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## The Late and Post Meroitic Tumuli Field of Hagar El-Beida 2 (Two Seasons in 2005)

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## THE LATE AND POST MEROITIC TUMULI FIELD OF HAGAR EL-BEIDA 2 (TWO SEASONS IN 2005)

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The site of Hagar el Beida 2 is one of a complex of tumuli fields located in the region. It lies on the floor of a vast wadi to the north of the modern village and was spotted

during a field reconnaissance in December 2003.<sup>1</sup> Investigated first in January-February 2005, it was believed to consist of 93 tumuli concentrated in four groups. Site

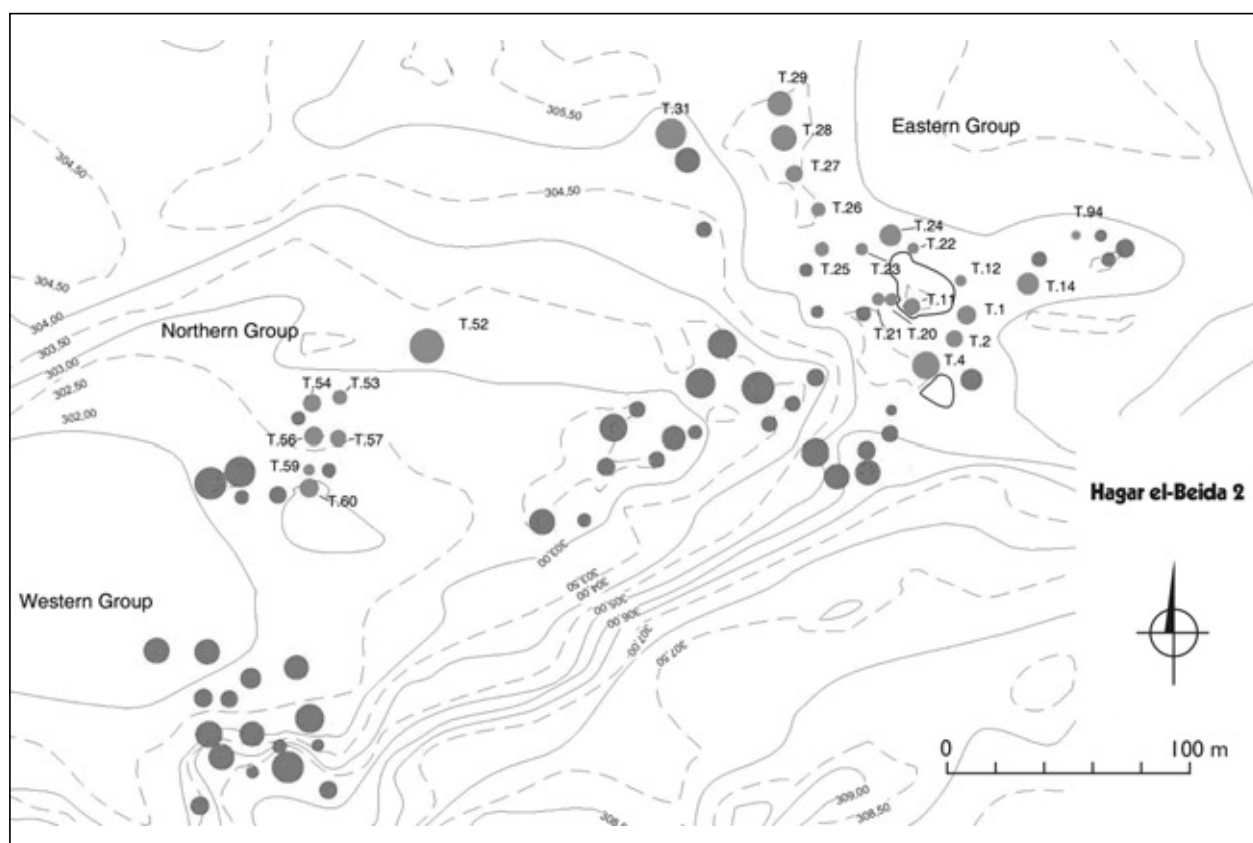


Fig. 1. Plan of the tumuli field of Hagar el-Beida 2  
(Drawing M. Sip)

