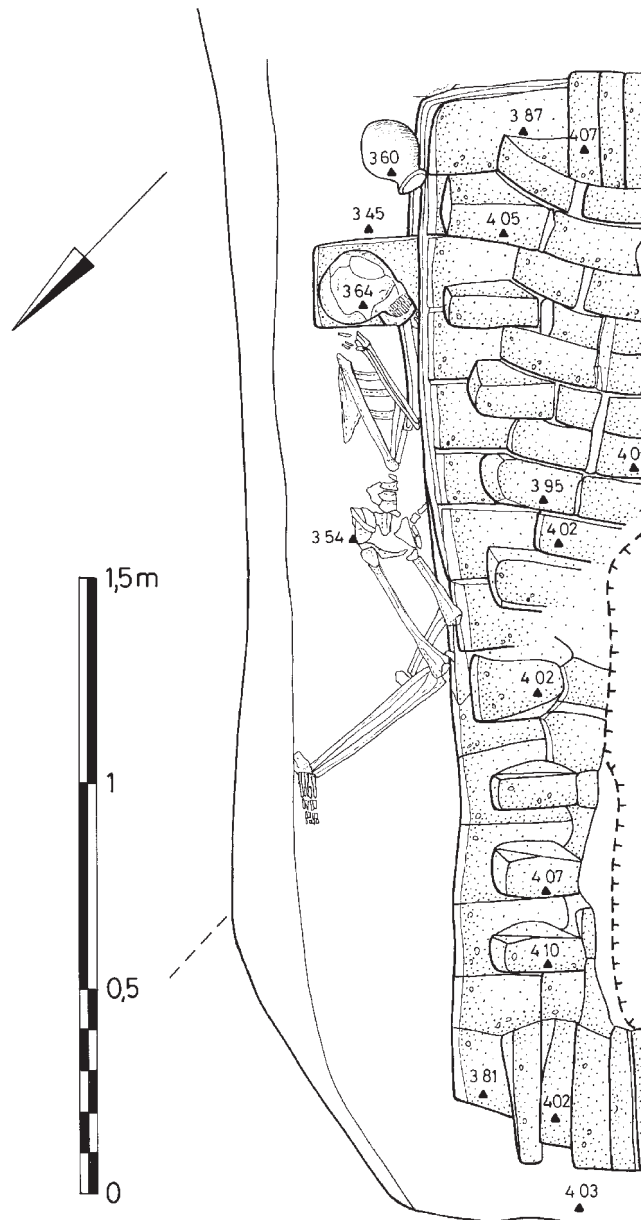


Fig. 4: Burial with the head placed on a mud-brick, in stratum F.

marker or as a focus for funerary rituals. One result of this was that the locations of tombs were easily forgotten, already at the time of a subsequent stratum.

This lack of superstructures does not, however, hold true always and everywhere at Tell el-Dab'a. In palace area F/I, tomb chapels are known from stratum d/1 of the late Middle Kingdom.¹⁸ Perhaps their appearance

related to a development with the tomb superstructures in that area; not all of those were built right above the tombs, nor were they always aligned to the burial itself, so that these superstructures ended up being built at some distance from the actual graves.

The most popular burial position in area A/II was supine, with the contracted legs pointing upwards. Sometimes the head was positioned on a brick (Fig. 4), likely intended as a substitute for a headrest and also known from Elephantine for the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period.¹⁹ There was no clear development at Tell el-Dab'a from an extended to a contracted position, as Seidlmayer has noted elsewhere for tombs between the late Old Kingdom and the early Middle Kingdom.²⁰

Single as well as multiple burials occurred throughout the ages. At Tell el-Dab'a, however, such tombs were not in use for decades or even centuries as was the case in Syria-Palestine; instead they are confined to a single stratum. These multiple burials show a tendency towards separate burials for males and females, a phenomenon also attested in Elephantine²¹ and the Near East.²² There is no visible break in burial customs at any one point. As a rule, the dead were buried with their heads pointing towards the entrance. Burial items would be laid out according to type and size: weapons always on the body, toggle pins on the left shoulder along with bowls and dishes (some of them near the head); jars, cups and juglets near the head or torso. Groups of juglets can also be found at the feet, and large vessels at the burial entrance.

