

**FIRST SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS AT
JEBEL ABU THAWWAB
(ER-RUMMAN), 1984
(PRELIMINARY REPORT)**

by
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Introduction

Yarmouk University sponsored the first season of excavations which took place at Jebel Abu Thawwab between May 26 and June 22, 1984, under the supervision of the writer. Messrs. Nabil Qadi and Fuad Hurani served as area supervisors. Mr. Fayez Tarawneh acted as surveyor and draftsman. Most of the thirteen workers were hired from the village of el-Mastaba ca. 2 km. north-east of the site.

The continuous support of Prof. Adnan Badran, the President of Yarmouk University and Prof. Moawiyah Ibrahim, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and of Prof. Adnan Nayfeh, the Dean of Scientific Research, made a great contribution to the success of the expedition. Contributions from His Excellency Ra'f Najem, the Minister of Public Works, were a great help to our dig. Many thanks are also due to Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, for his assistance and encouragement. The dig also benefitted from visits by several colleagues from Yarmouk University, the University of Jordan and the Department of Antiquities.

Site Location

Jebel Abu Thawwab is located ca. 2 km. ENE of the village er-Rumman, ca. 14 km. to the north of the town of Sweileh, and ca. 20 km. south of Jerash (Fig. 1). More precisely, Jebel Abu Thawwab is found at map coordinates between E-230,000 and 231,000 and N-174,732, and 174,750 at 550.00 m. above sea level.

Moreover, this site is situated between the contour lines 480 and 493, on the west slope of Jebel Abu Thawwab, overlooking Wadi er-Rumman which empties into the Zerqa River (Pl. VI: 1). The present Amman-Jerash main road divides the site into two parts. The land of the site itself is the property of the people of er-Rumman village.

Geologically speaking, the site is situated on a river terrace (Pl. VI:2), as identified by Dr. Hakam Mustafa.¹ The main water source of the area is the perennial Wadi er-Rumman which flows into Ain Ras el-Ma springs. Other springs such as 'Ain Um Karam, 'Ain Um Rabi to the north of the site and 'Ain el-Maiyita to the west may also have served as water sources for the area. Now, the area has been planted with various kinds of trees such as olives and figs, in addition to wild lavender trees. Also, crops and vegetables are still grown within the area of the site.

The size of the site is approximately 200.00 m. east-west and 300.00 m. north-south, judging from a surface survey that has been carried out. The side slopes gradually to the southwest towards Wadi er-Rumman (Pl. VI:1:). On both sides of this wadi, natural caves and shelters are recognizable. Unfortunately, the dig team did not have time to inspect these caves this season.

Objectives

The plans for excavation were developed when the writer and Dr. Robert Gordon, Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology of Yarmouk University, visited the site in the winter of 1983. This

Dr. H. Mustafa of the Department of Geology at Yarmouk University visited the site and will be

preparing a report on the geological setting of the area.

