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PETER M. FISCHER

The Swedish Jordan Expedition 2009 and 2010 at Tall Abu al-Kharaz

Preliminary results from the Early Iron Age occupation in Area 9
With appendices by T. Bürge, and A. Gustafsson & J. Azzopardi

Abstract*

Tall Abu al-Kharaz, in the central Jordan Valley, was occupied during approximately five millennia.[1] A walled town, which had a dominant position in the Jordan Valley, existed already in the Early Bronze Age IB, viz. before 3050 BC. Walled settlements also flourished at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (around 1600 BC), during the Late Bronze Age (roughly 1500–1200 BC) and throughout the entire Iron Age (roughly 1200–600 BC). It is most likely that Tell Abu al-Kharaz is identical with *Jabesh Gilead:* this city is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament. During earlier seasons most of the Early Iron Age remains were found to have been disturbed by later settlers. It is, therefore, essential for the documentation of the settlement history of this city, that the expedition of 2009 unearthed an extremely well-preserved city quarter dating to the 12/11th century BC (according to high-precision radiocarbon dates). The excavations were extended in autumn 2010 and a stone-built, architectural compound was uncovered. Fourteen rooms (state October 2010), with walls still upright and standing to a height of more than 2 m, were exposed. The inventories of these rooms, which comprised more than one hundred complete vessels and other objects, were remarkably intact. Amongst the finds were numerous imports from Egypt and Lebanon. There are also finds which should be attributed to the Philistines, according to several Aegean-style vessels. The find context points to a hasty abandonment of the city. In the past, the beginning of the Iron Age has often been described as "the Dark Ages"—a period of cultural regression: this categorization is not relevant to the find situation at Tall Abu al-Kharaz where the remains of a wealthy society, which had far-reaching intercultural connections, can be identified.

Introduction

The twelfth (2009) and thirteenth (2010) seasons of excavation at Tall Abu al-Kharaz were mainly devoted to the Iron Age occupation of the site.[2] The main objective of the continued excavations was to find and explore the earliest Iron Age occupation of Tall Abu al-Kharaz and to study new material for a refined stratigraphy. This information is published in the third volume on Tall Abu al-Kharaz, which concentrates on the Iron Age.[3]

At the end of the 2009 fieldwork season which was mainly carried out in Area 7 in the northernmost part of the city, it was our intention to clean and consolidate the city-walls from the Early Bronze Age through to the Abbasid period in

* *Acknowledgements*

The excavations at Tall Abu al-Kharaz were carried out with the kind support of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The Royal Court of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, represented by T.R.H. Prince Raad Ibn Zaid, Princess Majda Raad and the Swedish Embassy headed by H.E. C. Sparre again showed great interest in our work and provided support. The Department of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University in Irbid, headed by Dean Professor Z. Kafafi, supported the expedition in many ways and also arranged a public lecture at Yarmouk University, where the results from Tall Abu al-Kharaz were presented and discussed in a wider forum. Many thanks go to Professor E.M. Wild from the radiocarbon laboratory VERA, University of Vienna, who processed the samples at short notice.

1 Fischer 2008b. The tell occupies an area of 12 ha.

2 See the earlier publications on the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages in Fischer 2006a; *idem* 2006b; *idem* 2008a. See also Fischer & Feldbacher 2009; *iidem* 2010 (in press). The 2009 and 2010 teams consisted of 48 persons including P.M. Fischer (director), R. Feldbacher (assistant field director), H. Ta'ani (foreman, trench master), M. Al-Bataineh (surveyor, draughtsperson). Trench masters were J. Azzopardi, E. Björkander-Mannheimer, D. Blattner, T. Bürge, L. Franz, A. Gustafsson, N. Monschein, M. Pehrson, M. Rinner, S. Schedl, S. Schilk and P. Täuber. Assistant trench masters were I. Fischer, L. Längström, R. Lundh, S. Lundh, J. Martinell, S. Martinell, K. Nordström, L. Nyström and M. Werngren. The representatives of the Department of Antiquities were K. Janaideh and M. Es-Shalabi. The expedition was further supported by representatives of the Department of Antiquities, I. Melhem and N. Khasawneh. Additional support was provided by K.M. Dheeb and S. Esbeihat (cooks), D. Jawahreh (pottery washing) and M.M. Ahmad (transportation). 15 local workers from Pella, Mashare'a and Yabis were also engaged in the excavations.

3 Fischer, forthcoming. There are actually four volumes, including the volume on the chronology. The other three are Fischer 2006a, 2006b, and 2008a.

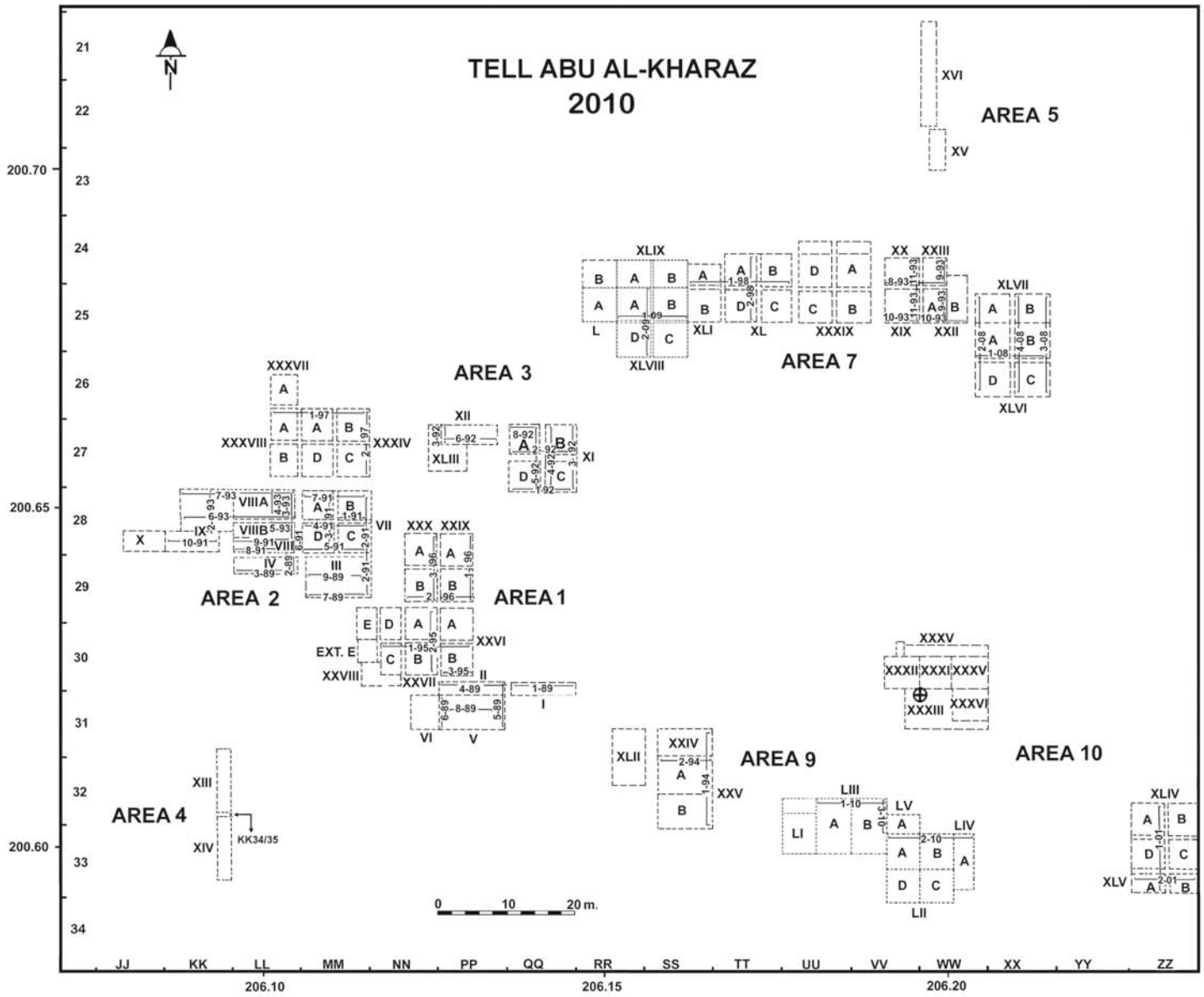

Fig. 1. Tall Abu al-Kharaz. Overview of areas, trenches and sections (drawing by M. Bataineh).

Area 9 which is in the southernmost part of the tell (*Fig. 1*). We were able to expose and clean some 30 m of the defence system of all periods in Area 9, east of the trenches which had been excavated in 1994 and 1995. Walls visible on the surface were recorded by our total station in order to present them digitally in a three-dimensional view, and some were also consolidated. During the cleaning process an almost square structure, 4.4 m × 4.2 m in size (outer dimensions), built on top of the Middle/Late Bronze Age city-wall and protruding towards the south, was exposed.[4] A trial trench exposed two strata of Iron Age occupation, Phases X and IX,[5] of which the oldest, Phase IX, revealed twenty-three complete earthenware vessels and many other finds of metal, stone and organic material in an excellent primary context, viz. a totally undisturbed room. The first radiocarbon dates from the floor of Stratum IX are all in the 12th–11th centuries BC.[6] This encouraged us to extend the excavations towards the east in 2010, and a total of 28 m represented by Trenches LI–LV were opened during these two seasons.