1 L. Krzyżaniak, M. Chłodnicki, M. Jórdeczka, M. Lemiesz, "Archaeological reconnaissance between Shemkiya and Khor um Ghizlan (left bank of the Nile) 2003", *GAMAR* 4 (2005), 39-43. Site 2 was first published as 16/2003. It was estimated initially at about 100 graves.

mapping in the winter season (November-December 2005)<sup>2</sup> excluded the western group of 16 tumuli as not connected. Therefore, the total number of graves with mounds or remains of mounds still visible on the surface now stands at 77. Of these 16 and 13 are in the southern and northern groups respectively, while the eastern one with 48 graves is the biggest [Fig. 1].

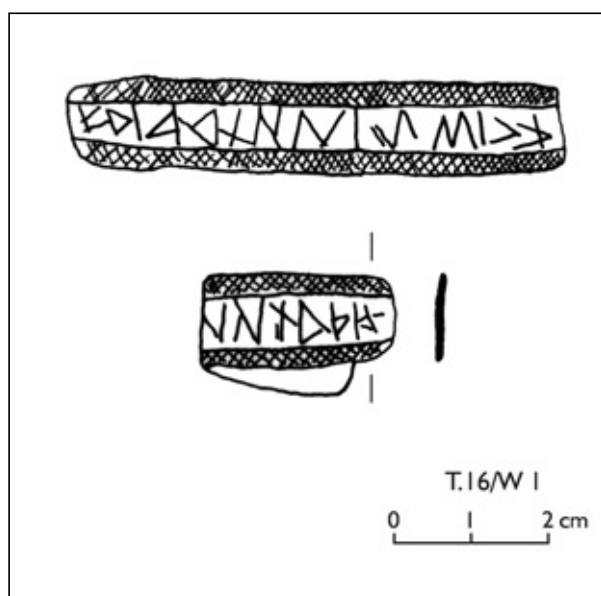


Fig. 2. Hagar el-Beida 2. Copper ring T.16/1 from a robber's pit (Drawing A. Longa)

During the first season 12 tumuli were examined, five (T.1, T.2, T.4, T.14 and T.24) in the eastern group and seven (T.52-T.54, T.56, T.57, T.59 and T.60) in the northern one. Another 12 tombs (T.12, T.25-T.29, T.31, T.94 and a group of four without skeletal remains: T.11, T.21-T.23) were excavated in the winter season. They provided a rundown through the different types of graves present on the site.

All of the graves excavated in the two seasons proved to be disturbed (except for T.54 and T.25 which were opened but not plundered). Ancient looting was attested by depressions in the central parts of the mound surfaces and robbery dumps nearby. The pits showed up in every cross-section. The fill of the mounds, shafts and burial chambers yielded pieces of potsherds fashioned to serve as handy shovels. In 12 of the recorded cases, there was evidence of contemporary looting (T.5, T.7, T.8, T.15-T.17, T.20, T.38, T.39, T.45, T.47, T.49). Those looted recently were situated mostly in the eastern group with only a few noted in the southern one. Coming from the robber's pit in T.16 was a curious find – a copper ring with engraved decoration [Fig. 2].

## THE GRAVES

Two general types of graves have been identified on the site. The first one comprises burials covered with mounds of silt and gravel, and loose pebbles scattered over the top. The size of these mounds has been observed to differ considerably with the best preserved ones reaching a height of 0.80-0.90 m. The predominant group, however, is from 0.20 to 0.60 m high. In

terms of area, two groups were distinguished: large tumuli measuring from 9 to 12 m across and small ones from 4 to 7 m.

