

Report of the Project "Wadi Abu Dom Investigation" Sixteenth Season, 13.02. – 15.04.2023

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Tim Karberg/Angelika Lohwasser
University of Muenster, Germany

1 Staff

Angelika Lohwasser (WWU, project director)
Tim Karberg (WWU, field director)
Jana Eger-Karberg (WWU)
Laura Haupt (WWU)
Magdalena Greshake (WWU)
Mohammed el Toum (NCAM)
Loai Shamsola (NCAM)
Ibrahim Bushara (Nilein-University Khartoum)

2 Proposed work

As announced after the interim campaign in autumn 2022, invasive archaeological investigations at the site of Umm Ruweim I (Wadi Abu Dom Itinerary survey number: Site 400, Feature 1) were to be resumed focusing at the northern rooms of the middle casemate and adjacent courtyard and corridor areas (fig. 1). The scientific aim was to further clarify the function(s) of the casemate rooms, as well as the building history of the complex as a whole (especially the stratigraphical relations between the middle casemate and the central building).

3 Realized work

3.1 Excavations at Umm Ruweim

3.1.1 Trench 16

At trench 16, a room within the middle casemate was investigated (fig. 2). At the top of the stratigraphy, a layer containing large quantities of mud brick debris was documented, obviously secondarily dumped there. After clearing the top layers of the stratigraphy, it additionally turned out that this room and the one immediately to the east are connected by a small door, which was not clearly visible at the surface. Within a lenticular accumulation of soft sandy material within the debris dump, a bronze statuette depicting the god Osiris and other bronze objects were found (cf. paragraph 3.2.2 below). Below the debris, a stratum of organic material was observed; unfortunately, no specific structure of the material (wood or straw?) was still visible since it was completely disturbed by insects. Below this organic layer, some hard walking horizons were documented, corresponding to the plastering of the adjacent walls. Below them, in the geologically in-situ soil, a rectangular, rather elaborate set of post holes was preserved, maybe representing an earlier building stage made from lightweight architecture.

3.1.2 Trench 17

In the corner of the courtyard between the central building and the walled transition to the central casemate, several horizons were found which, however, did not provide any clear usage relics and

thus indications of the functional context of this courtyard area. Isolated postholes were found deepened into both the geologically in-situ soil and the overlying secondary horizons, but without a clearly recognizable structure. It is noteworthy that the connecting walls to the central building proved to be stratigraphically much younger than the walls of the central building or the central casemate itself. There are two plastering phases of the outer wall of the central building: an older layer of plaster was apparently applied immediately after the construction of this section of wall, and the plaster layer that merges into the older primary walking horizon also closes the shallow foundation trench. Clearly above this, stratigraphically at the same time as the construction of the connecting structure to the central casemate, there is another younger plaster layer.

3.1.3 Trench 18

The excavations in the courtyard between the central building and the central casemate structure primarily clarified the wall connections in this area. The archaeological work in this area confirmed the assumption that the western and northern room alignments of the central casemate were built at the same time and were part of a uniform planning process.

3.1.4 Trench 19

The trench was intended to clarify the use and function of this room area (fig. 3). However, neither the archaeological features nor the pottery, bone and small finds recovered here allowed any further interpretation. From an architectural point of view, a relatively broadly projecting banquet near the wall base projecting to the south was an interesting detail maybe connected to an early shift in the planning process. Also noteworthy are two rows of postholes, which deepen into the upper edge of the geological soil and represent a direct predecessor construction of the stone masonry.

3.1.5 Trench 20

The courtyard area adjacent to the room excavated in Spot 16 was labelled as Spot 20. It was found that the wall between the room Spot 16 to the courtyard originally had regular openings (similar to a stoa), but that these were closed shortly (in stratigraphical terms) after construction by intermediate dry stone settings (fig. 4). However, the plaster preserved in the lower part of the wall shows a uniform transition to the corresponding walking horizon, which is solidified by precipitation of the clay plaster material and is situated directly above the rolling layer of the masonry. Therefore, not too much time can have passed between the construction of the original wall elements and the filling of the gaps. Regular post hole settings were also found in the courtyard area excavated in Spot 20, which deepen into the geologically in-situ soil and are apparently directly related to the postholes within Spot 16.