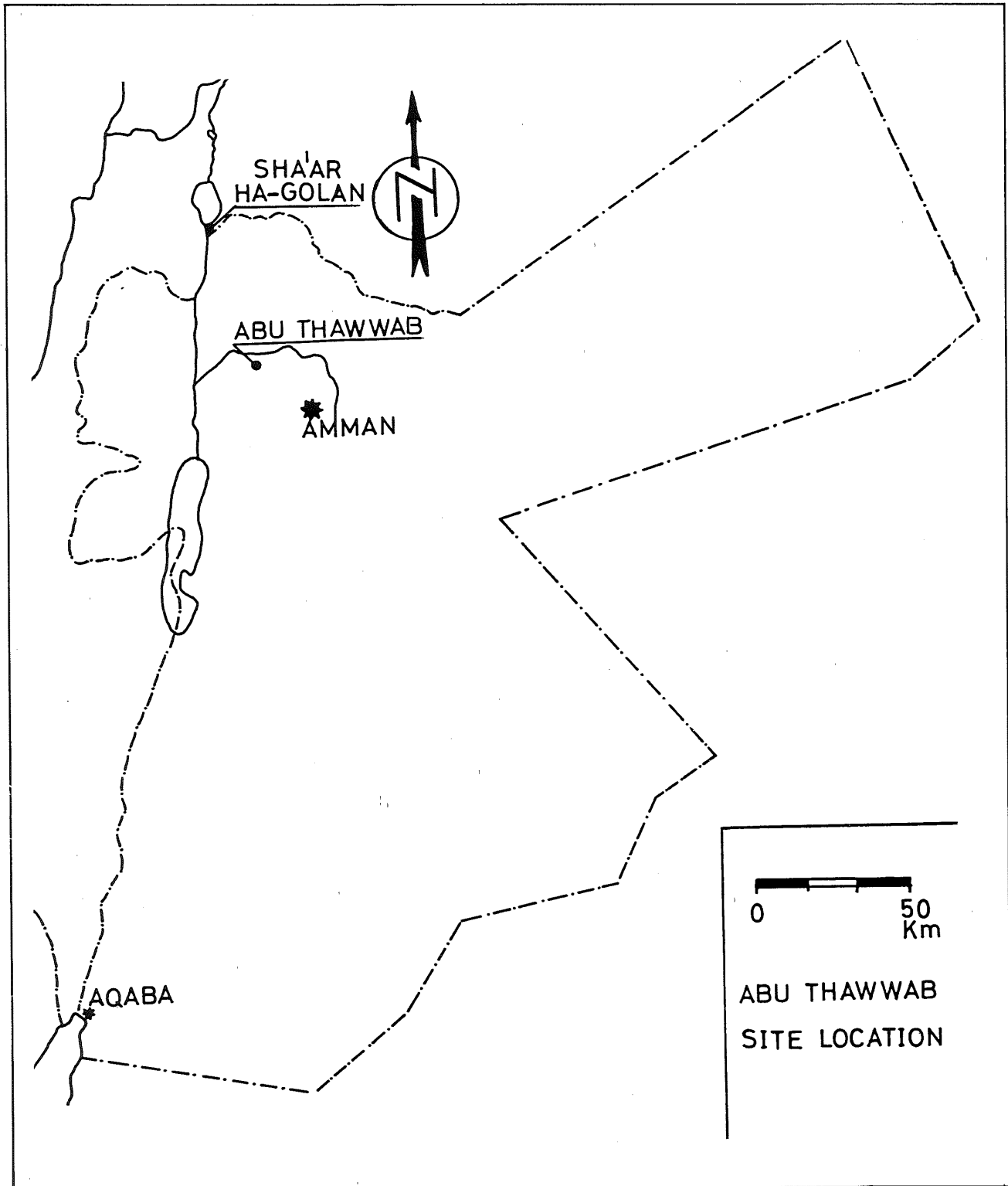


Fig. 1

visit resulted after reading a note published by Mr. and Mrs. Elizabeth and Colin Gilet who first found the site and published Yarmukian and Early Bronze Age pottery sherds collected there.²

During several visits to the site, surface pottery sherds and flint tools were collected and dated to the Late Neolithic

(Yarmukian), Early Bronze, Roman and Byzantine periods. Since it was announced that the site was being threatened by demolition due to the widening of the Amman-Jerash main road, and due to the fact that no Yarmukian sites have been excavated on the East Bank of Jordan, we decided to undertake a salvage excavation.

² Elizabeth and Colin Gilet, *Jebel Abu-Thawwab*, *Levant*, XV (1983), p. 187-191.

This may develop into a systematic long-term project in the end; but, the basic objective of the 1984 excavation was to check whether the undisturbed remains of the pottery Neolithic period could be found in stratigraphic context on this site.

Method of Excavation

A contour map was made and the site was divided into quadrants: A, B, C, and D (clockwise, SE to NE). Since the area located on both sides of the cut of the main road (Areas A, D) is the most threatened one, we concentrated our efforts there. Three squares A III 5, A III 6, and D III 4, each measuring 5.00 m. x 5.00 m., were opened at the beginning of the work. The first mentioned two squares are located on the road-cut on the east side of the road; the last one is on the west cut. These squares were put there after architectural remains in the cut of the road were recognized. Four trial trenches were opened, The first one was AIII 4 and the fourth was as AIDI 10. The first three were put in to follow a metre-thick wall which appeared after the trimming operations of the east cut of the road. Also, another

square, D III 5, was laid out north of D III 4 to follow walls uncovered in that area (Fig. 2).

For the registration operation, a *locus sheet* was typed including information about the progress of excavation, locus description, location of the locus in the square, under locus, over locus, locus dimensions, top and lower levels, collected pottery sherds, excavated objects and interpretation of the locus.

Daily top-plans, elevations of the excavated walls, main deposits, drawings of baulks and subsidiary baulks were also made.

Results of the Excavations

The general stratigraphic aim was virtually achieved for the excavated area by opening the above-mentioned squares and probe trenches. By the end of the season, virgin soil had been reached in all squares. This achievement enabled us to work out a correlation of all excavated loci. Two main occupational phases were identified, the first and earliest dates to the *Late Neolithic period (Yarmukian Culture)*. The second phase is the *Early Bronze Age*