Ritual practices in and around the tomb

For our insight into religious matters, we have to rely at Tell el-Dab'a on archaeological evidence due to a virtual lack of epigraphic sources. The city has always been a meeting point of the Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian cultures. It is still an open question whether, and in what measure, the population was influenced by the funerary beliefs of Egypt and those of the Near East. There is no evidence of long, continuous mortuary cults as was the ideal in Egypt proper, and at least available for the elite. There is also no evidence of ancestor cults – which was an important phenomenon in Syria.

¹⁸ Bietak 1984a; 1991a; 1994d; Schiestl 2003, 86-97.

¹⁹ Seidlmayer 2001, 224-6, fig. 8.

²⁰ Seidlmayer 1990, 426.

²¹ Personal communication from Stephan Seidlmayer.

²² For instance in Northern Israel at Tell Dan; see Ilan 1995, 134.

There is, however, evidence for pre- and post-burial ritual activity. A high degree of acculturation can be observed here. At least part of the funerary cult was performed at the burial location. Further activities were probably performed inside buildings located in the cemeteries and the large temple precinct. It should further be noted that there is a significant difference between the items found within and those found outside the grave. The proportion of Middle Bronze forms occurring inside ranges from 50 to 90 percent, a level far higher than in the external offering pits, which were predominantly furnished with an Egyptian repertoire.²³

Much has already been written about attendant burials (**Plate 10**).²⁴ For a short period, in stratum F, young females would be buried along with the tomb owner and placed in a pit outside his tomb chamber. The origins of this practice are unclear. Similar customs are known for Mesopotamia, albeit from the third millennium BC, as well as from the same period at Kerma,²⁵ where this custom could boast a long tradition.²⁶

At Tell el-Dab'a, donkeys have been found buried next to men, mostly in pairs;²⁷ they were so predominantly as part of weapon burials and may be regarded as status symbols. In contrast to other animals, the donkeys were usually buried in one piece. This is a well-known Near Eastern custom²⁸ and was probably adopted from Mesopotamia²⁹ via Palestine³⁰ and Syria.³¹ In Egypt it is confined to the eastern Delta;³² at Tell el-Dab'a, donkey burials are attested from stratum H³³ to E/1.

Meat offerings in cemeteries are also well attested. Carcasses or whole sheep or goats of both sexes have

been found deposited at the entrance in- or outside the tomb chamber (**Fig. 5**).³⁴ Pigs and cattle were rarely used for this purpose.³⁵ Sometimes burnt animal bones and ashes have been found inside the tomb pits.³⁶ These *Brandopfer* are well-attested in the funerary cult of Egypt.³⁷ Actual *Brandopfer* that were completely incinerated during the ritual are *not* attested in burial contexts at Tell el-Dab'a. However, an altar for burning offerings has been dug up in the courtyard of Temple III.³⁸

Another feature of funerary rites is the aforementioned offering pits. We can distinguish between offering pits for tombs and offering pits, or rather offering meals, for the entire cemetery. Offering pits dedicated to tombs appear at the start of the MB IIB Period (stratum E/3). They are often placed in front of the tomb entrance, though this was not a hard and fast rule. They are associated with every type of tomb: pit burials, mud-brick tombs and also jar burials,³⁹ regardless of age or sex, and both with single and multiple burials. Only a few tombs, however, have been provided with these pits.⁴⁰ For the other tombs, we may assume that other rituals took place, such as libation offerings⁴¹ or recitations of the offering formula.⁴² Further rituals are likely to have taken place in the surrounding chapels and temples.

Continuity of the mortuary cult was confined to any one stratum only.⁴³ Larger offering pits that have been found inside the cemeteries can be interpreted as the remnants of offering meals.⁴⁴ The vessels deposited in these pits were sometimes deliberately smashed and frequently show signs of wear and tear.⁴⁵ Besides pottery, animal bones – predominantly of bulls and oxen,⁴⁶ but

²³ In the offering pits, the proportion of Middle Bronze shapes stands at just 12.44 %; see Müller 2008, 39.

²⁴ Bietak 1989.

²⁵ Firth 1927, figs. on 129 and 143; Vercoutter 1966, 214; Gratien 1985, 96.

²⁶ C Bonnet 2004, 76-7.

²⁷ Examples of single donkeys are documented for tombs A/II-p/14 no. 18 (Forstner-Müller 2001, 212-5, figs. 12-16; see also **Plate 10** in this volume) and F/I-o/19 no. 8 (Bietak 1991a, pl. 9 [A]).