3.1.6 Trench 21

Spot 21 was, like spot 19, intended to clarify the room function. Here, despite some post hole settings, again no specific hints towards the room usage phase and its function could be derived from the architectural record and the patterns of the find material.

3.1.7 Trench 22

Unlike in the neighboring room, no special floor features such as postholes were found here. Direct indications of the function and use of the room could also not be derived from the find material. Remarkable, however, is a lenticular concentration of finds with a diameter of approx. 30 cm at a layer boundary, which can already be assigned to a secondary use phase of the room complex. A total of 465 faience and 45 ostrich eggshell beads were recovered here.

3.1.8 Trench 23

The detailed investigation of the door between the room spot 16 and spot 20 in the middle courtyard was labelled as spot 23. It revealed a broad banquet at the foot of the wall. The threshold was covered by plaster and not reinforced by larger stone slabs or wooden beams.

3.1.9 Trench 24

This trench was done inside a casemate room that had already been suggested in advance as intentionally terraced (even if this terracing had not yet been interpreted as such during the architectural survey carried out in 2011). This assumption was confirmed during the excavation work. It revealed a sequence of several intentional filling strata, some of which consisted of stones, others of large quantities of pottery and organic material. This part of the terrace fill was evidently made using waste. Solitary postholes were found on the upper surface of the terrace fill, suggesting that there may have been a construction of lightweight vegetable architecture on top of the terrace. Other solitary postholes were also found in the geologically in-situ soil, but these do not show any coherent structure (fig. 5). There is no stratigraphy worth mentioning between the level of the base of the wall and the beginning of the fill strata, so that it can be assumed that the terracing was created immediately after the construction of the walls. However, this may have been a change of plan, as suggested by individual details such as small window openings covered by the terracing.

3.1.10 Trench 25

A further trench was done between the two walls and pillars at the connective construction between the middle casemate and the central building. This confirmed the assumption that both connection walls are stratigraphically contemporaneous to each other and therefore belong as a whole to the additions to the original architectural design constructed during the presumed renovation work. However, there were no reliable indications of the use and function of this transitional area in this section either.

3.1.11 Trench 27

In this section, the stratigraphic relation between the connecting structures between the middle casemate and the central building on the one hand, and the staircase and platform construction in this corner of the building on the other was investigated. It turned out that the staircase is contemporary to the walls of the central casemate. The pillar belonging to the connective structure towards the central building also proved to be stratigraphically younger at this spot.

3.1.12 Surface clearing 28/29

At the central structure, a surface clearing was carried out to clarify the structure of the platform assumed to be placed the center of the central structure. Even though only the upper, eolian accumulated sandy layers could be cleared in this campaign, it became apparent that the lateral edges of the block layers of the "altar" situated below the recent surface of the terrain are less clear than the architectural surveys of 2011 made it appear. It remains unclear whether this building element is a platform-like structure at all, or merely a relic of a much later subsequent use. The clarification of this question must, however, be left to future research, which will hopefully make it possible to excavate the spot down to the geologically in-situ soil in this area.

3.2 Find material documentation

3.2.1 Pottery

We did primary photographic documentation and weighing of all sherds of the season 2020 (5 guffas) as well as a part of the 2023 season (4 guffas). Due to the short time and the amount of newly discovered pottery sherds we decided not to glue at the moment. This is planned for the next season.

The overall impression is that most vessels are Late or Postmeroitic in date. There seems to be a high percentage of so-called beer-jars (red neck, mat impressed body, fig. 6). However, also a certain quantity of very heavy and hard huge wheel-made vessels is present (fig. 7). Open bowls, either mat impressed or otherwise little decorated, as well as some small beakers and cups are in the convolute, too (fig. 8).

The decoration is mostly impressed (dots and small squares) and incised, sometimes in quite complex pattern (fig. 9). Very few painted decoration, mostly red lines near the rim, but also an ankh-sign (fig. 6).

