

The Hellenic Archaeological Project of the University of Ioannina in Jordan: A Preliminary Synthesis of the Excavation Results at Ghawr aş-Şāfi and Tall al-Kaf-rayn (2000-2004)

In 2000, under the auspices of the Department of Antiquities and the Department of History and Archaeology of Ioannina University, a Hellenic research-excavation project directed by the author commenced in Jordan.

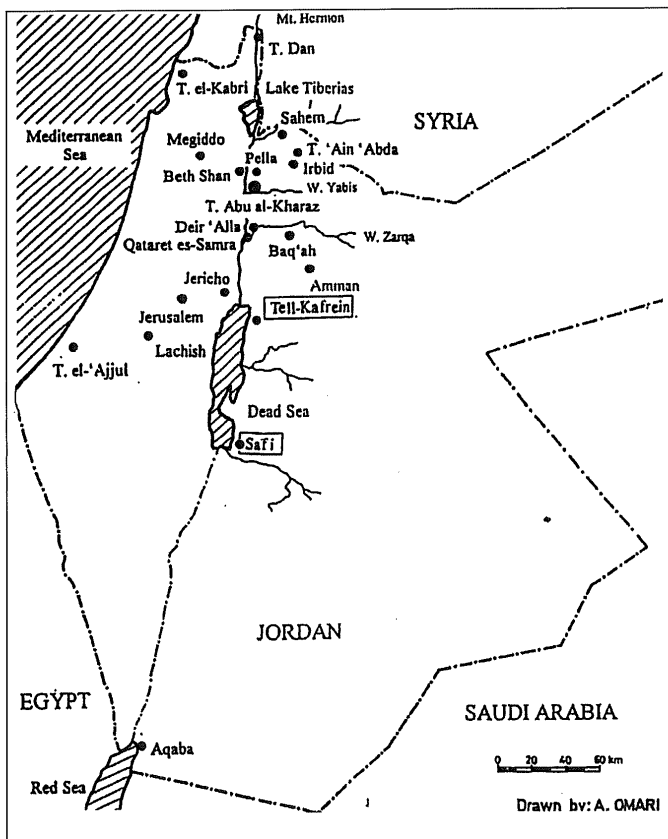
The present paper should be considered as a brief and preliminary synthesis of the results of our excavations at the sites of Ghawr aş-Şāfi and Tall al-Kafrayn during the past five years (2000-2005) (FIG. 1). As the excavation at Tall al-Kafrayn and

a further and detailed study of the material from both sites are in progress our conclusions are provisional.

The first objective of the project was to continue excavations at the badly robbed prehistoric cemetery at an-Naq' in the Ghawr aş-Şāfi and to search for the settlement belonging to it. An-Naq' lies on the western edge of aş-Şāfi ridge, in the neighborhood of the present-day aş-Şāfi town, immediately SE of Wādī al-Ḥasā, at the south-eastern end of the Dead Sea (map reference, E 195.6, N 1048.1). It is here on the southern and eastern banks of the wadi that this extensive, and perhaps the largest, prehistoric cemetery in South Levant has been found by tomb robbers. The cemetery extends over an area of about 200 dunams, at an elevation of 194m below sea level (FIG. 2). Thousands of tombs are in such close proximity that they often overlap at different levels. Previously, a team under the direction of Dr. Mohammad Waheeb from the Department of Antiquities and Dr. Hamza Mahasneh from the Department of Archaeology at Mu'ta University conducted small rescue excavations in an effort to protect the cemetery from further illicit intruders (Waheeb 1995: 553-555; Politis 1997: 342, 1998: 627-634). Dr. Mohammad Najjar has continued investigation of the cemetery.

During the short first season (April 2000)¹ 14 tombs were excavated to the south of those excavated by the Department of Antiquities (FIG. 3). Although most of the tombs had been robbed-out we gained important information regarding their architecture and chronology.

