

# Social differentiation in Neolithic Communities in the Middle Nile Region

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## Abstract

Through recent archaeological fieldwork a better understanding of the past human life during Neolithic could be established in the Middle Nile Region (from the First Cataract to the Sixth Cataract where the White and Blue Nile connected). Based on the excavation and archaeological research, especially in Neolithic cemeteries (e.g. R12, Kadruka, Al-Ghaba, Kadada and Kadero) and the study of the funeral goods in burials, some social and economic aspects in addition to the funeral practices of the Neolithic communities in the Middle Nile Region in Sudan and Egypt could be noted.

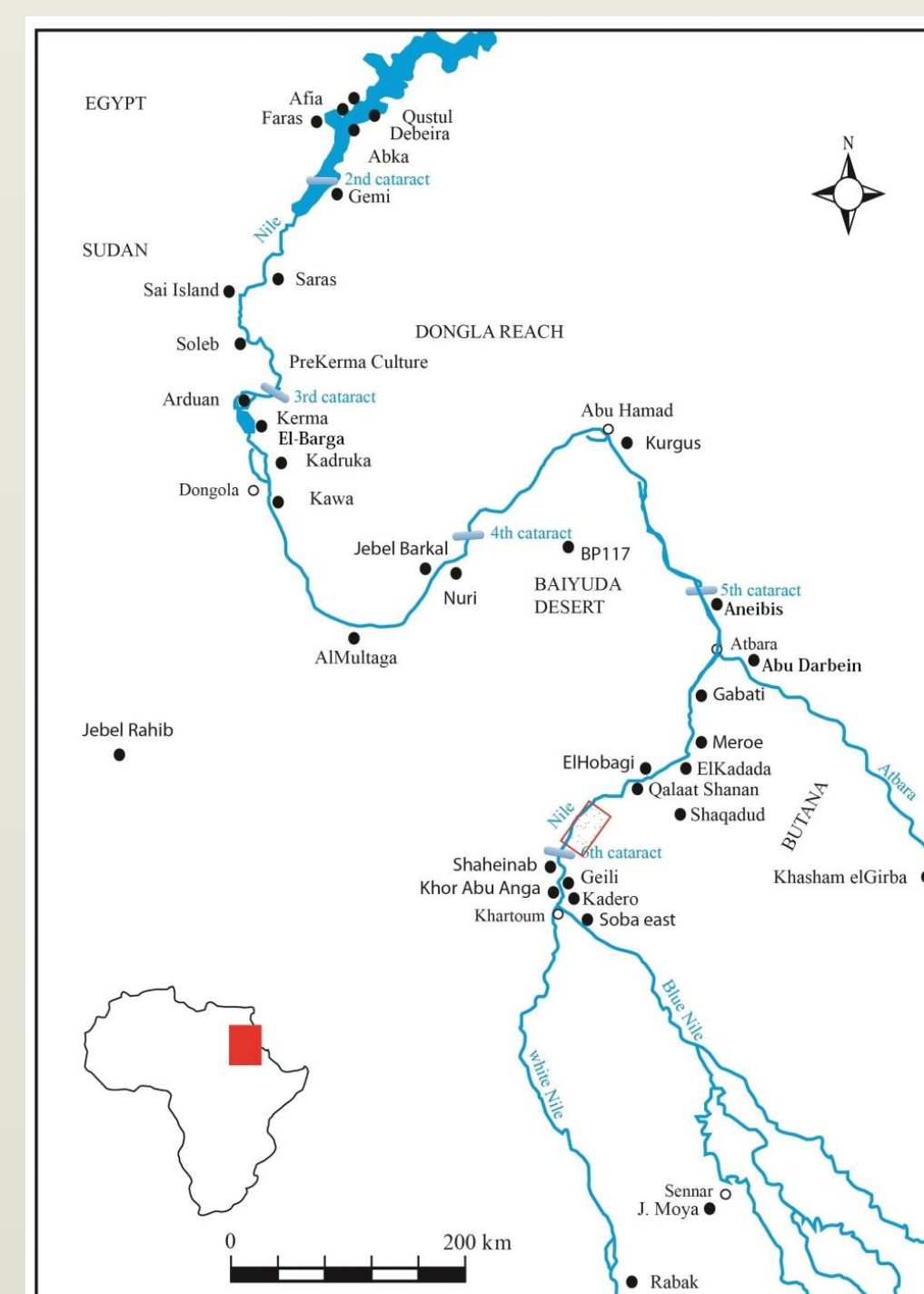
This paper is an attempt to highlight the social differentiation in Neolithic communities in the Middle Nile Region based on the analyze funeral goods (quantity, quality, and materials). Also, to highlight the possible contact between these communities and others.