We observed that there are many decorated rims, even very coarse and badly made vessels bear sometimes rims with impressions, incisions or wavy borders. These decorations can be done either in an imprecise way, but sometimes they are of high quality (fig. 10).

3.2.2 Small finds:

Bells (fig. 11): in the same spot two bronze bells were found. Due to corrosion it remains unclear if they are decorated. Both of them are hemispheric, and in one of them the rod for the suspension of the mallet is visible.

Rings: three small bronze rings, one of them twisted (fig. 12)

Udjat: One small Udjat of faience, partly broken (fig. 13)

Beads: hundreds of cylindrical faience and ostrich eggshell disc beads. Some of them are distributed all over the excavation area, but in one spot there was a kind of deposit with nearly 500 beads. Since the conditions are quite well, also short strings (fibre), one of them still stringing four beads, are preserved.

Pendants: few stone drop pendants

4 Proposal for future activities

For excavation campaigns planned in future, we want to resume the excavation work at the central building and extend it to the rooms north and west of the spots 28 and 29. On a longer time scale, excavations along the eastern part of the middle casemate as well as the whole course of the outer casemate.

5 Endangered sites

No freshly disturbances of cultural heritage sites were observed during the campaign. Activities observed in the vicinity of Umm Ruweim (including including gold mining) were investigated and turned out to be affecting any archaeological sites.

6 Final remarks

We would like to thank Mr. Mohammed el Toum and Mr. Loai Shamsola very much for all their indispensable help and smooth organization! They have acted as good mediators to the people in the Wadi Abu Dom as well as experts for organization and especially as good friends to us!

