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A LATE 4TH - EARLY 3RD MILLENNIUM BC GRAVE AT SPIDEJ (EASTERN JAZMURIAN, IRANIAN BALUCHISTAN)

BY

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Abstract: We present here the results of the excavation in 2003 of the most furnished grave found in Spidej (grave 125), in Eastern Jazmurian area (Iranian Baluchistan). Probably dated around 3000 BC (3200-2800 BC), it displays a funerary assemblage of 59 pottery, copper-alloy and stone artefacts mostly unknown up to now, except for the very partially published excavation in Bampur 14 / Saidabad led by Mehdi Rahbar in 2003.

Keywords: Spidej, Bampur, Jazmurian basin, Baluchistan, Bronze Age

Introduction

The archaeological site of Spidej (N 27°39'14"; E 59°59'26"; 714 m asl; see figs. 1 and 2) is located on the north-eastern fringe of the Jazmurian basin, some 55 km south of Bazman volcano, in the upper part of an alluvial conoid, nearby the junction of the floodplain with the mountain. Due to local volcanic activity, the site is surrounded by many hot springs.

After the report of illegal excavations going on in Spidej in 2001/1380 (probably inspired by the looters who had just started to be active in the Jiroft area at that time), M. Heydari (ICCHTO Sistan-Baluchistan) spent there 3 rescue campaigns in summer 2002/1381 (14 days), in summer 2003/1382 (103 days) and summer 2005/1384 (25 days)¹ among the still active plunderers. The conditions were not secure, and the rescue operations had to be carried out faster than one would have wished.

In 2002, a survey was made around the site, in a strip of 40 km in length and 2 km wide, during which 18 sites, mainly prehistoric, were discovered.

¹ With the help of Reza Ganjali, Mohammad Reza Mollashai, Ahmad Rezasheikhi, Hossein Pourmand and Mehdi Minaei.

The material found on the surface of the site and in the looting pits was also recovered and systematically recorded. Because of its bad preservation, one grave (n° 101), not disturbed, was also excavated in order to get a first insight on the local material culture and dating of the site.

In 2003, 37 other graves were excavated (Graves 102-138), including Grave 125 which is the main topic of this paper. Spidej was also recorded as a national monument (*asar melli*) while a watching station with a guard was built to protect the site from further destructions that could have been planned at night time. In 2005, the extent of the site was determined through a systematic series of test trenches, while a preliminary topographic map was drawn². The archaeological materials collected during these seasons in the site are currently held in the Museums of Zahedan and Chabahar.

Occupation periods at Spidej (see Pl. 2)

Through this rescue work, several occupation periods could be determined in Spidej, including:

- a graveyard dating from the late 4th / early 3rd millennium BC to the 2nd half of the 3rd millennium BC (Graveyard A), as suggested by the abundant ceramics scattered on surface by the looters, and there recovered (see below); Grave 125 belongs to this graveyard and can be ascribed to its earliest occupation, around 3000 BC;
- a late 3rd / early 2nd millennium BC graveyard (Graveyard B) according to the ceramics found there, distinguished by a peculiar incised decoration and displaying abundant comparisons with Shahdad;
- a probable Parthian graveyard (with *damb*, or dry-stone tumulus structure);
- and some Islamic remains, including notably a fortress (qalehye Spidej; Spidej is actually a deformation of *sepid dej*, “The white fortress”) and a contemporaneous graveyard.

Description of graveyards A and B

The destructions caused by previous illegal excavations (at least 200 vertical looting pits as well as horizontal tunnels spoiled the site) had deeply

² See Heydari 2006/1385 for a preliminary report concerning Spidej.

disturbed the site. Moreover, the actual presence of armed looters during the official rescue activity limited the time of the dig and may have prevented the recovery of important details. Only well preserved (non-looted) graves were chosen for excavation, 30 in graveyard A, and 8 in graveyard B (38 all in all, from Grave 101 to 138).

Graveyard A

Graveyard A is located in the northern part of the Spidej basin (Pl. 2). Some graves were actually found from the present surface thanks to the still visible structures used to mark them, aligned cobbles forming squares (with sides of 3,5 to 4,5 m) or circles (3,5 to 4,5 m in diameter). These funerary constructions might have marked the original trampling surface of the cemetery, and are currently exposed by strong erosion, that locally removes one or more later alluvial layers, in some places 1 to 1,5 m thick.

Two types of graves were recorded: simple pit graves and catacomb-like ones. Simple pit graves displayed a round or oval pit which, once filled, was covered with 5 to 7 stone slabs. Considering their funerary furniture, these graves were relatively 'poor', often containing only few ceramic vessels. However, being quite visible on surface, these graves had frequently been excavated and looted, disturbing most of the original layout and breaking the vessels.

Catacomb-like graves consisted in a round or oval pit closed with stone slabs, giving access to a chamber, sometimes closed also with slabs. Probably belonging to a more affluent part of the Bronze age society, these graves were more furnished than the simple pits and showed more variety in their assemblages: copper alloy artefacts (circular mirrors, pins, daggers, axes and compartmented stamps seals; on this last type of artefacts, see Heydari, Desset & Vidale 2018: seals n° 1, 2, 8, 12, 28 and 29, presented in this paper as coming from graveyard B), alabaster, chlorite, carnelian and lapis-lazuli beads, marble vessels and well-known but still mysterious small stone columns (three specimens found). These tombs and their goods were usually better preserved, perhaps because their deeper shaft and better construction protected the artefacts from rain infiltration and from the pressure of the closing slabs.

Considering the similarity of their ceramic assemblages, both these types of graves were probably used at the same time. As stated above, they can be preliminary dated between the late 4th / early 3rd millennium and

the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. The earliest graves (like 125, see below) were furnished with well fired / clinky fine mineral tempered grey/buff/orange ware, usually decorated with dark grey to black painted geometric patterns. This fine ware comes in few different shapes with many variations including hemispherical bowls (with different sizes), less common bowls with straight walls and small restricted goblets or low beakers with a distinctive, monotonous linear design. The best comparisons for these materials are with the pottery found in the Saidabad graveyard (Bampur 14), excavated by Mehdi Rahbar in 2003 (see below the comparisons section), and published in Persian.

Some graves were probably more recent and, when properly studied, might be ascribed to the second half of the 3rd millennium BC, because of characteristic ceramic shapes such as the “scorpion bowls” (contemporary with Shahr-i Sokhta Period III and Konar Sandal South settlement), incised grey ware, globular vessels with tubular spout (found also in Shahdad and Mahtoutabad graveyards; see for example Desset et al. 2017: vessel n° i), pear-shaped beakers (cf. Shahr-I Sokhta Period II, phases 5A-5B, around 2600-2500 BC), high footed cups (found at the looted cemetery site of Mahtoutabad and recovered in other plundered sites of the Halil basin) and the use of excised, string-shaped decorative patterns below the rim reminding of similar pottery found at Chegerdak (Heydari et al. 2015: fig. 5, n° g). To these elements, we might add some carved (scorpion) chlorite vessel fragments (still unpublished), the small stone columns and a small copper alloy dog which finds precise parallels in Gonur Depe (ca 2200-2000 BC). In the whole, the fine grey ware still remained the most common funerary furniture of this second phase, nevertheless displaying more frequently animal decorative patterns than in the previous centuries.

Graveyard B

Located in the western part of the Spidej basin, graveyard B is distinguished by stone-built gable roof graves. Eight graves of this kind could be excavated. The ceramics found here differ completely from those of graveyard A and may be ascribed to the late 3rd / early 2nd millennium BC. They were usually rougher, with reddish to orange paste. While vessels have almost no painted decorative pattern, they were incised with some

interesting (and still unpublished) tree, human, solar or triangular-shaped figures and frequently stamp-sealed (cf. Heydari, Desset & Vidale 2018: sealings n° 1 to 19, presented in this paper as coming from graveyard A). The closest comparisons available are with Konar Sandal North, Shahdad, Tepe Yahya IVA and Shahr-i Sokhta III-IV. The material recovered here includes also chlorite vessels fragments with geometric designs and some marble vessels. In general, graves from graveyard B were not as rich as in graveyard A. Some of them had also been looted in antiquity. A settlement possibly associated to this graveyard was located 3 km south-eastward, in the Pir Sohran valley, where similar sherds as well as some evidence of stone architecture could be observed.

Grave 125 (Graveyard A): excavation and stratigraphy

We chose to publish Grave 125 because it had not been disturbed by looters, displayed the most abundant funerary furniture of the entire cemetery, with not less than 59 artefacts (52 ceramics, four copper alloy/bronze artefacts, and three stone finds) and document an up to now rather poorly known period, around 3000 BC. The grave is located at 711 m asl, in the north-eastern part of graveyard A, and its coordinates are N 27°39'14"; E 59°59'27".

The trench where Grave 125 was found measured 2 × 2 m. The first 15 cm (layer 1) were filled with a mix of loose dirt and sherds. From 15 cm to a depth of 80 cm (layer 2, 65 cm thick), the excavators found loose dirt and stones, and no potsherds. At the depth of 80 cm, two large stone slabs were encountered, which closed the pit of a grave. The 3rd millennium BC surface of the graveyard was probably immediately above. From 80 cm to 185 cm (for a thickness of 105 cm), layer 3 was the filling of a vertical pit, distinguished by a very loose sediment mixed with sand. The vertical shaft, thus cleared, gave access to a lateral chamber (a catacomb-like grave), where, from a depth of ca. 185 to 210 cm (layer 4), the furnishings (59 artefacts) of Grave 125 had been deposited with the dead (see Pl. 3 and Pl. 4). Unfortunately, no bone remains survived in the chamber, perhaps due, as stated above, to the fluctuations of the water table, and the position of the body can be only guessed (see below).

Description and catalogue of the grave assemblage

The 59 artefacts found in the chamber (see Pl. 5 to 22) are currently kept in two Museums³. In Zahedan part of the assemblage is at present on the general exhibit, in showcases which could not be opened during our study. Thus, although we had good pictures and drawings of almost all the assemblage and as we tried to present each object with standard graphic reproductions and the relative pictures, in the following catalogue are some inconsistencies. For example, of artefacts 125/37 and 125/58 we have no documentation; of 125/7 there is only one picture, while 125/14 lacks a photograph. Part of the assemblage was materially at our disposal: these are the vessels whose colours (paste and pigments) are recorded with the Munsell soil cards. The finds which were not directly accessible are those described, in the following catalogue, with more generic colour descriptions and less technological details.

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|---------------|---|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 125/1 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | pink-orange, pigment dark brown | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body and base |
| 125/2 | Pl. 17 and 18 | subcylindrical bowl, painted | buff ware, fine | 7.5YR8/1 (light grey) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body and base |
| 125/3 | Pl. 17 and 18 | small restricted jar with a short neck, a truncated cone-like neck and a spout (not preserved), painted | medium-fine red-orange ware | 5YR7/6 (orange) pigment 5YR6/1 (brownish grey) | coiled and wheel-fashioned (?) | - |
| 125/4 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 5YR7/3 (dull orange) pigment 5YR7/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the base |
| 125/5 | Pl. 17 and 18 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 10YR5/2 (greyish brown), pigment 10YR3/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body and base |

³ We want to thank here Ms. Atefe Bazzi, Ms. Samira Naroui and Ms. Somaye Dorakzadeh for their collaboration in drawing the ceramics.