## Introduction

### Middle Nile Region:

As for the Time and Space of the Study: Middle Nile Region term refers to the area from the First Nile Cataract and the surrounding area to the Sixth Cataract where the White and Blue Nile are connected. As you can see on the map, this means that there are three cultural entities: Lower Nubia, Upper Nubia and Central Sudan. As it is shown in the time table, there is slight differentiation in the time frame between the three areas. The earliest phase is Early Neolithic in Upper Nubia (about 6000 – 5500 BC) represented by El- Barga while the later phase is Late Neolithic (about 3500 BC) represented by El- Kadada and Es- Sour sites in Central Sudan.

### Time & Space:



Source: Usai, D. (2016). A Picture of Prehistoric Sudan. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935413.013.56>

## Methodology- Data Analysis

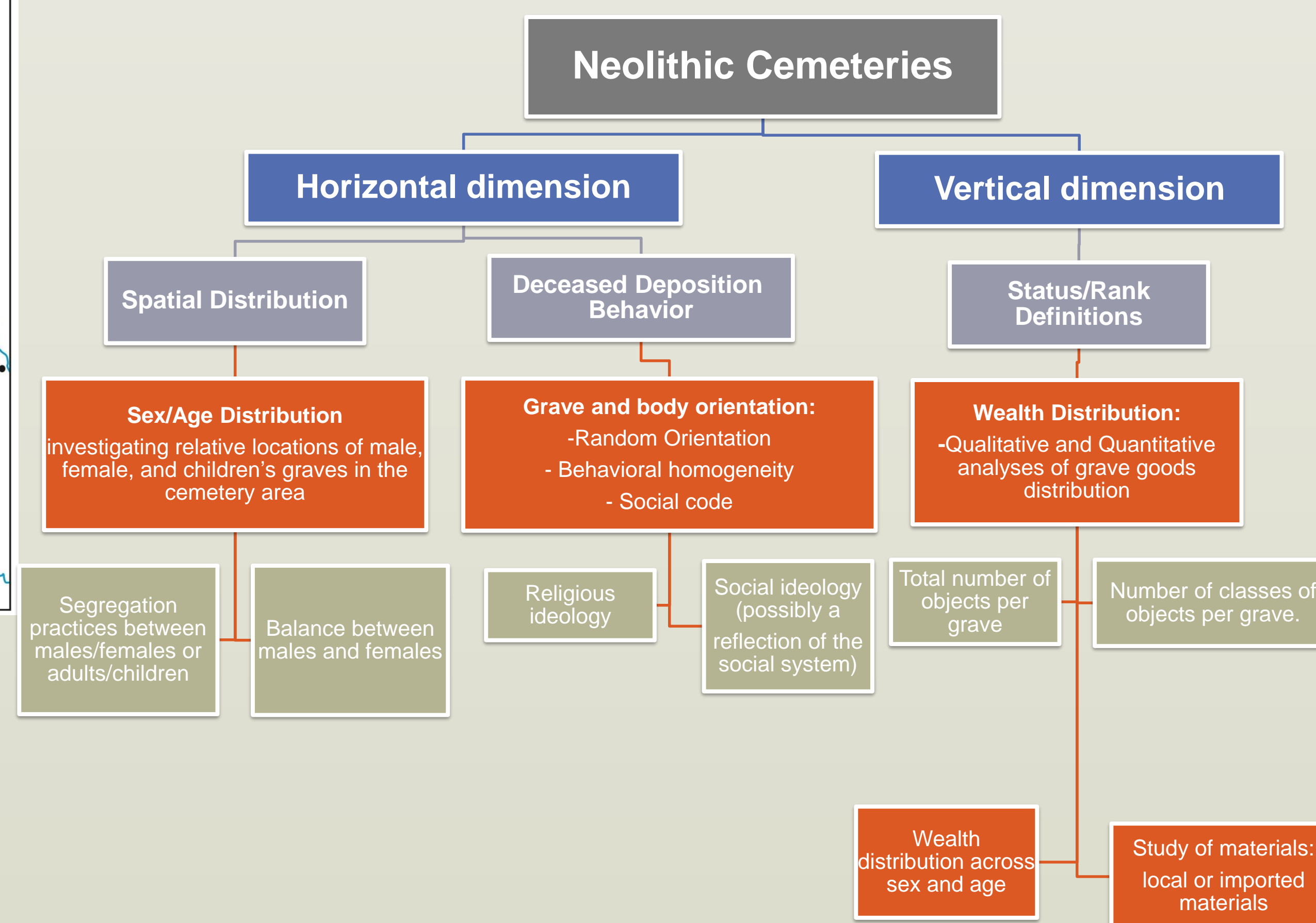
As for the data analysis, in this research it is important to use the two dimensions of the burial analysis.