Results from the excavations in Area 9: Trenches LI–LV[7]

PHASE XII *(FIGS. 2, 7)*

The architectural remains of this phase, most of them visible on the surface or just below a thin layer of colluvial soil, were badly preserved due to their superficial positions. Only the northern part provided some interpretable structures (W 629, 615, 617 and 618). The western structure is fairly well-preserved, approx. 11 m (east–west) × 5 m (north–south) in size. An opening, 4 m wide, separates the western from the eastern structure. From the eastern structure only one wall

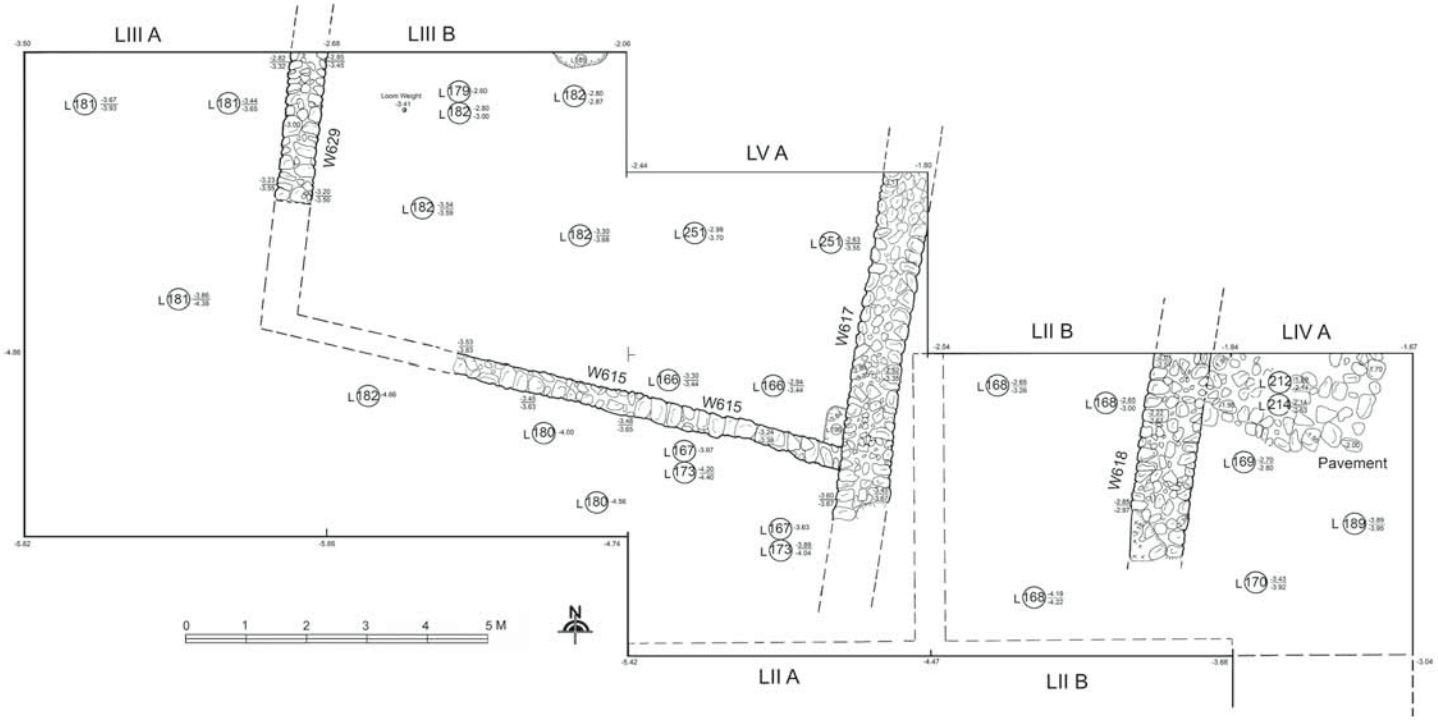

Fig. 2. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, plan of Phase XII (drawing by M. Bataineh).

[4] See Fischer & Feldbacher 2010.

[5] The occupational phases of the Early, Middle and Late Bronze Ages correspond to Strata I to VIII. Consequently, the earliest Iron Age phase is Phase IX. In the preliminary reports the Iron Age stratification (Stratum 1) is always from the surface: Stratum 1 with suffix A, then Stratum 1B etc., regardless of the area. This means that Stratum 1B in Area 7, for instance, may not necessarily correspond to Stratum 1B in Area 9 or any of the other areas. In Area 9, Stratum 1C from the preliminary reports corresponds to occupational Phase IX, Stratum 1B2 to Phase X, and Stratum 1B1 to Phase XI.

[6] Processed by the VERA laboratory, University of Vienna. A thorough discussion of the radiocarbon dates will appear in the Iron Age volume (Fischer forthcoming).

[7] The systematic study of the Area 9 compound is part of the PhD thesis by T. Bürge.

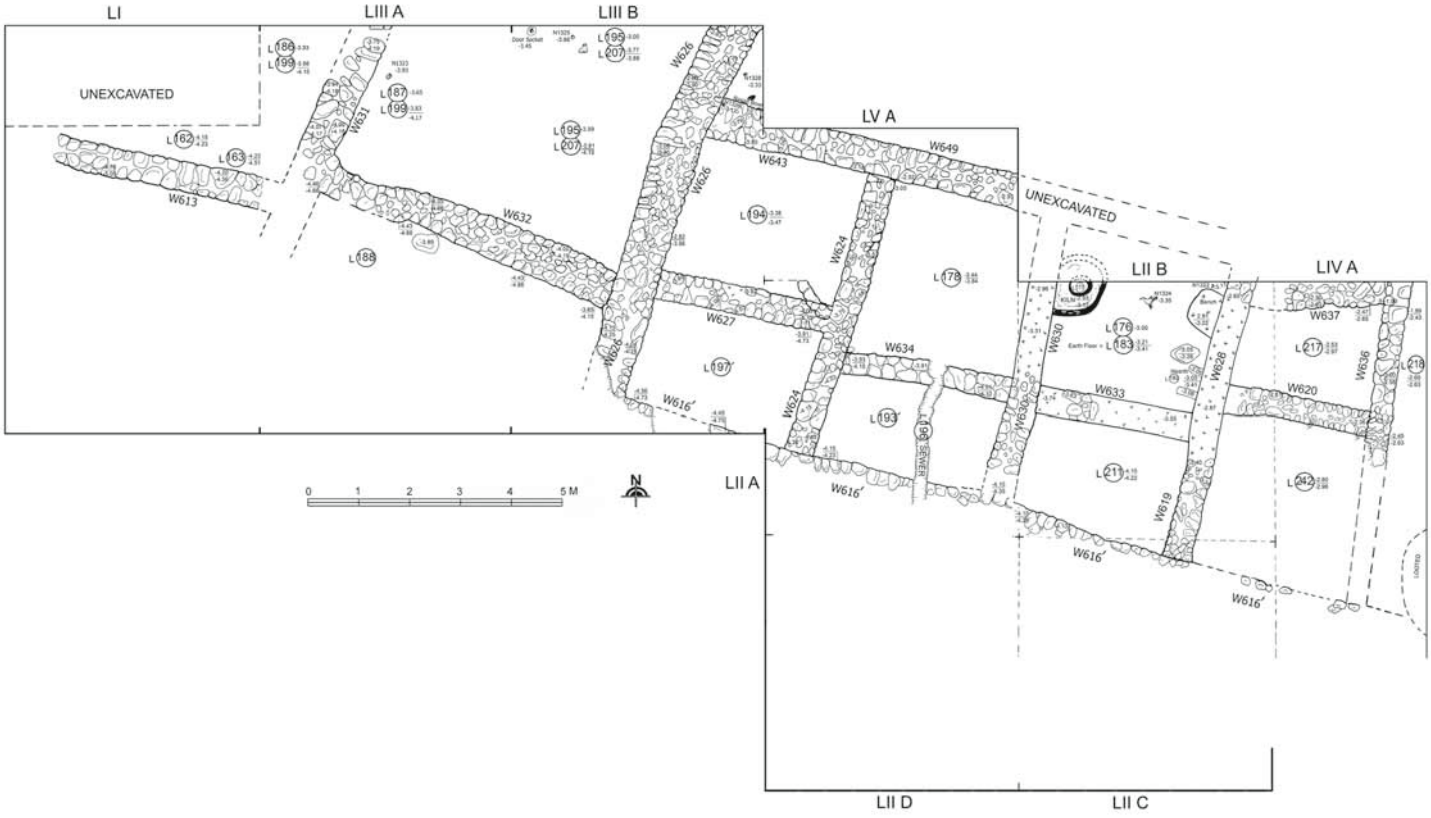

Fig. 3. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, plan of Phase XI (drawing by M. Bataineh and T. Bürge).