Karima, 24.03.2023

Tim Karberg/Angelika Lohwasser

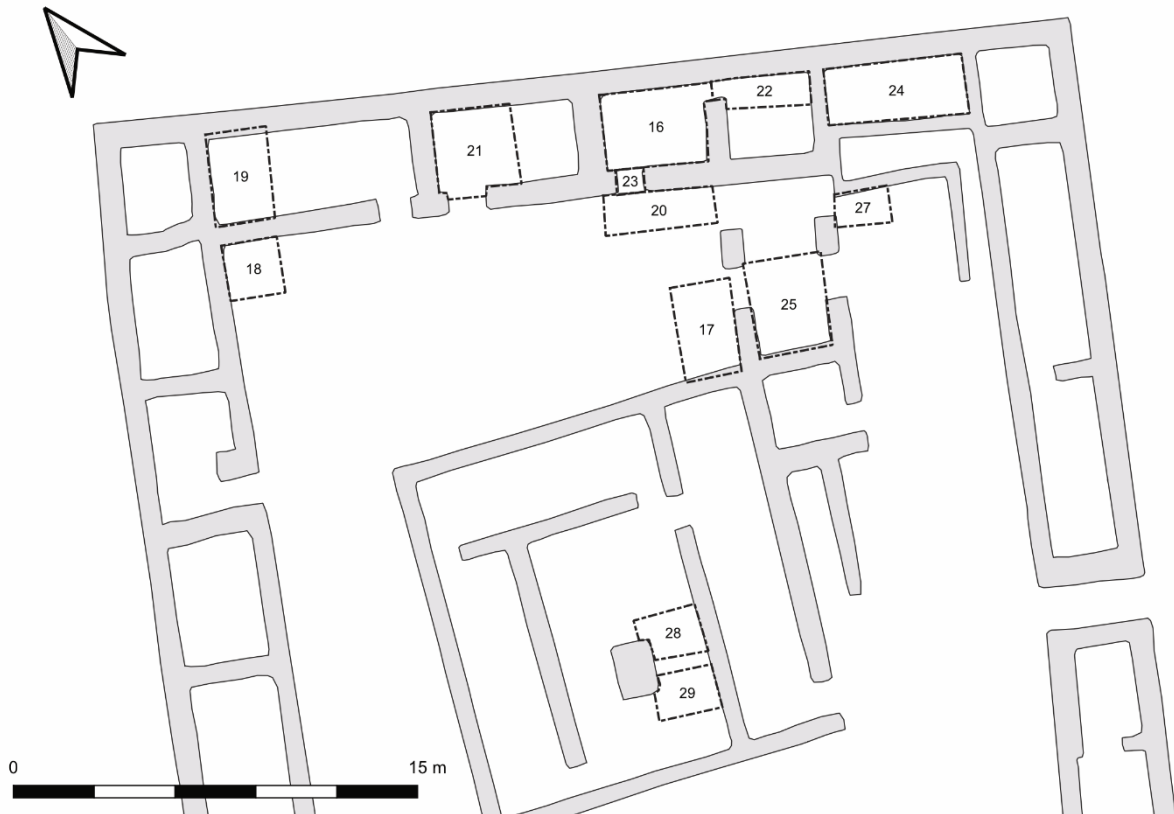


Figure 1