The first one is the horizontal dimension that includes two points:

1) recording the spatial distribution (the sex and age distribution in the cemetery and the relative locations of the male, females and children graves). This point is important to recognize if there are any segregation practices between males\ females or adults and children. Also, to record the how far the balance between the males and females.

2) The second point is the deceased deposition behavior (the grave and the body orientation, if it is a random orientation or if there is a common behavior\ social code all over the cemetery. The last point is quite important as we could define if there is one cultural group or more is represented in the cemetery.

As for the vertical dimension, it is related to define the status\ rank definitions by wealth distribution analysis; qualitative and quantitative by recording the total number of objects per grave and the number of classes of objects per grave. Also, to study the wealth distribution across sex and age and study of materials, if the funeral goods are from local or exported materials.



## Research Difficulties

- Some cemeteries were discovered during survey projects or salvage excavation. So, there were not fully studied or published. For example: Three sites were excavated by Sudanese teams from Khartoum and Nile Universities: Retej, Qal3et Shenan and Es- Sour. The three sites include important data but they are not fully published.
- The bad condition of the archaeological and osteological remains as the burials are simple pits or human remains on surface, etc.
- In addition, the threats that face the archaeological sites in Sudan like urban development, agricultural activities and illicit digging.
- No detailed quantitative data are yet produced by the excavators at important Neolithic cemeteries of the Kadruka area and central Sudan: Kadero, el-Kadada, el-Chaba.
- There is a general lack of quantitatively arranged data on side of deposition, and body and face orientation from excavated cemeteries in Upper Nubia and Central Sudan, with exception of last excavation like in R12, in Northern Dongola Reach, Upper Nubia.
- The previous studies focused on the funeral goods as the most important element in the study of the burials.

Two graves from El- Barga: On left: an infant with bracelet made of Hippo Ivory and necklace of amazonite beads. On right: a female with labrets made of Ivory. Honegger, M.: 2005, p. 103



## Case Study: Kadero I

Kadero I is located about 20 km north Khartoum on the Eastern Nile Bank. Kadero I is considered one of the most important cemeteries in Central Sudan for several reasons: the site includes settlement middens that similar to Shahinab, and was dated to 4850- 4250 BC. In addition to cemeteries dated to Early and Late Neolithic.