The alternative type consists of graves with a round, oval or ovaloid ring of stones around the base. The burial chambers were dug in the alluvial layers of the wadi. Mounds without the stone rings occurred only in the eastern group.

2 The first season was headed by Ms Anna Longa with the assistance of students from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań: Mr. Krzysztof Garwoliński, Ms Martyna Mazur and Mr. Paweł Polkowski. During the second season Ms Anna Longa was assisted by Mrs. Joanna Dębowska.

The present state of research is based on preliminary field prospection. The tombs explored were selected with an eye to examining different kinds of construction,

both the large ones with well preserved mounds and those marked on the surface by nothing but concentrations of large stones. Four general types of burial chambers were

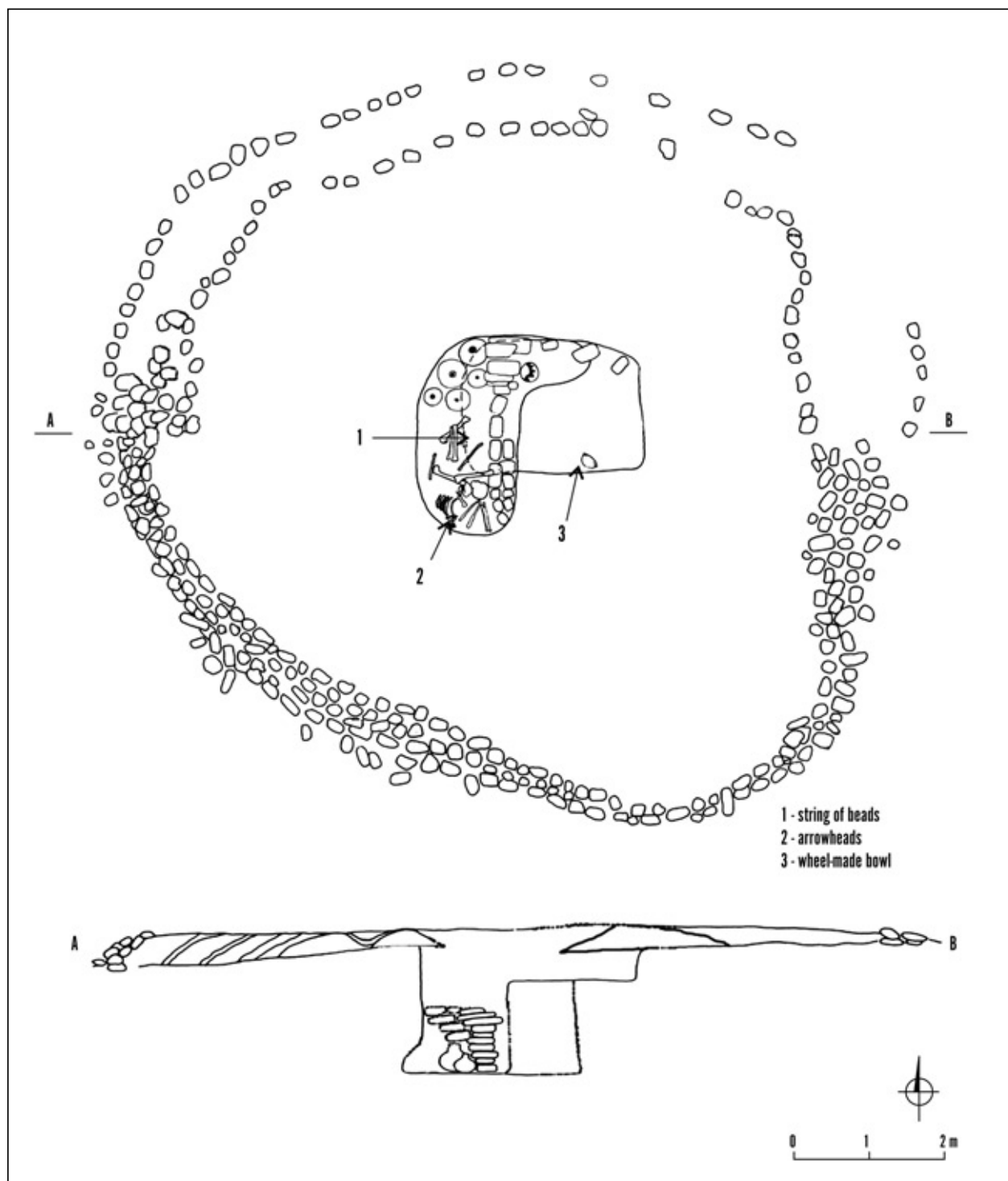


Fig. 3. Hagar el-Beida 2. Tumulus 52 in the northern group  
(Drawing A. Longa)

distinguished: the most common niche graves, trenches in the shaft bottom and one example each of a rectangular and an L-shaped chamber [Fig. 3]. The burial shafts were oval or cylindrical in horizontal cross-section. In the tumuli with L-shaped and rectangular burial chamber, the shaft was rectangular with rounded corners.

No observable preference in body orientation was apparent, the E-W position being just as common as the N-S one. Anthropological examination of the skeletal remains<sup>3</sup> in the two seasons demonstrated that eleven of the tombs contained male burials, aged mostly between 30 and 45. Four burials contained children's remains and another four those of females. In four of the graves no skeletal remains were discovered.

The male burials included both the big tombs with well preserved mounds and those marked on the surface with concentric rings of stones.

The mound of grave T.12 consisted of gravel covered with loose pebbles. Oval in shape, it was preserved in good condition, measuring 5.00 by 5.50 m at the base. The underground part comprised a vertical shaft and side chamber oriented E-W. The grave had been plundered in antiquity, leaving the original blocking of the burial chamber damaged. The skeleton of a male (35-40 years of age) was found partly level with the blocking and partly still inside the chamber. The original position could not be reconstructed. Despite the plundering, the grave offerings included two iron arrowheads, a ceramic cup and bottle, both decorated, and a rich collection of beads made of stone, glass and ostrich eggs, as well as a bird-shaped amulet (interpreted as a representation of Horus) [Fig. 4].

