

PRELIMINARY EXCAVATION REPORT OF A MEGALITHIC BURIAL SITE NEAR ADĪNA, DISTRICT SWABI

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Megaliths in the form of stone graves and standing monoliths are found in Sindh and Balūchistān in large numbers. Their extension to the North-West of Pakistan is also attested by the famous Asota megaliths in District Swabi, showing a circle of large standing stones without the presence of any burial on the site. Unfortunately, no proper attention was paid to the study of these megaliths in Pakistan, since independence. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, however, started its first ever excavation of a megalithic site in the country, called Dumlottī in the Malīr Basin, District Karachi, in 1975. The results yielded by this excavation provided important information not known before.

The Dumlottī burials were stone graves presenting superficially a box shape feature, which contained burnt and calcined fragmentary bones of human bodies, placed in a small round shaped pit in the centre of the grave chamber. These bones were sometimes found accompanied with semi-precious stone beads of various types. Nothing else was found in these stone graves. The excavation of the stone graves at Dumlottī could not solve the dating problem of the megaliths. However it revealed a distinct cultural complex that once flourished in the past in this region.

In order to promote research activities regarding the study of megaliths in Pakistan, the University of Peshāwar discovered and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums N.W.F.P. excavated, a new megalithic site in 1993. It consisted of a good number of stone graves near Adīna village, in District Swabi. The site lies about 5 km to the West of Asota megaliths and has not been reported so far. The results achieved from the excavation of Adīna stone burials were very fruitful, and are to be presented here.

THE SITE

The megalithic site of Adīna lies about 27 km east of Mardān city and about 16 km west of Swabi town (Map). The stone graves are seen scattered on top of a spur at the foot of the Karāmār hill range, overlooking Adīna village (Pl. I and II).

The site of the graves is approached by a flight of roughly made stone steps, ascending in a serpentine fashion. The area occupied by the graves measures 220 x 150 m (approx.). Some standing stones aligned in a row in the fashion of Asota megaliths but not in a circle are also visible on the site, at places which are perhaps, meant to mark the burial area (Pl. III).

The megalithic burials at Adīna, which superficially appear box-shaped, resemble in construction the megaliths found at Dumlottī, and in the Deccan.

The Dumlottī grave site was poorly equipped, and generally yielded charred bones accompanied by beads of semi-precious stones. The megalithic burials at Adīna in general

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consist of four enclosing stone slabs set an edge in the earth. Each grave is covered by a large stone slab which in some cases is now missing, having perhaps been taken away by the villagers for use in the modern graves. The graves are mostly oriented East-West, except in a few cases where this orientation has not been strictly observed. On the average, these graves internally measure 183 cm in length and 76 cm in breadth.

The standing stones of the graves ranged in height from 90 to 120 cm above the surface level of the ground. The stone slabs for the graves have been obtained from the same spur on which the grave site stands and used in the rough and undressed form. The colour of these stones has turned black owing to patination on their outer surface. The graves are normally built at a distance of 1-1/2 to 3 m from one another, but some lying very close together have also been noted.

EXCAVATION

The stone graves at Adīna that were visible on the ground surface were numbered individually and a similar method of excavation was adopted for them. A total number of 76 graves were excavated. In the first instance the capstone covering the grave was removed which was then followed by excavation of the earth filling inside the grave. The earth filling, normally a deposit of two layers ranged in thickness from 30 to 60 cm, overlying a hard floor level made of natural rock or paved stone slabs. It was on this floor that grave goods such as pots, stone, terracotta beads and rings of different sizes made of gold, copper and shell were found along with burnt human bones (Pls. IV–VIII). The human bones were placed openly in the centre of the grave (Pl. IX) but in some cases they were placed in big jars, which in the case of two graves were found broken due to the weight of the collapsed debris of the graves (Pl. X–XI). The upper layer was formed of alluvial earth of compact nature, which usually sealed the grave goods lying on the floor.

Some stone graves were found empty which may be attributed to an inexplicable incident like the inability to find the cremated bones after burning the dead body or they were constructed but not used or may have been part of another ritual.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

The stone graves at Adīna are found on the slope of the front of the hill and amidst extensive rocky outcrops, from where stone could easily be obtained for the construction of the graves. The builders of these graves never tried to erect their tombs on arable land, and kept them confined to barren and hilly area. This shows that they were a settled people who practised agriculture and knew the value of crop producing land. The excavation has shown two phases of construction in these graves. In the first instance the grave chamber was bounded by large stone slabs cut from the huge lime stone blocks and fixed vertically in the ground. The second step was the placing of the grave goods along with the cremated remains. The central point of the grave floor was surrounded by earthen pots, terracotta beads of various shapes and sizes. This shows the great anxiety of the living to provide their dead with pots and articles of their personal decoration which they thought would be useful in the other world. Sometimes, the calcined bones were put in a large earthen jar and placed inside the grave chamber along with other grave goods. Those items were then covered and sealed by an overlying deposit of earth. Lastly the grave was closed from the top by a large capstone covering the entire area of the grave chamber.

What is more interesting is the mode of burial itself. The graves at Adīna are found to be burials of a secondary nature i.e. after death the body was burnt somewhere else, the available bones were salvaged from the flames of fire and interred in these graves.

FINDS

A. Pottery

In addition to the earthen jars which contained the calcined human bones, a good number of other pots of different sizes and shapes were found in the graves. The pottery collection includes different types of miniature pots, small and medium size bowls and goblets, which may be divided into two groups. (1) Those which are hand made and (2) those which are wheel turned. The hand made pots include miniature vessels bearing a round body with flat base and rimless mouth. These pots are of thick fabric and possess a high percentage of coarse grained sand mixed in the clay. The body presents a rough, dull red surface, externally decorated in some cases with incised designs. The wheel made pottery, which comprises of bowls and goblets bearing flat or pedestalled bases, shows thin and medium fabric. The pots are made of fine alluvial clay showing red or dull red washed surface on the external side. No painting is noticed on these pots.