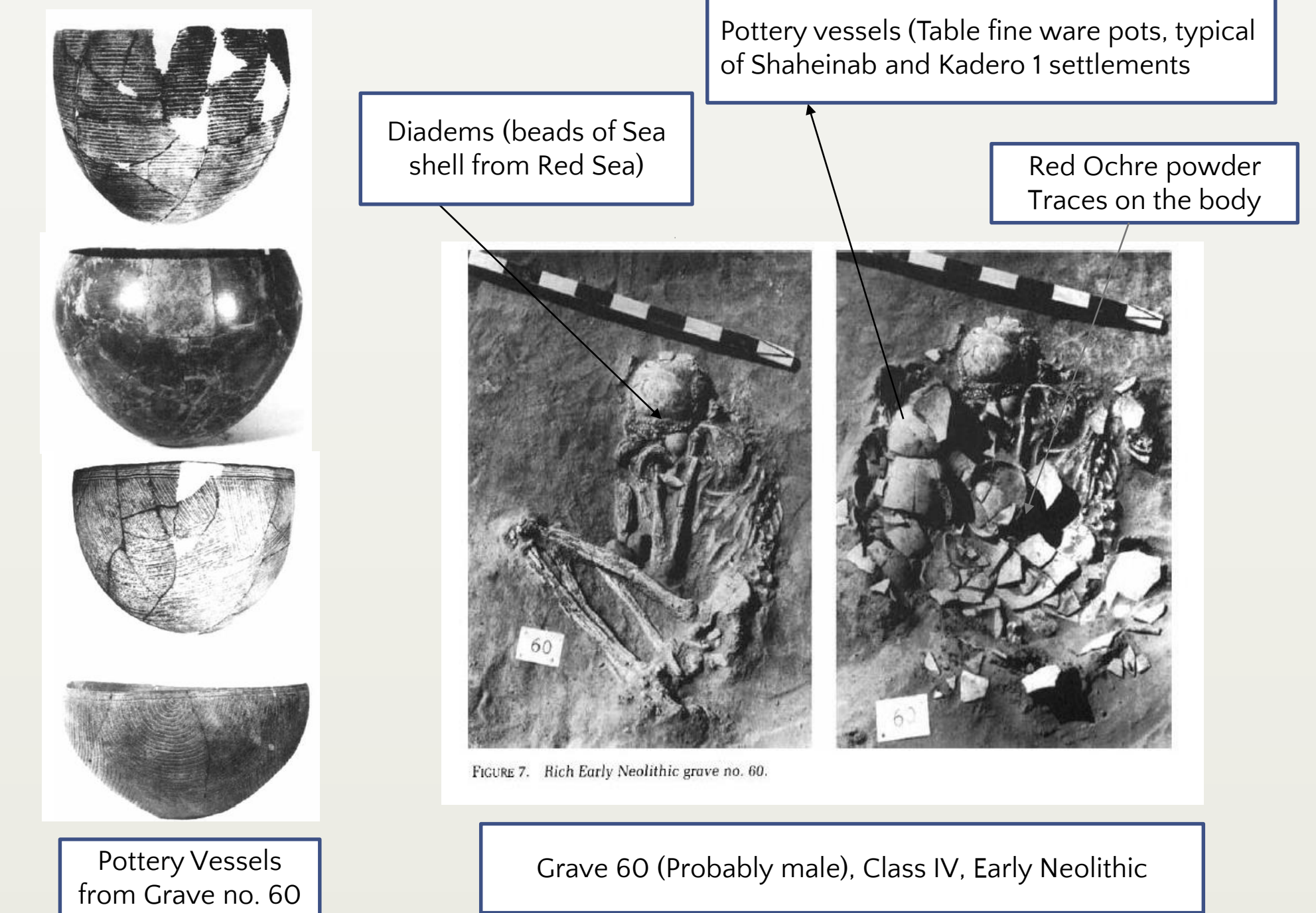
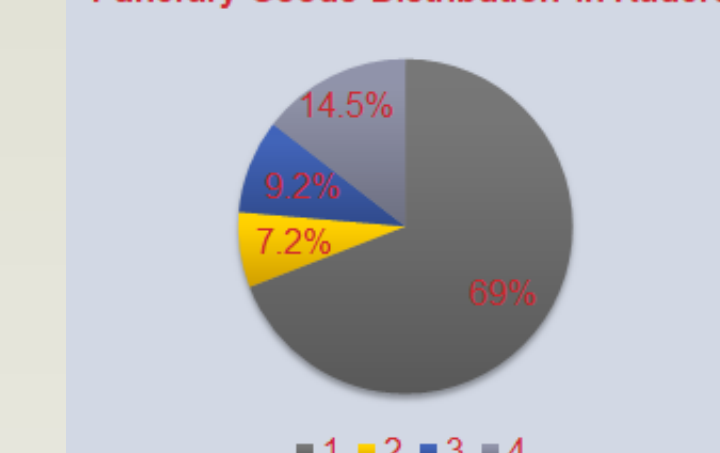
There are two main burial grounds in Kadero 1: The first one included two burial clusters: northern and southern both dated to Early Neolithic and located nearby the settlement middens, while the second one is far from the settlement and included 55 burials.