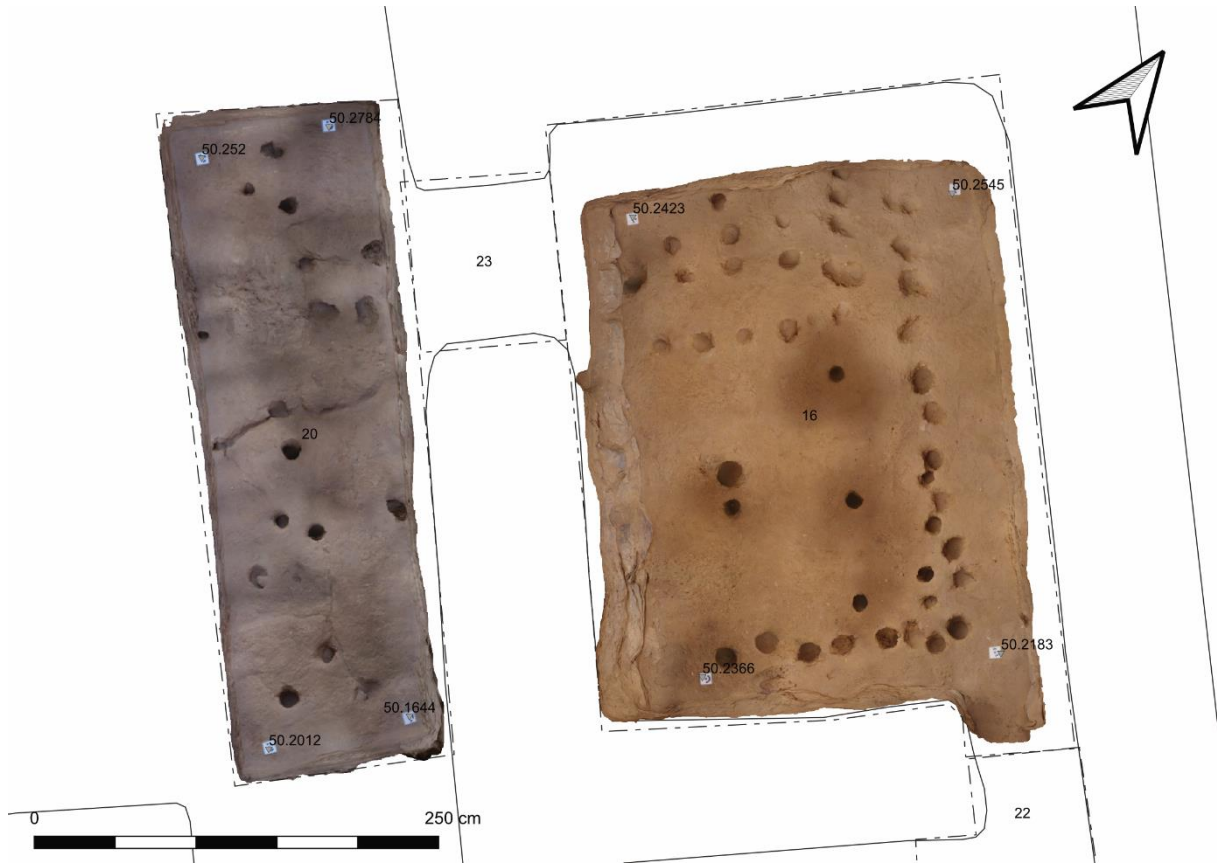


Figure 2

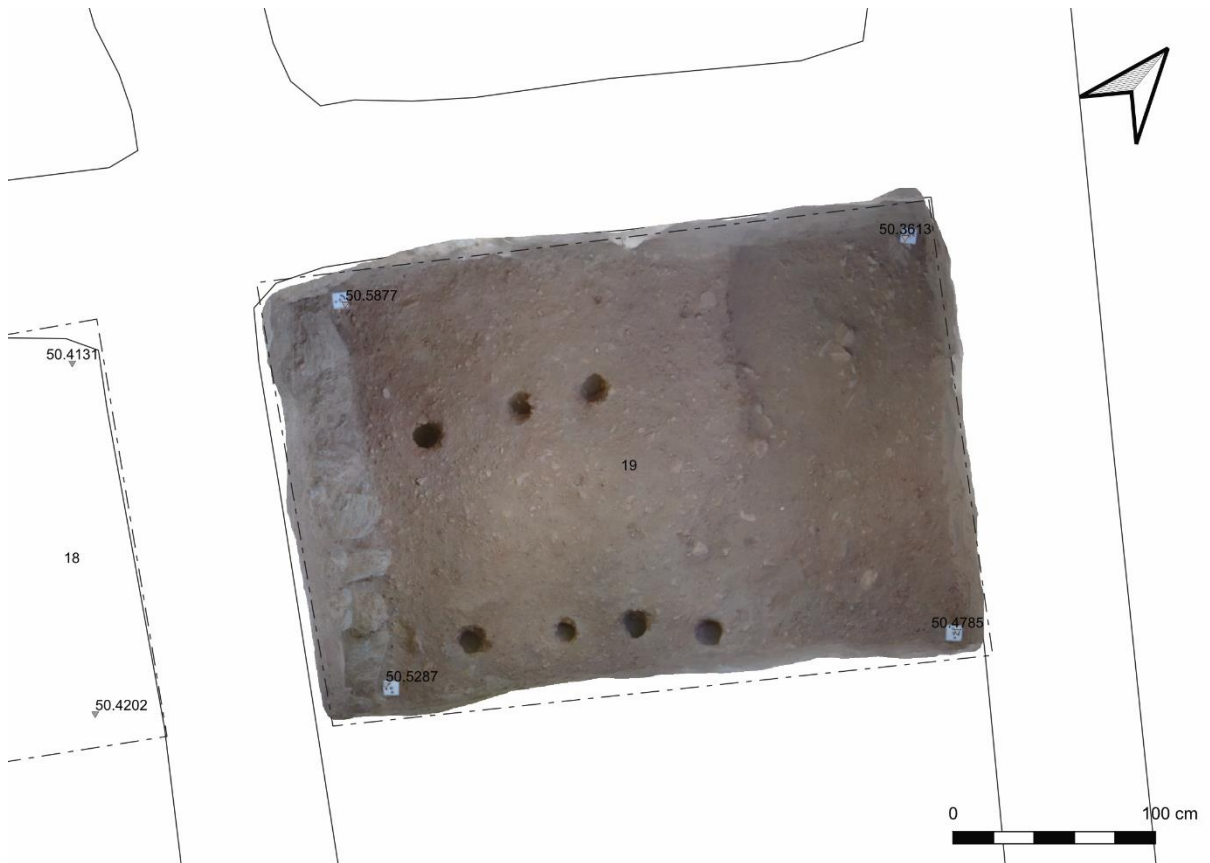