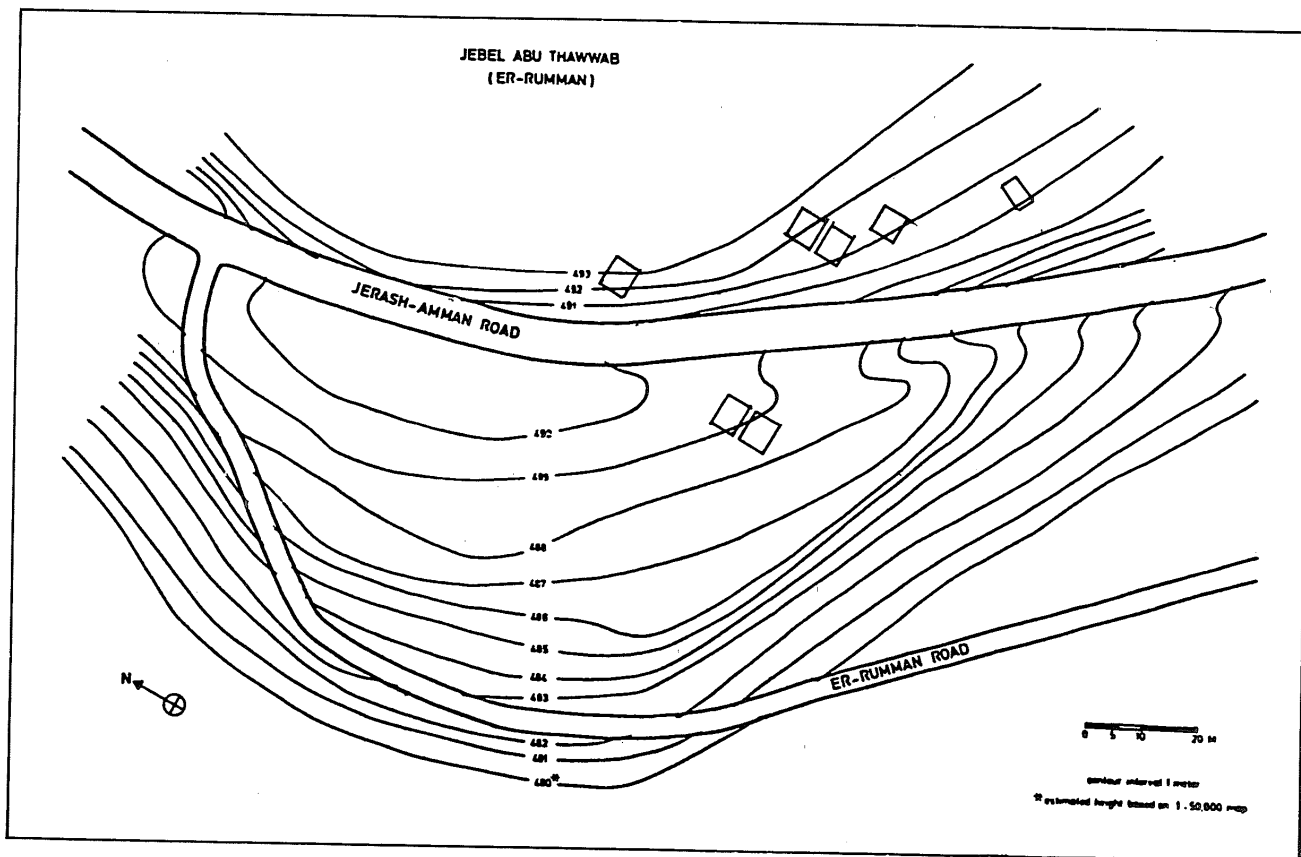


Fig. 2

I. In some of the trenches, these two phases are separated from each other by a mixed fill, consisting mostly of small sized stones. This deposit was first excavated in Area A, in Squares III 5 (loc. 2) and III 6 (loc. 2), where it is about 0.60 m. thick (Pls. VII: 1, 2). Late Neolithic 1 (Yarmukian) and Early Bronze Age I pottery sherds were found in this fill. The same stoney layer was found in Area D. No occupational surfaces or structures were found in this deposit. The EB I wall in A III 5 (loc. 3) was built over it. The same fill was removed from the area under Wall 7 in Area IV 4 (cf. below).

To describe the results of this first season of excavation, we will start from the earliest occupation evidence on the site and proceed to the most recent.

Phase II: (Late Neolithic 1)

The earliest stratum of occupation which was attested in all excavated trenches on the site, dates back to the *Yarmukian Culture* (ca. 6000-5000 B.C.). The excavated architectural remains associated with this phase were stone walls, not yet interpreted as buildings. Any connection between these walls was destroyed during the construction of the Amman-Jerash main road in the 1950's. The largest wall which might be related to this phase is that one found in A III 4 (locus 7). It extends 15.00 m. in a north-south direction. Each course has two rows of boulders with a fill of small stones in between, three courses are still preserved (Fig. 3), Pl. VIII: 1). This was founded directly on virgin soil. The pottery found in the associated loci is Yarmukian. The function of it is still unclear; only further excavation will clarify this. This wall (loc. 7) was built against an East-West wall (loc. 6). These two walls are very similar in construction and material; also, they were built on the same elevation (Pl. VIII: 2).

Immediately east of the junction of Walls 6 and 7, a fragmentary wall (loc. 15) consisting of one row of stones was found. This wall is running parallel to Loc. 7 but at a lower level and runs under wall 6. The pottery sherds excavated in the foundation

trench (loc. 16) of wall 15 points to a Yarmukian Period date for the wall.

In Area D and in Square III 5 (Loc. 9a), another wall consisting of one course of small and medium sized unhewn stones was excavated. This wall runs NW-SE and was also laid on virgin soil. It should be noted here that this wall was reused in the Early Bronze Age I by adding courses of boulders to it (Fig. 4, Pl. IX: 1). We faced the same problem here we had previously encountered, that most of it had been cut by the road, and no more information could be reported about it.

In addition to the architectural remains, mentioned above *storage pits* dated to this phase were also excavated. The first one of these pits was found in Area D Square 10. This circular pit was dug into the virgin soil and measures 1.00 m. in diameter and about one and a half metres in depth. The inner sides of it were lined with medium and large boulders.

Another, smaller pit, similar to the first one in shape and diameter, was excavated in D III 5 (loc. 15). A large quantity of Yarmukian pottery sherds was found in both pits.

The excavated Late Neolithic 1 strata produced a large number of *Yarmukian pottery sherds*, though no intact pottery objects were found. These sherds bear the same characteristics as those found at Sha'ar ha-Golan, Tuleilat Batashi, and at Munhatta 2B in Palestine, and at Byblos in Lebanon. Most of the Yarmukian sherds were decorated with a herringbone design, red slipped (2.5 YR 4/6), red painted (2.5 YR 4/6), handmade and badly fired. Though this pottery collection needs more detailed study, the recognizable types consist mostly of jars (hole-mouth and globular), simple bowls and cups (Figs. 5, 6). A detailed report about the Yarmukian and EB I pottery from the first season of excavations at Jebel Abu Thawwab will be published in the *Zeitschrift des Deutschen-Palastina Vereins*.