Some specimen of these pots are described below:—

PL. XII

Hand-made pitcher, with convex base and a rough, slightly out-turned rim. The body of the pot at the shoulder level is provided with four conical knobs at equal distance from each other, which bear perforated holes. These obviously served as suspension holes. The entire body of the pot is decorated with incised lines, drawn horizontally and obliquely. The incised line at the base in the shape of a sun flower might be a sacred motif. The pot is of a dull red colour and of medium fabric.

PL. XIII

Hand-made miniature pot with a round body and convex base. The rim is broken and missing. The body is composed of a high percentage of coarse grained sand mixed in the clay. The colour is dull red and the fabric is medium. A hole visible at the shoulder level appears to be of a spout which is now missing.

PL. XIV

Miniature, hand-made pot, similar in shape and colour to Pl. XIII. Its body has been restored but some fragments belonging to the rim and base are missing. The pot has a wide open mouth and slightly out turned rim.

PL. XV

Hand-made miniature pot, with a pear-shaped body. It has a flat and an open, rimless mouth. Its body is rough and has a dull red colour on the external surface. The fabric is of medium texture.

PL. XVI

Interesting example of a hand-made miniature pot, bearing a convex base, and a squat body which is narrowed at the neck and mouth. The rim is straight-sided but thickened on the outside. The pot has a coarse plain dull red surface.

PL. XVII

Miniature vessel in the shape of a flower pot. The body is narrow at the base, but becomes gradually wider as it reaches the mouth. The base is flat, and the mouth is of a rimless type, but partially damaged. The body is coarse and plain showing dull red colour. The fabric is medium.

PL. XVIII

Small, pear-shaped, wheel-made vessel. Three parallel ribbed designs are seen running round the middle of the body. The pot is well fired and of a red colour. The fabric is medium.

PL. XIX

Small wheel-made pot of the same shape as described under Pl. XVIII. It was found broken in the course of excavation, but has been restored. Parallel ribbed designs are seen on the upper half of the body. The fabric is thin.

PL. XX

Small wheel-made pot with round body, flat base and wide open rimless mouth, parallel ribbed designs are visible on the entire body. The pot is of red colour and thin fabric.

PL. XXI

Wheel-made bowl bearing a blunt carination on the shoulder. Its base is flat and it has a wide open rimless mouth. Two parallel string marks of the wheel are seen on the shoulder. The rest of the body is plain and reddish in colour on the external surface. The fabric is medium.

PL. XXII

Another type of a wheel-made bowl, with round body, narrow flat base and wide open mouth. The rim shows a sharp top with slight inversion. The pot bears ribbed designs on the upper half of the body and a perforated round shaped knob on the one side which probably served as a suspension hole.

PL. XXIII

An interesting wheel-made bowl bearing a convex base a straight sided flanged rim and carination on the shoulder. The rim is made in a fashion to receive a lid but the cover was not found. The rim of the bowl is slightly damaged at one point. The fabric is medium.

PL. XXIV

Wheel-made, short pedestalled pot, bearing a rimless wide open mouth. The body of the pot is round and red washed on the external surface. The fabric is thin.

PL. XXV

Wheel-made pot standing on a long pedestal. Its mouth is wide open showing a slightly everted sharp rim. The rim is partially broken, the body is washed and has a plain surface. This vessel is comparable to some of the pedestalled pots of the Gandhāra Grave culture, datable to the 2nd millennium B.C.

B. Minor Objects

The stone graves at Adīna have yielded a good number of minor objects, which include a small ring made of thin gold wire two rings made of copper (Pl. XXVI) a shell bangle

(Pl. XXVII) and several terracotta and stone beads (Pl. XXVIII). The terracotta beads are biconical in shape, while those of stone are flat on one side and conical on the other. The type of stone used for manufacturing of beads is green phyllite, which is found locally in the hill range near Adīna.

CHRONOLOGY AND CONCLUSIONS

The excavation of the graves at Adīna has not yielded any datable material such as inscriptions or coins, which could have proved helpful in establishing an absolute chronology. The evidence that has come to our hands consists of pottery and a few minor objects like beads.

In the pottery collection of Adīna graves some of the specimens, for instance the pear shaped vessels (Pls. XVIII and XIX), are frequently seen among the early Buddhist pottery collections found in Taxila, Swāt and several other sites in Gandhāra, datable from the 1st century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D.

But two examples from the pottery lot of Adīna bearing pedestal (Pl. XXIV, XXV) are comparable to some of the pots of the Gandhāra Grave culture, dated to the 2nd millennium B.C. But taking into consideration a total contrast in construction of the grave chamber and the interment the Adīna burials belong to a different cultural complex, and appear to be more akin to the stone cists at Dumlottī which represent similar burials of calcined human bones.

What is of special interest, is a carinated bowl (Pl. XXI) also seen in the surface collection of pottery of the Italian Mission from the valleys of Tangīr and Dārel (Northern Areas of Pakistan), which, according to them, is dated to the 3rd century B.C.

In view of the evidences discussed above any absolute date given at the present will be highly misleading. In order to solve the dating problem it will be necessary to explore and excavate more sites of similar nature.

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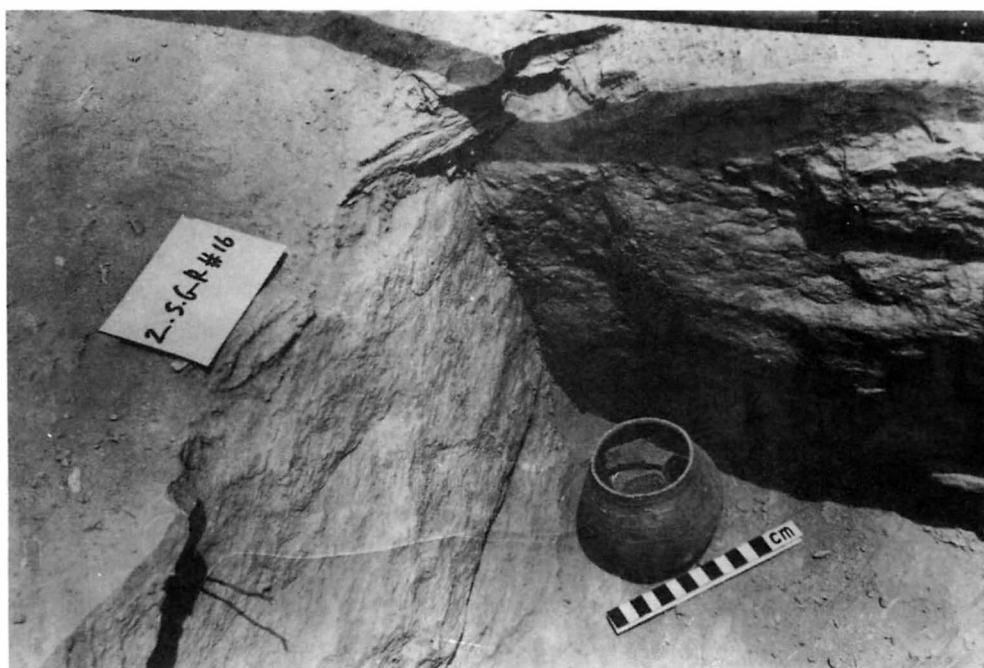
Pl. I. Adīna: General view of the site.