Figure 3

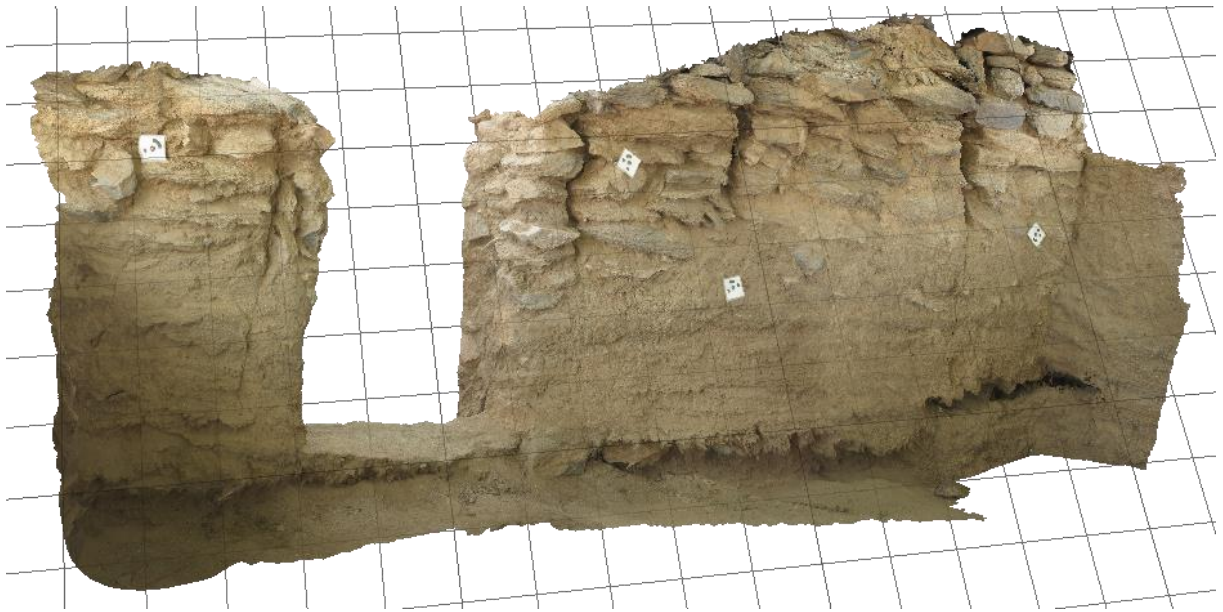


Figure 4

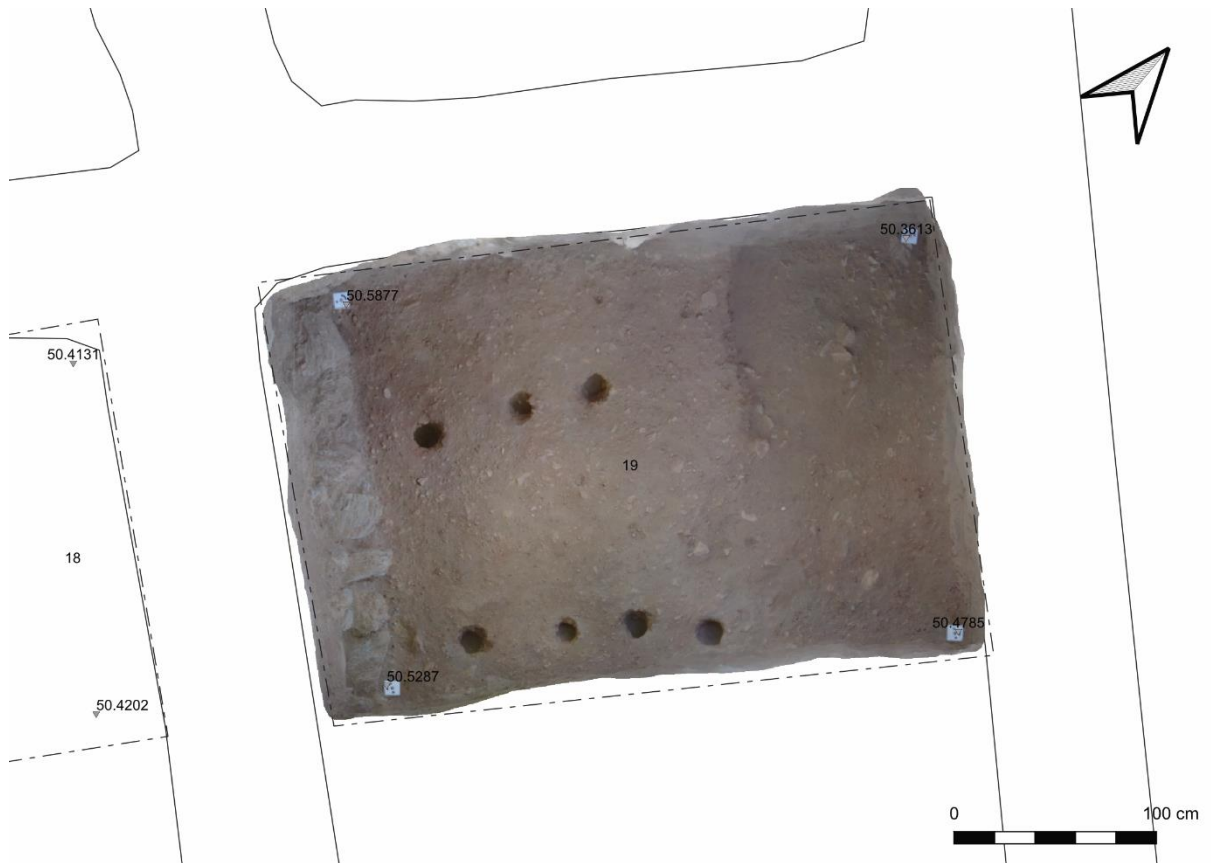