Grave T.25 did not have a mound. Instead, the only marker on the surface of this tomb was a circular concentration of stones measuring 4.40 by 5.00 m [Fig. 5]. The burial chamber was of niche construction, oriented E-W. The male (age 20-25 (30) buried in the grave was laid out on the left side with legs pulled up, the head to the east and facing south [Fig. 6]. A big decorated bowl was deposited by the head and a globular pot [Fig. 7], also decorated, by the knees. Strings of ostrich-shell beads were wound around the hips of the deceased. A string of faience, stone and glass beads decorated the neck. A silver ring was found on the middle finger of the left hand. Grave T.26 was marked on the surface with a ring of stone 4 by 6 m in diameter. The surface features were in poor condition, presumably due to plundering of the grave structure underneath. The burial niche contained a male skeleton (estimated age at death 30-35 years) in constricted position, lying NW-SE with the head to the south and facing west. The upper part of the skeleton had been disturbed. Grave goods included a large decorated bowl and a small iron arrowhead.

The mound of T.28, which rose to a height of 0.80 m, had an ovaloid ring of stones elongated in an E-W direction. It measured 9.30 m N-S by 12.20 m E-W at the base. A dump to the northeast was proof of plunder, as was a depression noted in the center of the mound. This robbers' pit was also clearly distinguishable in the section through the mound [Fig. 8]. The burial niche was oriented E-W. The skeleton had been disturbed heavily by robbers. The age of the male buried in this grave was estimated at 40-45 years. Some of the grave goods survived in the fill: piece of decorated bowl,

3 Carried out by the mission's anthropologist Karol Piasecki.





*Fig. 4. Grave goods from burial T.12  
(Photo Ł. Gauza)*



*Fig. 5. Grave T.25 during exploration  
(Photo J. Dębowska)*



*Fig. 6. The burial chamber of T.25  
(Photo A. Longa)*



*Fig. 7. Ceramic vessels from grave T.25  
(Photo L. Gauza)*



fragments of iron arrowheads and beads of faience, glass and stone. Moreover, textile fragments from the grave can be interpreted as part of the robes or shroud of the dead.