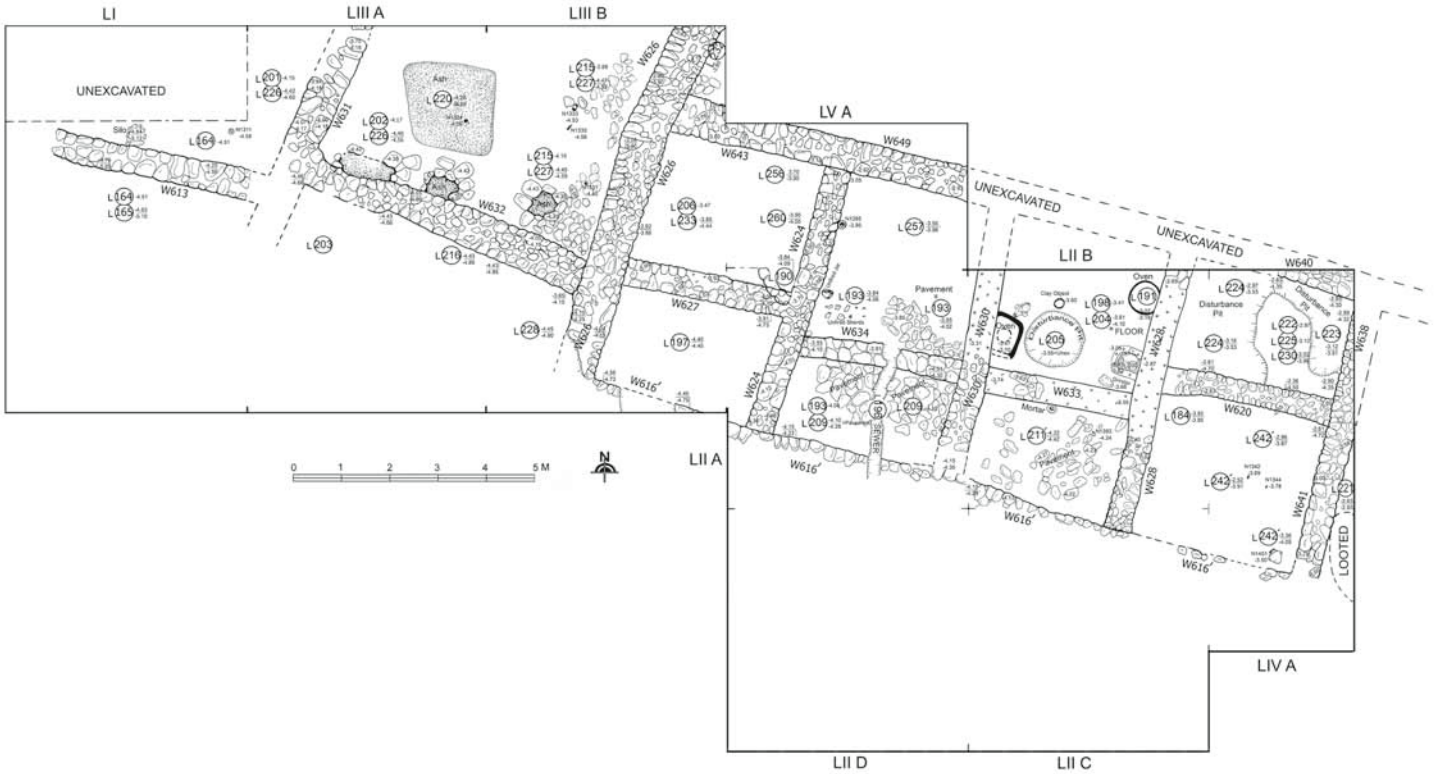

Fig. 4. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, plan of Phase X (drawing by M. Bataineh and T. Bürge).

(W618) and a stone pavement could be exposed. The function of these two buildings is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, the large dimensions of the western structure and its proximity to the summit of the tell, make it likely that it had an administrative function. The 4 m wide opening between the two buildings may point to a portion of the city gate.

The majority of the sherds are from the second half of the Iron Age, most likely the end of Iron Age IIA and the beginning of IIB, viz. a date in the second half of the 9th century BC. However, a few intrusive sherds dating to the Late Roman/Byzantine and Abbasid periods were also found. There are no other finds of significance except for a typical Iron Age loom weight of unfired clay.

PHASES XI AND X (*FIGS. 3*, *4*, *7*)

These two phases, which are very close in time and in which roughly the same stone-built structures were used, will be treated jointly. The exposed compound is at least 22 m wide (east–west), 8 m long (north–south) and contains 12 walled spaces. These spaces are bordered to the south by an array of city-walls from earlier periods which were reused as foundations for new structures. The uppermost of these reused and modified walls is W616'. The two phases, XI and X, were easily distinguished in the eastern part, whereas the structures of the western part were in use continuously throughout Phases X and XI.

The largest walled space, 6 m × 5m large, is in the western part. It is most likely a courtyard which was partly paved with stone. There are three stone-lined installations along the southern wall (W632) which are associated with the preparation of food. In the north is a dislocated door-socket made of limestone. On the floor is a substantial layer of burned debris and ash. Finds from the floor level and the fill above it include a black juglet (N1323), a plain juglet (N1333), two ceramic spindle-whorls made of recycled pottery sherds (N1325, N1331) and a bronze arrow-head (N1335). To the northeast of the eastern wall, bordering the courtyard, were three additional finds: a recycled spindle-whorl (N1326), part of a basalt bowl, and a partly preserved bronze handle of a sword or a large dagger (N1328).

The next eight spaces, also those covered by debris and ash, are smaller and of varying dimensions, roughly between 2–3 m × 2 m. Two central spaces are partly paved with stone, the southern of which is disturbed by a sewer (L196). The sewer dates to the Abbasid period, and functioned as a drain for rainwater from higher up the tell leading the water outside the city, through the array of city-walls from earlier periods. Large pieces of a black jar with the typical white Abbasid decoration were found embedded in the sewer. The central rooms contained numerous pieces of leather-hard, unfired vessels, mainly larger vessels, which proves that the pottery was locally produced. The northern room of the next pair of rooms towards the east revealed quite a large, roughly circular installation which, most likely, is a pottery kiln. Opposite the kiln is a clay bench, and south of it a small fireplace built of mud-brick.

Amongst the finds are a fishing hook (N1322), a basalt millstone (N1324), a limestone mortar (N1385), a cylindrical clay lid (N1342), a carnelian bead (N1344), a tool or pendent of terracotta (N1393) and a decorated jar with a pattern encircling the entire shoulder (N1401; *Fig. 5:1*). The pattern on the shoulder of the decorated jar gives the impression that the potter tried to imitate a script. According to K. Jaros,[8] the most frequently appearing "sign" is that resembling a *waw*, other signs look like *kaph*, *samech* and *taw*. However, further interpretation was not possible and it may be the case that an illiterate potter tried to imitate signs. This is based on the idea that we should not view this "sign" as a simple decoration. In contrast to other similar vessels on which the decorations are much more accurately executed, this one is totally different. The typical juglet type has a somewhat marked shoulder (*Fig. 5:3*). An unusual vessel is a hybrid of a bowl and a chalice: it has impressed decorations on the interior (*Fig. 5:2*). Cooking pots have typically triangular rim sections (*Fig. 5:5*, *6*) and storage jars show often neck ridges (*Fig. 5:4*).

The older sub-phase is conspicuous in the four eastern rooms where in one of the northern rooms two clay-built ovens preceded the kiln of the next phase. There are also installations of clay and a millstone, all of which point to the preparation of food. Finds from all these twelve spaces are quite scarce which confirms that the people resettling in the later part of the Iron Age "cleaned" the area, or that the area was looted after the conflagration and a probable attack: it is also obvious from the thick layer of debris and the ash that Phase XI suffered a severe catastrophe.

According to the pottery and radiocarbon, the strata from these two phases belong to the second half of Iron Age I, most likely Iron Age IB–IIA. A date from the second half of the 11th century to the 9th century is suggested.[9]

PHASE IX (*FIGS. 6*, *7*)

After removing thick debris, with a total thickness of almost 1 m, and the burnt-down roof constructions which were up to 0.5 m thick, we were able to expose a compound of approx. 28 m in the east–west direction and 8 m in the north–south direction. The compound consists of seven pairs of rooms (R1–14 in *Fig. 6*), which gives the strong impression of cen-

[8] Email on 29 October 2010.
[9] See n. 7.

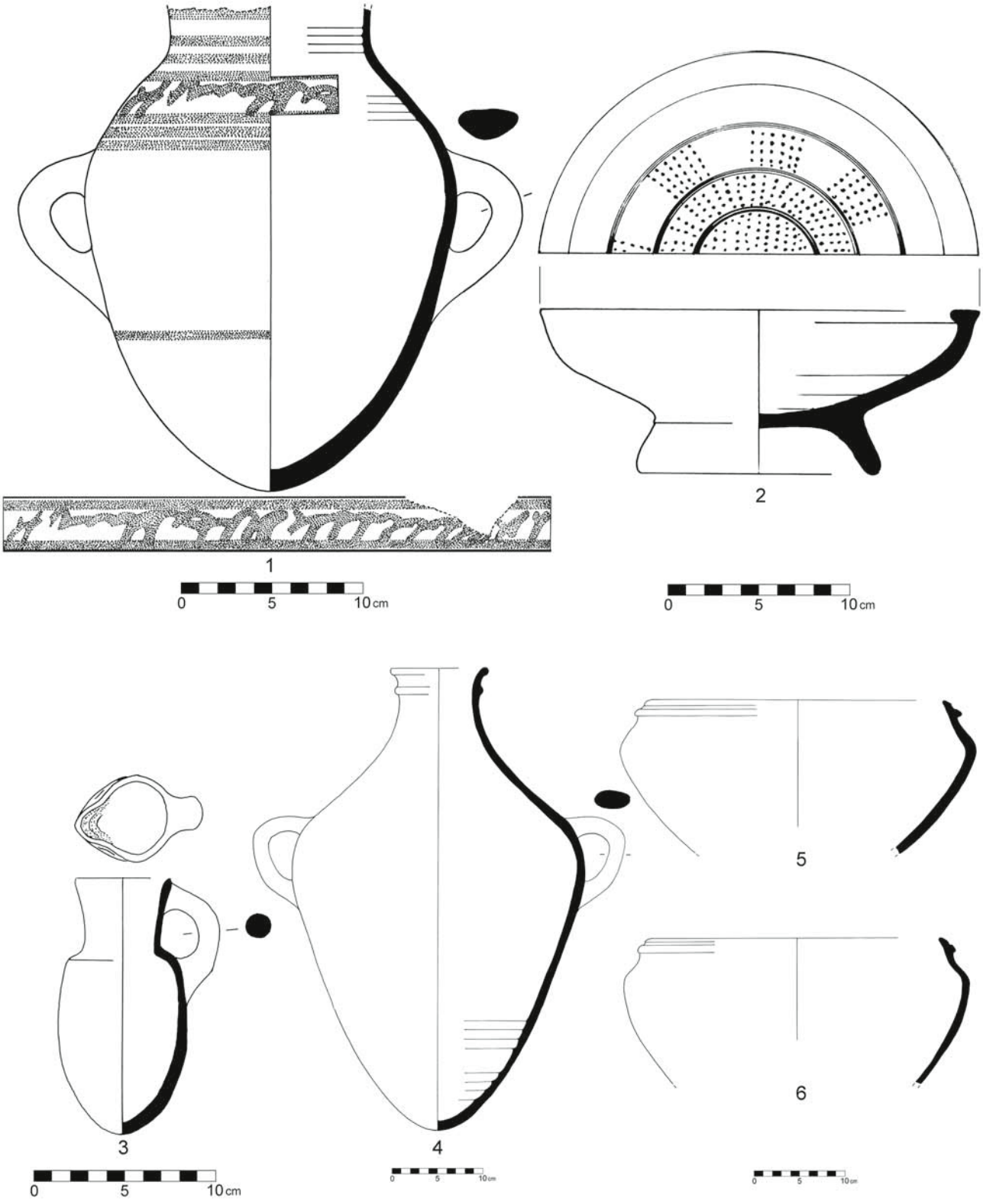

Fig. 5. Phase X: selected pottery (drawing by M. Bataineh).