²⁸ For general comments, see Wapnish 1997.

²⁹ Boessneck and von den Driesch 1977; Postgate 1986; Zarins 1986.

³⁰ See, for instance, Petrie 1931, 4-6, pls. 8-10, 17; 1932; 1934, 15-6; Tufnell 1958; Kenyon 1960; 1965; Stewart 1974.

³¹ Strommenger and Kohlmeyer 1998, 93, table 17, no. 6.

³² Anonymous 1949; Holladay 1982, fig. 66 [a-b].

³³ Schiestl 2002, 332, fig. 2.

³⁴ In area A/II, there are more male than female sheep; see Boessneck and von den Driesch 1992, 27.

³⁵ For example in tomb A/II-m/12 no. 9; see Bietak 1991b, 120, fig. 75.

³⁶ A fire place was discovered on top of the vault of tomb m/15 no. 9. An almost complete shoulder blade of an animal, the burnt bones of a goat and the femur of a sheep had been placed in front of the tomb entrance (Boessneck and von den Driesch 1992, 13; cf. Bietak 1986, pl. 9).

³⁷ Junker 1941, notably 117; H Bonnet 1952, 123-5; Schott 1953, 14-6; Eggebrecht 1975; Müller 2008, 340-1.

³⁸ Bietak 1996, 36.

³⁹ Forstner-Müller 2001.

⁴⁰ Müller 1996, 229-30.

⁴¹ Assmann 2003.

⁴² Borghouts 1980, 1014.

⁴³ Forstner-Müller 2003.

⁴⁴ In addition to the five offering pits described by Müller 1996, 233, a sixth pit was discovered recently and will be published by Kopetzky and the present author.

⁴⁵ Müller 1996, 233; 2008, 366.

⁴⁶ Boessneck and von den Driesch 1992, 25. For the offering pits filled with young bulls in area H/VI, see Bietak, Dorner and Jánosi 2001, 64-7, fig. 23 [a-b].