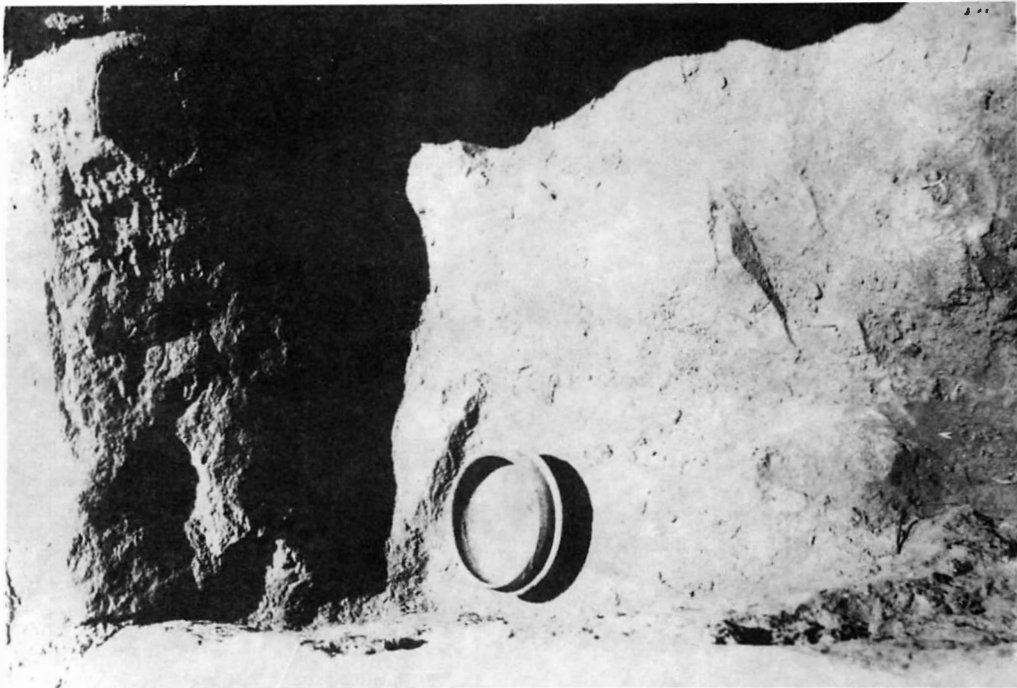
Pl. II. Adīna: Part of the site showing graves before excavation and standing stones.



Pl. III. Adīna: Part of the site showing some more graves and standing stones.



Pl. IV. Adīna: An excavated grave with a pot inside the grave chamber in situ.



Pl. V. Adīna: An excavated grave with calcined bones and a pot in situ.



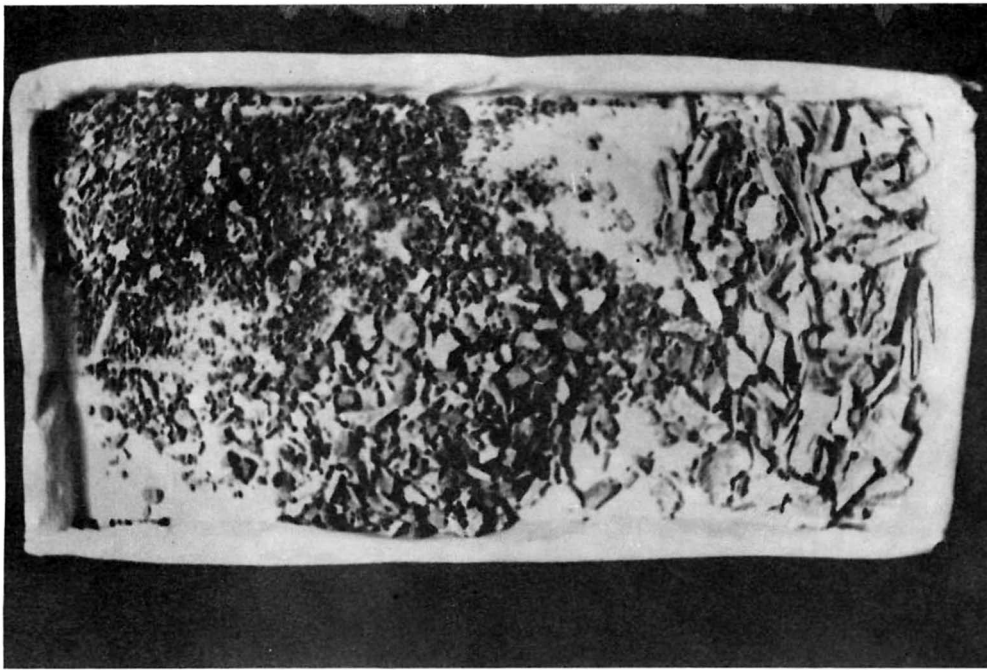
Pl. VI. Adīna: An excavated grave with pedestal bowl and a grave under foundation.



Pl. VII. Adīna: An excavated grave with calcined bones and two pots in situ.



Pl. VIII. Adīna: Excavated graves with calcined bones with two pots in situ.