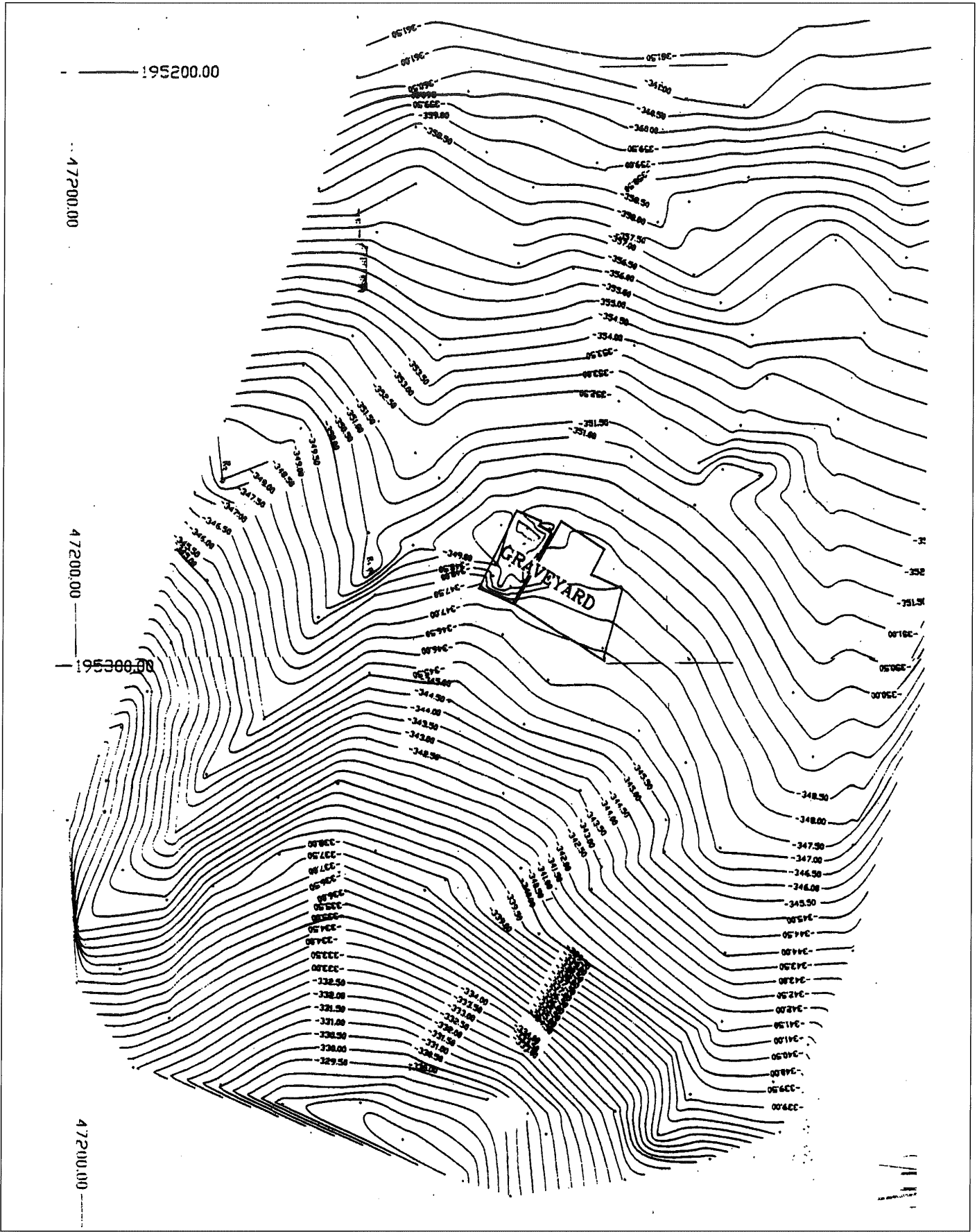
They were constructed of wadi pebbles and irregular medium to large size stones neatly stacked



1. Map showing the location of aş-Şāfi and Tall al-Kafrayn.

¹ The first excavation-team consisted of the authors, Khalil Hamdan, representative of the Department of Antiquities, the post-graduate students and field archaeologists K. Paschalidis, D. Basakos,