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| 125/6 | Pl. 7 and 8 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR5/1 (brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR7/1 (black) | wheel-thrown (?) | multiple stages of trimming or slow turning, alternating with sets of oblique spatula impressions |
| 125/7 | Pl. 16 | small biconical jar, unpainted | grey ware, medium-fine | 5YR7/1 (light grey) | probably coiled | - |
| 125/8 | Pl. 15 and 16 | small biconical jar, unpainted | grey ware, medium-fine | 5YR5/2 (reddish grey) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body; below the maximum expansion, entirely covered by a continuous series of chattering marks |
| 125/9 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 7.5YR7/4 (dull orange) pigment 7.5YR3/2 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the base, interior oxidised |
| 125/10 | Pl. 15 and 16 | flat biconical jar | coarse grey ware | 5YR7/1 (light grey) | probably coiled | - |
| 125/11 | Pl. 15 and 16 | small biconical jar, unpainted | grey ware | 7.5YR7/1 (light grey) | probably coiled | heavily burnished with spiral movements, trimmed on the lower exterior body |
| 125/12 | Pl. 15 and 16 | Slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | yellowish-orange, pigment black | wheel-thrown | - |
| 125/13 | Pl. 7 and 8 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR7/1 (light brownish grey) pigment 5YR3/1 (brownish black) | coiled and wheel-thrown | chattering marks on the exterior, signs of a spatula inside; turned on the lower body and the base |
| 125/14 | Pl. 7 and 8 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware | 5YR8/1 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR3/2 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | paddled with a spatula, trimmed on the base |

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|---------------|---|---|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| 125/15 | Pl. 9 and 10 | small, squat jar, unpainted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR7/1 (light brownish grey) | probably coiled | trimmed and slightly burnished on the lower exterior body |
| 125/16 | Pl. 7 and 8 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR4/3 (brown) | Wheel-thrown (?) | trimmed on the base |
| 125/17 | Pl. 5 and 6 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey to buff ware, very fine | 7.5YR8/3 (light yellowish orange) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | extensively padded on the exterior with rhythmic spatula marks; trimmed on the base |
| 125/18 | Pl. 19 and 20 | hemispherical bowl with restricted mouth and narrow base, painted | medium-fine black-on-red slipped ware (?) | bright red-orange slip, dark grey to black slip | probably coiled | lower body trimmed or turned |
| 125/19 | Pl. 19 and 20 | large subglobular necked jar, painted | buff/orange ware, medium-fine | pinkish buff, pigment dark grey | probably coiled and wheel-fashioned | trimmed and smoothed on lower body and base |
| 125/20 | Pl. 13 and 14 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR7/4 (dull brown) | wheel-thrown | finely trimmed on the base; ghost marks of the decoration of another vessel, from the same pile |
| 125/21 | Pl. 15 and 16 | small subglobular jar, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 2.5Y7/4 (pale reddish orange) pigment 2.5Y4/3 (dull reddish brown) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the base |
| 125/22 | Pl. 15 and 16 | small subglobular jar, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | reddish orange, pigment dark reddish brown | wheel-thrown | trimmed at the lower body and base |
| 125/23 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff ware, very fine | 2.5YR7/4 (orange) pigment 2.5YR4/1 (reddish grey) | wheel-thrown | turned on the base |
| 125/24 | Pl. 17 and 18 | small truncated cone-like bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR8/1 (light grey) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed at the lower body and base |

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|---------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------|--|
| 125/25 | Pl. 9 and 10 | hemispherical bowl | grey ware, very fine | 7.5YR6/2 (greyish brown) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (brownish black) | coiled and wheel-fashioned | entirely turned and smoothed on the exterior; oblique spatula marks on the outer rim |
| 125/26 | Pl. 9 and 10 | small hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, very fine | pinkish grey, pigment greyish black | wheel-thrown | - |
| 125/27 | Pl. 11 and 12 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | brownish grey, pigment greyish black | wheel-thrown | - |
| 125/28 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 2.5YR7/4 (pale reddish orange) pigment 2.5YR7/1 (reddish black) | wheel-thrown | interior oxidised |
| 125/29 | Pl. 13 and 14 | hemispherical bowl | grey ware, very fine | 5YR8/1 (light grey) pigment 5YR4/2 (greyish brown) | wheel-thrown (?) | lower body and base are heavily trimmed with chattering marks at the maximum expansion |
| 125/30 | Pl. 17 and 18 | truncated-cone like bowl, painted | buff/orange ware, fine, slightly porous | 7.5YR8/3 (light yellowish orange) pigment 7.5YR5/1 (brownish grey) | coiled and wheel-fashioned | lower exterior part slightly polished |
| 125/31 | Pl. 5 and 6 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | light brown to grey, pigment dark brown | wheel-thrown (?) | - |
| 125/32 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff ware, very fine | 7.5YR8/3 (light yellowish orange) pigment 7.5YR7/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | turned on the base |
| 125/33 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 5YR7/6 (orange) pigment 5YR4/3 (dull reddish brown) | wheel-thrown | lower body and base turned |
| 125/34 | Pl. 11 and 12 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey to buff ware, fine | yellowish brown, pigment reddish brown | wheel-thrown (?) | - |
| 125/35 | Pl. 9 and 10 | hemispherical bowl, painted | buff/orange ware, fine | 7.5YR8/3 (light yellowish orange) pigment 5YR5/3 (dull reddish brown) | wheel-thrown | paddled with a spatula, trimmed on the base |

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|-------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 125/36 | Pl. 13 and 14 | sub-cylindrical bowl, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 5YR8/3 (pale brown-orange) pigment 2.5YR6/6 (orange) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the base |
| 125/38 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | yellowish-orange, pigment dark brown to black | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the base |
| 125/37 | Not documented, see map | slightly restricted beaker, painted (?) | - | - | - | - |
| 125/39 | Pl. 5 | hemispherical bowl, painted | buff ware, fine | yellowish-orange, pigment dark brown | wheel-thrown | - |
| 125/40 | Pl. 15 and 16 | small subglobular jar, painted | buff/orange ware, fine | 7.5YR7/4 (dull orange) pigment 7.5YR4/1 (brownish grey) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body |
| 125/41 | Pl. 13 and 14 | small hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, very fine | 7.5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on the lower body and base |
| 125/42 | Pl. 13 and 14 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, very fine | 10YR7/1 (light grey) pigment 7.5YR3/2 (brownish black) | coiled, fashioned on the potter's wheel | lower body and base trimmed or turned (?) |
| 125/43 | Pl. 13 and 14 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey to buff ware, very fine | 5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR4/2 (greyish brown) | coiled and wheel-fashioned | entirely turned or trimmed with spiral-like movements, but on rim |
| 125/44 | Pl. 5 and 6 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, very fine | Light pinkish grey, pigment dark brown | wheel-thrown (?) | trimmed on lower body and base |
| 125/45 | Pl. 13 and 14 | low hemispherical bowl | grey ware, very fine | 7.5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR2.5/1 (black) | wheel-thrown (?) | trimmed on lower body and base |
| 125/46 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff ware, very fine | yellowish buff, pigment dark grey | wheel-thrown | - |

| Id. | Plates | Description | Ware & Texture | Colour(s) | Forming Technique | Other Technical Features |
|------------|---------------|---|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 125/47 | Pl. 19 and 20 | large globular necked jar, painted | buff/orange ware, fine | | coiled and fashioned on the potter's wheel; upper body enlarged by paddle and anvil | trimmed and smoothed on lower body and base |
| 125/48 | Pl. 17 and 18 | squat subglobular restricted jar, painted | medium-fine red-orange ware | red-orange, pigment dark grey | coiled, wheel-fashioned (?) | - |
| 125/49 | Pl. 17 and 18 | small hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware, fine | 7.5YR7/2 (light brownish grey) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | - |
| 125/50 | Pl. 13 and 14 | hemispherical bowl, painted | grey ware | 10YR7/1 (light grey) pigment 10YR3/3 (dark brown) | wheel-thrown (?) | trimmed on lower body and base; repeated spatula marks all around the outer rim |
| 125/51 | Pl. 21 and 22 | shaft-hole axe | copper alloy / bronze | - | - | - |
| 125/52 | Pl. 21 and 22 | flat trapeze-like axe | copper alloy / bronze | - | - | - |
| 125/53 | Pl. 21 and 22 | flat knife with a slightly bent profile | copper alloy / bronze | - | - | - |
| 125/54 | Pl. 21 and 22 | lozenge-like bead | grey chalcedony with white bands | - | - | - |
| 125/55 | Pl. 21 and 22 | two irregular spheroidal beads | lapis lazuli | - | - | - |
| 125/56 | Pl. 21 and 22 | stone blade | grey chalcedony? | - | - | - |
| 125/57 | Pl. 21 and 22 | shaft-hole axe | copper alloy / bronze | - | - | - |
| 125/58 | None | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 5YR6/3 (dull orange) pigment 5YR7/1 (black) | wheel-thrown | turned on the base; the interior is more oxidised than the exterior |
| 125/59 | Pl. 15 and 16 | slightly restricted beaker, painted | buff/orange ware, very fine | 5YR7/6 (orange) pigment 7.5YR3/1 (brownish black) | wheel-thrown | trimmed on lower body and base; fired in a pile |

Catalogue of grave 125 assemblage

The pottery of the grave, concerning the abundant number of bowls is made with fine ceramic pastes free from visible inclusions. The medium- and large sized bowls, at a preliminary visual inspection, seem to have been made with sequences of superimposed coils, fashioned and thinned at the potter's wheel, possibly, at least in some cases, formed with the aid of a flat spatula-like tool. Spatulas frequently left on the outer of the pots rhythmic series of fine, parallel marks. Given the fineness of the pastes, sometimes these marks may be confused with the chattering marks left by potters when they freehand trimmed the base and the lower walls of the vessels. The wide trimming of the base is a reasonably reliable indicator of the use of some kind of wheel.

Restricted beakers and small jars, and probably the smaller hemispherical and truncated cone-like bowls, were thrown directly on the potter's wheel in a single operation. The thicker and larger restricted jars were made with coarser pastes, formed with superimposed coils fashioned on the potter's wheel, than covered with a very fine slip or wash, and painted with dark pigments.

Most of the finer bowls are made in a fine grey ware, and fired in reducing conditions in piles that sometimes included specimens painted in different designs (e.g. fig. 13, 125/20). The control of the reducing atmosphere might have been partial (purposefully or not), because in the whole assemblage one sees a gradual transition from grey to light buff or even slightly reddish shadows.

Black-burnished ware pots are the coarsest ones, made with coils and heavily polished on the outer surfaces.

Comparisons and dating (see Pl. 23)

Ceramic comparisons with Shahr-i Sokhta, Tepe Yahya / Kerman and the Kech-Makran chronology allow us to date Spidej grave 125 around 3000 BC (between 3200 and 2800 BC).

Vessels 125/7, 8, 10 and 11 share the biconical profile, the firing in strongly reduced conditions and a careful polishing of the surface as pots found in the oldest graves and occupation layers of Shahr-i Sokhta and labelled "Black burnished ware". Many tombs, at Shahr-i Sokhta (Piperno & Salvatori 2007) have this type of vessel: Grave 116/6616 (p. 160),

128 inf./7102 and 7103 (p. 172), Grave 129/7110 (p. 173), Grave 135/7491 (p. 184), Grave 139/7530 (p. 189), Grave 708/7564 (p. 243), Grave 1102/8207 and 8208 (p. 349). In all these contexts, these jars are found with ceramics clearly ascribed to Period I (calibrated radiocarbon dated to 3100-2900 BC). In Grave 1002, a biconical black burnished jar is the sole furnishing (p. 341), and in another case (Grave 2/6398, p. 27) the same type appears together with ceramics datable to Period II, phase 5A, ca. 2600 BC⁴. These small biconical grey/black burnished jars were also found in Damin⁵ and Bampur 14 / Saidabad (see below).

The large lozenge-shaped bead of grey chalcedony, 125/54, is also common in the burials of Shahr-i Sokhta I. See, in Piperno & Salvatori 2007, Grave 710/7576 (p. 245); Grave 747/8509 (p. 315); Grave 748/8514 (p. 316); Grave 754/8555 (p. 325); Grave 750/8561 (where the bead type appears with a black-burnished biconical jar: p. 326-327).

In Kerman province, Tepe Yahya display few but significant similarities with a small subglobular jar, found in IVB.6 context but probably older ('intrusive black on buff ware'; Potts 2001: fig. 3.9, n° i and Mutin 2013: fig. 3.38, n° 1 / Yahya 0905, who includes this ceramic in his South-eastern Iranian Plateau / SEIP group) and which may be compared to our vessels 125/21, 22 and 40. Belonging also to these intrusive black on buff ware found in IVB.6 layers are two hemispherical bowl fragments (Potts 2001: fig. 3.7, n° f and g) displaying exactly the same decorative pattern under the rim as many bowls found in Spidej grave 125.

While the material found in grave 125 might present some general similarities with the 'local' / non Uruk-related painted assemblage found in Mahtoutabad III (Desset et al. 2013: 38-43), in a grave recently excavated by N. Eskandari in Varamin (6 km south-west of Konar Sandal South in Jiroft plain) and dated around the late 4th / early 3rd millennium BC (Eskandari, Hessari, Vidale & Desset, ongoing research), some bowls (vessels n° 31, 32 and 52) were identical to Spidej grave 125 hemispherical bowls with their outside painted decoration under the rim and their inside central decoration.

⁴ On the Black burnished ware found in Shahr-i Sokhta, see also Sajjadi 2003: fig. 24 and 29. On this type of ceramic in south-eastern Iran and its hypothetical relation with north-eastern Iran, see Mutin 2013: 114.

⁵ Tosi 1970: 22 and fig. 9a-d, 41 and 42: pots 16, 17, 18 and 19.