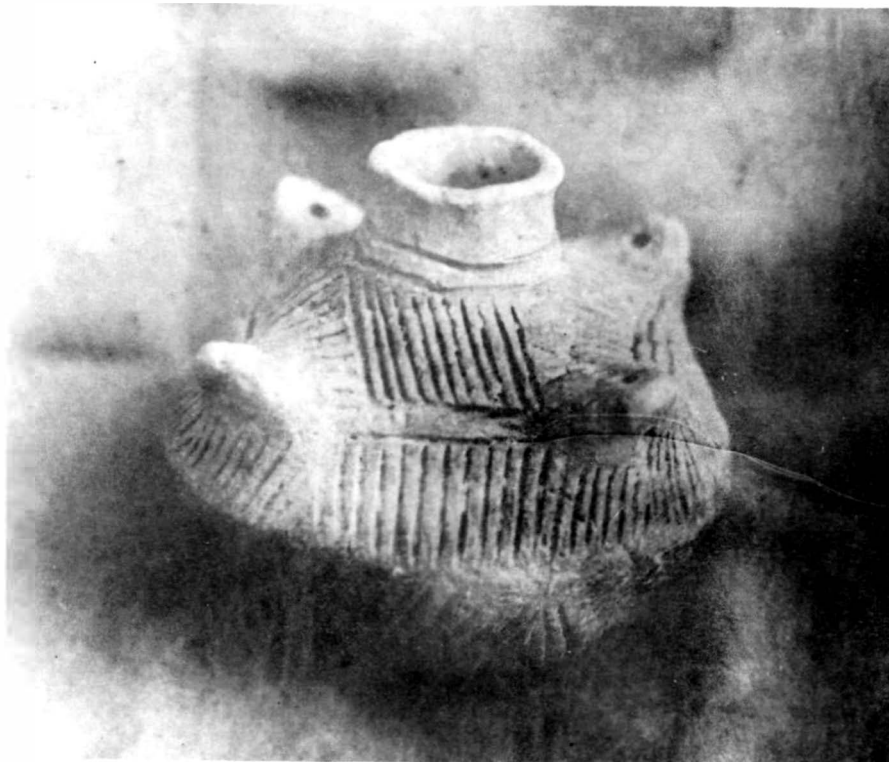
Pl. IX. Adīna: Deposit of calcined human bones in a grave in situ.



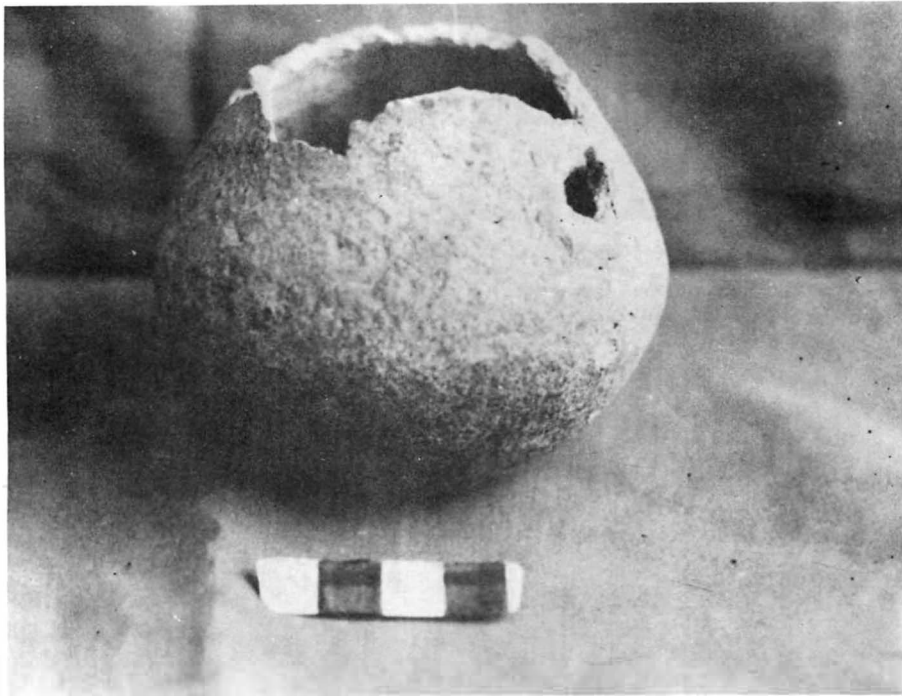
Pl. X. Adīna: Fragments of a burial jar in situ inside a grave.



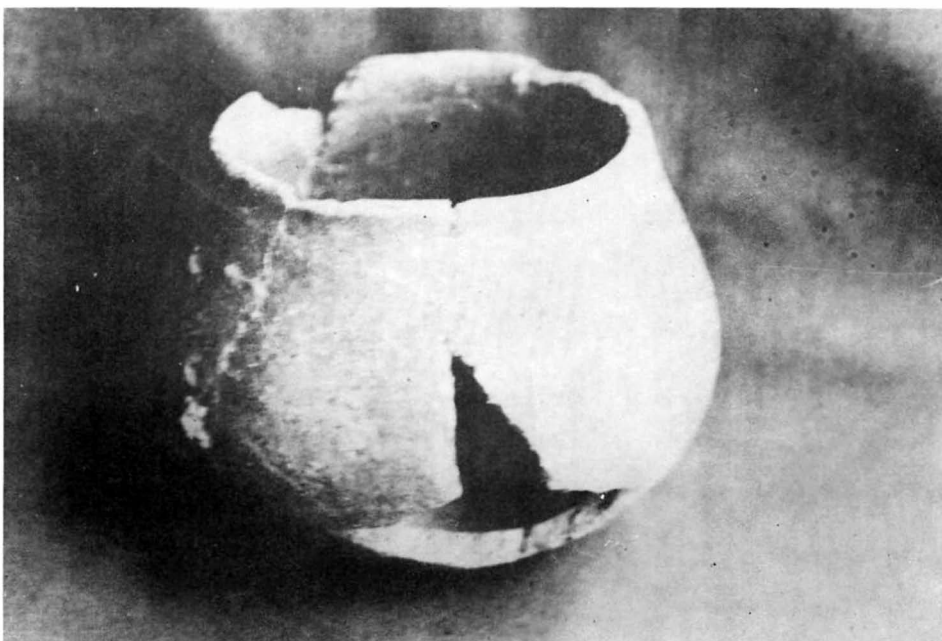
Pl. XI. Adīna: Fragments of a burial jar in situ inside a grave.