E. Papadopoulou, A. Tsonos, K. Politis and G. Papaioannou and archaeologist A. Dalamanga, representative of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



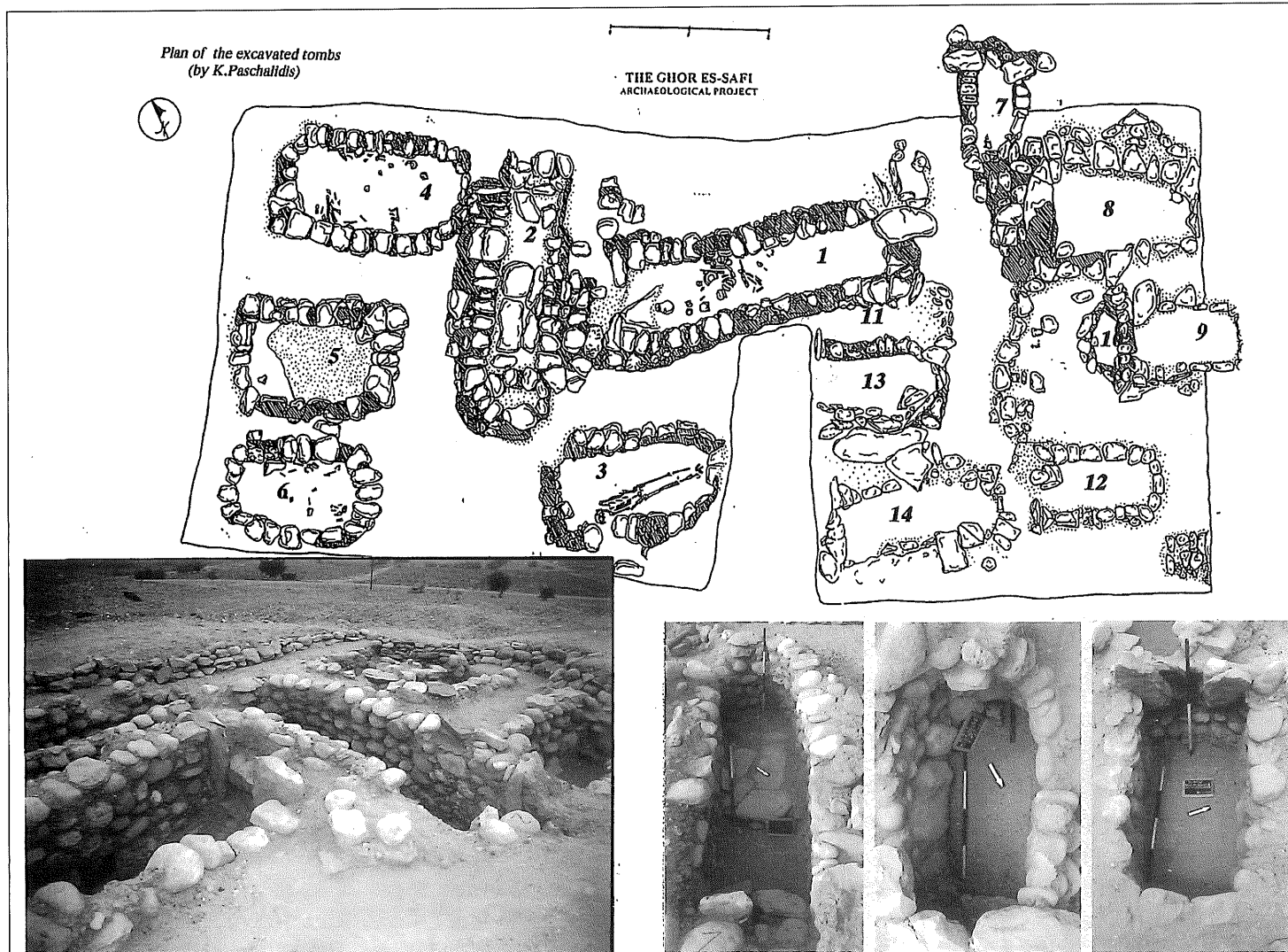
2. Contour plan of excavation area of an-Naq' (by AEGEK Co).

around the interior edge of the tombs, thus enclosing them. They belong to two main types: (a) roughly rectangular cists with one of their narrow ends apsidal and the other closed by orthostats; and (b) roughly ellipsoid. Their dimensions range between 1.80 x 1.30m to 4 x 1m. Their floors were paved by packed soil, small slabs or pebbles (onto which sometimes several stones from the tomb casing wall had fallen) and were roofed by three or more large irregular slabs.