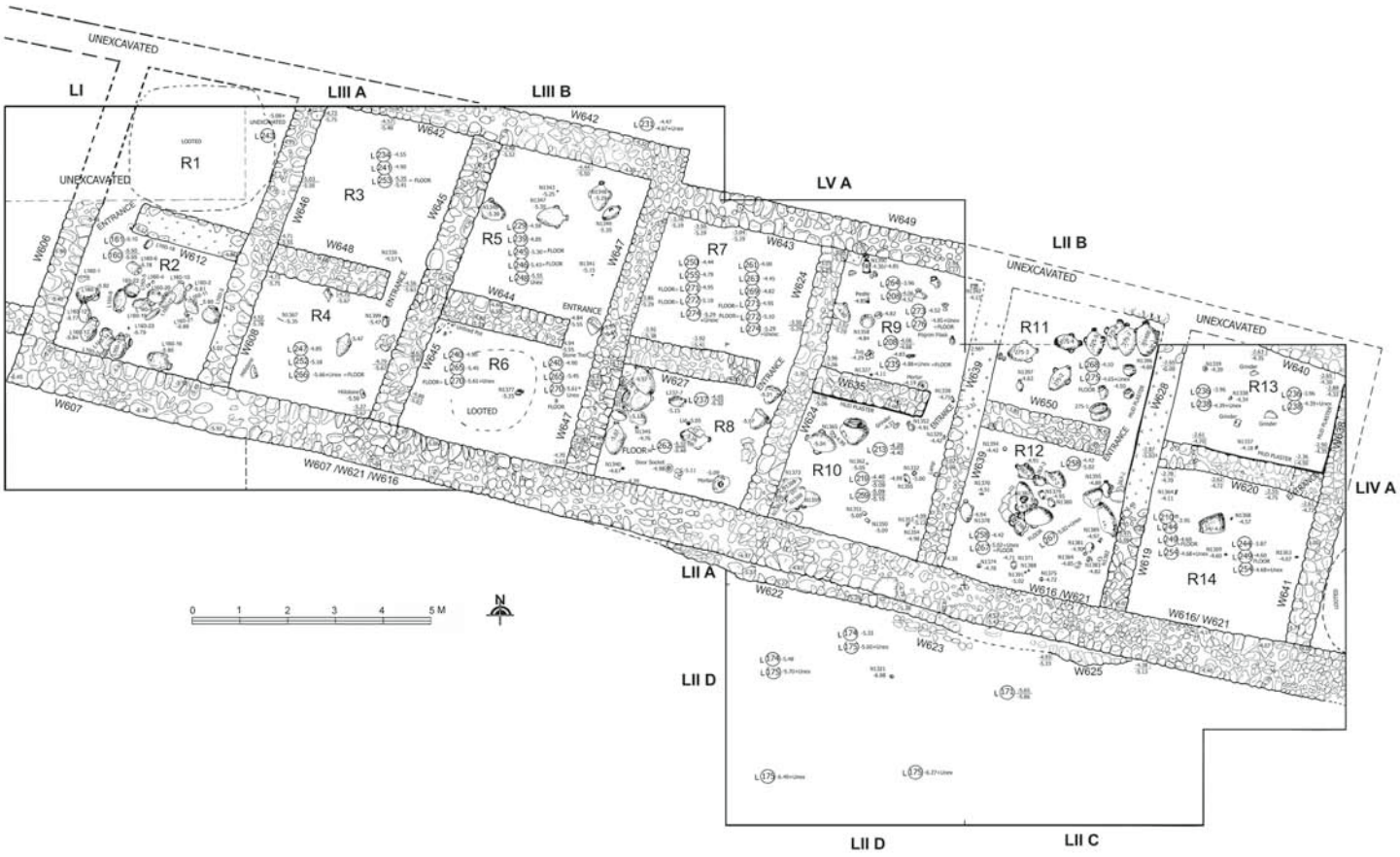

Fig. 6. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, plan of Phase IX (drawing by M. Bataineh and T. Bürge).

trally supervised town planning.[10] The fourteen rooms are fairly standardized; they are from 2.5 m × 3 m to 3 m × 3 m in size. The walls of the compound are generally 0.6–0.7 m wide, except for the city-wall to the south which is approximately 1 m wide and against which the compound is built to the south. All seven pairs of rooms are connected to each other through standardized entrances which are 0.6 m wide. These entrances are always to the east, except for the westernmost pair of rooms which had the entrances to the west. Some entrances have a threshold of clay because the northern row of rooms is somewhat higher up the tell than the southern row of rooms. All rooms were plastered on the interior with a layer of fine clay.

Regrettably, three looters' pits reached Stratum IX and disturbed the contexts. One is in the northern room of the westernmost pair (Room 1),[11] the second is in the southern room of the third pair (Room 6) and the third is east of the seventh pair, viz. outside the opened up area to the south. The floor contexts of the remaining, twelve, undisturbed rooms are amongst the most rewarding of all the rooms so far excavated during the last 20 years. Room 2 is the space which was excavated in 2009 and was crowded with finds (*Fig. 8*). After the removal of the burnt-down roof construction, we exposed a "primary find context" in the shape of a storage room with numerous intact or complete finds, close to 30 in number. This excellent find situation, where none of the room's many objects were disturbed after the conflagration, came as a surprise when one considers the proximity of the room to the surface, especially in its southern part. The space was enclosed by the walls W606, 607, 608 and 612—some of them preserved up to 1 m high. There was a 0.12 m thick wooden roof support approximately in the centre of the room. There is an

[10] The rooms are numbered 1–14 here, from west to east: Room 1 is north of Room 2, Room 3 north of Room 4 etc.

[11] Room 1 was used as a storage area for fine, raw clay which points to the production of pottery.

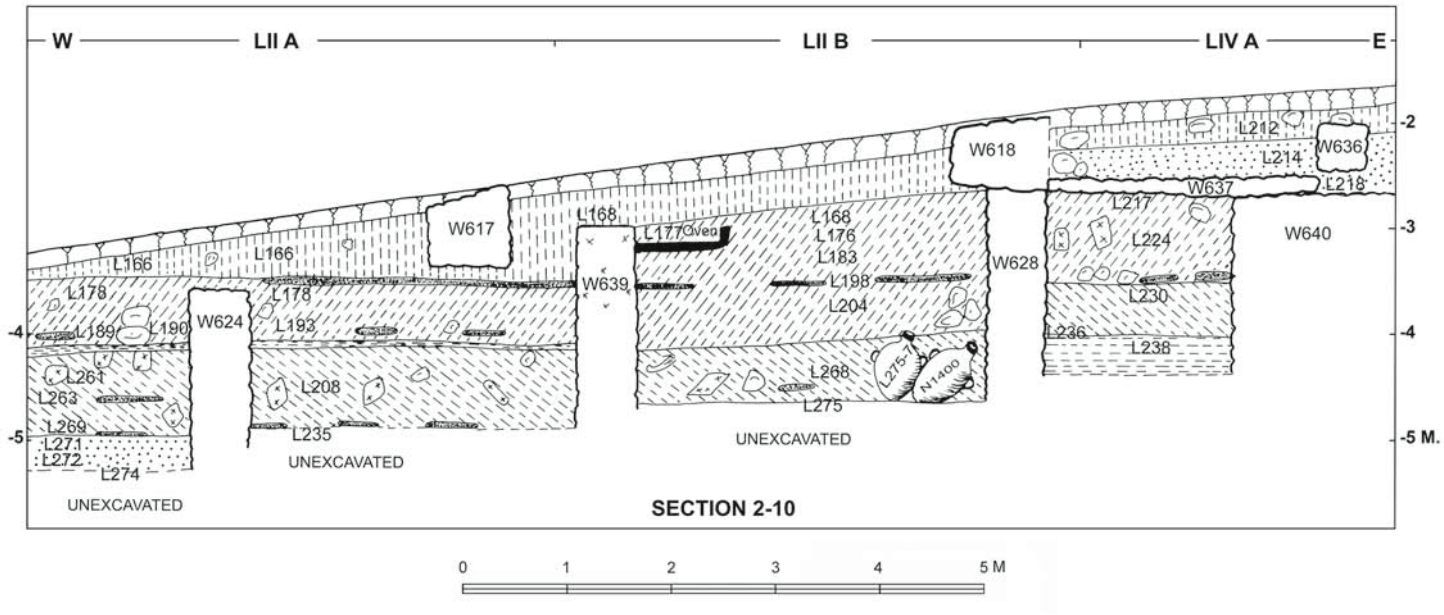

Fig. 7. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, northern section (drawing by M. Bataineh).

Fig. 8. Tall Abu al-Kharaz, Area 9, Phase IX, Room 2 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

entrance, 0.8 m wide, in the northwest corner, together with a step leading up to the next (now looted) room. In the south-east corner of the passage leading to the next room there is a limestone door-socket. 18 earthenware vessels were exposed: three juglets, one strainer jug, one krater and 13 jars. Three jars contained the remains of (barley?) flour, one of which contained as much as four kilograms of flour (*Fig. 9*), and the krater contained the dried remains of, most likely, olive oil and olive pits. Finds of basalt stone include a mortar, a mill-stone and a spindle-whorl which was probably reused because its shape and production technique point to a product of the Early Bronze Age and not the Iron Age. Another find of an

Fig. 9. Contents (barley flour) from one of the storage jars in Room 2 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

Fig. 10. Phase IX storage jars in Room 5 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

unusual shape is a ribbed spindle-whorl of fired clay. A sheet of bronze might belong to the door construction. A quite heavy limestone cylinder, 0.3 m long with 0.23 m diameter, shows a centrally placed depression on one side whereas the other side is broken-off. This stone was used for crushing olives.