Yarmukian *flint tools* were also found at the site. The tools encountered were mostly made of flakes and consist of blades and deeply denticulated sickle-blades (Fig. 7). Some of them still have a high sheen

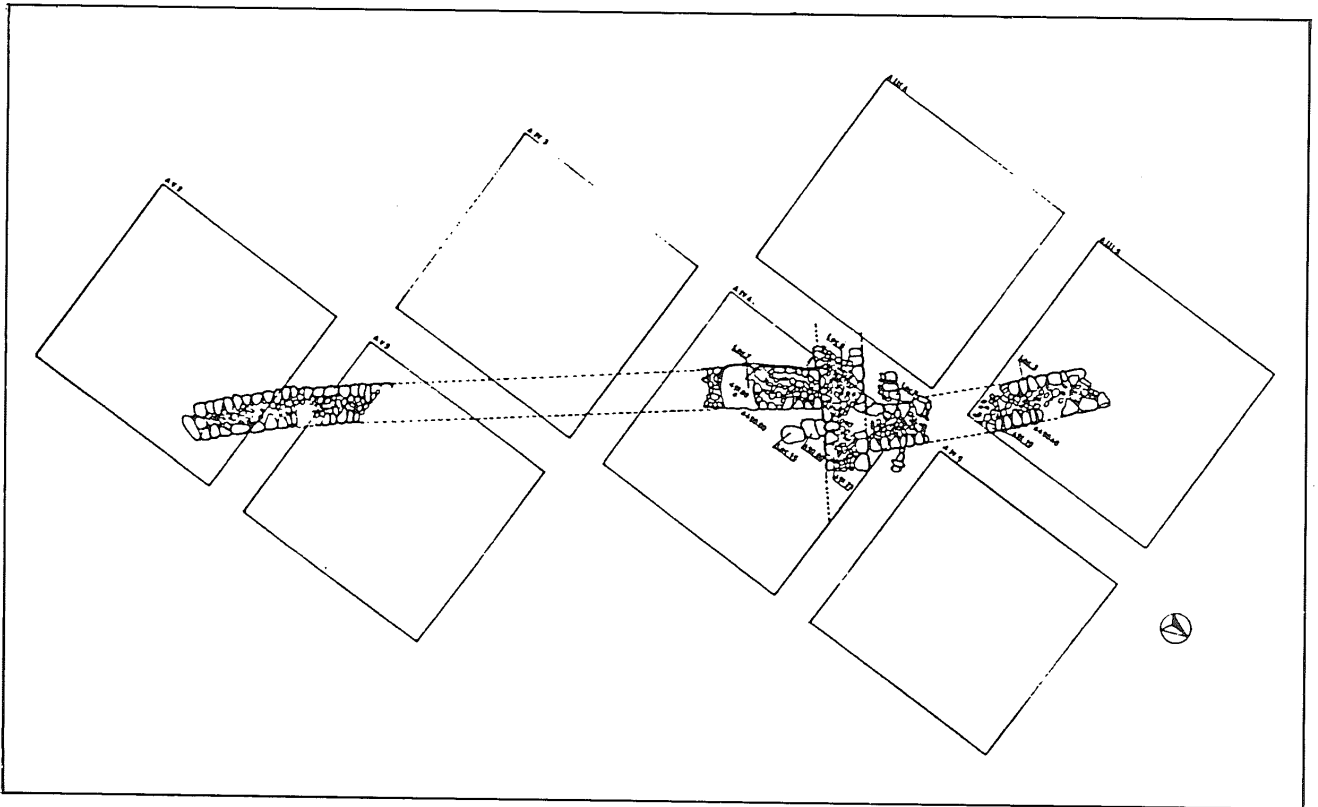


Fig. 3: Yarmoukian and Early Bronze Structures Found in Area A

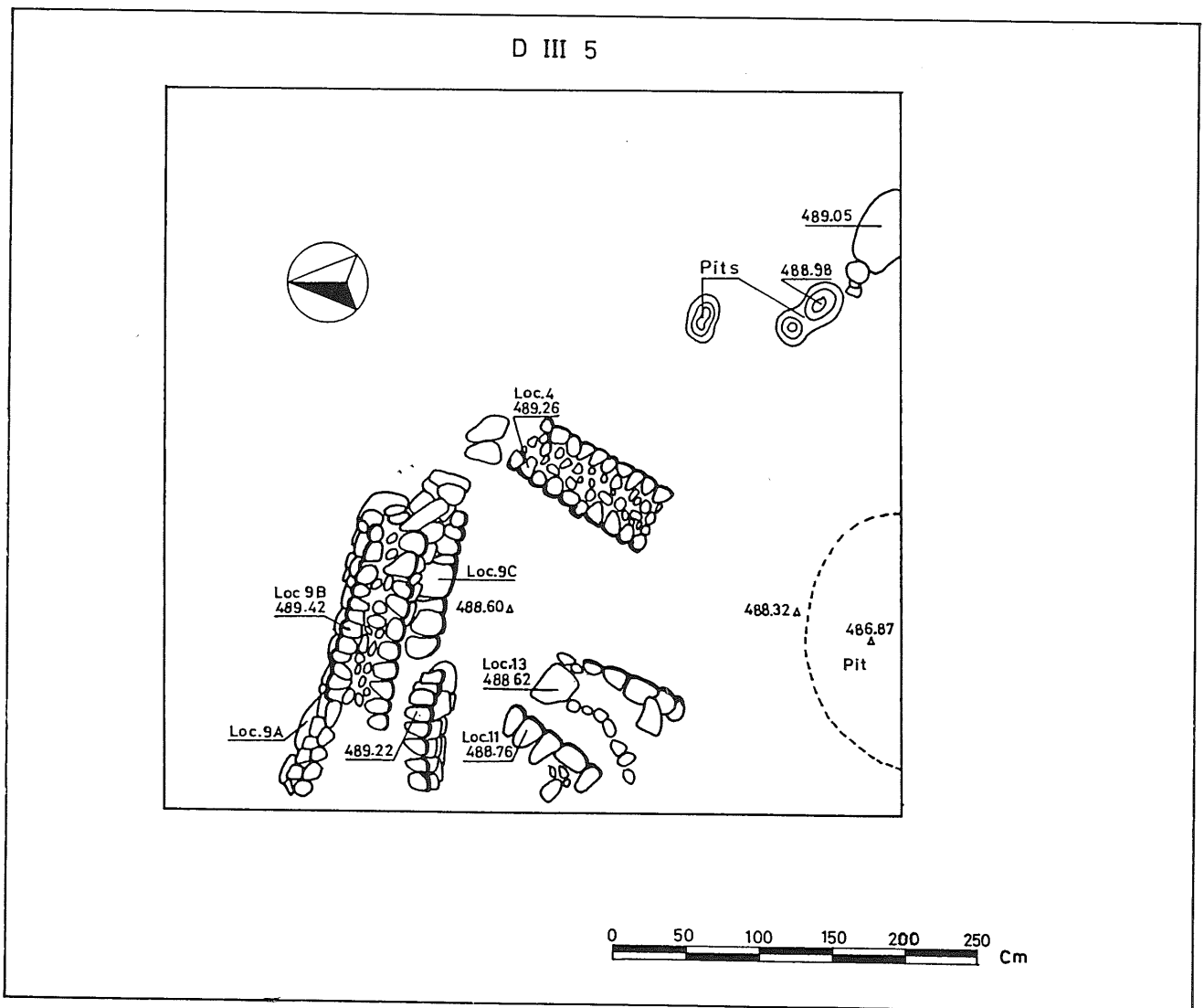


Fig. 4: Yarmoukian and Early Bronze Structures

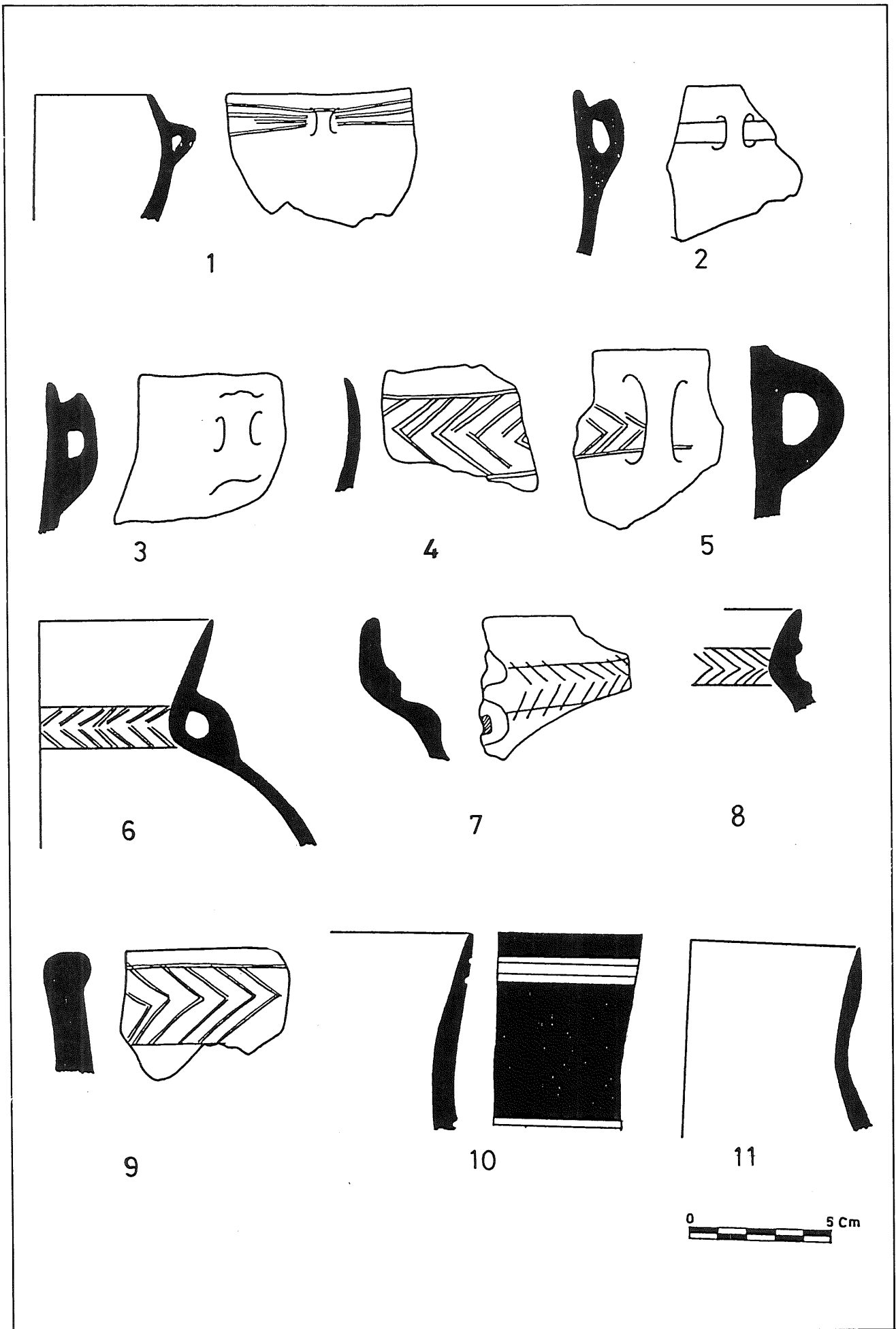


Fig. 5: Yarmoukian Pottery Sherds

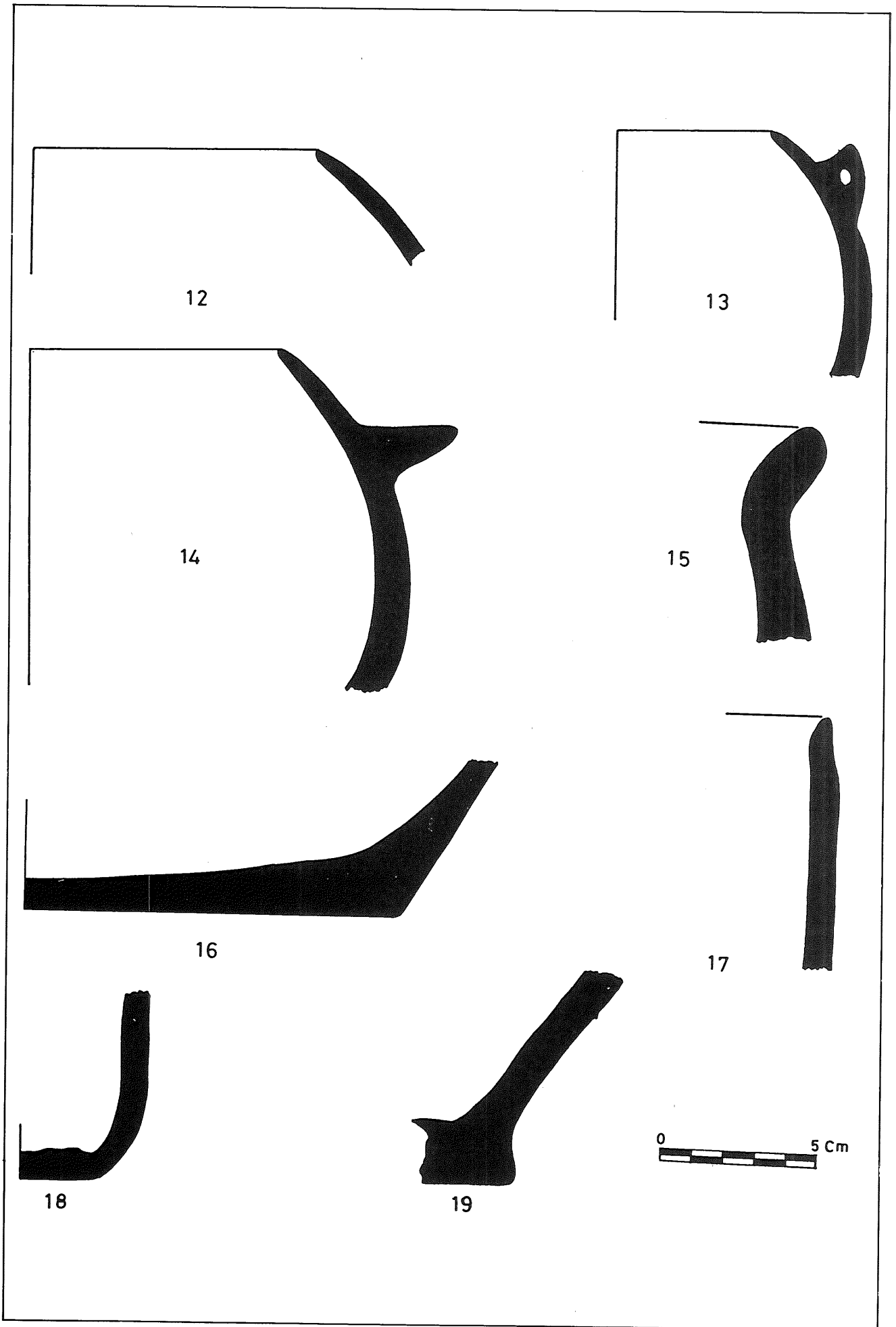


Fig. 6: Yarmoukian Pottery Sherds

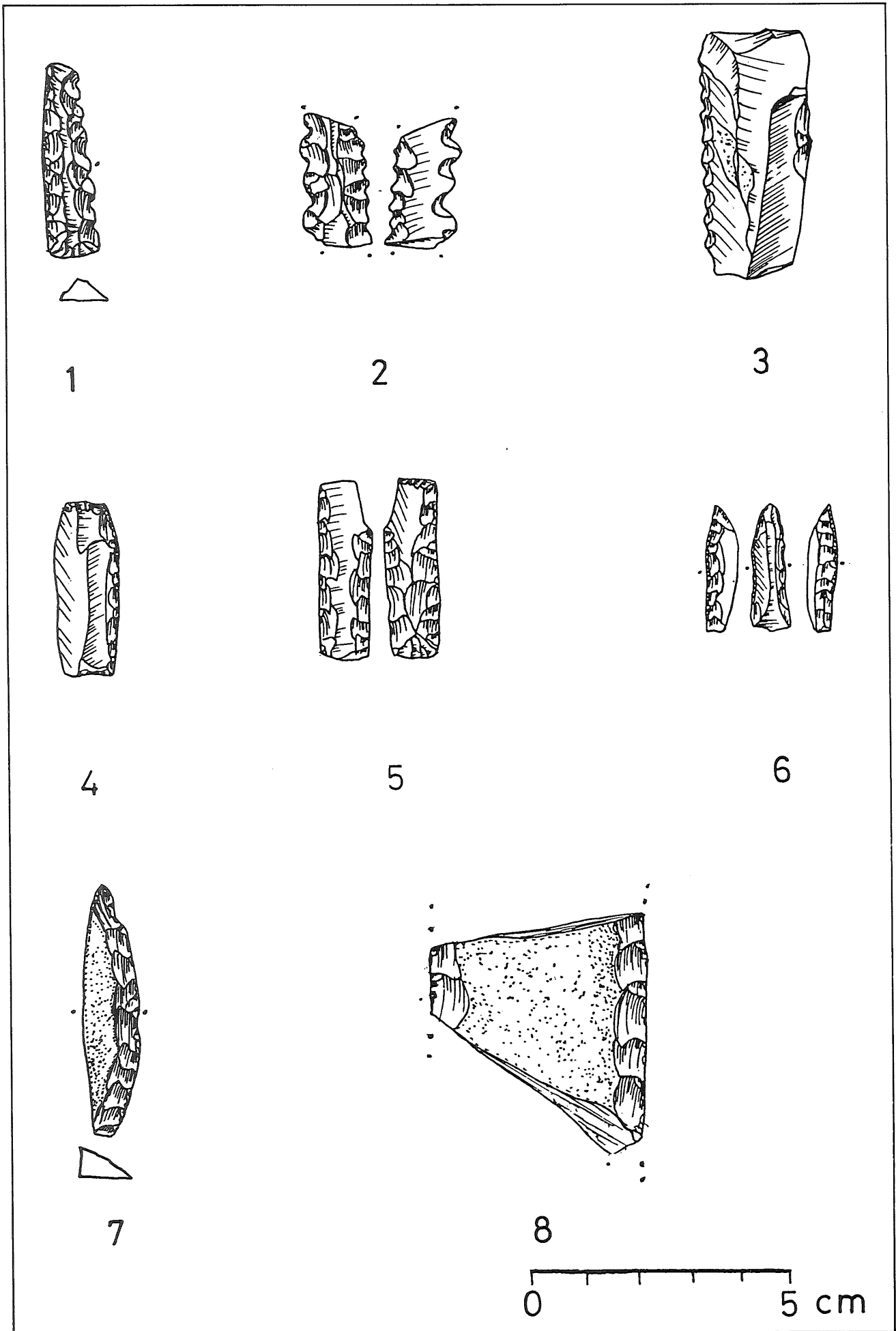


Fig. 7: Flint Tools

(gloss). Similar tools were also found at Sha'ar ha-Golan and were related to the Yarmukian culture.³

None of the pebble figurines which are considered to be typically Yarmukian (as at Sha'ar ha-Golan) were found at our site this season; but, a number of ground stone artefacts were found.

Botanical samples were collected at the site and analyzed by Mr. Reinder Neef, from the Biologisch-Archaeologisch Instituut in Groningen, Holland, who identified *Triticum monococcum* (einkorn) seeds from Yarmukian levels.

Phase I: (Early Bronze I ca. 3200-3000 B.C.)