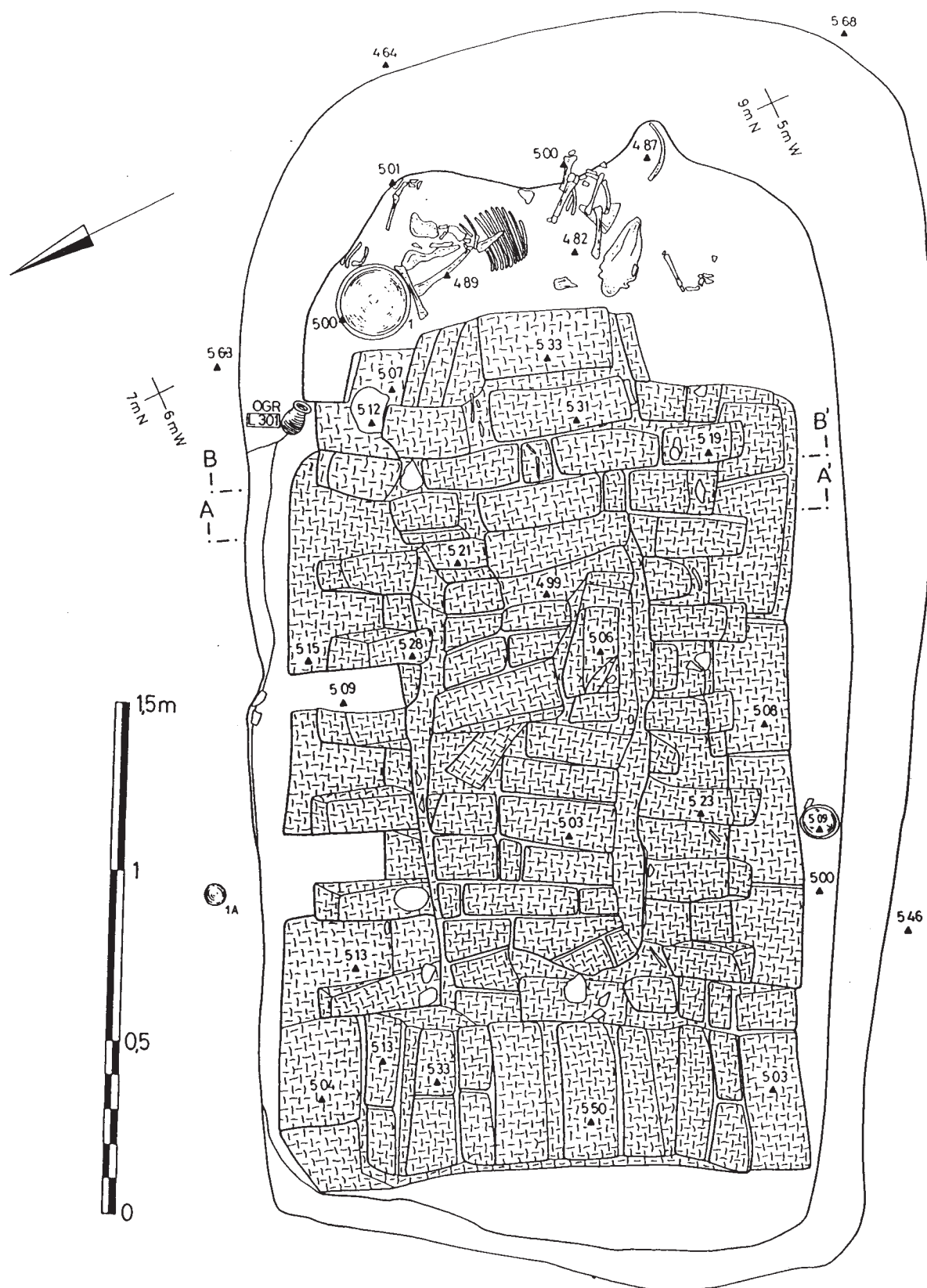


Fig. 5: Dismembered sheep left in front of the tomb entrance as a meat offering, tomb A/II-p/13 no. 15, stratum E/2.

sometimes pigs – have been excavated.⁴⁷ A remarkable fact is that the latter were found near Egyptian-style chapels I and V, but never anywhere near Temple III.⁴⁸

A striking feature of the offering pits, contrasting with the tomb repertoire, is the preponderance of Egyptian vessels.⁴⁹ This could indicate that the idea of using offering pits originated from the Egyptian cultural sphere. Evidence for offering meals has also been presented by Anne Seiler in her study of pottery from the Eighteenth Dynasty tombs at Draʿ Abu el-Naga;⁵⁰ after use, however, the pots were there not deposited in pits but thrown away over a wall. For the ancient Near East, there is a dearth of detailed studies on this topic, although a similar idea has been postulated for Ebla.⁵¹ Better documented is the custom of having meals of sacrificed animals in temples, both for the Levant and for Temple III at Tell el-Dabʿa.⁵²

In all strata of area A/II, vessels were placed at the entrance or in the vicinity of tombs and other structures, possibly for purification before entering.⁵³ Libation offerings are well known for Egypt,⁵⁴ where vessels filled with liquids were positioned inside or near temples and tombs.⁵⁵ These offerings are also well attested for the Near East, where libations for the dead were of essential importance, as the water in the underworld was thought to be poisonous and undrinkable.⁵⁶ As in Egypt, a libation of water could substitute a more substantial offering. In Tell el-Dabʿa area A/II, sometimes small vessels were walled up inside the walls of the tomb chamber or at the entrance. These were always cups or miniature jars made of Nile B2 or C1 clay.

Cultural-historical background and social status of the deceased

Besides the evident Egyptian elements, the Asiatic component in the funerary culture of area A/II – donkey

burials, toggle pins, weapons, and pottery types of the Middle Bronze Age culture – is already present in *phase I*.

Originally, tomb owners are most likely to have served the Egyptian crown, linked to the administration as mercenaries, leaders of expeditions and similar functions.⁵⁷ It was only later that they became independent from the central government.

Inside the cemeteries, epigraphic sources are confined to scarabs bearing titles of officials.⁵⁸ Whether the titles on these scarabs can be linked to the tomb owners or otherwise is open to debate.

The cemetery of area A/II is far less organised than the so-called Palace Cemetery in F/I (stratum d/1) in that it shows a variation from very simple pit burials, with no or only one or two funerary items, to large and well-equipped mud-brick tombs. In further contrast to area F/I, we encounter no tomb owners of Syro-Palestinian stock who went on to become high Egyptian officials; I would cautiously suspect a broader social spectrum that did not include the highest echelons.