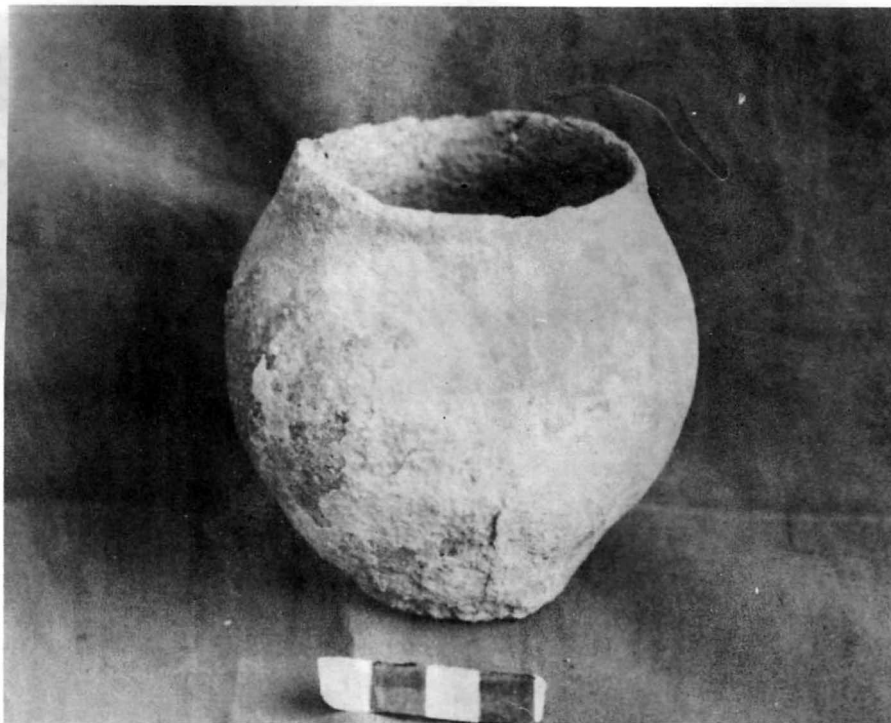
Pl. XII. Adīna: Pot with incised decoration.



Pl. XIII. Adīna: Pot with broken mouth.



Pl. XIV. Adīna: Pot damaged partially.



Pl. XV. Adīna: Pot with damaged rim.



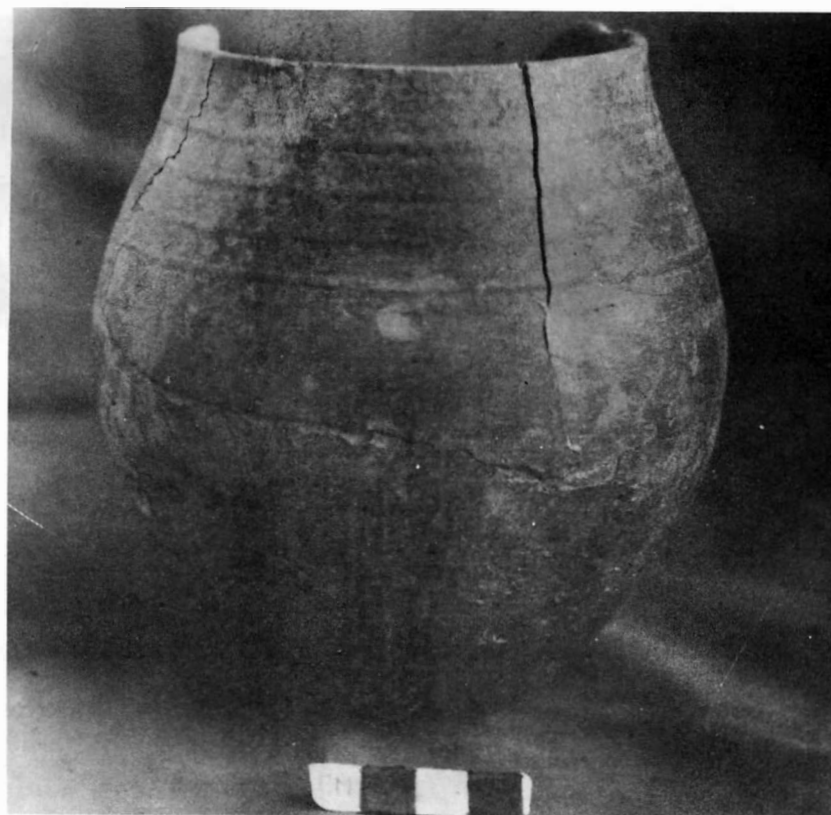
Pl. XVI. Adīna: Pot with narrow mouth.



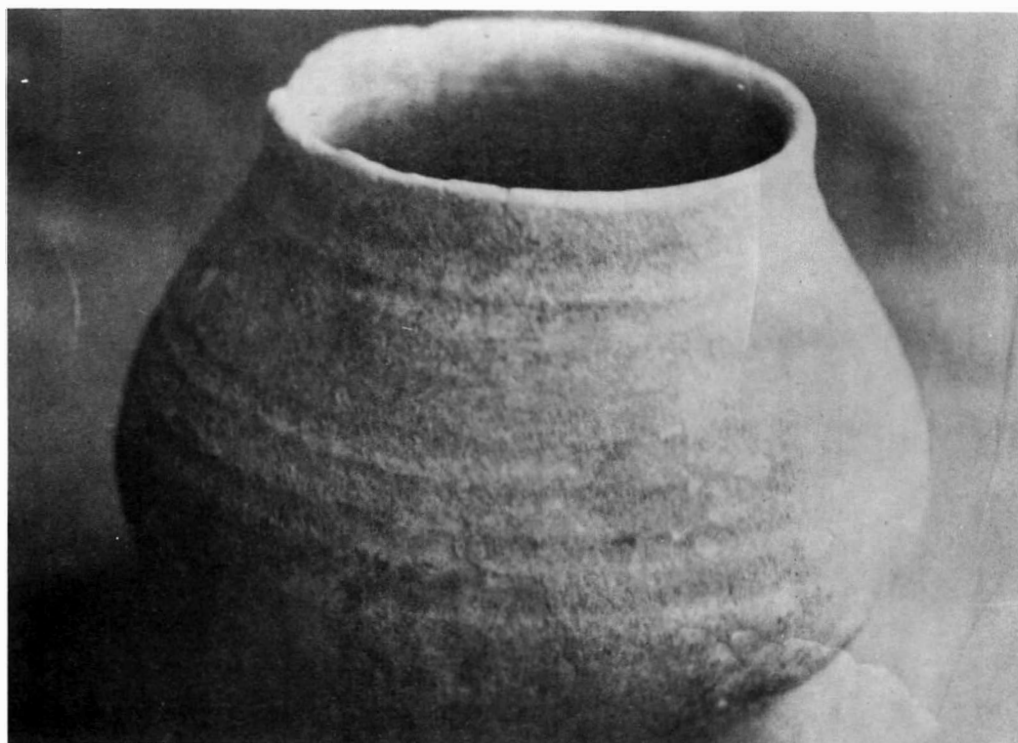
Pl. XVII. Adīna: Open mouthed vase.