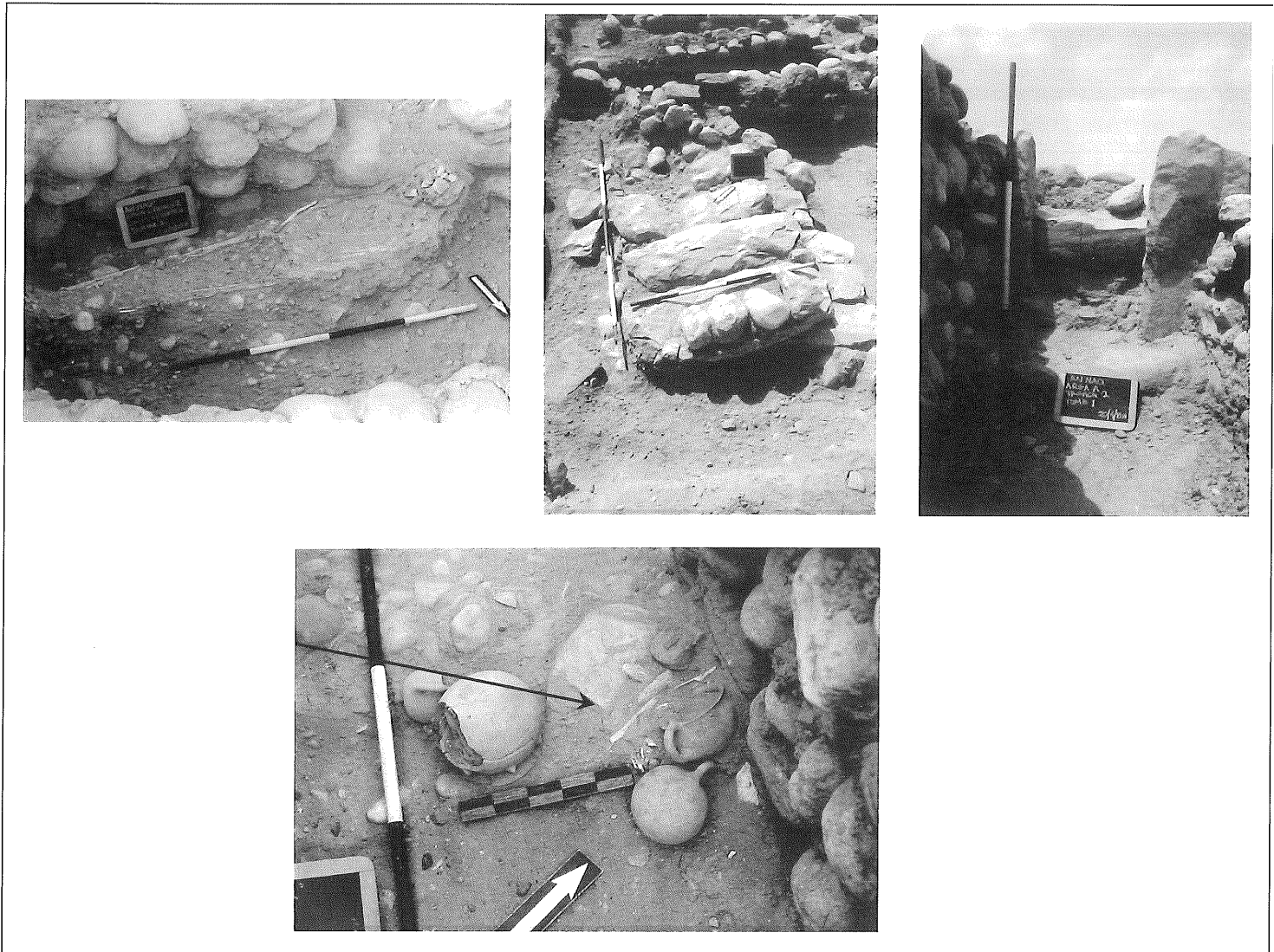
Skeletal remains were found much disturbed in almost all tombs. Only a single burial of an adult was found *in situ* in Tomb 3, placed on its back in an extended position with hands crossed over the lap (FIGS. 3-4). This seems to represent the burial practice, i.e. inhumation, for this cemetery. The dead were accompanied by several gifts, consisting of clay pots and basalt bowls, similar to those known from Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Thomas and Rast 1989: 294-302, figs.168-170) Tall al-Fār'a (N) (deVaux and