Figure 5

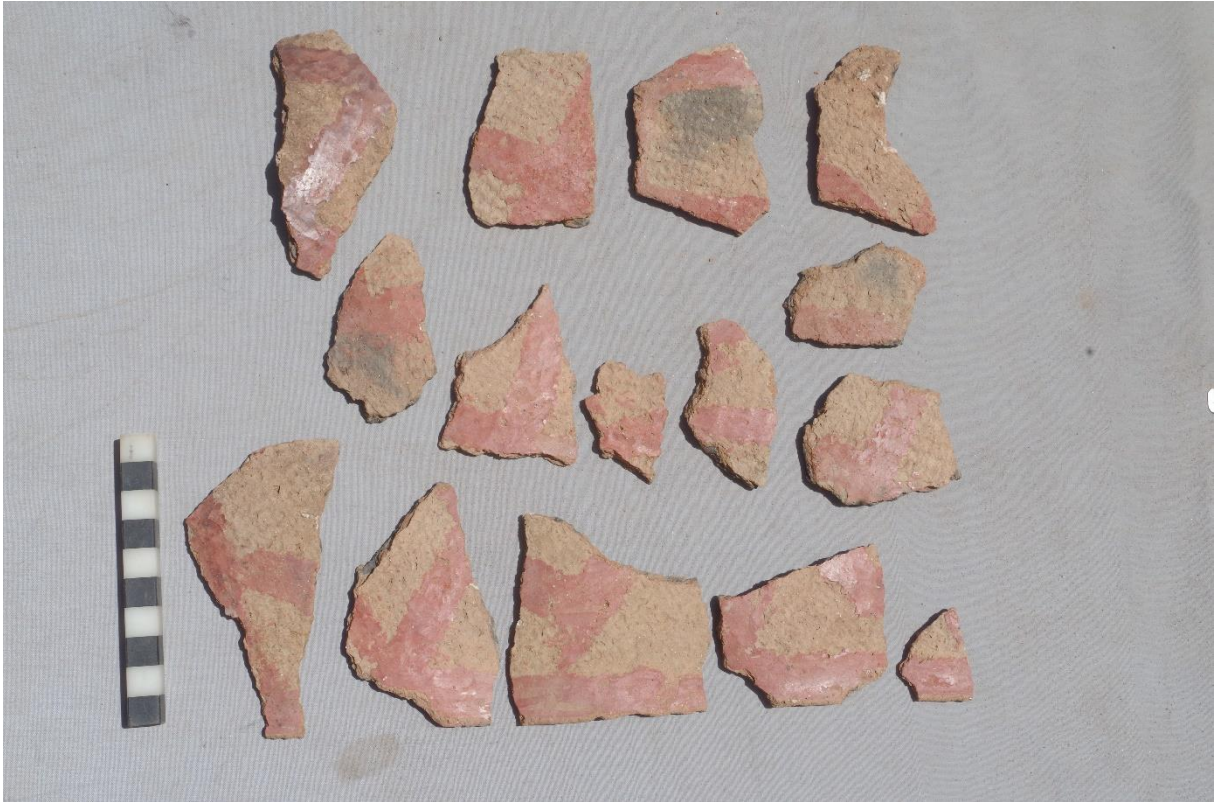


Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