Room 3 and Room 7 are unexpectedly devoid of any finds of special interest, in comparison to the contents of the other rooms. Room 4 contained a cooking pot (N1399) and a bronze pin (N1367), and Room 5 contained four, complete storage jars (*Fig. 10*; *Fig. 19:4*). Room 6 was partly looted: only a broken basalt bowl (N1377) and numerous pieces of unfired vessels remained. Room 8, which was obviously a storage and working facility was again crowded with finds: storage jars, cooking pots of the typical Early Iron Age types with triangular rims (see the principal type in *Fig. 19:3*), jugs, mortars, two spindle-whorls (N1340, N1376), a basalt pestle (N1345) and a juglet (N1386).

The next pair of rooms, Rooms 9 and 10, were also packed with finds, some of them of special interest since they are imports: one is a large globular jug from Room 9 (*Fig. 14:1*). It is of excellent craftsmanship in bichrome decoration on a burnished reddish-yellow background. It is an import from the Phoenician sphere of culture. This room also contained an upright-standing stand/incense burner with a lid in the shape of a chalice (N1390/1 and /2; *Fig. 15*), all of it *in situ* (see appendix by T. Bürge). Traces of an oily liquid were still visible on the exterior of the stand. Other finds are a cooking pot of an unusual shape (N1358, *Fig. 14:7*), a pilgrim flask (L264-1, *Fig. 14:2*), a pyxis (N1392, *Fig. 14:3*)[12] and tools of stone including a mortar and a pestle. Room 10 to the south was entered through the aperture in the southeast part of Room 9. Also this room was packed with finds. In the southwest corner of the room there were storage jars and other vessels leaning against the walls (N1359, N1360, N1361, N1366; *Fig. 16*). Other finds from Room 10 are kraters (one is N1356, *Fig. 17:5*), pilgrim flasks (one is N1350), a double-pyxis (N1365, *Fig. 17:4*), a pyxis (N1351, *Fig. 17:3*) and various juglets (one is N1355), lamps, one of which is four-spouted (N1332, *Fig. 19:2*), and a variety of stone tools. The pyxides, with their characteristic shape and decoration, point to Aegean influence. There are at least two Philistine-type vessels which were definitely imported: one, from the southwest corner, is a large, shallow, white-slipped, burnished bowl standing on three loop handles (N1372, *Fig. 19:1*), and the second one is a monochrome decorated, large jug with a thick, white, burnished slip (N1352, *Figs. 11:4*, *13*).

The next pair of connected rooms, Rooms 11 and 12, also contained a multitude of objects, some of which were imported. The northern Room 11 contained seven storage jars (two, N1400 and L275-7, are shown in *Fig. 20*), four cooking pots, a chalice and two large "goblets" (one is N1397, *Fig. 11:1*). Room 12 to the south contained, *inter alia*, nine storage jars, jugs, juglets and a lamp (N1371). There are also two elaborated pilgrim flasks in Room 12; one of which has bichrome decoration (L267-3, *Fig 17:1*; and N1381, *Fig. 17:2*). A two-handled jug was filled with 37 balls of unfired clay: their function is not clear (*Fig. 21*). A jug still sealed with a lid and containing flint blades should be mentioned (N1379, *Figs. 11:2*, *12*). Other finds are a scaraboid of steatite with a stylized representation of the head of a horse instead of the common representation of the beetle's pronotum and the wings, and with drilled circular decorations on the base (N1388, *Fig. 18:1*).

[12] The designation of such a vessel as "pyxis" does not correspond to that of similar vessel shapes from the Mycenaean sphere of culture, where they are termed "alabastra". Nevertheless, the term "pyxis" for our vessel shapes is widely used in the Levant. Therefore, this term is kept in order to follow traditional Levantine terminology.

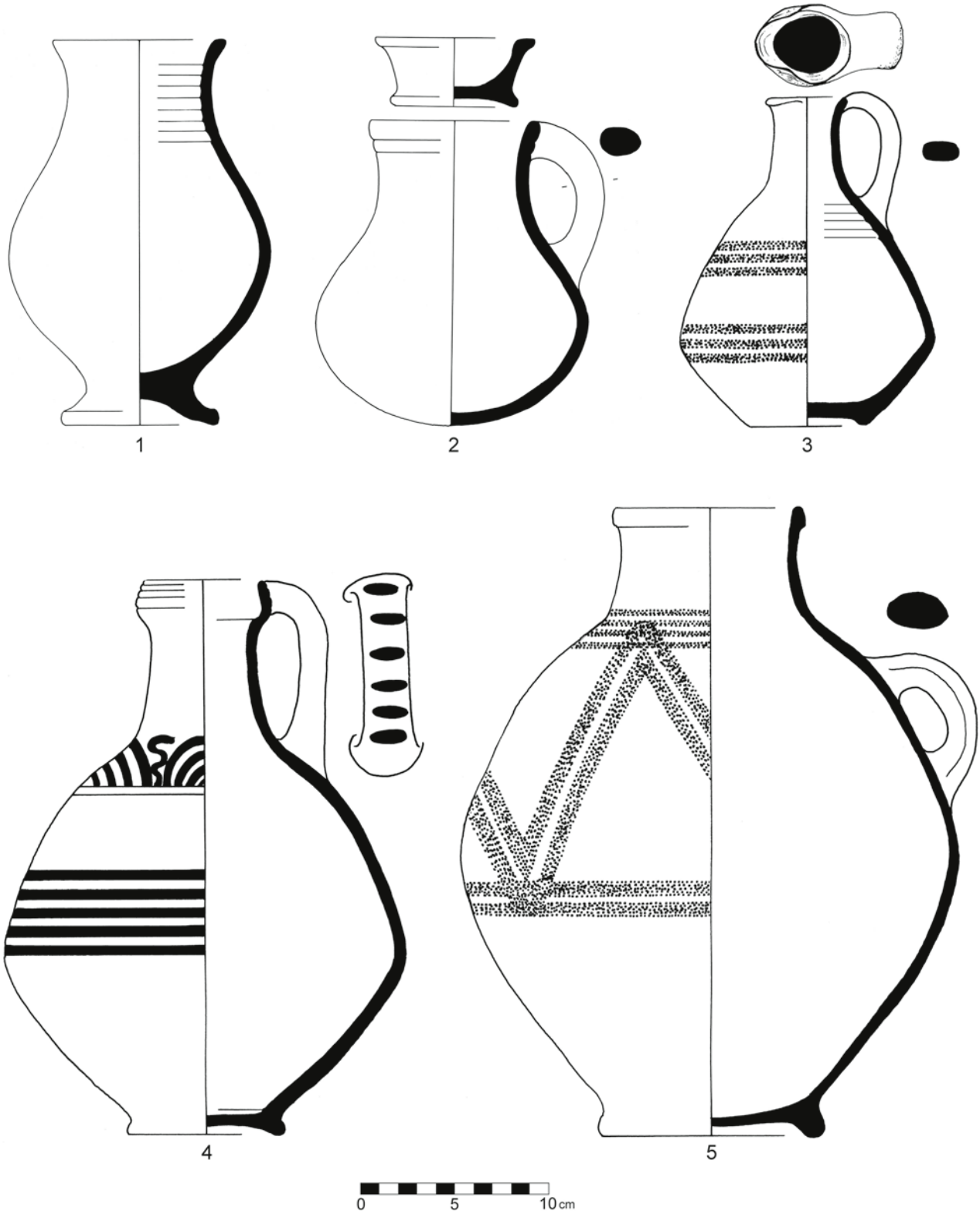

Fig. 11. Phase IX: selected pottery (drawing by M. Bataineh).

The other is a scarab of paste with the possible throne name of Tuthmosis III (N1389, *Fig. 18:2*).[13] One of the small vessels is made of alabaster-calcite in the shape of a pyxis (N1382). Room 13, the northern of the next two pairs of rooms, is also well-preserved: its well-constructed walls are still standing to a height of more than 2 m (*Fig. 22*). Rooms 13 and 14 did not contain the same multitude of finds as the rooms to the west. Nevertheless, a number of stone tools and a complete transportable oven (arab. *tannur*) in Room 14 should be mentioned (*Fig. 23*). The oven lay on its side with the heavy roof construction on top of it (*Fig. 24*).

According to the pottery and radiocarbon dating, Phase IX should be dated to Iron Age I. Thus, a date in the first half of the 11th centry BC for the destruction of this phase is suggested.[14]

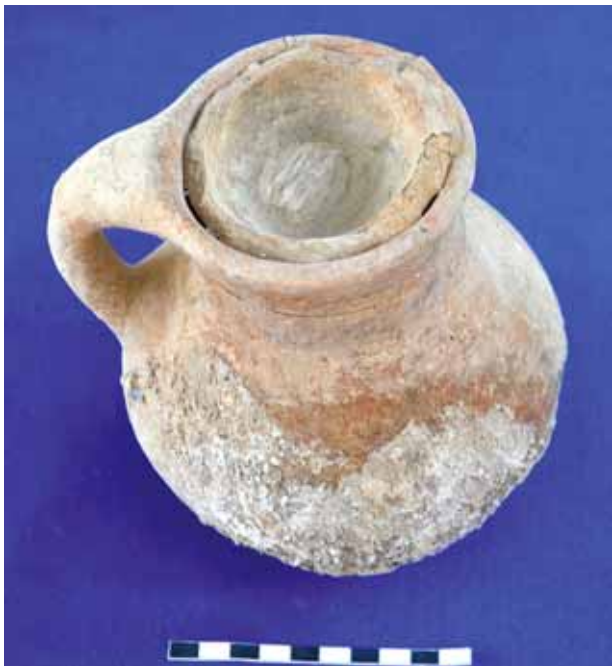

Fig. 12. Phase IX: sealed jug from Room 12 as found (photograph by T. Bürge).