Conclusion

The re-arrangement of space in stratum F had no connection whatever with the immigration of a new ethnic group, but everything to do with the region's separation from the main part of Egypt during the Thirteenth Dynasty.⁵⁹ The continuity in the funerary repertoire also shows that it was not an influx of new settlers that lay behind this spatial development.⁶⁰ The founding of the temple must be seen against a backdrop of disappearing royal control from Lisht,⁶¹ now that the cultic activity was managed by the local ruler of an independent area.

⁴⁷ Müller 1996, 16.

⁴⁸ Müller 1996, 16.

⁴⁹ Müller 1996, 326.

⁵⁰ Seiler 1992; 1995.

⁵¹ Xella 1988.

⁵² For an in-depth discussion and bibliography, see Bergquist 1993, 55, and in general Bottéro 1994.

⁵³ Forstner-Müller 2001, 204, fig. 6.

⁵⁴ Schäfer 1898, 147; Kees 1912, 216; H Bonnet 1952, 425.

⁵⁵ Borghouts 1980, 1014.

⁵⁶ See recently Katz 2004 (citing earlier literature).

⁵⁷ See Bietak 1994b.

⁵⁸ Compare Ben-Tor 1994; for the scarabs in general, see Mlinar 2001.

⁵⁹ For the historical changes during this period, see already von Beckerath 1964, 81-108; Bietak 1984b, 62.

⁶⁰ For the evidence, see Bietak 1991b, 39, and in this volume.

⁶¹ How important control of cult activity used to be in Egypt, and how much the maintenance of cult was deemed a status symbol, has been clearly argued by Baines 1987, 91: "The ruler or the superior takes on responsibility for cult in implied return for the labour given him by the people. The superior's view is thus that the rest of humanity need not be concerned with the cult and the maintenance of sweetness and light, so that there is a social division of care, but the rest of society need not have agreed about this. ... With the disappearance of central authority in the First Intermediate Period and a probably looser social hierarchy, local involvement in religion could have become more significant."

The lack of hierarchy and the separation from the central Egyptian state enabled independent access to the cult, the process culminating in a “private” cult centre. The inhabitants of Avaris, who had originally been settled by the Egyptian crown, had long been familiar with Egypt and its power apparatus. As power became decentralised and the administration of resources and their distribution weakened, traditional lines of supply, information and trade came also to an end. Gradually, new long-distance commercial links came to be forged, and new trading partners such as Cyprus were found.⁶²

What Thomas Schneider has demonstrated for Asiatics in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period holds also true for Tell el-Dab'a. It is not possible to distinguish a separate,

culturally distinct group of “foreigners” or “Asiatics” who stood apart through mutual experiences of immigration and otherness. The historical situation shows a complex situation of diverse, non-homogenous and quickly acculturating social elements. We may therefore dismiss the notion that shared ultimate origins were here an identity-forming factor.⁶³ Mutual features of burial customs and the funerary repertoire were not rooted in family ties or shared migratory movements, but in the power and supplies structure of the period in question.

The nucleus of Hyksos power was confined to the eastern Delta or possibly the whole of the Delta. There is no evidence that the Hyksos ruling class achieved supremacy over Palestine or, for that matter, over the rest of Egypt through territorial occupation.

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This may then apply more strongly to the Second Intermediate Period, which came after a time when rules of decorum had loosened and religious material was a little more freely available for private monuments than it had been in the Old Kingdom.”

⁶² For Cypriot imports, see Maguire 1986; 1992; 1994; 1995.

⁶³ Schneider 2003, 339.