Steve 1949: 120, fig. 6:21), Jāwā (Helms 1976: 13 fig.9:1) and Lachish (Tufnell 1958: 72, fig. 26:7) stone mace-heads, comparable to those found at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Thomas and Rast 1989: 289-294 fig. 167, 183) and Abū Ḥāmid (Bienkowski 1996 89-90, fig. 104) glass-paste beads, a bronze ring whorl-shells and shell-bracelets with parallels from Palestine and the Sinai peninsula (Thomas and Rast 1989: 310-312, fig. 183). One exceptional find was a broken andesite-porphry spheroid bow with flat, with a finely undercut collar and two perforated roll handles (reg. no. GS-AN 16), similar to Egyptian Predynastic-IIInd Dynasty types, and probably an import from there (Petrie 1901a: Pl XLIX O131, U130, 132) (FIG. 5a-d).

On the basis of the plain and painted pottery assemblage, corresponding to Jordan Valley type (ledge-handled and wide-necked jars, painted-spouted-jars, deep bowls, plates, cups, amphoriskoi, juglets), the excavated tombs could be dated



3. Ghawr aş-Şāfi (an-Naq') Cemetery.



4. An-Naq' cemetery: tombs and burials.

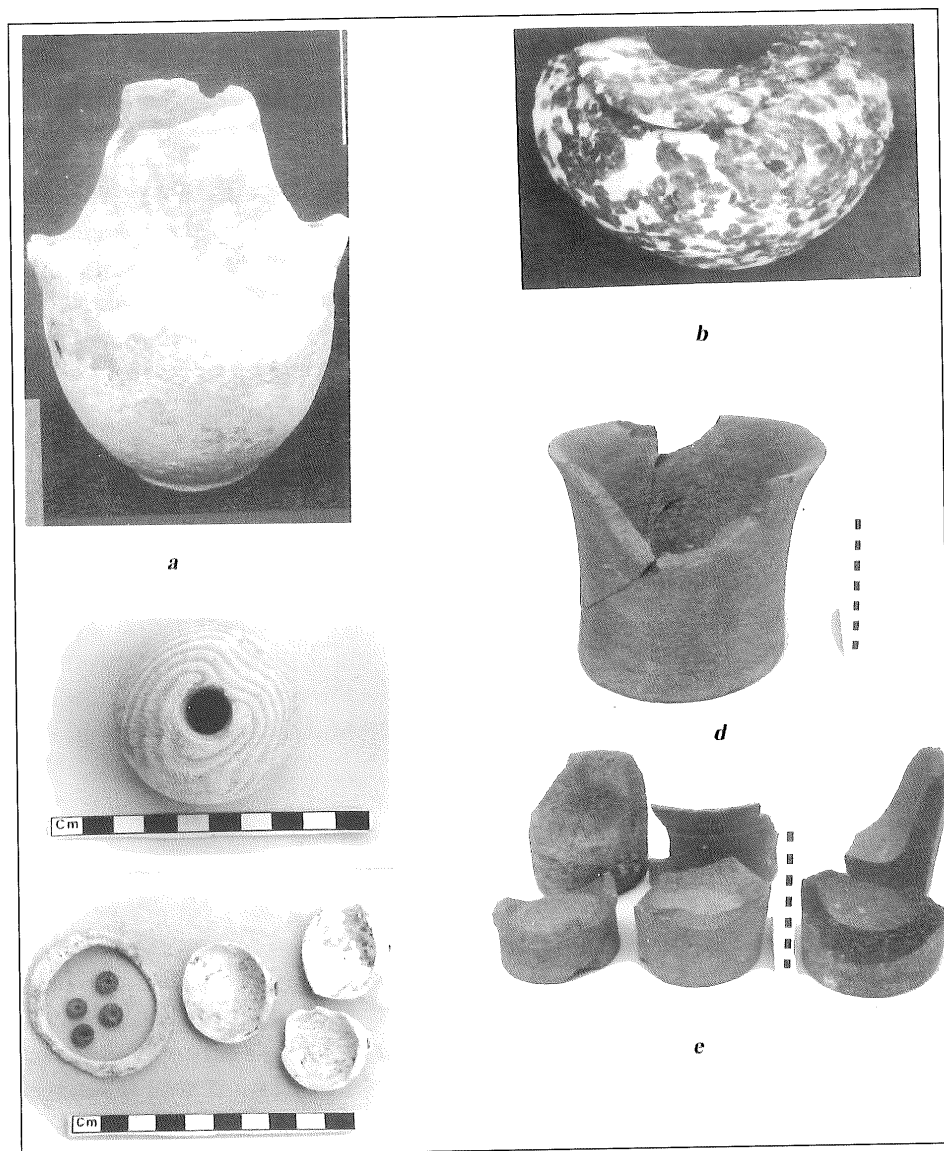
to the EBA I-II, contemporary to those from previous excavations at the site (Waheeb 1995: 553) and to those at Bāb adh-Dhrā' (Thomas and Rast 1989: 235ff., figs. 148-149, 153-154). The same date could be also assigned to some fragmentary basalt vases (Amiran and Porath 1984: 11-19) and artefacts from surface exploration conducted to the north and south of the excavation area (FIG. 5e).

Unfortunately the search for an associated contemporary EBA settlement was inconclusive, but trial trenches revealed remains of a large Iron Age II agricultural settlement at the site Tulaylāt Qaṣr Mūsā al-Ḥamid, in a small distance west of the pre-historic cemetery, under alluvial deposits and modern agricultural fields