Excavations on both the east and west sides of the road produced archaeological remains which could be dated to the Early Bronze Age I (ca. 3200-3000 B.C.). These were excavated in the top strata of the site and consisted mainly of architectural remains, pottery sherds, and flints.

Early Bronze I architecture was encountered in both excavated areas A and D. In Area A, Square III 5, a wall was built of two rows of medium sized stone with small stones in between. This wall is approximately 1.00 m. wide, the excavated segment is 2.25 m. long and 0.40 m. high. It runs NW-SE and abuts another wall running E-W, one metre wide, which dates to the same period and was found in A III 4. This wall was also built of medium sized boulders. The excavated portion of the wall is about 2.20 m. in length. The western part of the area where the two walls were found was already bulldozed and parts of the structure were missing. Therefore, it is still difficult for us to find out the function of this structure (Fig. 8).

Typical EB I structures were found in Area D, Squares III 4 and III 5. In Square III 4, a room represented by three walls built of small and medium sized boulders were excavated. The eastern part of this structure was cut in the road construction.

The remains of the northern wall (loc. 3) measures 1.50 m. long, 0.75 m. wide and stands to a height of half a metre. The excavated part of the south wall of this room measures 1.75 m. long, 0.70 m. wide and 0.25 m. in height. Locus 12, which forms the west wall of the room, was also built of small sized boulders. It measures 2.10 m. long, 0.60 m. wide and 0.50 m. high. This room has a plastered floor in which two small holes were recognized. Such holes were found at 'Arad in Palestine and were identified as "cup holes".⁴ In one of them a large pottery jar was found, which has ledge handles and a flat base. The entrance to this room is located in its southern wall, which is the longer side of the room. This entrance consists of two flat-stone steps leading to the inside of the room.

In the same square (D III 4), other structural remains were found. These consisted of: a wall (loc. 21) going N-S and forming a corner with Loc. 6, the south wall of the room mentioned above; benches built against the inner faces of these two walls (Pl. IX: 2). These benches were built of small boulders. Belonging to this structure is a plastered floor (loc. 24). Such buildings were also excavated at 'Arad in Palestine and dated to the early Bronze Age I period.⁵

Fragmentary walls (loci 4, 9b and 9c) related to the EB I period were also encountered in Square III 5 (Pl. IX: 1). These walls are missing large parts as a result of the building of the Amman-Jerash main road. The first one (loc. 4) was built of two rows of small sized stones, with egg-sized stones in between. This wall runs N-S and measures ca. 1.00 m. long, 0.45 m. wide; the only preserved course is 0.12 m. high. It could be that this wall joined wall 9b at the NE part before it was cut by the opening operations for the road. Wall 9b was also built of small and medium sized boulders. This EB I wall was built over the Late Neolithic wall 9a, and it could be a re-use of it. It runs E-W and measures 2.70

³ M. Stekelis, A Neolithic Industry: the Yarmukian of Palestine, *IEJ*, 1 (1950-51) p. 7-27.

⁴ R. Amiran, et. al., *Early Arad, the Chalcolithic*

Settlement and Early Bronze City, I. First-Fifth Seasons of Excavations, 1962-1966, Jerusalem, 1978, Pl. 143:3.