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I. FORSTNER-MÜLLER

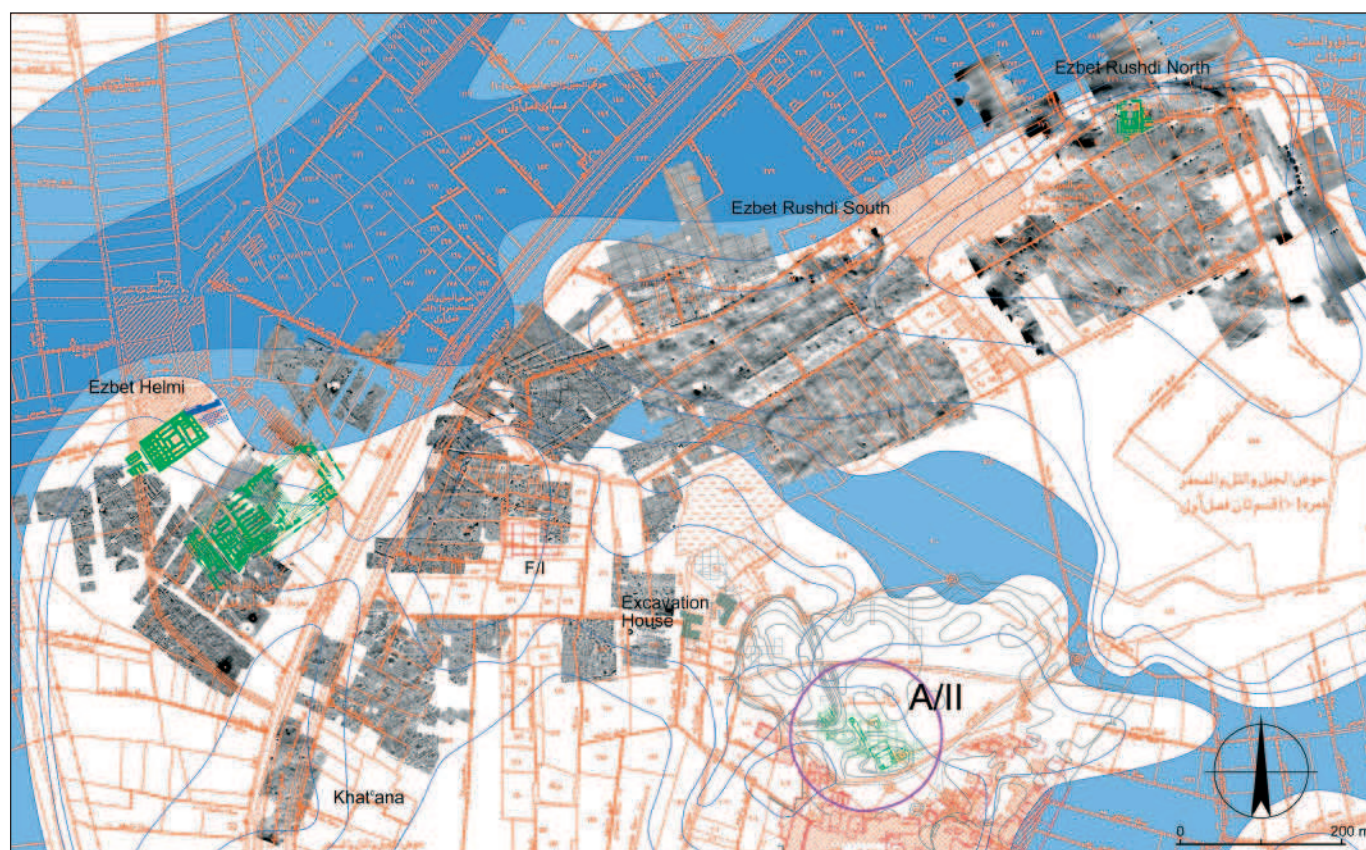


Plate 7: General map of Tell el-Dab'a, showing the relative position of area A/II.