Another ovaloid mound on an E-W axis is T.29 in the vicinity of T.28. It measured 7.20 m N-S by 10.20 m E-W at the base. Despite plundering, the mound still rose to a height of 0.50 m. The skeleton of a male aged 30-35 was found in the burial chamber in disturbed condition, and the original position could not be reconstructed [Figs 9,10]. The original grave goods were represented by only one arrowhead, one ceramic pot and beads of faience and glass. The stone ring around mound T.31, which was 0.50 m high, measured 10 m N-S by 11.50 m E-W. Clear evidence of plunder was observed in the top of the mound. A rectangular (2.40 m E-W by 2.10 m N-S) burial shaft was located in the center; it led to a rock-cut burial chamber, oriented E-W and blocked with mud bricks. The western part of this blocking had been removed by

robbers. The skeleton, presumably of a male aged 40-45 at death, was found disturbed. The shape of the burial niche indicates that it had been deposited on an E-W axis with the head to the west (the upper part of the skeleton was found in the western part of the burial chamber) [Fig. 12]. Beads of ostrich eggshells, faience and stone, and one point of iron are the only remains of the original grave goods.

#### CHILDREN'S TUMULI

Four children's graves were discovered on the site. Two of them were examined in the spring season, while the others in the winter one.

One of the children's graves (T.27) had a gravel mound with small, loose pebbles strewn all over it and surrounded with a ring of stones following an ovaloid plan, measuring 6.20 m E-W and only 5.00 m N-S. It was a chamber tomb and it had survived in generally good condition despite the bones having been disturbed by robbers. Judging by the orientation of the



Fig. 8. Grave T.28 during exploration  
(Photo A. Longa)





*Fig. 9. Grave T.29 during exploration  
(Photo A. Longa)*



*Fig. 10. Grave T.29 during exploration  
(Photo A. Longa)*

chamber, the body was probably laid out along an E-W line. The original grave goods comprised stone and faience beads, as well as beads made of ostrich eggshells, and a small plain bowl.

No mound was preserved on another child's grave, T.94. It was marked on the surface by a concentration, about 4 m in diameter, consisting of big stones and loose pebbles. An oval chamber at the bottom of a burial shaft contained a child's burial, lying oriented N-S with head to the north and facing east. No grave goods were recorded.

#### OTHER GRAVES

Four of the investigated graves contained grave goods, but curiously no skeletal remains. Tumulus T.11 had a largely destroyed gravel mound, built on an oval plan more or less 5.60 m across and 0.60 m high.



Fig. 11. Decorated bowl from grave T.11  
(Photo Ł. Gauza)

A vertical oval shaft led to a small niche oriented N-S. Despite sieving, no traces of bones were recovered from the fill of the shaft and burial chamber. The grave goods included a tanned animal skin of rectan-



Fig. 12. The burial niche of T.31 with traces of ancient plundering  
(Photo J. Dębowska)

gular shape, measuring 0.35 x 0.30 m. Four ceramic vessels were also discovered: a wheel-made red-slipped cup, wheel-made bowl with painted and stamped decoration [Fig.11], handmade cup with impressed decoration filled with white pigment, and finally a spouted vessel with painted decoration below the rim. Moreover, there were three iron arrowheads found in the grave.

Tumulus T.21 had a well-preserved stone ring surrounding a mound rising 0.10 m above the ground. The diameter of the mound was about 5 m. The burial chamber-niche contained only a few stone beads and a small bowl.