Pl. XVIII. Adīna: Vase showing ridged decoration.



Pl. XIX. Adīna: Bowl showing ridged decoration.



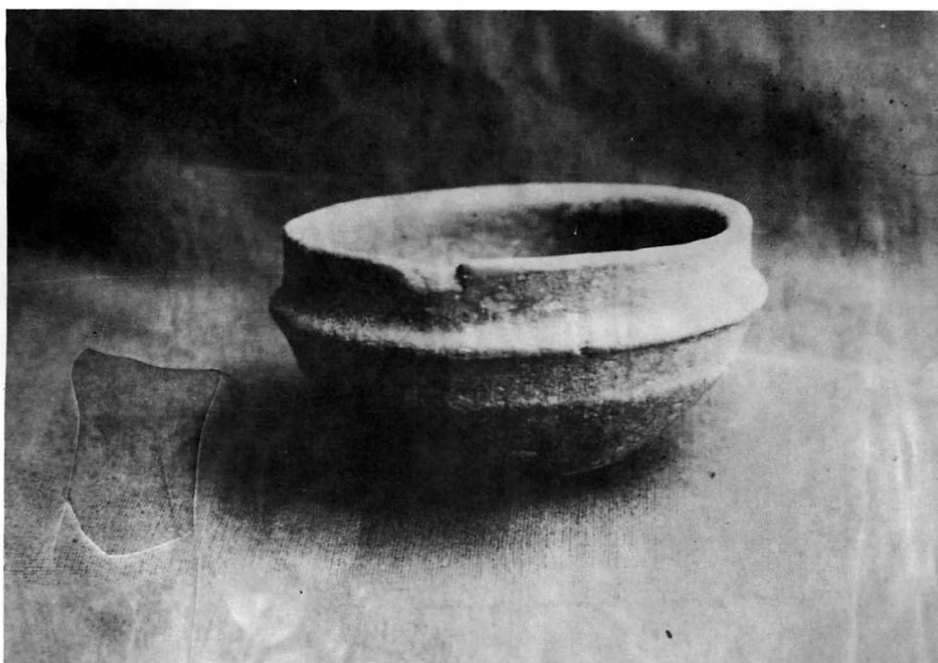
Pl. XX. Adīna: Bowl showing grooved decoration.



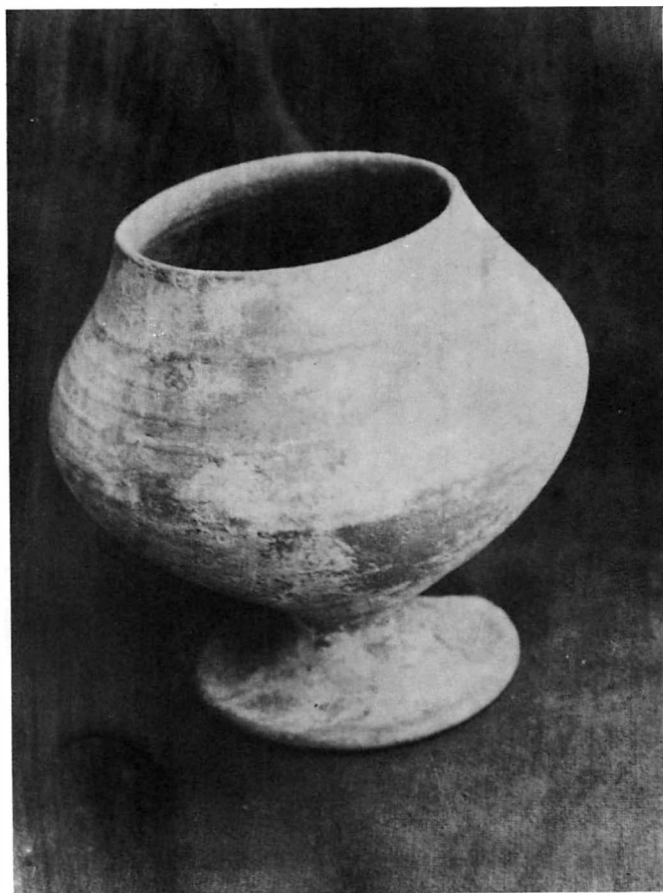
Pl. XXI. Adīna: A carinated bowl.