⁵ *Ibid.*

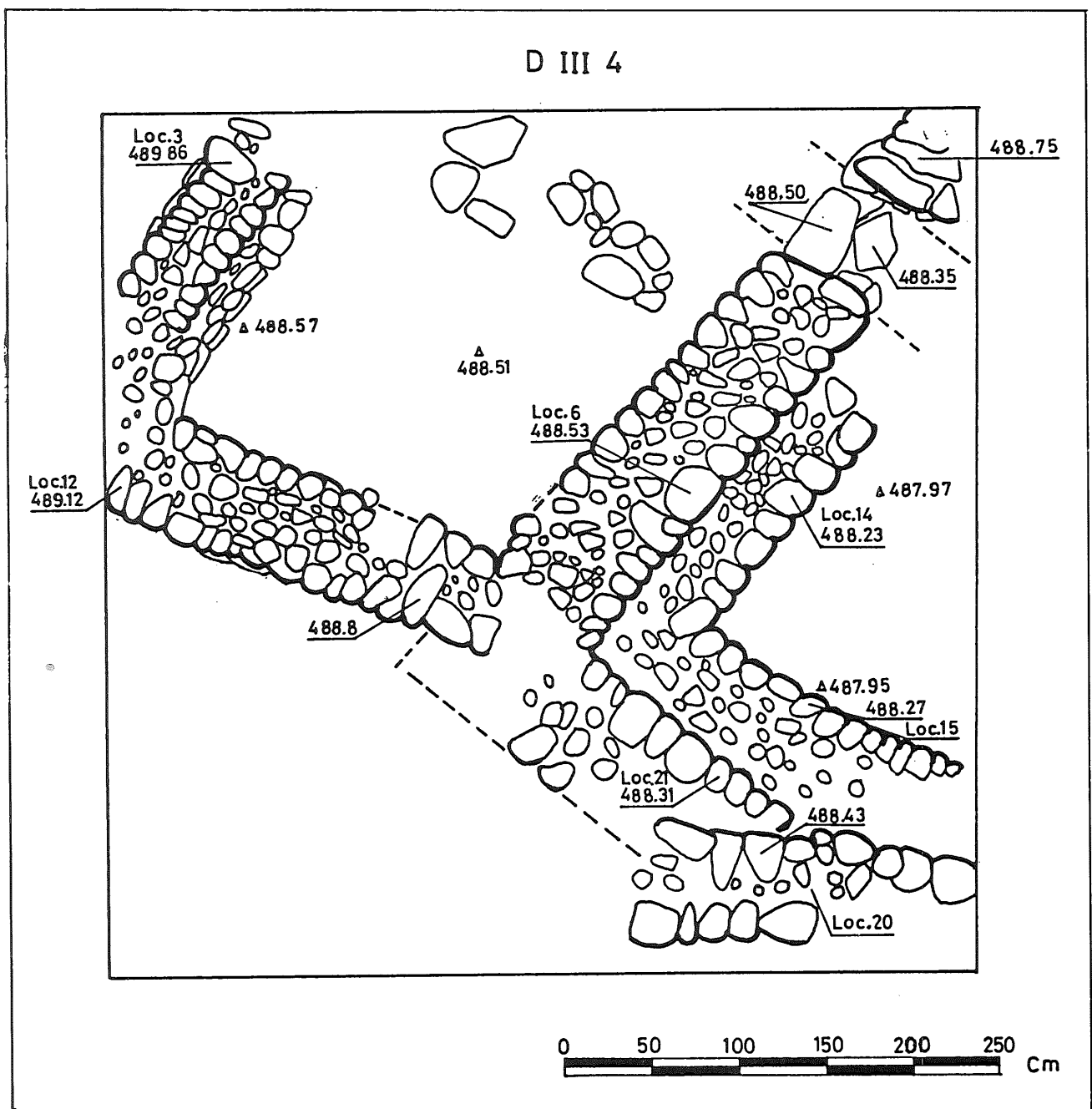


Fig. 8: Early Bronze Age Structures

m. long, 0.85 m. wide and 0.75 m. high. Another wall (9c) was added later at the south face of wall 9b. This was also built of medium sized stones. It should be noted here that both walls 9b and 9c are related to the same period (EB I), while the wall below these (9a) is dated to the Late Neolithic period. This dating is based on the pottery excavated during the removal of the walls. A cut through the three walls showed that they were built on three different levels (Fig. 4).

In addition to these walls, plastered pits similar to those found in Square D III 4 were found. These pits were lined with pottery sherds. These, too, may have been

“cup-holes” (Pl. IX: 3).

Although we did not find intact pottery objects of the *Early Bronze I* this season, a large number of sherds related to this period were excavated. The types recognized within this assemblage of pottery sherds consist of jars, hole-mouth jars, and bowls. Most of the collected sherds are painted with red paint in criss-cross lines and bands. Also, grey burnished and red slipped wares were found. A detailed report about the pottery repertoire from Jebel Abu Thawwab will be published in the *ZDPV*.

Flint tools such as Canaanite blades and basalt grinding stones dated to the

Early Bronze Age I were also excavated at the site.

Conclusion

As a result of our first season of excavation at the site of Abu Thawwab, two occupational phases have been recognized at the site. The earliest one belongs to the Late Neolithic 1 (Yarmukian Culture) dated to *ca.* 6000-5000 B.C.; the latter is of the Early Bronze Age I (*ca.* 3200-3000 B.C.). A layer of small stones about 0.60 m. in thickness separates the two phases from each other and no occupational remains were excavated in this layer,

though Yarmukian and EB I pottery sherds were found in it. Yarmukian sherds similar to those found at our site were excavated at the PPNB site, 'Ain Ghazal, near Amman.⁶ It has been reported as well that Yarmukian pottery sherds were found at Sleihi, a site about 6 km. to the west of Abu Thawwab.⁷

Finally, it is hoped that more intensive work will be done at Jebel Abu Thawwab (er-Rumman).

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⁶ G. Rollefson, personal communication.

⁷ D. Kirkbride, Short Note on Some Hitherto

Unrecorded Prehistoric Sites in Transjordan, *PEQ*, 91 (1959) p. 52-54.