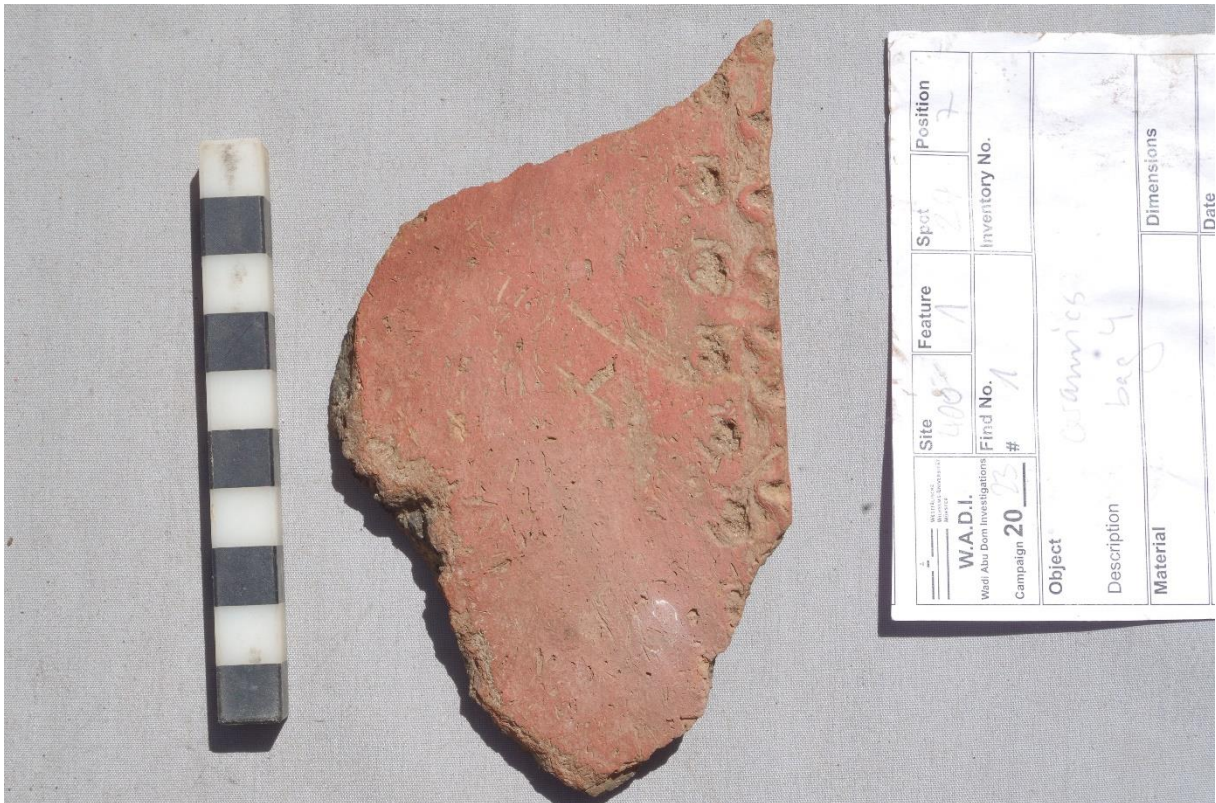


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13