Some general features are also shared between Spidej grave 125 and Makran period IIIa, phase 2 ceramics, in the late 4th millennium BC, such as the fine black painted grey ware hemispherical bowls (Didier & Mutin 2013: fig. 4, n° 6 and 7; to be compared with our 125/49 notably).

In Khurab, Katukan and Damin, Stein excavated some graves showing some similarities⁶ with Spidej grave 125 assemblage, while the low beakers or goblets 125/1, 4, 9, 12, 23, 28, 32, 33, 38, 46 and 59 are almost identical, for form and decoration, to a type of small vessel found during illegal excavations in graveyards of central Baluchistan, dated to ca. 3100-2800/2700 BC⁷.

The best comparison for Spidej grave 125 is nevertheless to be found in the graveyard of Bampur 14 / Saidabad (Rahbar 1382/2003 and 1396/2017), located some 7,6 km west / south-west of Bampur archaeological compound and some 67 km south-east of Spidej (27° 9'45.71"N / 60°23'5.03"E). 15 graves were excavated here in 2003, some of them were just simple pits while some displayed circular or square/rectangular built mud bricks or chineh walls.

In several graves, more than 100 artefacts could be found far outnumbering the 59 artefacts found in Spidej grave 125. The funerary furniture included copper alloy artefacts such as knives (*khenjar*), vessels or mirrors, stone beads, marble vessels and one stone column. Ceramic vessels were mainly red and grey fine ware with black painted decoration. As in Spidej and on some vessels found in Makran, on some vessels could be observed the negative patterns impressed during the firing, due to the stacking of the ceramics (Rahbar 1396/2017: 64).

Rahbar (Rahbar 1396/2017: 65), while mentioning the ceramic comparisons between Bampur 14 and Shahr-i Sokhta II/III, stated that the best match was to be found with Spidej and that the Bampur 14 graveyard could be dated from 3000 BC to 2300 BC, which is more or less our estimation for Spidej graveyard A (see above).

⁶ Stein 1937: pl. XV, Dmn.01 (Damin), pl. XVII, n° A.117 (Khurab), pl. XXXII, n° 8 (Katukan) and 10 (Khurab).

⁷ See Franke & Cortesi 2015: Cat. 448. The same pattern is also recorded in a similar and contemporaneous small container, but with a sub-cylindrical body: *ibid.*: 204, Cat. 386.

Consequently, since Spidej grave 125 assemblage

- does not display the well-known tronconical footed beakers characteristics of the early/middle 4th millennium BC assemblages in South-Eastern Iran and Baluchistan;
- does not display the well-known ceramic shapes attested in the 2nd half of the 3rd millennium BC usually decorated with vegetal/animal painted patterns (which explains the lack of comparisons with Bampur and Shahdad⁸) such as the canister jars, pear shaped beakers, scorpion bowls, footed cups and globular pots with tubular spout;
- may be related to Shahr-i Sokhta I, Tepe Yahya IVC (and Varamin grave) and Kech-Makran IIIa (phase 2);

all in all, Spidej grave 125, may be confidently attributed to the late 4th / early 3rd millennium BC (3200-2800 BC), around 3000 BC. With the still partially and Persian published Bampur 14 / Saidabad graveyard, this grave and its assemblage are currently our best and most secure documentation for this period in Iranian Baluchistan.

Grave architecture, spatial setting of the objects and rituals of deposition (see Pl. 3 and 24)

The grave's chamber is subrectangular, with a north-west to south-east orientation. The north-western part is void of artefacts, while in the opposed part the objects are densely packed and often superimposed in piles. Due to the contingencies of the dig, the exact location of the vertical access shaft and the entrance to the chamber could not be located, but possibly the access was on the north-western side of the excavated cavity. In fact, it might seem more likely that restricted pots 18, 19, 48 and the largest container, necked jar 47, were deposited first in the rear of the grave chamber, particularly if they contained liquids.

The spatial setting of the 59 artefacts recorded in the grave seems to have followed certain depositional rules (Pl. 24) during the funerary ceremony. In catacomb graves of southern and south-eastern Iran, for example at Shahr-i Sokhta (Piperno & Salvatori 2007), bronze artefacts, cosmetic holders and other valuable items are often placed near the head of the dead who was usually deposited facing the entrance, thus it is possible that the body was placed in the gap visible between the main cluster, the cranium

⁸ See de Cardi 1970 and Hakemi 1997.

resting near the knife 55 and the beads 54 and 55. But this, like for the access, remains a conjecture.

If our hypothesis about the entrance of the chamber and the body location are correct (Pl. 24), then the introduction of the furniture in the grave probably started with a line in the southern part of the grave formed by two couples of larger restricted or painted pots (in red; from west, necked jars 47, the largest vessel of the grave, and 48; then necked jar 19 and pot 18). These vessels are accompanied by three hemispherical bowls (20, 49 and 50; in yellow) and by two more painted beakers, 58 and 59 (in blue).

The metallic and stone artefacts (in grey) were then probably placed near vessel 18, possibly before the deposition of the body.

After the body was introduced in the grave, a new depositional pattern started with several piles of grey-to-buff painted bowls (in green and yellow) placed one inside the other and associated to small bowls (in yellow) and painted beakers (in blue). Along the north-western wall of the chamber, a pile is formed by bowls 13, 5 and 4; a line of four black burnished jars (7, 8, 10 and 11, in dark grey) separates these pots from another group including respectively bowls 15 and 14 and 17 and 16, that might have belonged or not to a single pile. Both groups / piles (13, 5 and 4 vs. 15, 14, 17 and 16) are accompanied by a couple of the slightly restricted painted beakers (in blue) that are the most common ceramic type in the assemblage. The first group also includes a cone-like restricted jar with carinated shoulder (3, in red).

A second large pile is formed by bowls 27, 26 and 25. On top of these were placed the restricted beakers or small subglobular jars 21, 22, 23 plus a small hemispherical bowl, 24 (in yellow). The small bowls 29 and 30 (in yellow) and a larger restricted beaker, 28, were deposited west of this pile. The impression is that painted beakers (in blue) accompanied bowls (in green and yellow) after a complementary role in the rituals of deposition.

This impression is supported by the last pile, where after the first and large bowl 39 was offered, beaker 38 and then bowl 31 were deposited, followed by beakers 32 and 33 and bowl 35, on which were laid beakers and bowls 37 and 36. The position of these latter beakers might have been unstable, and perhaps we have to hypothesize that between these latter and bowl 31 there was some decayed organic material. The pile was finally

topped by bowl 34. Bowls and beakers, therefore, seem to have been deposited in couples, or in alternate sequences. At the western end of the chamber, the piled bowls 44, 42 and 43, accompanied by beakers 40 and 46 and by the small hemispherical bowls 41 and 45 seems to re-propose the same pattern.

On the whole, three copper alloy axes and a knife, plus the abundant pottery, witness a costly funeral, perhaps performed by a substantial congress. If the two couples of larger restricted or painted pots (18, 19, 47 and 48) and the metallic and stone artefacts probably deposited before the dead may have played a specific (ritual ?) role during the funerary procedure, perhaps as the private property of the dead or as a display of his/her wealth, the four piles of vessels subsequently placed were probably the remains of his/her relations with the living. They might have represented separate or parallel events, perhaps individuals organized in four groups (families ?) repeatedly placing in the grave the same coupled vessels (simplifying the matter, bowls plus beakers; food offerings / share of a funerary banquet ?), accompanied by peripheral small hemispherical bowls. In this second stage, the single and well delimited row of 4 biconical black-burnished jars (7/8/10/11) is probably far from casual and probably played a specific role. Future excavations should try to determine what their content might have been.

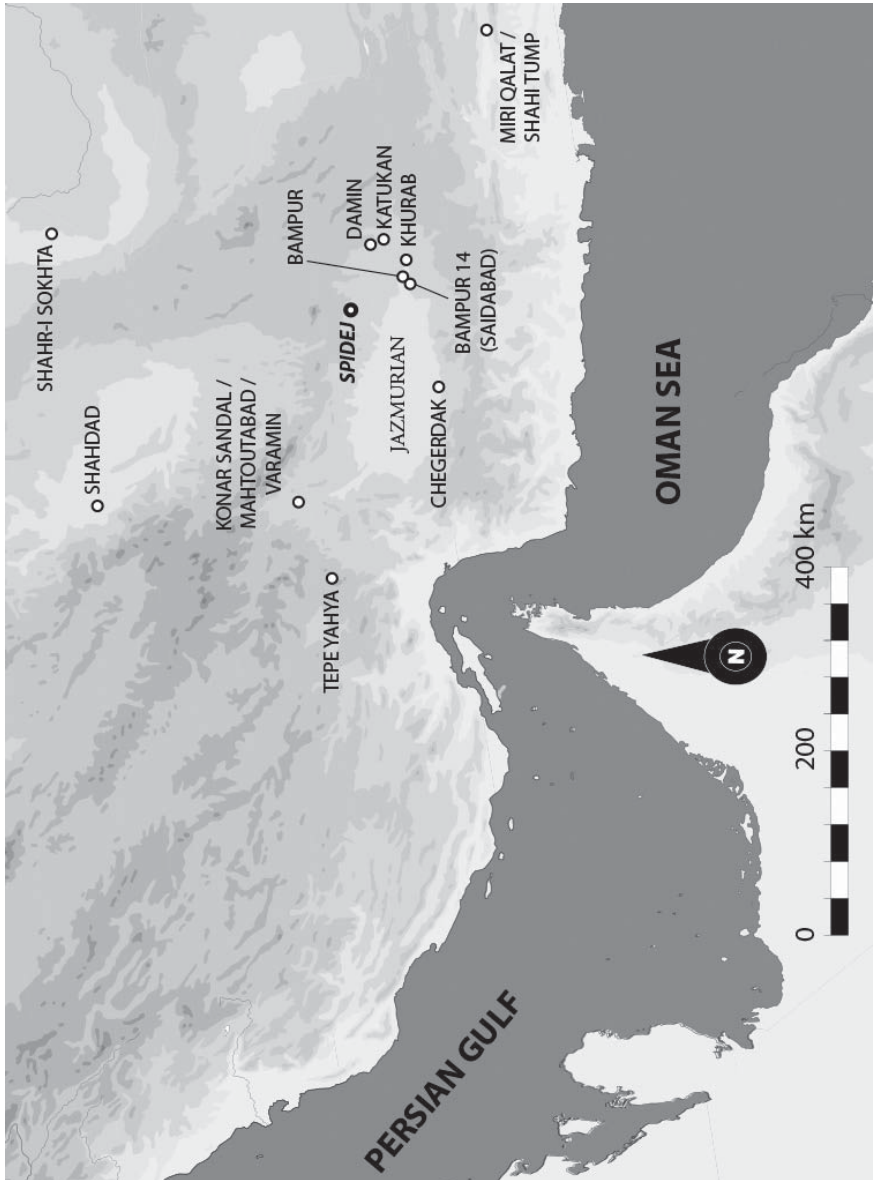
Conclusion

Grave 125 in Spidej graveyard A shed light on a poorly documented period in Iranian Baluchistan, around 3000 BC, with a coherent corpus of 59 artefacts variously related to Kerman, Sistan, Iranian Baluchistan and Pakistani Makran.