Preliminary conclusions

It can be stated that, for the first time, we have manifest proof of Early Iron Age occupation at the site. After the removal of the burnt-down roof constructions of twig-reinforced sun-dried clay, we exposed numerous "primary find contexts" in the form of 14 rooms with many intact or complete finds. This excellent find situation where, in principle, none of the hundreds of complete objects were disturbed after the conflagration came as a surprise when one considers the rooms' proximity to the surface, especially in the southern part of Area 9.

The exposed compound of Phase IX has a length of at least 28 m.[15] It represents the basement or the first floor of a building on which another storey was built. The regular, well-built stone architecture with superstructures of sun-dried clay, wood and straw suggests a centrally supervised town-plan (see the 3D reconstruction in *Fig. 25*). The rich

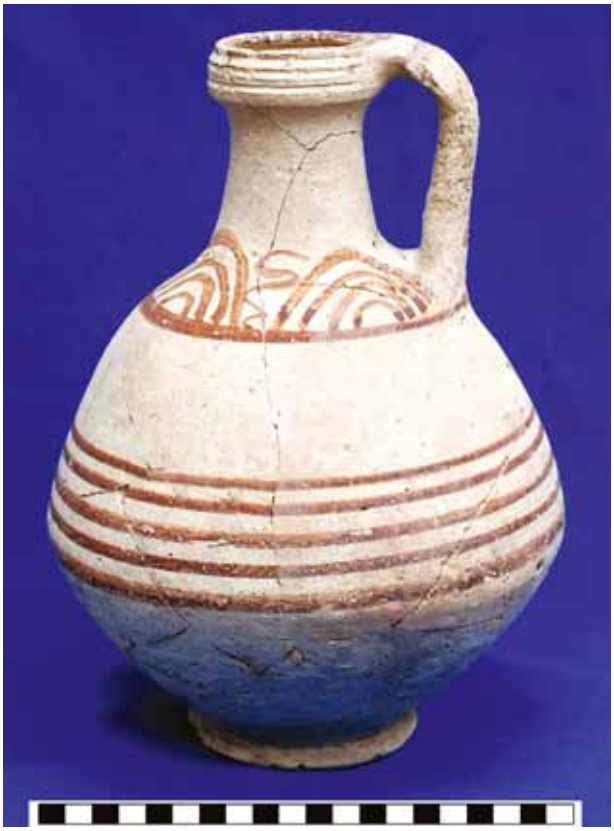

Fig. 13. Phase IX: Philistine-type monochrome-decorated jug from Room 10 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

[13] With reference to A. Ahrens, German Archaeological Institute, Damascus, who wrote on 26 October 2010: "... a version of 'Men-Kheper-Re' (Tuthmose III's throne name) ... However, this is not clear beyond doubt, and one of the signs could also read 'user/woser'... Since the hieroglyphs are locally executed, a definite reading is always difficult ..."

[14] See n. 7.

[15] The compound is even larger: during a survey in 2011 we could trace additional rooms towards the east.

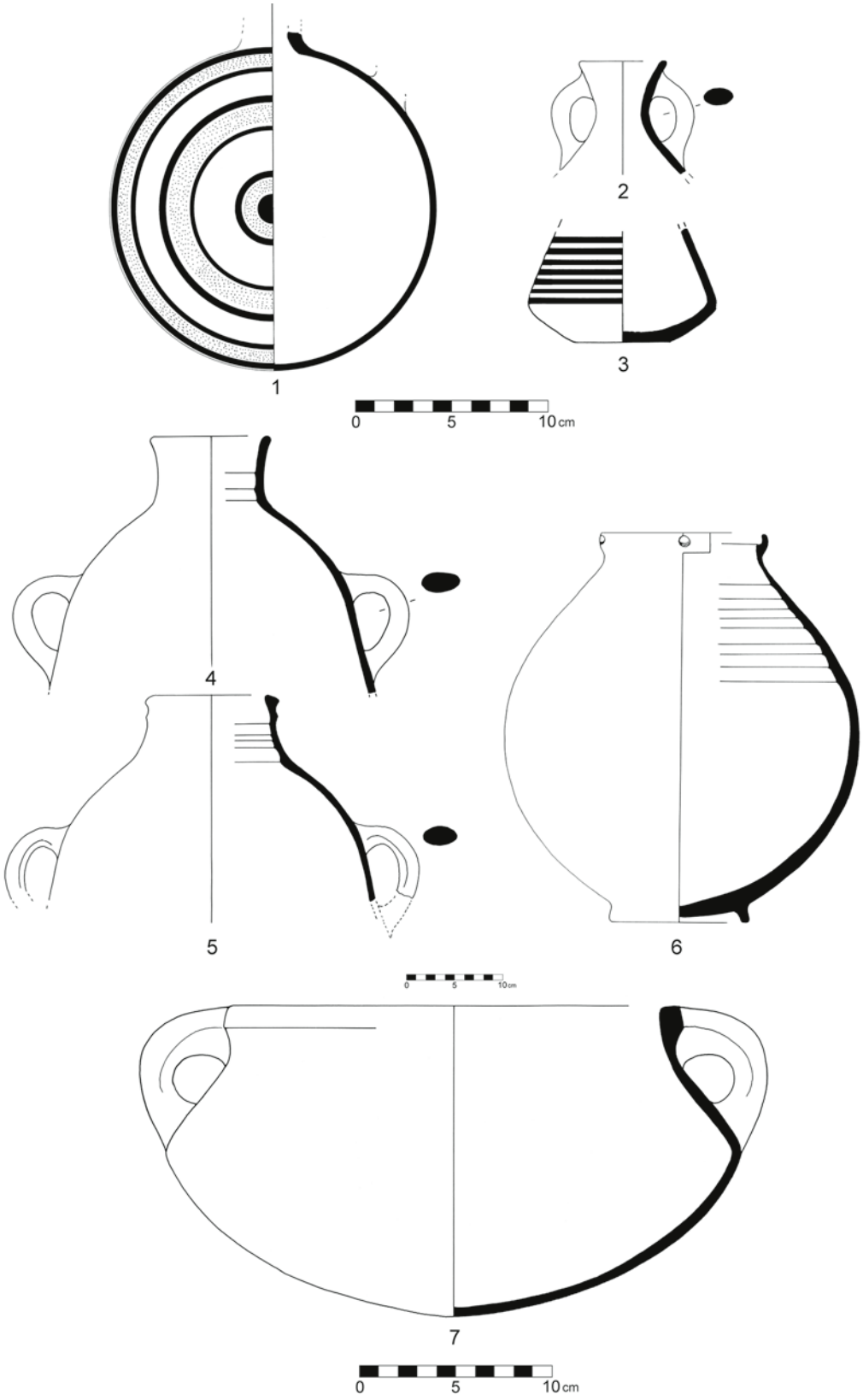

Fig. 14. Phase IX: selected pottery (drawing by M. Bataineh).

Fig. 15. Phase IX: stand and chalice-lid from Room 9 (photograph by P.M. Fischer, drawing by M. Bataineh).

Fig. 16. Phase IX: collection of in situ *pottery from south-western corner of Room 10 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).*

finds point to far-reaching intercultural connections either directly or via middlemen: in addition to imports from Cisjordan there are finds which can be associated with the Philistine and Aegean sphere of culture, and Phoenicia. The scarabs are most likely locally made but they may also represent imports. There are numerous storage vessels, many of which still contained large amounts of cereal grains such as barley and millet, chickpeas and olive oil, and semi-processed food (*Fig. 27*). Spindle-whorls and loom weights show that textiles were produced, and the storage of high-quality raw clay points to the local production of pottery. The variety of pottery shapes is impressive. All this evidence demonstrates a wealthy Iron Age I society which had contacts all over the Eastern Mediterranean in the 12th and 11th centuries BC.

The settlement of Phase IX suffered a severe catastrophe and a general conflagration. The city was hastily abandoned and most of the possessions of the inhabitants were left behind. After a possible occupational lacuna, the area was reoccupied in Phase X. The chronological conclusions based on the radiocarbon results are preliminary: sequencing and modelling of the data have not yet been completed and will be published within a short period of time.[16] Nevertheless, there are clear chronological tendencies for Phases IX and X: the destruction of Phase IX seems to have occurred around 1050 BC, and the destruction of Phase X in the middle of the 10th century BC. Phase XI was destroyed in the second half of the 9th century and Phase XII just before 800 BC.

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[16] See n. 7.