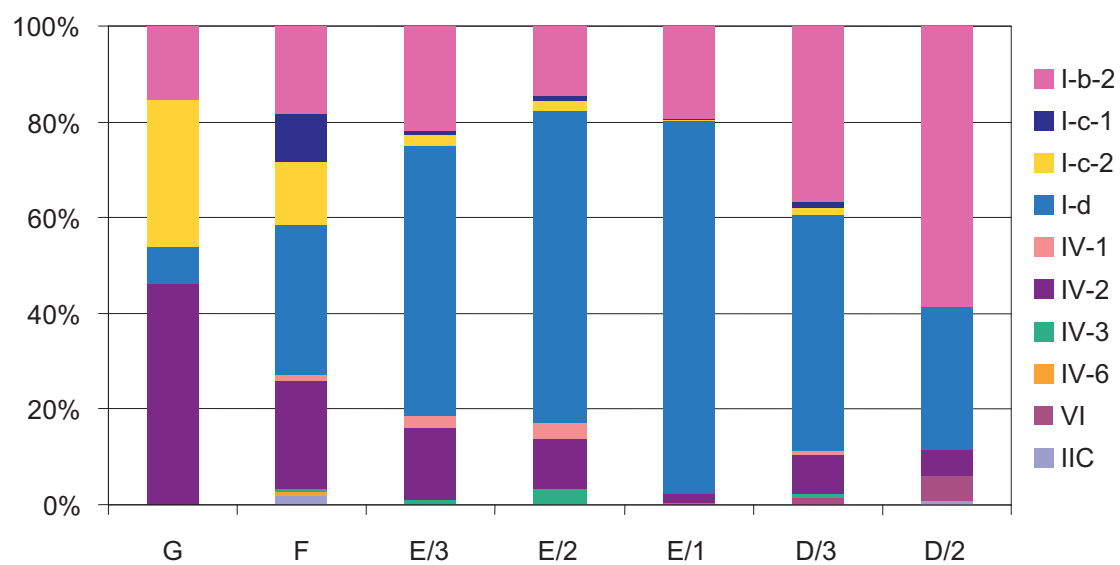


Plate 8: Proportions of different pottery fabrics within different strata.
The colour purple (VI) represents the Cypriot pottery.

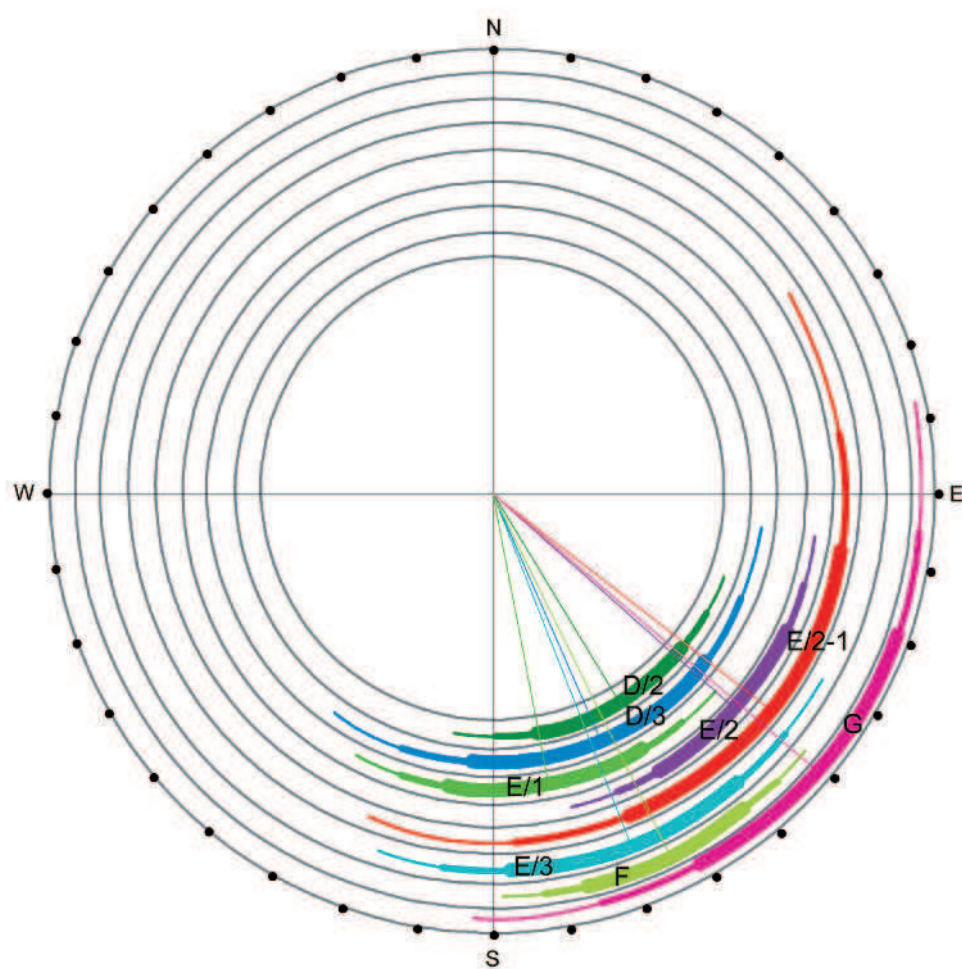


Plate 9: Bullet-diagram showing the orientations of tombs in all strata of area A/II,
mostly ranging between south- and eastward.



Plate 10: Attendant burial of a young female placed outside a longitudinal wall of the tomb chamber, and a donkey burial. Tomb A/II-p/14-no. 18, stratum F.