According to L. Krzyzaniak who worked on Kadero since 1971, he made a classification for these burials according to the funeral goods distribution. In this classification, he determined 4 classes: Class I with no furnishing or funeral goods at all, Class II with one pottery vessel, Class III that include from 1- 3 pottery vessels and Class IV or Elite like he called them that include numerous and different grave goods.

He also records the spatial distribution for these 55 burials: 38 that belong to class I are closed to each other and the same for the 8 rich graves. He also mentioned that the first burial ground, which nearby the settlement middens are poor comparing to the second burial ground that located far from the settlements. It is important to mention that two of the 8 elite graves are dated to Late Neolithic.

class	wealth of furnishing	no. of graves	%
I	no furnishing	38	69.0
II	1 pottery vessel	4	7.2
III	1-3 pottery vessels and/or personal adornments	5	9.2
IV	numerous and diversified grave goods	8	14.5
total		55	

Funerary Goods Distribution in Kadero I



## Conclusion

- Neolithic cemeteries are considered an important source to study several aspects of the Neolithic communities; not only the funeral\ religious aspect but also the economic and social aspects.
- It is important to record all the details about the burials in order to achieve efficient analyzing (quantitative and qualitative data), horizontal and vertical dimensions.
- Social differentiation between Neolithic burials is recorded in Middle Nile region cemeteries (e.g. Kadero I, Kadruka) by studying the funeral goods in burials (num. of classes, num. of objects, materials)
- More intensive theoretical and comparative studies into cultural anthropology have to be done. However, there are some points to be hypothesized:
  - The presence of children burials in the "Elite graves" refers that their families are important and have remarkable status in their communities.
  - The presence of non-local materials, may refer to the Elite had commercial relationship with these areas.
  - The presence of human sacrifice in some Neolithic Cemeteries (e.g. Kadada ) is an evidence of non-egalitarian society.
  - The social differentiation refers to successful economic system that led to high rank families (Elite). It may be mixed economic system depended on: foraging, hunting, fishing, cattle breeding and cultivation.

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## Methodology- Data Collection

Cemeteries are one of the most important study sources during Neolithic. Through excavation, numerous sites were discovered, recorded and studied. As a part of the data collection, an Excel sheet was created to collect the available data that are necessary for the research. The sheet records the following information: the site\ cemetery, location, area (one of the three previously mentioned), date, the previous excavation and what the previous excavation or research focused on; for example, some projects focused on the study of the funeral goods while others focused on the stratigraphic study of the site and\ or an osteological study focused on the human remains, etc. The last column includes notes about the most remarkable features in this site.

Site:	Date:	Excavated by: (Name + Season)
<b>Horizontal Dimension:</b>		
Burial/ Grave No	Grave Shape	Burial Position
	Grave Orientation	Body Orientation
	Sex	Age
<b>Vertical Dimension:</b>		
<b>Funeral Goods:</b>		
Total number of objects per grave:		Number of classes of objects per grave:
Ceramic	Material \ Temper	Typology
	Class	Material
Personal Adornments		Source
Stone tools (Grinding \ Palettes)	Material	Typology
		Source
Lithics	Material	Typology
		Source
Animal Remains	Animal Identification	Complete Skeleton
		Parts (e.g. Bucrania)
		Bone Tools
Human Sacrifices		