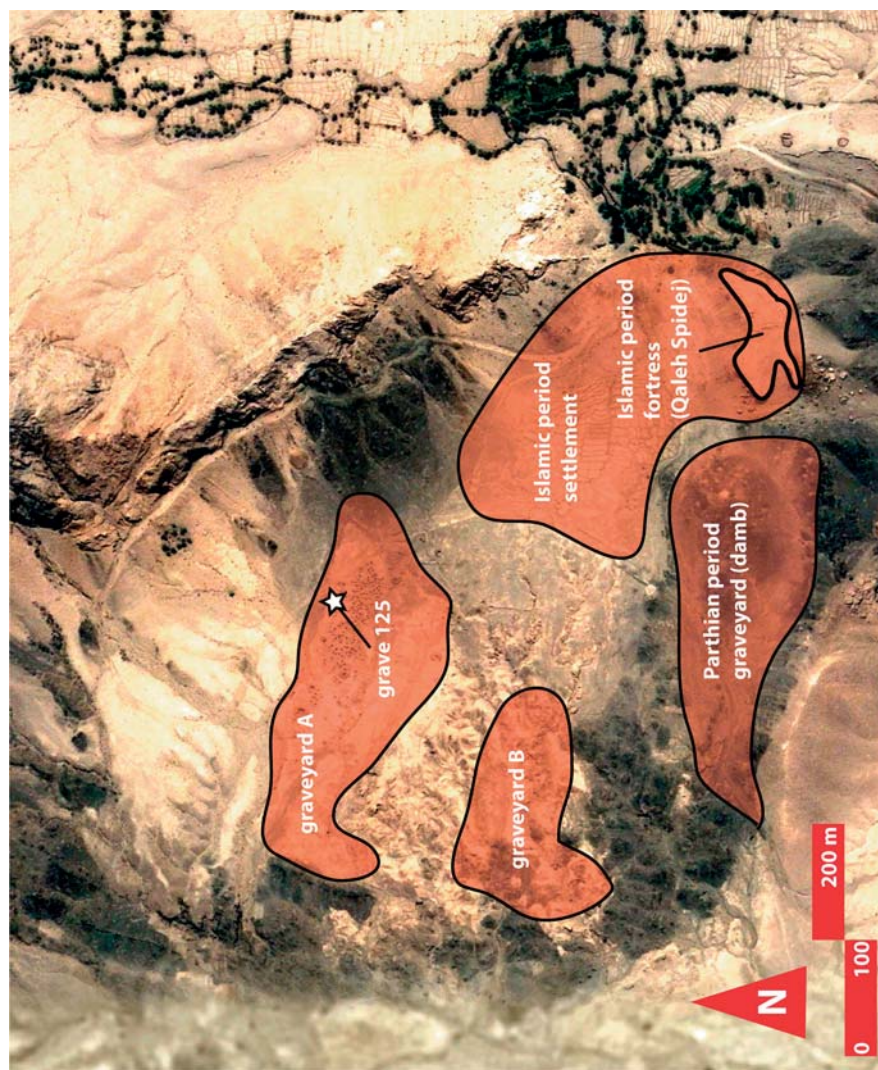
As the analysis of the depositional sequence of the furnishing may lead to hypotheses about its function, it should be stressed here that, facing the persistent lack of enough well controlled excavations and well stratified archaeological material, excavations and publications of graves (*ensembles clos*) well furnished with complete ceramic vessels, documented as far as possible by ¹⁴C dating, seem a rather efficient and low-cost strategy to progress in the basic ceramic typo-chronology of an area. This is a path we will follow in further publications.

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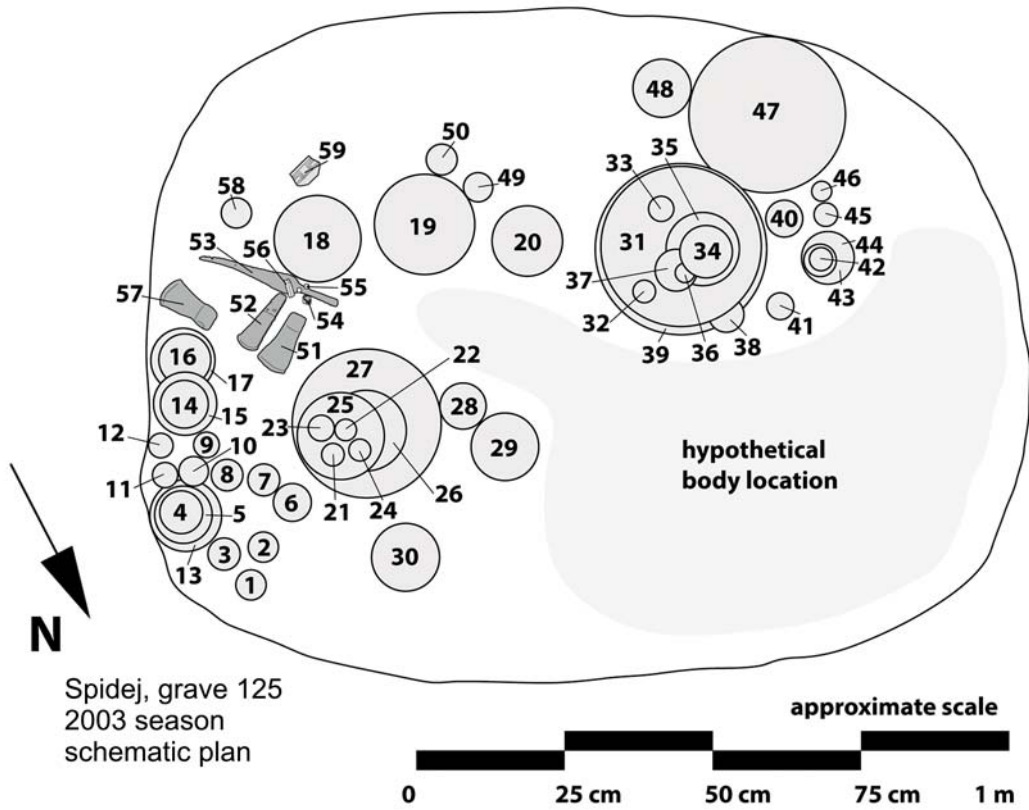
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Pl. 1. General map of the sites mentioned in the text.



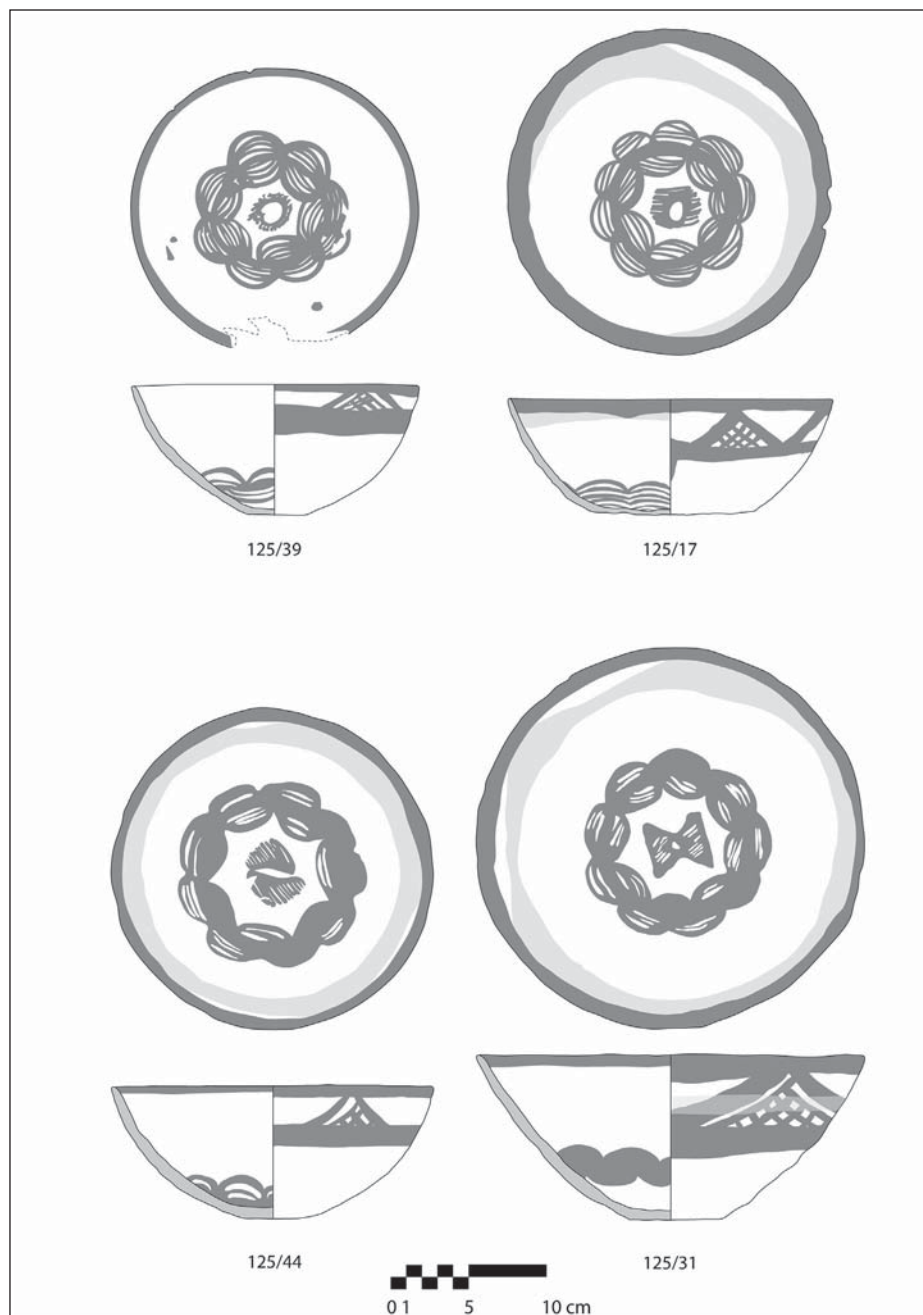
Pl. 2. Plan of the Spidej basin and its various occupations observed in the field.



Pl. 3. Schematic plan of grave 125.



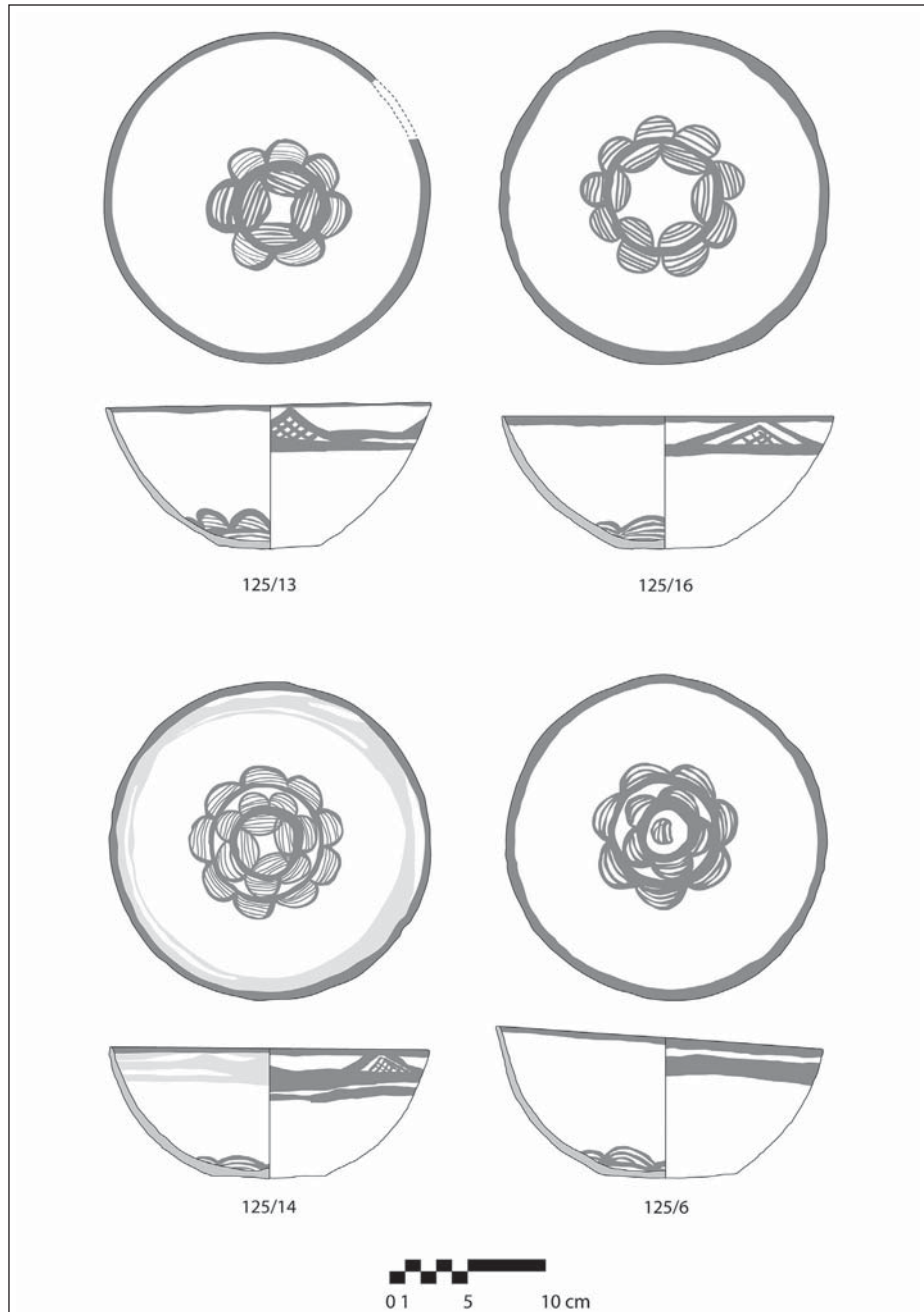
Pl. 4. Picture of the excavation of grave 125.