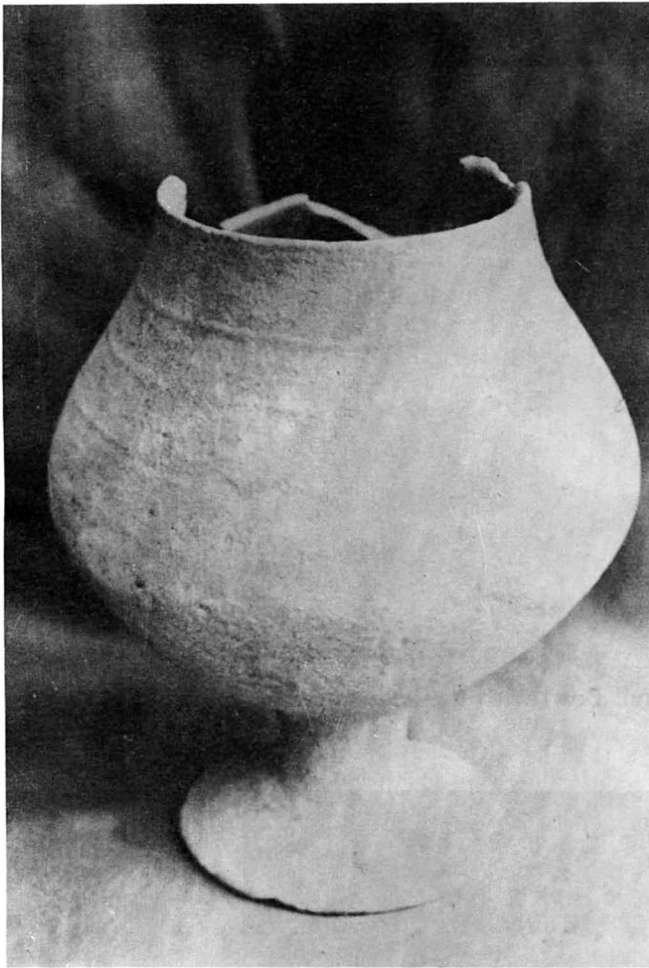
Pl. XXII. Adīna: Handled bowl.



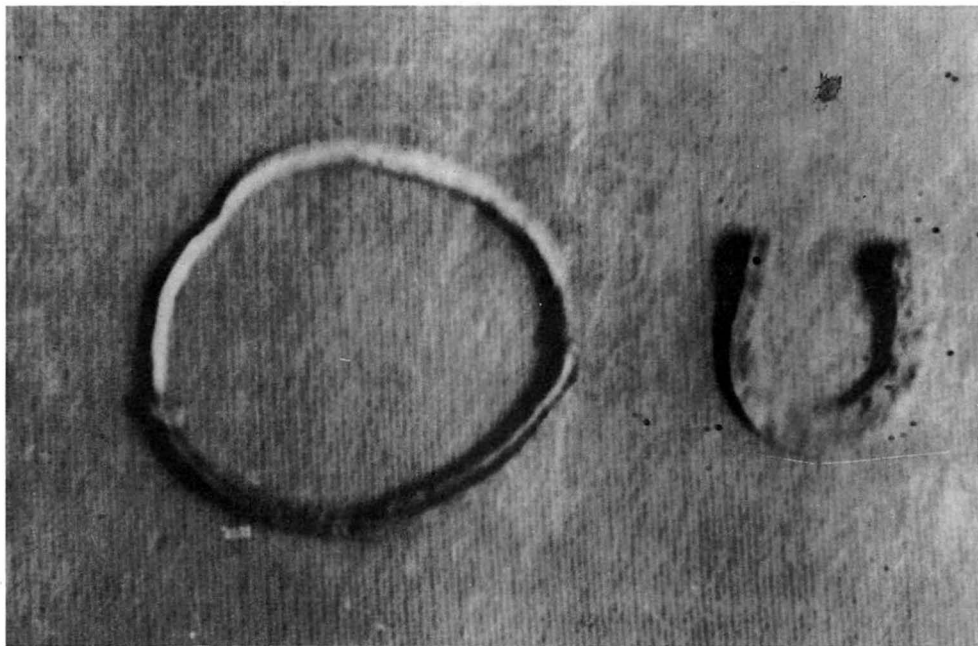
Pl. XXIII. Adīna: Bowl with flanged rim.



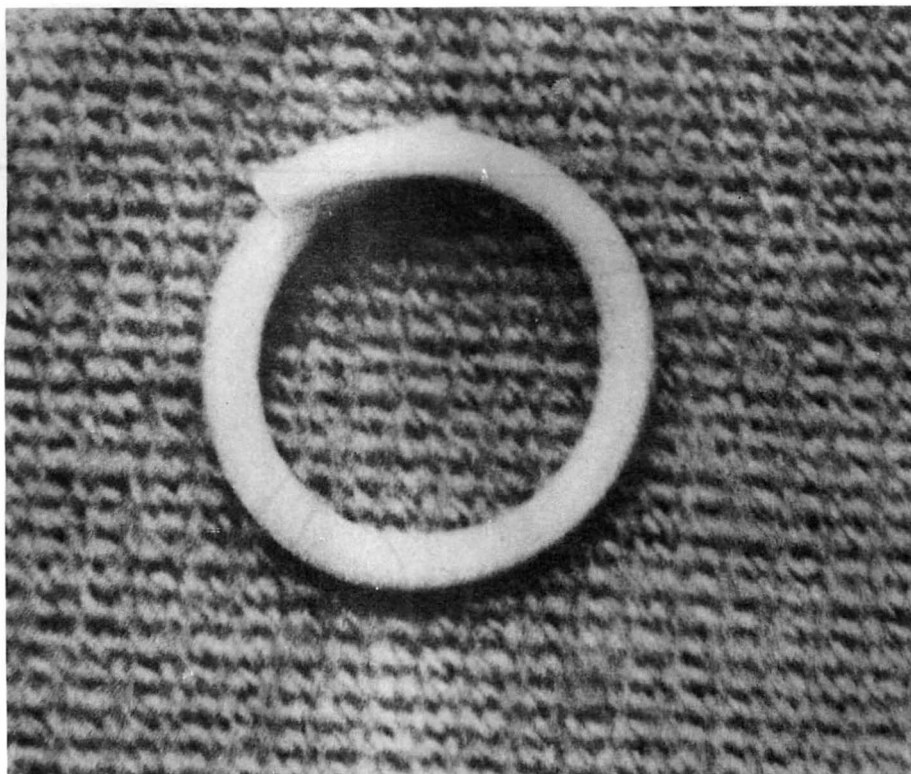
Pl. XXIV. Adīna: A pedestalled bowl.