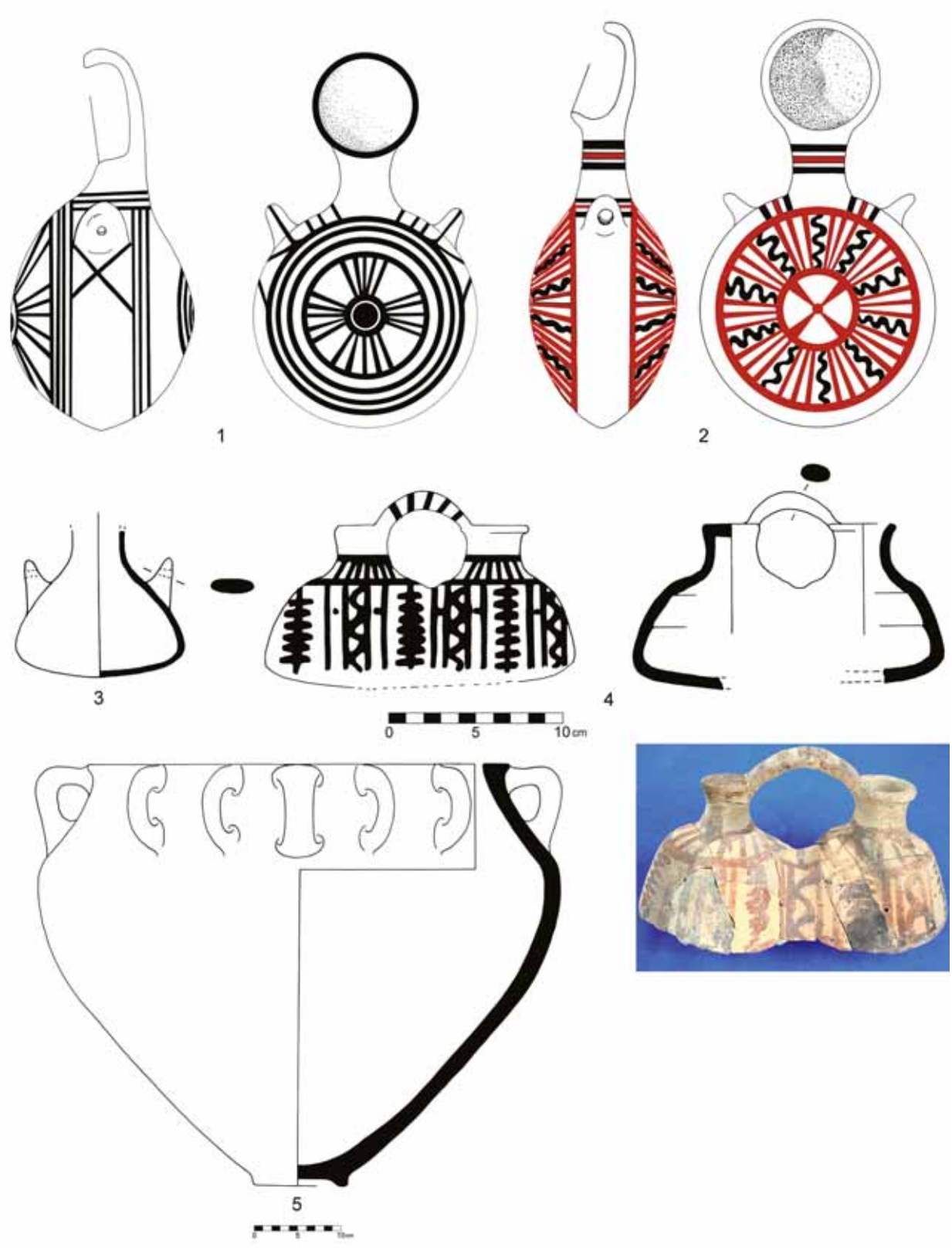

Fig. 17. Phase IX: selected pottery including Philistine-style and Aegean-style vessels (drawing by M. Bataineh, photograph by T. Bürge).

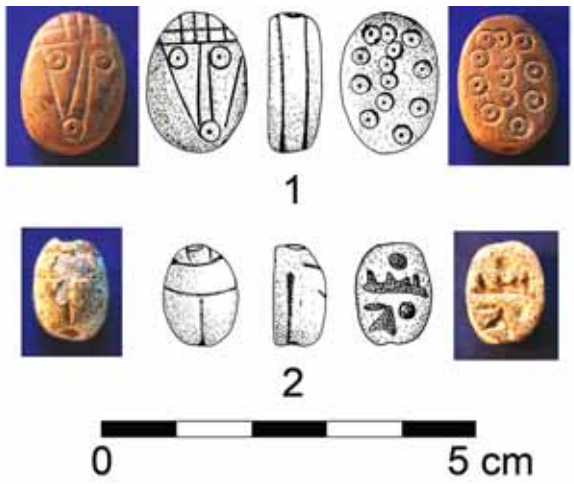

Fig. 18 (right). Phase IX: scaraboid and scarab from Room 12 (photographs and drawings by T. Bürge).

Fig. 19 (below). Phase IX: selected pottery (drawing by M. Bataineh, photograph by T. Bürge).

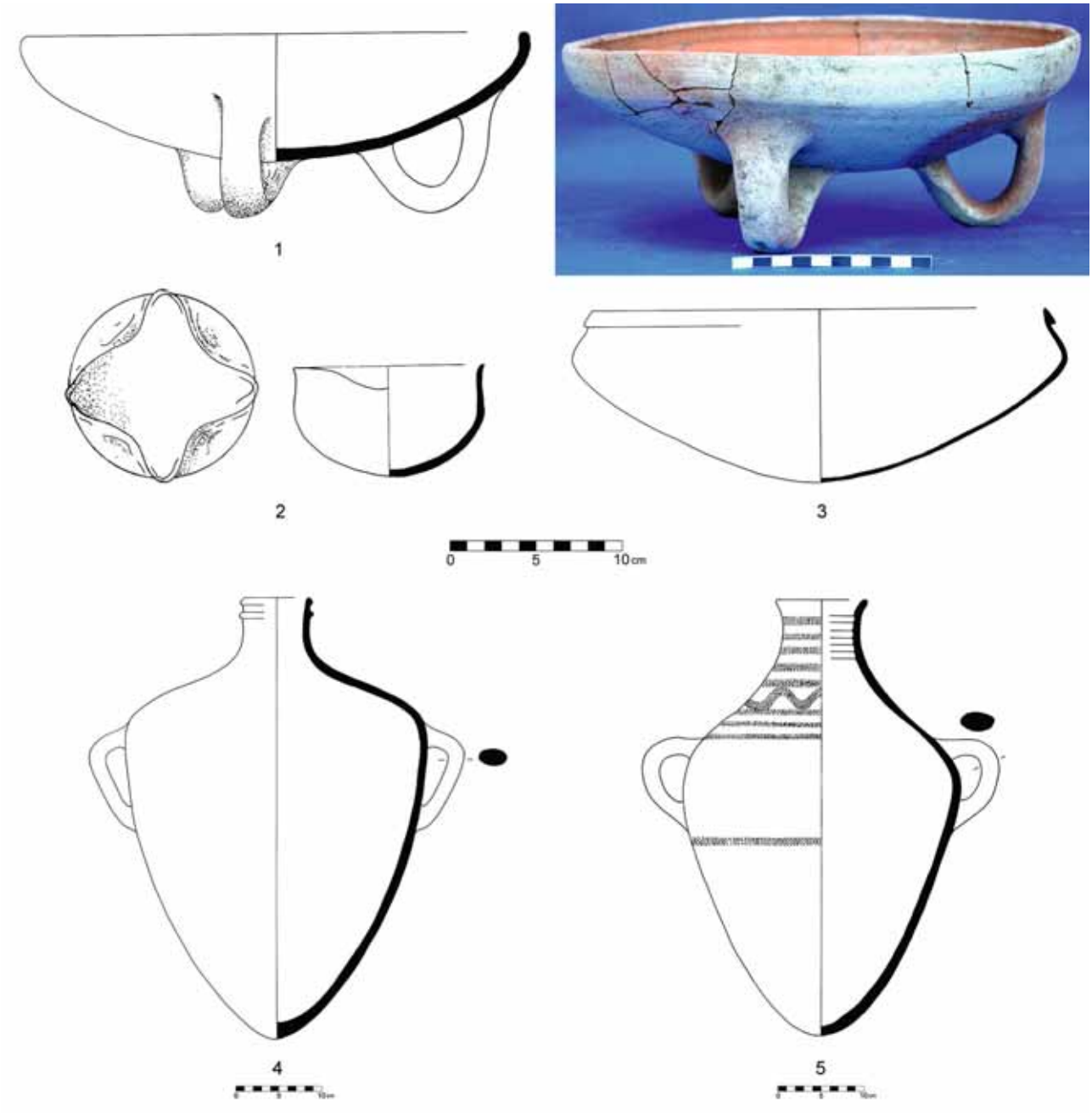

Fig. 20. Phase IX: northern section of Room 11 with storage jars in situ *(photograph by P.M. Fischer).*

Fig. 21. Phase IX: jug with clay balls (photograph by T. Bürge).

Fig. 22. Phase IX: Room 13 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

*Fig. 23. Phase IX: oven (*tannur*) below collapsed roof of Room 14 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).*

*Fig. 24. Phase IX: oven (*tannur*) from Room 14* in situ *(photograph by P.M. Fischer).*

Fig. 25. Phase IX compound (state autumn 2010): 3D reconstruction (produced by M. Bataineh).

Fig. 26. Phase IX: collection of in situ *pottery from northwestern corner of Room 8 (photograph by P.M. Fischer).*

Fig. 27. Phase IX: contents of two vessels; millet above, chickpeas below (photograph by P.M. Fischer).

Appendix 1: An Early Iron Age stand or incense burner from Tall Abu-Kharaz

BY T. BÜRGE

Material and context

During the 2010 campaign at Tall Abu al-Kharaz, a stand or incense burner (N1390/1, *Fig. 15*) was discovered in an Early Iron Age compound.[17] It was found *in situ* in the northwest corner of Room 9 in Trench LVA (see overview in *Figs. 1* and *6*), together with a chalice which was placed on top, in the opening of the stand (N1390/2, *Fig. 15*). The dimensions of Room 9 are: 3 m × 2.5 m, the walls being 0.6 m (western wall W624), 0.6 m (southern wall W635), 0.65 m (northern wall W649) and 0.6 m (eastern wall W639) wide. Their preserved heights range between 1.35 m (W649 with a total height of 2.25 m; the upper portion is reused in Phase X), 2.10 m (W624), around 2 m (W639—not completely exposed) and 1.10 m (W635). Room 9 is connected to Room 10 from the south, through a 0.55 m wide space between the eastern end of W635 and wall W639.

The stand was found next to a rectangular platform (surface approx. 24 cm × 32 cm; height around 15 cm) made of mud-brick in the northwest corner of Room 9). A complete chalice (L273-4, *Fig. 15*) was discovered just southeast of the stand. Other finds in the same room were a number of complete, or almost complete vessels: a cooking pot (N1358, *Fig. 14:7*), three jars (L208-4, L208-5 and L273-3, *Fig. 14:4*, *5*, *6*), a small krater (L273-2), a jug (L273-1), a pyxis (N1392, *Fig. 14:3*), parts of a pilgrim flask (L264-1, *Fig. 14:2*), three kraters (L264-2, L208-1 and L208-2) and a number of stone tools; amongst these were two pestles and one mortar (N1330/1–3). Of special interest is a high-quality, bichrome-decorated, globular jug of Phoenician provenance (L208-6, *Fig. 14:1*).