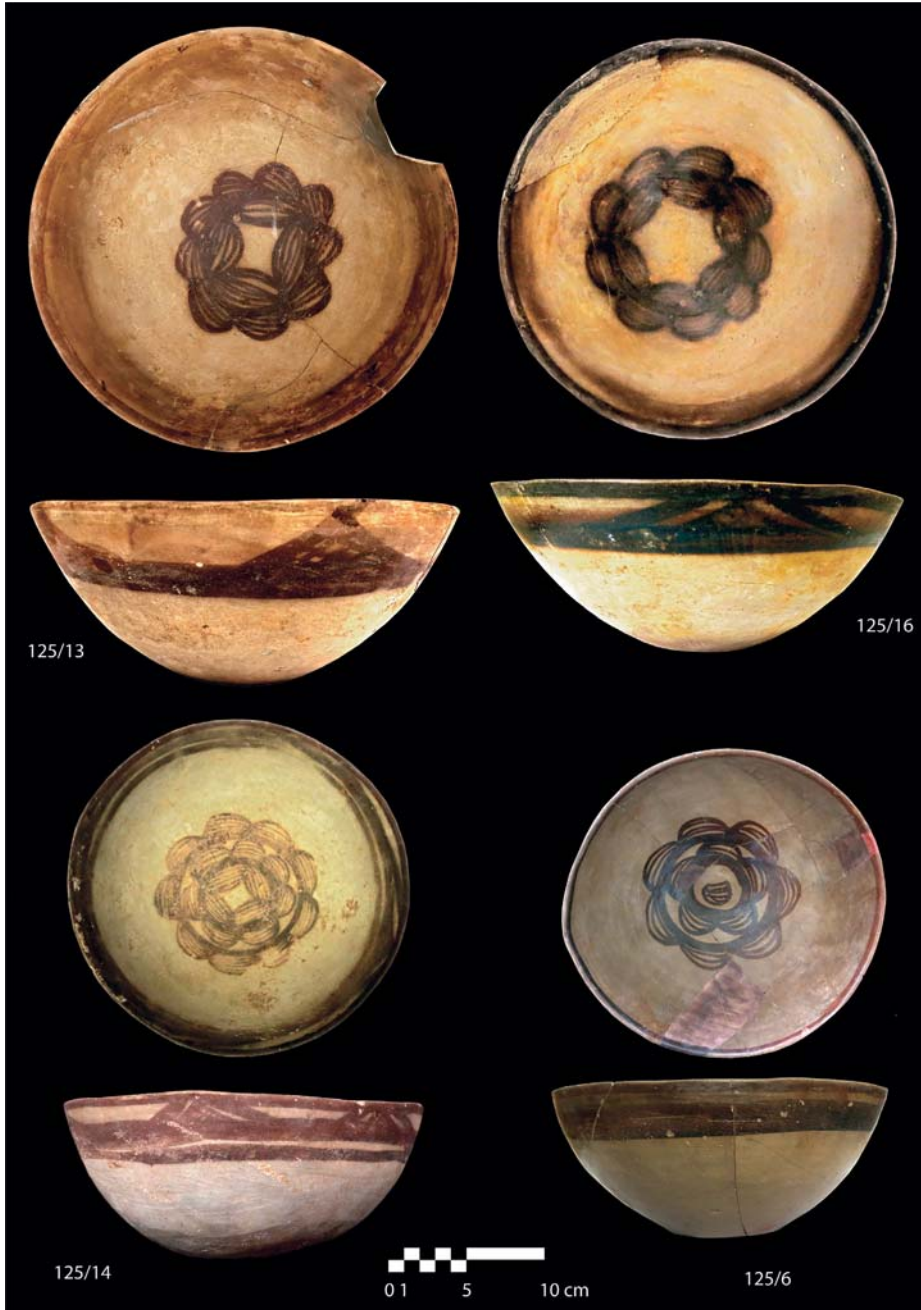
Pl. 5. Drawings of hemispherical bowls (part 1).



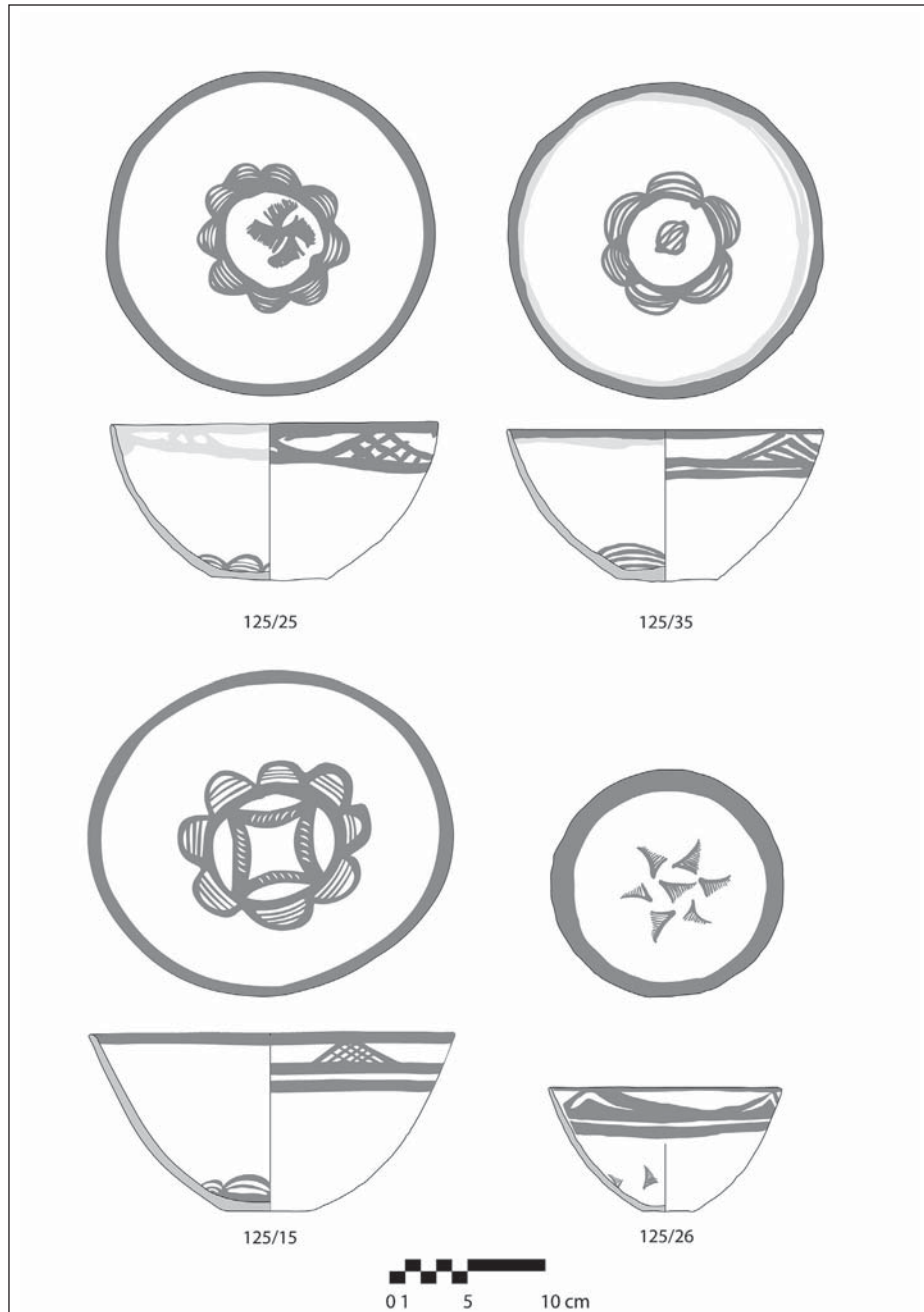
Pl. 6. Pictures of hemispherical bowls (part 1).



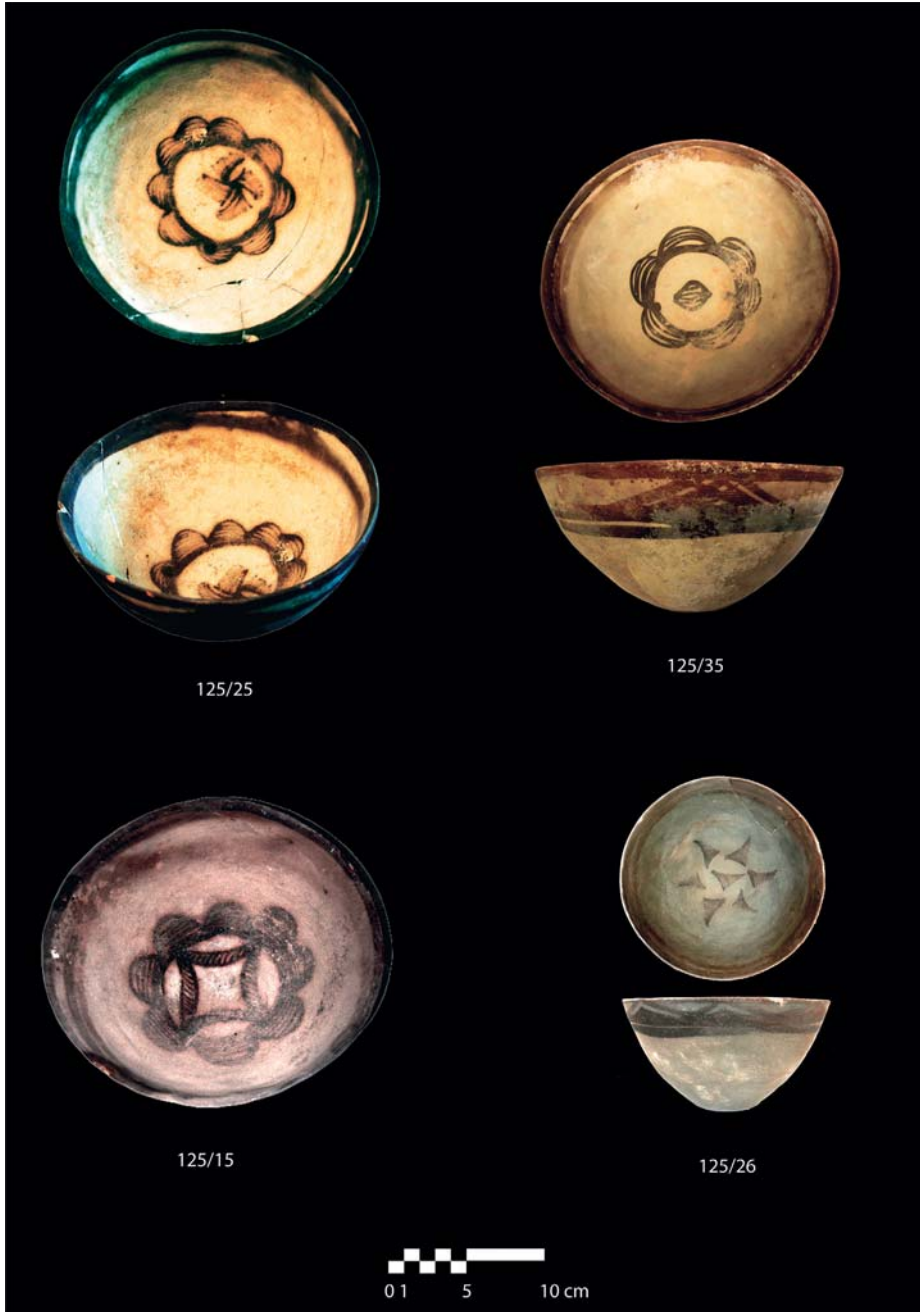
Pl. 7. Drawings of hemispherical bowls (part 2).