Nearby, tumulus T.22 also had a stone ring and a low mound rising no more than 0.05 m above ground level. The diameter was about 4.30 m. At the bottom of a vertical shaft there was an E-W-oriented niche. Three iron arrowheads, stone beads and a fragment of faience vessel were found in the fill of this burial chamber.

T.23 also had an oval mound strewn with loose pebbles. It measured about 4.50 m across and has survived to a height of 0.40 m. The underground part of the tomb consisted of a trench at the bottom of the shaft. The fill of the chamber yielded beads of ostrich eggshells and an iron arrowhead.

## SUMMARY

The male graves investigated in the course of the two seasons are highly differentiated with regard to the superstructures. Most of the time, the graves had big well-preserved mounds. The grave goods included ceramic vessels, arms and personal adornment. Children's graves were usually deprived of grave goods or else received a single vessel. The graves with nothing but grave goods could have been cenotaphs. They were all in a single area and could have constituted a separate part of the site set aside for symbolic graves.

The pottery discovered in the graves represents four types: large jars, open bowls, cups and small jars. Apart from three examples of wheel-made pots, all the vessels were hand-made. The surface of the pots is predominantly black or pink and most vessels were decorated. There is a larger group of pottery, mostly bowls, with incised decoration filled in with white pigment.

The eastern group of tumuli usually contained deep bowls, cups and bottles with both broad and narrow mouths. The handmade bowls were usually decorated in the upper part of the vessel under the rim with registers of ornament – impressed, relief and also plastically decorated. One small wheel-made bowl has stamped and painted decoration in the upper part of the vessel. Recovered specimens of handmade bottles usually had stamped or incised register decoration. The ornament is found usually on the base of the vessel neck and on the shoulders. In this part of the site pottery represents the same technological type and is quite uniform in character. This type of pot corresponds to the Late Meroitic period.<sup>4</sup> The chronology is confirmed by the architecture of the superstructures and the underground parts of the tombs.<sup>5</sup>

An interesting collection is composed of iron weapons, found exclusively with male

4 M. El-Tayeb, E. Kołosowska, "Pottery from the Fourth Cataract region (Sudan)", *GAMAR* 2 (2003), 117-126.

5 Id., id., "Burial traditions on the right bank of the Nile in the Fourth Cataract region", *GAMAR* 4 (2005), 51-74.



burials in the eastern group of graves on the cemetery. A spearhead and double-barbed arrowhead are unique, the predominant form being a single-barbed arrowhead with differently formed blades. Meriting note are two archer's rings of stone, also found in the tumuli in the eastern group.

A vast collection of beads made of various materials was collected from the site. Most beads were disc-shaped and made of ostrich eggshell. Also quite popular were cylindrical beads of faience, green and blue in color. In addition, examples of barrel-shaped beads of white and blue glass, as well as barrel-shaped and biconical of stone were found. One should also mention two rings: the copper band illustrated above and another one of silver wire.

The northern group of graves is highly different from the eastern one. Pottery found in this part of the site consists of: large and medium-sized bottles, small cups and globular pots. Interesting vessels were discovered in the context of the mound of grave T.57. They were deposited inside the

stone ring and then covered with the mound, making them contemporary with the time of construction. These vessels were made of Nile silt and rather poorly fired. Traces of awkward modeling, their forms and fragility indicate that they had no practical function. Moreover, their insignificant size and bottle-like shape could testify to their role as models of regular full-sized vessels.

Personal ornaments recovered from this part of the cemetery repeat forms and materials noted in the eastern group. Interestingly, only one grave contained arrowheads. This section of the wadi was evidently in use as a burial ground in Post Meroitic times, judging by the pottery and structural features of the tumuli.<sup>6</sup>

The presented conclusions are not to be treated as final, considering that the data comes from only two of three grave groups, which were partly examined in the course of the two field seasons. Further work on the site will surely bring new evidence to confirm and elaborate on the above.

6 Loc. cit.