The stand/incense burner was found together with a lid in the shape of a reused chalice. The stand is 47 cm high; its diameter at the bottom is 24 cm narrowing to 12 cm at the top. It is double-fenestrated and of cylindrical shape, flaring slightly out towards the double-carinated base. It has two vertical handles slightly above and between the two rectangular windows with rounded corners, each 6 cm wide and 8 cm high. The everted and rounded rim is worn and only a small part of it is preserved. The stand is wheel-made and hard fired, its fabric is yellowish brown and coarse with mainly grey inclusions; the slip is light reddish yellow. It has no decoration, but dark grey patches from top to bottom—probably the remains of an oily substance which flowed down—are visible. A chalice was placed on top, in the opening of the stand. Apparently it was secondarily used as a lid, as its base was cut in order to fit into the top opening. The preserved height of the chalice is 15 cm and the diameter of the rim is 17 cm. The fabric is similar to that of the stand. There are darker spots on the interior of the bowl—possibly also remains of oil.

Selected parallels

Stands of cylindrical shape are found all over the ancient Near East, dating roughly from the 3rd millennium BC onwards. Due to the fact that they are especially frequent in the Levant between the Middle Bronze Age and the 10th century BC,[18] they can be classified as one of two types. The body of the first type is finished as a bowl—resembling a chalice. It appears less often in comparison to the second type, a cylindrical stand which is open on the top and bottom like the item being discussed here.[19] In contrast to our stand, many show decorations such as paintings or applied human or animal figures. The number of the openings varies, as does their shape: rectangular, oval, triangular and small circular windows appear in the same period; vertical handles are very common in Palestine from the Middle Bronze Age to the 11th century.[20]

Another stand (N114), from Tall Abu al-Kharaz, comes from Area 2. It was discovered in the temple of Phase VII, which dates to the Late Bronze Age IC, approximately the 14th century.[21] This stand has apparently been exposed to intense heat as the lower part of it is heavily corroded and the soil around it was ashy.[22] Together with a fenestrated stand from Pella, with a crudely painted decoration of human figures and a variety of animals and plants, which was found in an offering pit in a Late Bronze Age II temple,[23] these stands represent the geographically closest parallels.

Examples from the Iron Age I period can be found in Hazor:[24] a stand decorated with a rope ornament, and from

[17] "Stand" is used here as a generic term for incense stand and incense burner, see below (discussion on possible functions).

[18] Mazar 1980, 93.
[19] Mazar 1980, 94.
[20] Mazar 1980, 94–96.
[21] Fischer 2006a, 141, fig. 154; 151, figs. 163, 1–2; chronology table see *ibid*. 70, 374.
[22] Fischer 2006a, 141, fig. 154 and personal communication.
[23] Bourke 2004, 16–18; 17, fig. 12.
[24] Yadin *et al.* 1961, pl. 204, 2.

Iron Age IC at Tell Qasile.[25] Most similar to our stand are two stands from Megiddo VIA: one has plastic decorations in the form of small balls below the ridge;[26] the second is so far the closest parallel to our stand.[27] The latter is an undecorated stand of tubular shape with two rectangular windows, which are comparatively smaller, and remains of two vertical handles.

Possible functions

Stands of this type are often referred to as "incense burners" or "incense stands" due to the interpretation that frankincense or other aromatics were burned at the bottom of the stand[28] and/or in the bowl that covered the stand. The absence of traces of combustion on some of the known examples[29]—see also our stand—makes their function as incense burners unlikely.[30] Nonetheless, several seals depict stands, of cylindrical shape, in scenes of a worship ritual.[31] A possible use as a holder for sacred plants in fertility rituals has been suggested by Rowe,[32] or likewise for presentation of food and drink offerings.[33]

Nevertheless, the connection between such stands and a cultic context can be questioned. Fowler[34] regards at least some of them as braziers for heating in winter, but also proposes other secular uses such as heating water or keeping food or drink hot, as well as the use of incense as a perfume or deodorant to counteract unpleasant odours.[35] Possibly the smoke from burning substances served to keep away flies and mosquitoes.[36] The lack of evidence of combustion remains a problem. Nevertheless, the negative evidence of visible soot can be explained by the possibility that this stand had never been used.

Discussion

One should avoid assigning Room 9 to an exclusively cultic context solely on the strength of the presence of such a stand. The aforementioned possible remains of oil on the stand and on the chalice make it very likely that it was used for liquids—whether in a secular way, as suggested by Fowler[37] and explained above—or in cultic practice as a libation vessel. The latter suggestion is supported by the evidence of the raised platform and the chalice (L273-4) next to it. Three stands from Tell Qasile—all of them found within a temple building—were found leaning on a similar platform[38] serving as a support for a sacrificial bowl. Thus, a private house sanctuary in Room 9 is, at the very least, conceivable.[39]

Obviously the effort put into the manufacture of our undecorated stand with its reused lid is relatively low compared to other, more elaborate, objects from the same period. The context in which one of the stands from Megiddo was found,[40] a storage area, is interesting. According to Arie,[41] cultic acts may have been performed in order to protect stored goods—or it was simply stored there between the rituals—a possibility that may apply to the stand from Tall Abu al-Kharaz.

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25 Mazar 1980, 87–89, figs. 23, 25–27; pl. 32, 1–2; pl. 33, 1; all of them are painted.
26 Arie 2006, 218, fig. 13.41; 223, fig. 13.45; 264, fig. 13.62.11.
27 Finkelstein *et al.* 2000, 267, fig. 11.17, 7 = Loud 1948, fig. 80, 9.
28 Tracing back to Andrae 1938, 111; Schaeffer 1949, 260–261, fig. 11, 1; DeVries 1976, *passim*; Nielsen 1986, 42–46.
29 E.g. in Tell Ta'anek, see Lapp 1969, 44.
30 See Lapp 1969, 44; Fowler 1984, 185; *idem* 1985, 27.
31 E.g. Bikai 1978, 77–79; who points out that these were probably made from metal.
32 Rowe 1940, 52–54.
33 With Egyptian analogies, cf. Nagel 1938, 176–181; depicted on seals and reliefs, e.g. Keel 1996, 158, fig. 242; food offering cf. Mazar 1980, 96; libation funnel e.g. Schaeffer 1936, 110.
34 Fowler 1984, 184.
35 Fowler 1985, *passim*.
36 As already suggested by Fowler 1984, 184 ("insecticide").
37 Fowler 1984, 184; *idem* 1985, *passim*.
38 Stands nos. 3446, 3255 and 3604, found in Shrine 300, Mazar 1980, 27.
39 See also Mazar 1980, 94.
40 Arie 2006, 264, fig. 13.62.11; context see Arie 2006, 234, fig. 13.46.
41 Arie 2006, 247.

Appendix 2: The interpretation of an Early Iron Age room uncovered in 2010

BY A. GUSTAFSSON & J. AZZOPARDI

Material and context

The roughly square Room 8 in Trench LIIIB measures 3 m × 2.4 m, the widths of the walls being 0.6 m (northern wall W627), 0.5 m (eastern wall W624), 0.85 m (southern city-wall W621) and 0.6 m (western wall W647). The walls are preserved to heights of up to 1.4 m. All the walls had remains of pinkish brown mud plaster attached to their surface. In the northeast corner in W627 there is an entrance, 0.5 m wide, leading northwards to Room 7.

To the south of the entrance, leaning against W624, were two storage jars which were broken when the roof collapsed. In the western part of Room 8 there were six broken storage jars leaning against Wall 647 and also broken by the collapse of the roof. A complete juglet (N1386) containing carbonized legumes (chickpeas) was located below the storage jars. Another complete vessel, an obviously unused cooking pot (L237-5), was leaning vertically against W627 (*Fig. 26*). A decorated jug (L237-7) was lying alongside W627. It is decorated with brownish red bands on the neck and below the belly, bordering double zigzag lines which surround the belly (*Fig. 11:5*). An incomplete rim of a cooking pot (L237-8) was found next to the entrance along W627. Other, almost complete, finds which were found nearer the centre of the room were: two lids made of unfired clay, two jars (L237-1 and L237-6), a krater (L237-2), a carinated bowl (L237-3) and a jug with decorations (L237-4). Approximately 25 additional broken storage vessels were scattered around the whole room.

Two mortars were found alongside W621. One of them (in the southeast corner) was broken at the bottom. This mortar was lying upside down and was larger (37 cm wide) than the other (18 cm wide). The second mortar was found in the centre of the southern half of the room. Between these two mortars were four basalt pestles, and a fifth basalt pestle (N1345) was found in the western part of the room. Along W621 was a spindle-whorl (N1340). A second spindle-whorl (N1376) was located in the northwest corner. At least three post-fired mud-bricks were close to W624. Additional finds were a couple of polished bones and the shell of a river clam. A large amount of roof debris and ash covered all the finds.

Discussion

The context of Room 8 allows for several conclusions. It contained a considerable number of storage jars leaning against the walls. These and the juglet with chickpeas (*Fig. 27*, lower part) suggest a storage area for food and liquids. The mortars and pestles found close to the city-wall indicate food processing. The necessity of a light source is obvious and a lamp was not found. This suggests a small hole or slit to allow light to enter the room. Spindle-whorls and polished bones which were possibly used to wind thread indicate, at the very least, the production or mending of textiles, or a storage area for these items. All of these finds point to a storage room which was also used for certain activities and which was accessed from the storey above by a ladder. The slits or holes in the city-wall, which were not large enough for large projectiles or humans to pass through, would have been the only source of natural light. The apparent floor above, at street level, would also explain the scattered textile production tools, which fell down when the floor above collapsed.

Ash was found everywhere in this space. The fact that so many vessels and items were left behind indicates a hasty retreat from a building on fire, as well as no return to the debris to scavenge for surviving food and artefacts.

Conclusion

The findings presented here suggest the basement of a domestic structure. The main function of this space is storage of liquids and food. It seems to have also been used as a workshop for textile production, or at least for the mending of clothes and the processing of food. Some of the vessels and tools most likely fell down from the storey above. Of specific importance is the fact that the former inhabitants never returned to their homes after the vast conflagration.

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