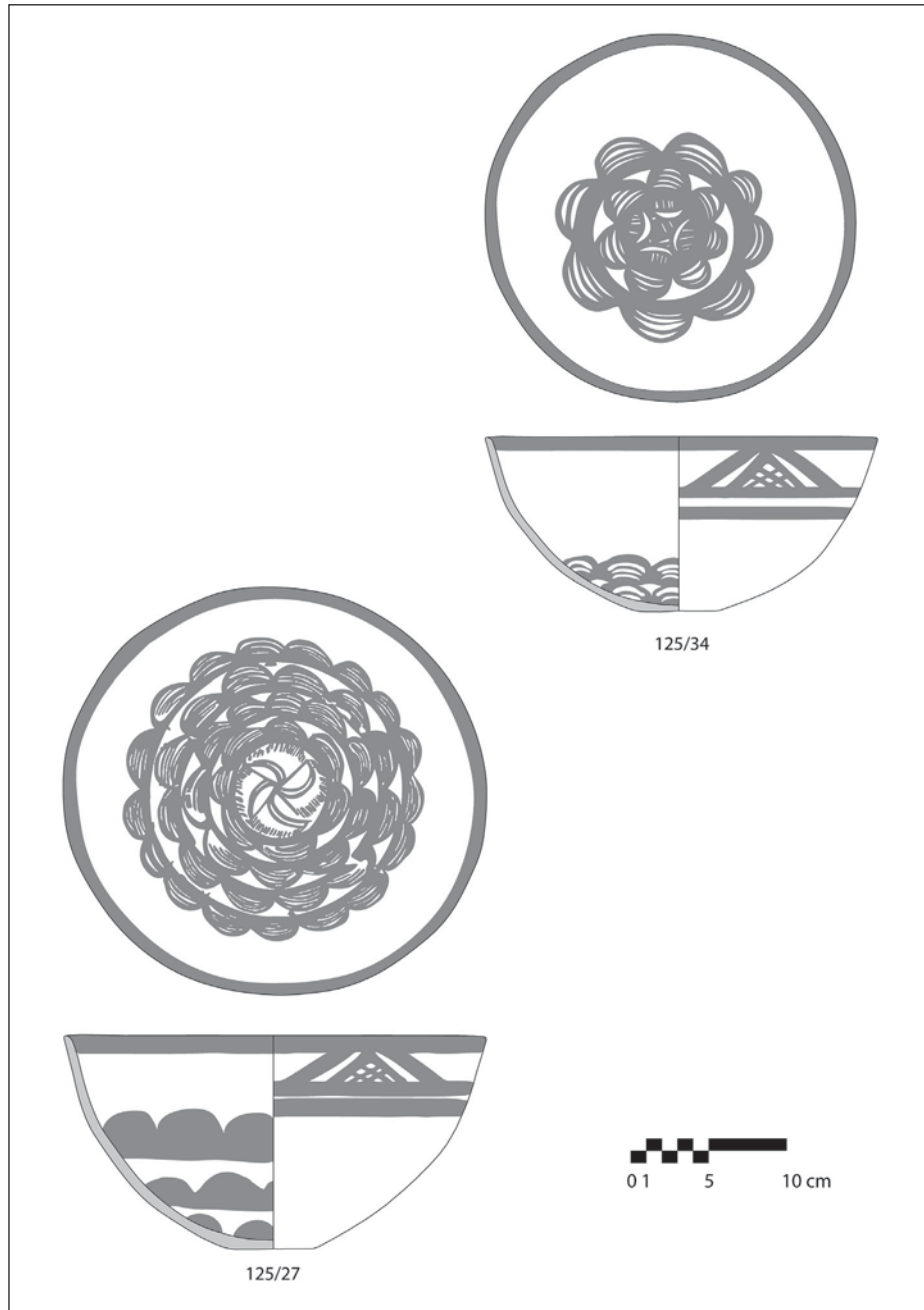
Pl. 8. Pictures of hemispherical bowls (part 2).



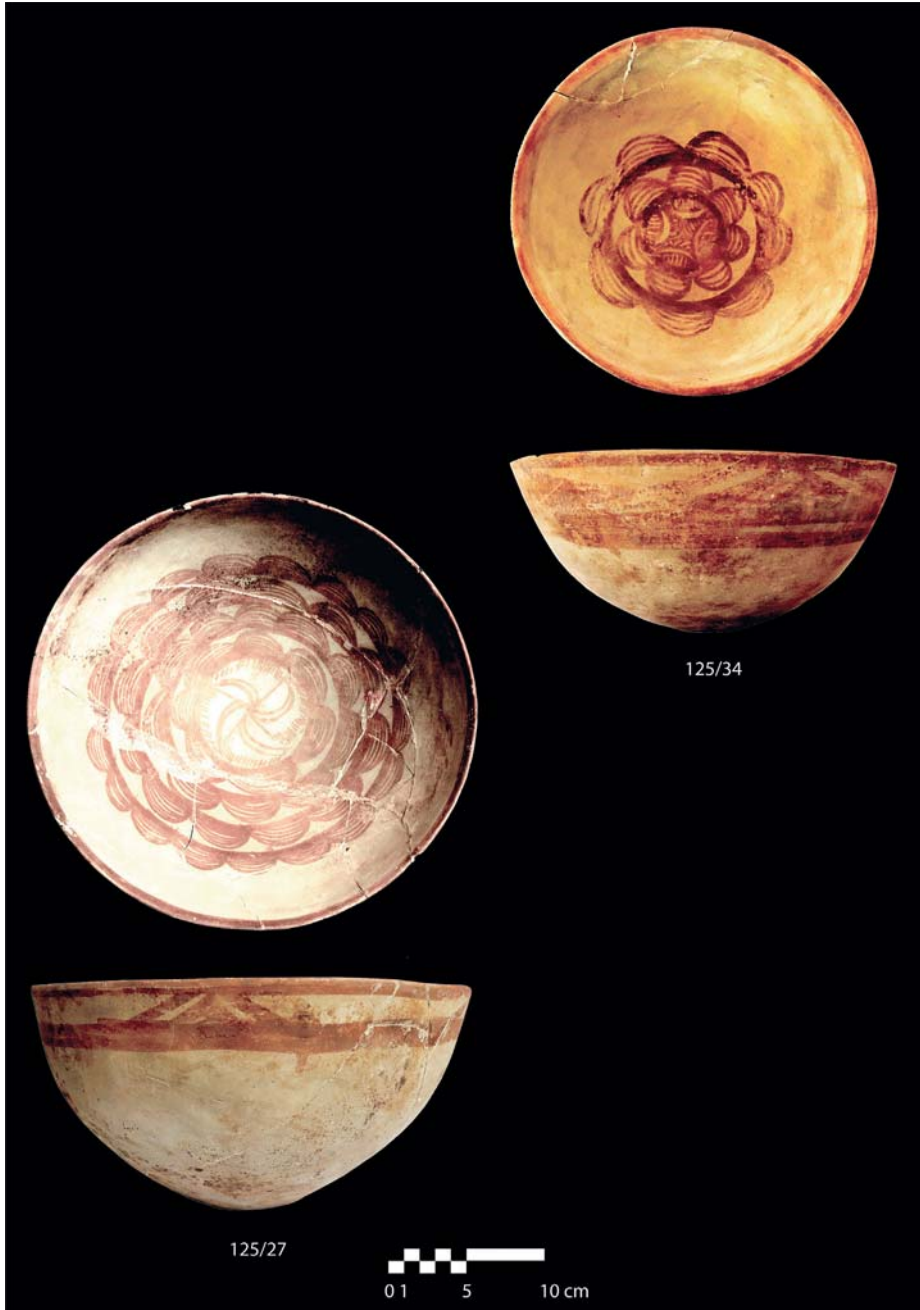
Pl. 9. Drawings of hemispherical bowls (part 3).



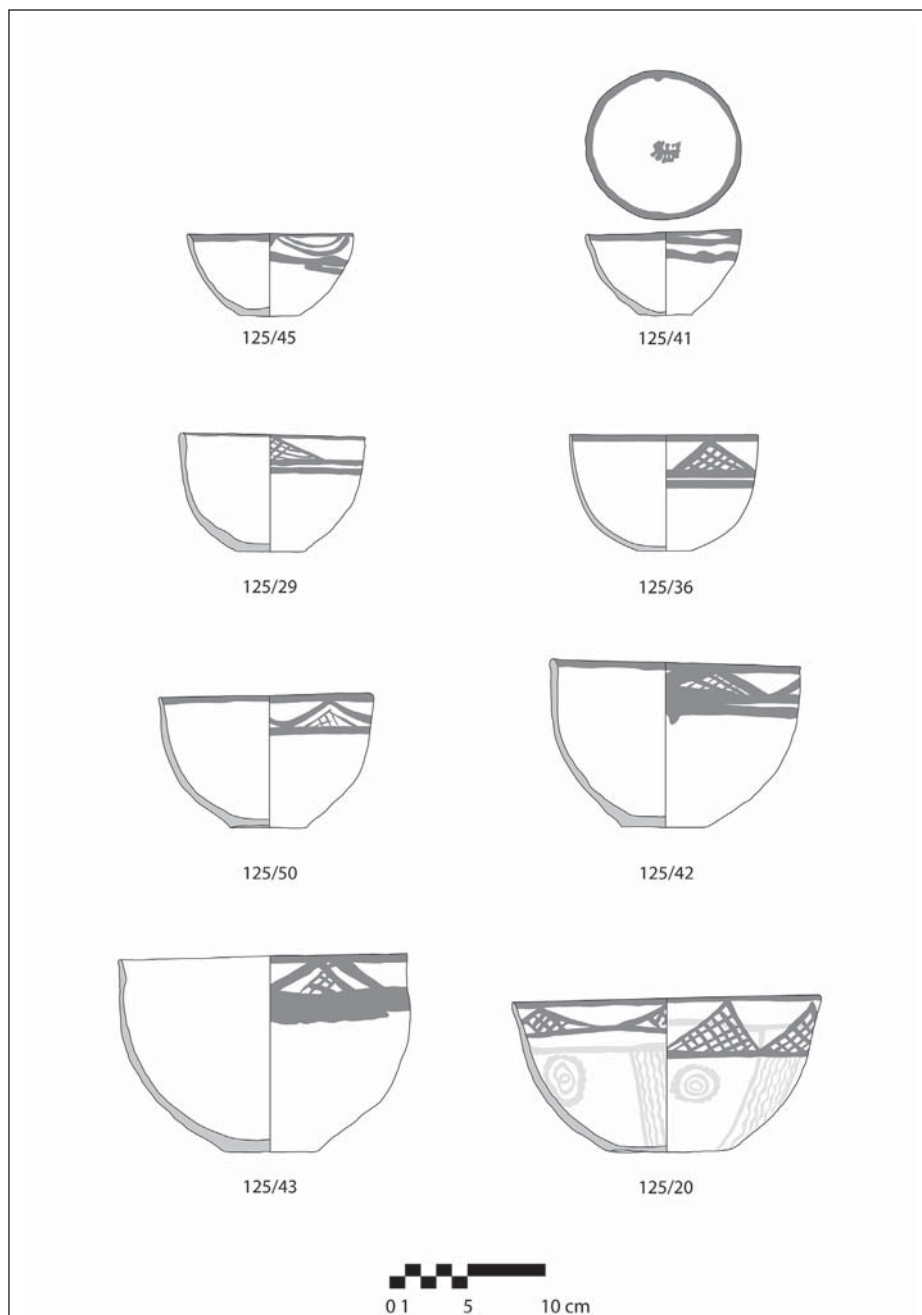
Pl. 10. Pictures of hemispherical bowls (part 3).