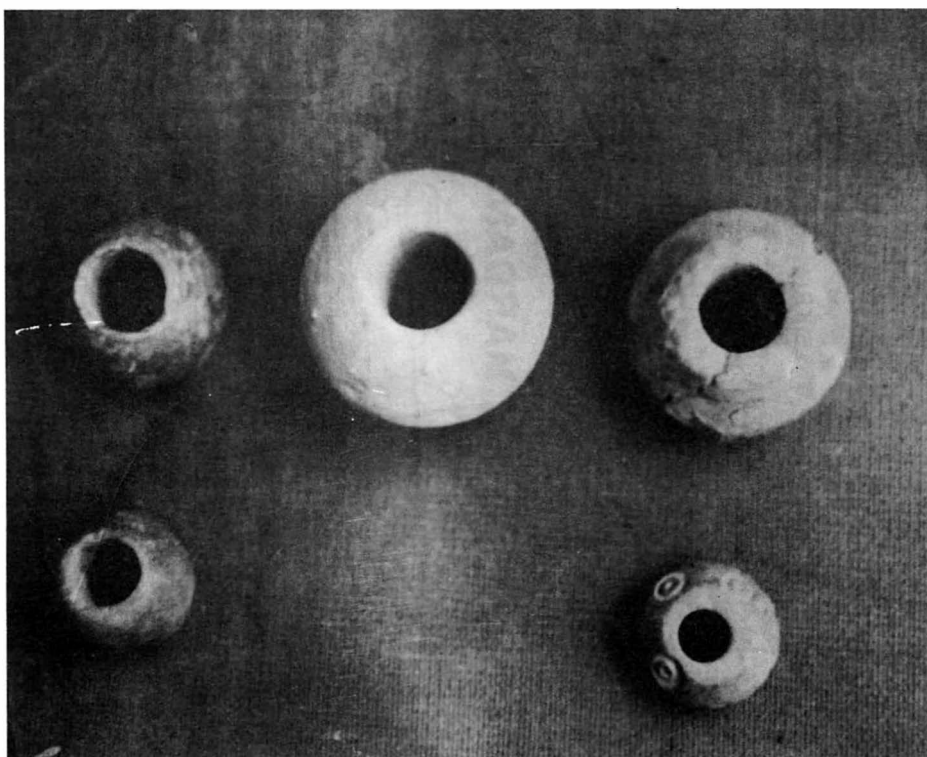
Pl. XXV. Adīna: A pedestalled bowl.



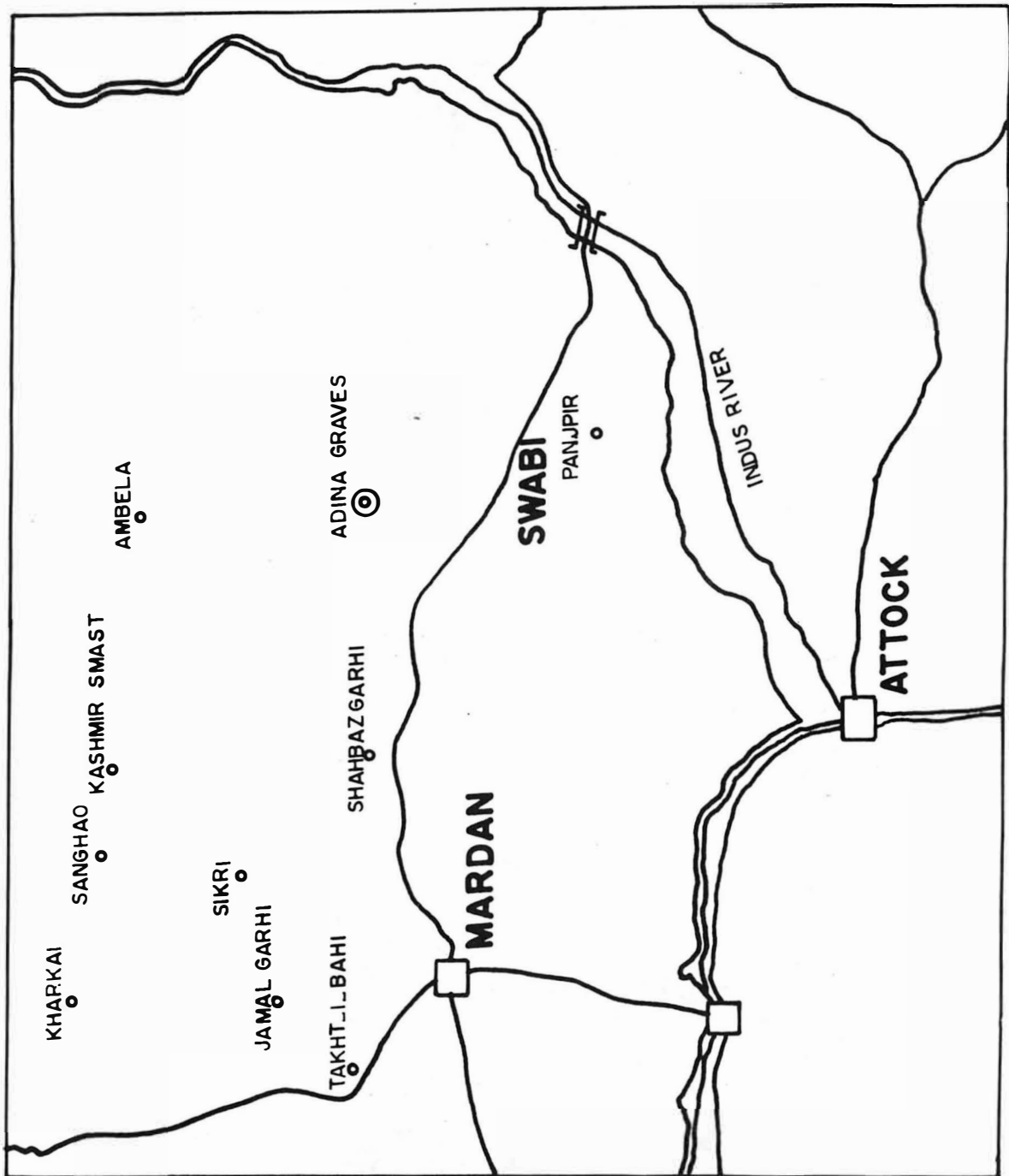
Pl. XXVI. Adīna: A shell bangle.



Pl. XXVII. Adīna: Copper ring.



Pl. XXVIII. Terracotta beads.



LOCATION MAP OF ADINA SITE