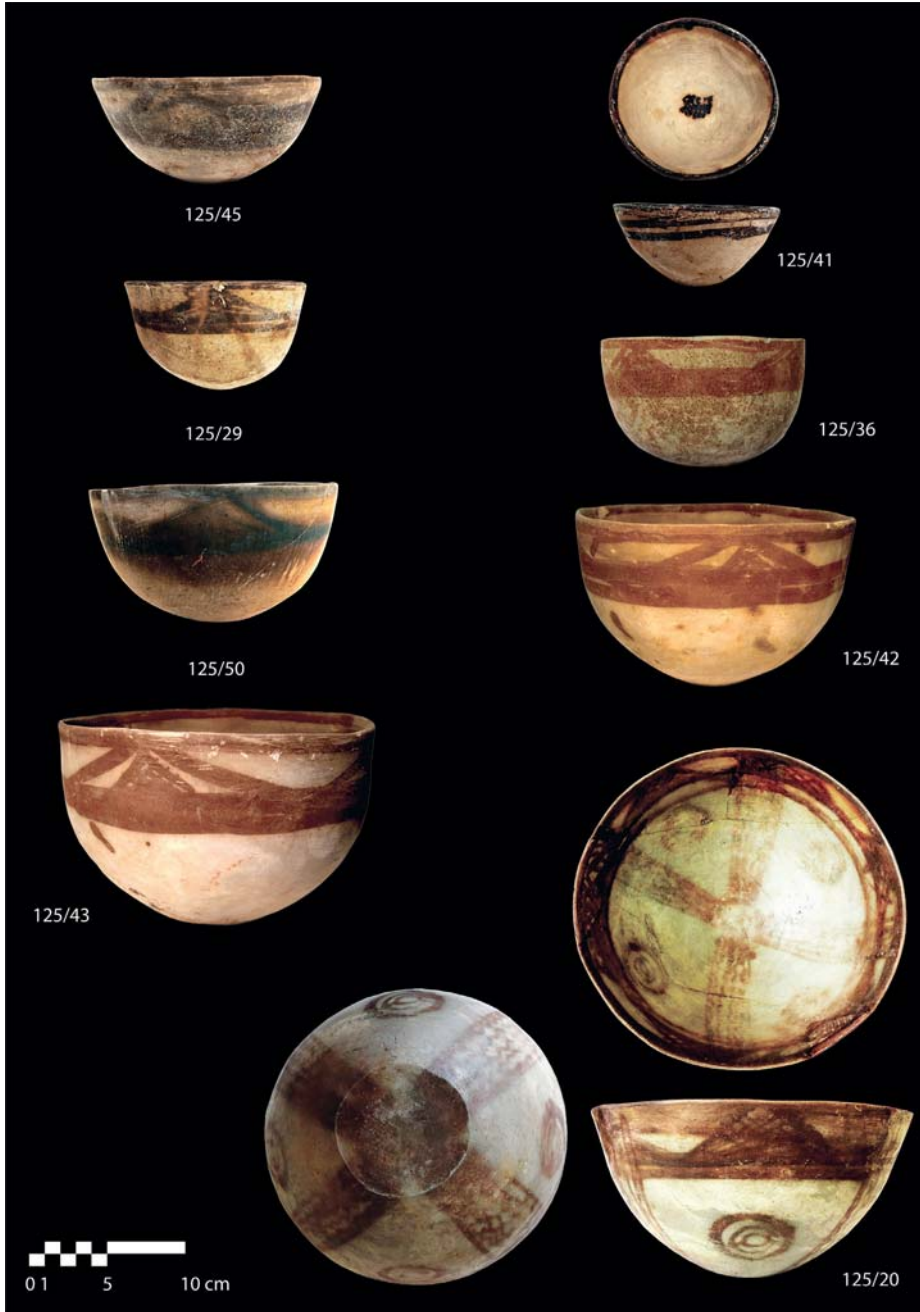
Pl. 11. Drawings of hemispherical bowls (part 4).



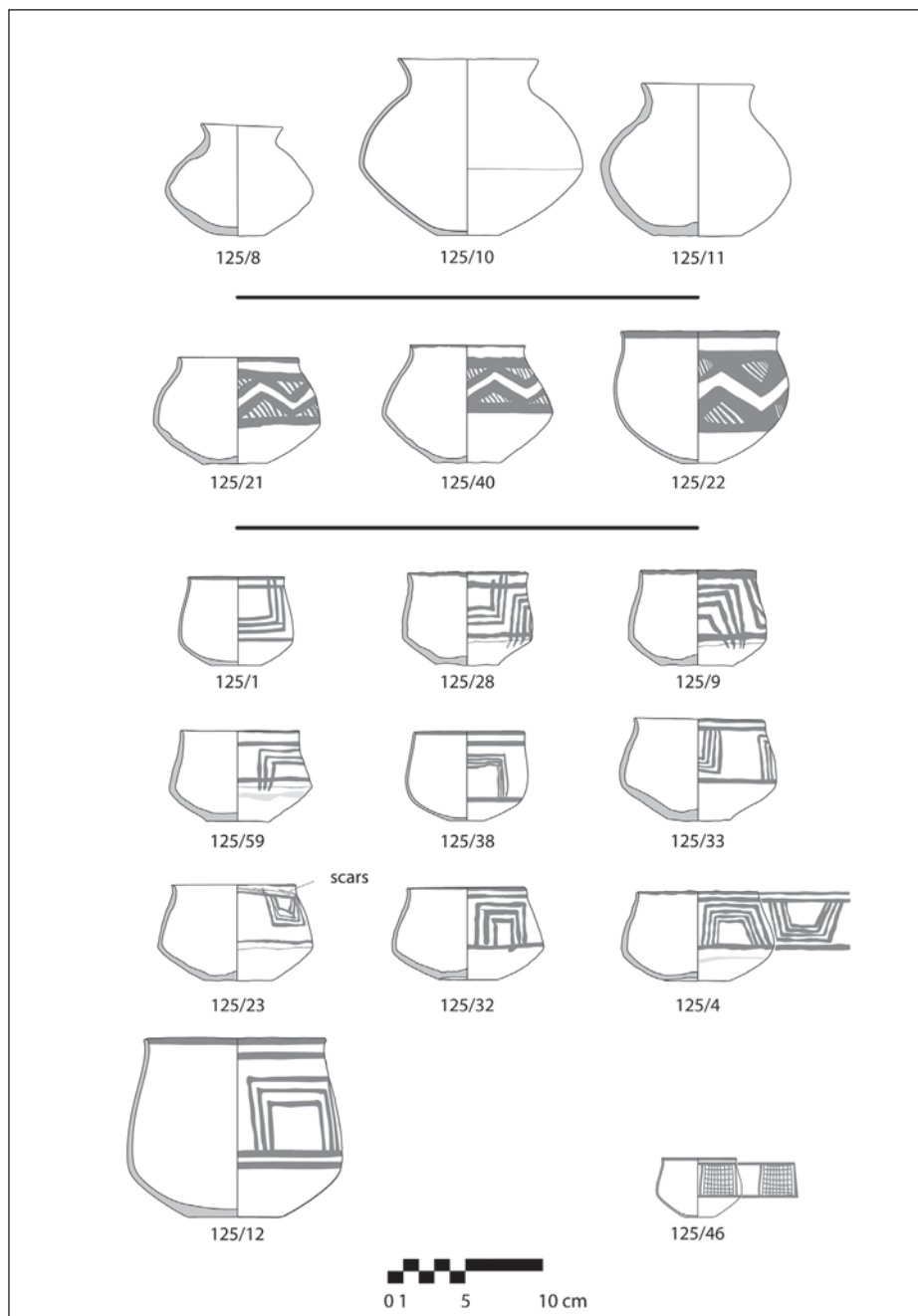
Pl. 12. Pictures of hemispherical bowls (part 4).



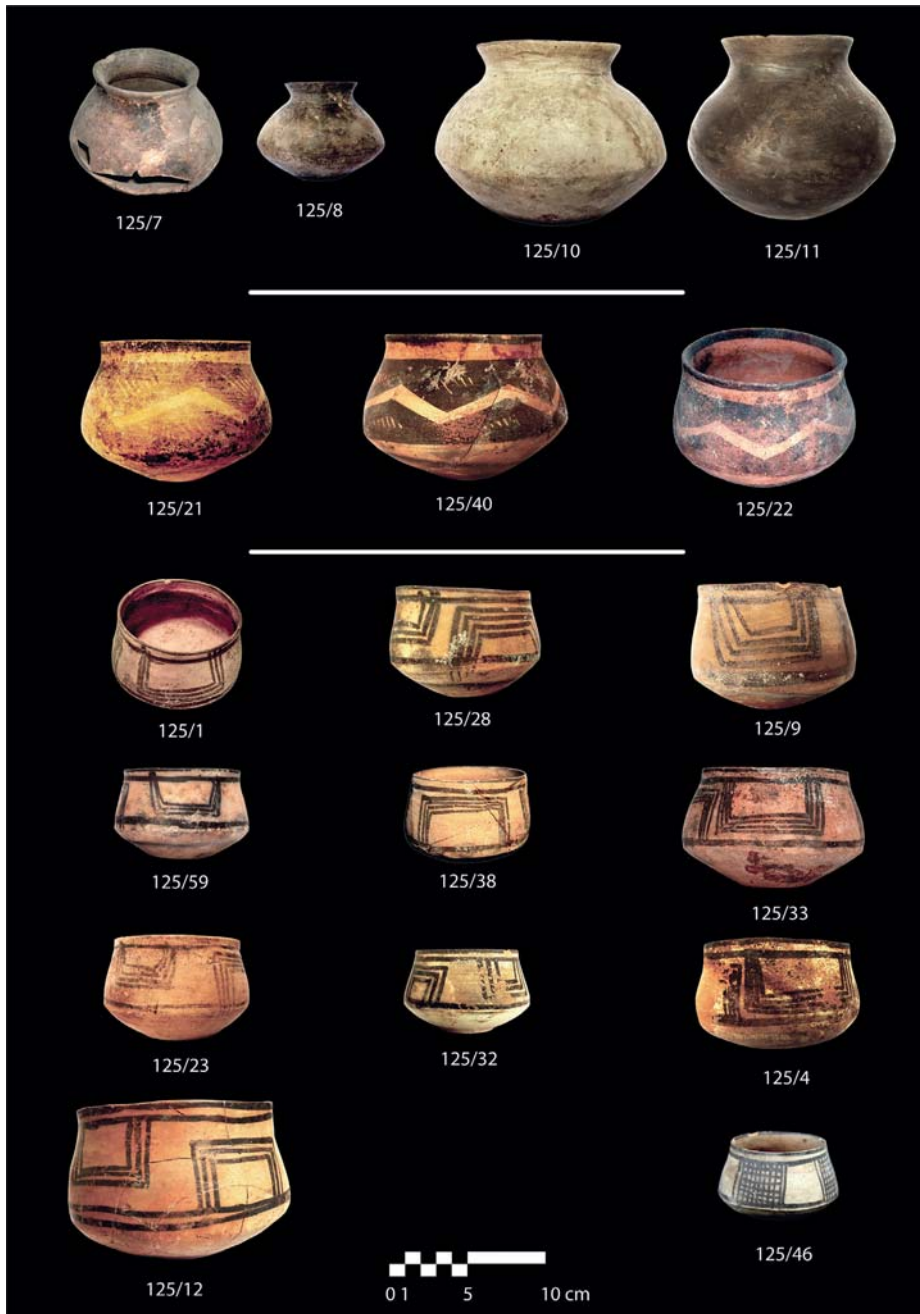
Pl. 13. Drawings of small and low hemispherical bowls.



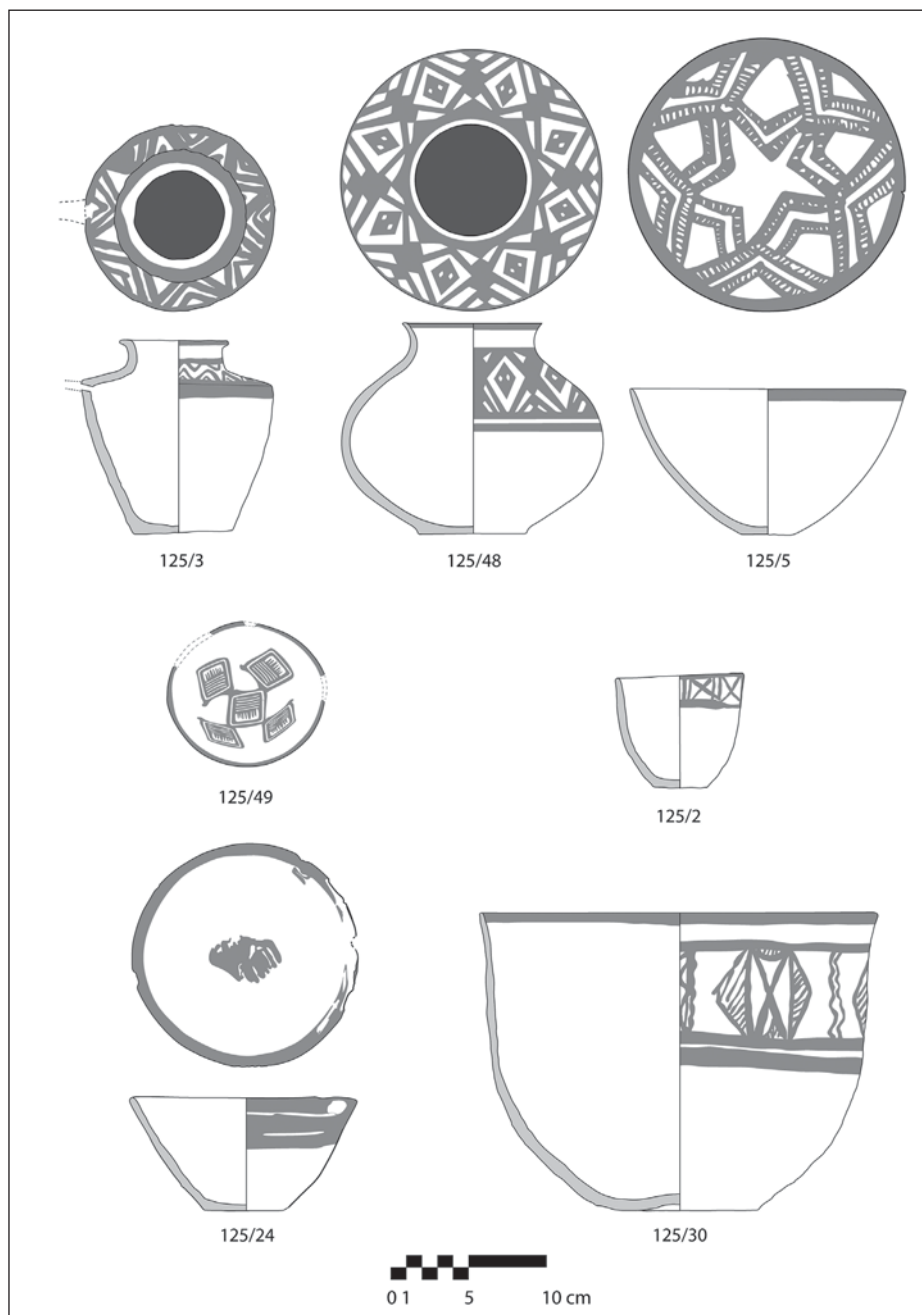
Pl. 14. Pictures of small and low hemispherical bowls.



Pl. 15. Drawings of small biconical greyware jars, small subglobular jars with hatched painted decoration and slightly restricted beakers with rectilinear painted decoration.



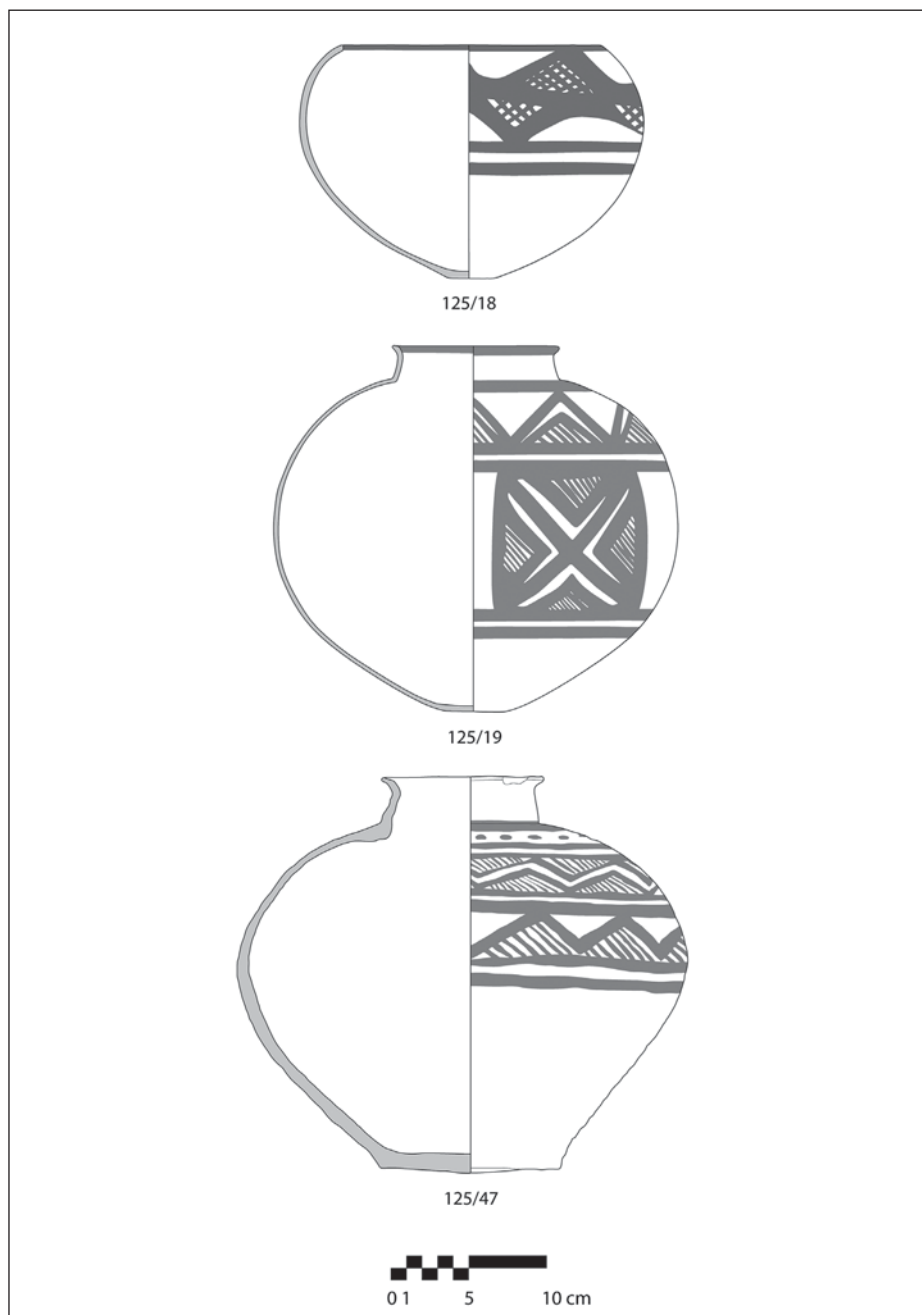
Pl. 16. Pictures of small biconical greyware jars, small subglobular jars with hatched painted decoration and slightly restricted beakers with rectilinear painted decoration.



Pl. 17. Drawings of various vessels (part 1).



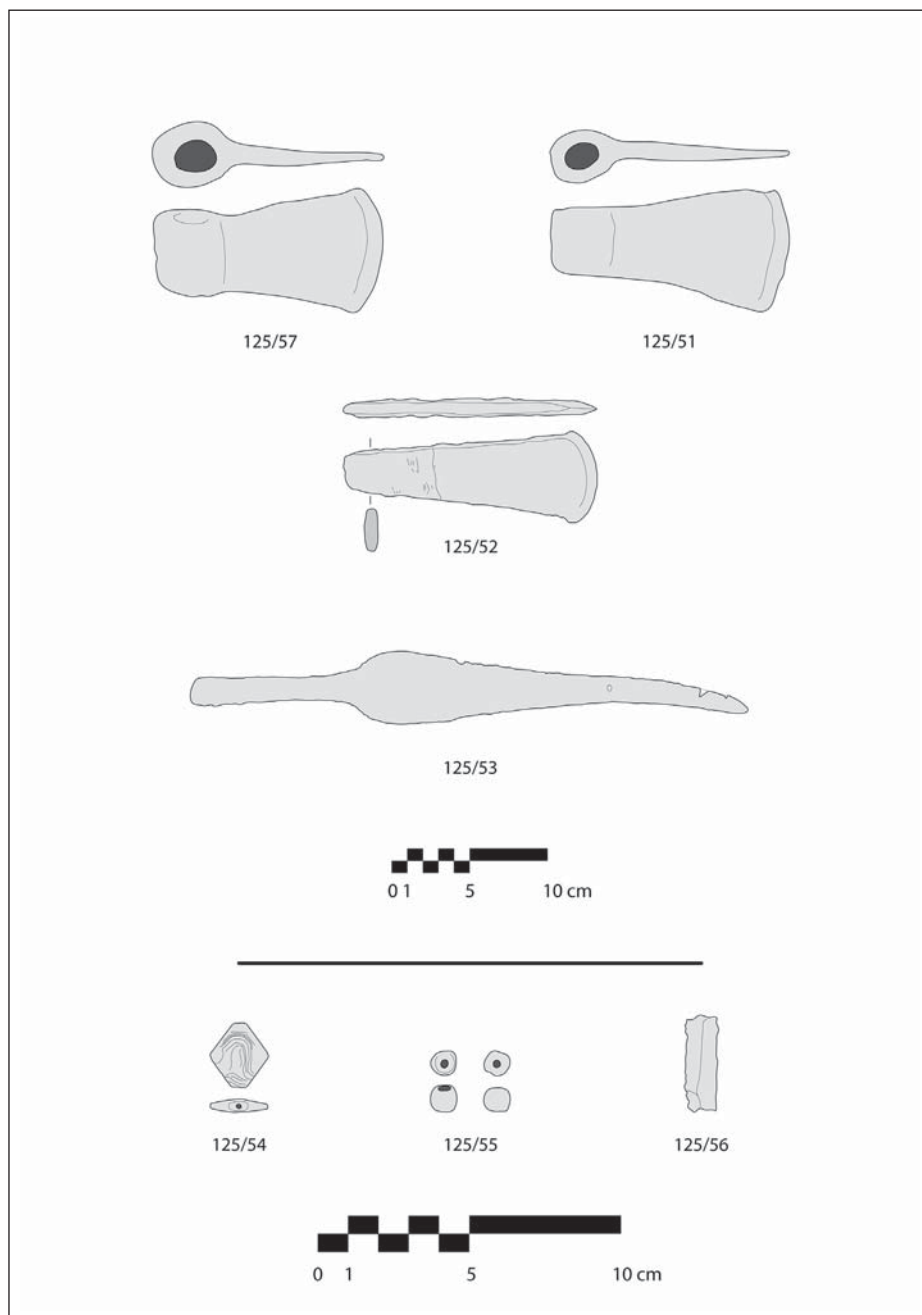
Pl. 18. Pictures of various vessels (part 1).



Pl. 19. Drawings of various vessels (part 2).



Pl. 20. Pictures of various vessels (part 2).

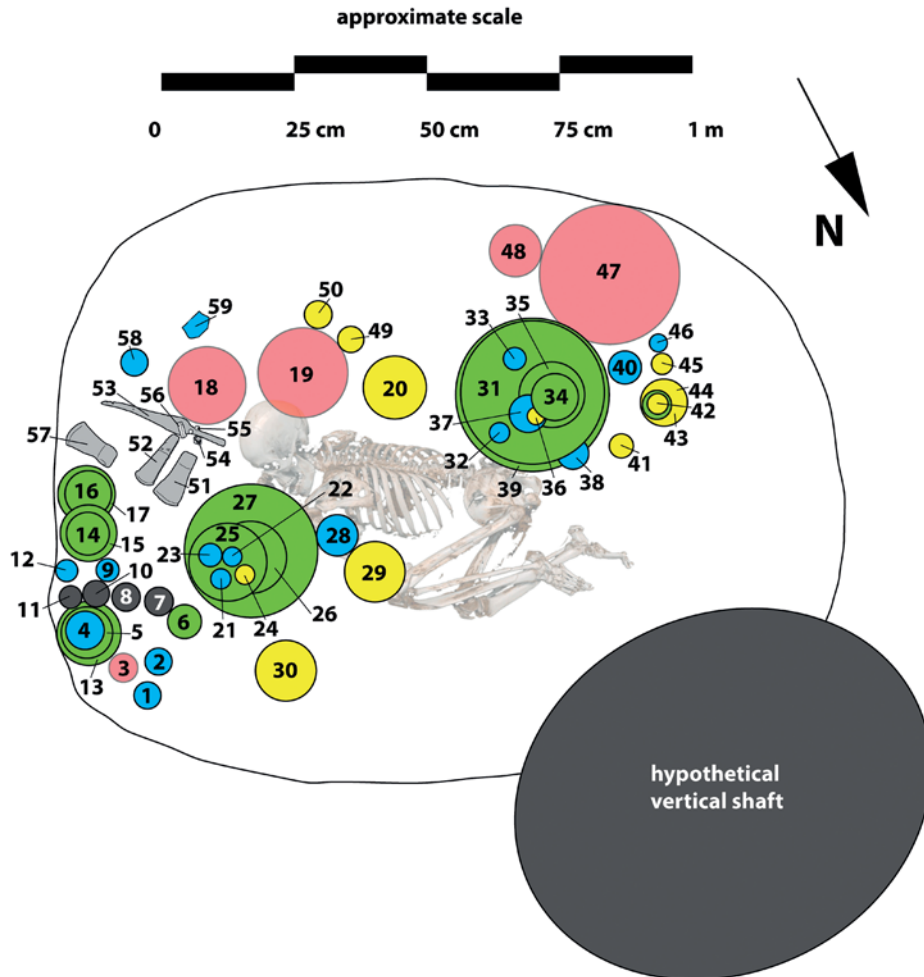


Pl. 21. Drawings of the metallic and stone artefacts.



Pl. 22. Pictures of the metallic and stone artefacts.

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Pl. 24. Spatial analysis of the location of the funerary furnishing in grave 125.