Further investigation of the cemetery has been interrupted for technical and other reasons and in 2002 we moved northwards, in the central Jordan Valley. Since then our project has been continued in

four successive seasons at Tall al-Kafrayn, nearly a kilometre north of Wādī al-Kafrayn).

Tall al-Kafrayn is an isolated cone-shaped site, rising 35m above the valley floor (FIG. 6). The small, flattened summit of this natural rock-hill has been used during the last century as a cemetery. It is surrounded by modern roads and buildings, traditional local houses, and its slopes have been to some extent damaged by erosion, and military defensive activities. The site lies near the King Hussein Bridge, on the border with Israel, and next to the town of South ash-Shūna, overlooking all the approaches to the Valley, with a view all the way to Jerusalem and Jericho across the Jordan River. In ancient times it was the site of a fortress or fortified village, commanding a strategic location astride an established communication caravan route that linked Central Jordan Valley with Jericho, Lebanon, Syro-Palestine, Cyprus and the Aegean to the



5. Finds from the an-Naq' cemetery.



6. Tall al-Kafrayn. View from E.

west and with the hills and settlements of the inland Jordan and the Arabic peninsula to the east.

The ancient habitation of the site is attested by visible architectural remains of several buildings and by a cemetery of rock-cut tombs along the east and west bases of the hill, which suggest the existence of an important settlement here (Khouri 1988: 75).

The work area was located at the East-South-Eastern upper part of the tall, overlooking the modern village, Tall Shrup, to the east and south and downtown Dead Sea and South ash-Shūna to the west.

The main objectives of the first season (May 2002) were to prepare a detailed contour map for the site, conduct a surface survey, and record every visible ancient remain. Thus, after preparing the contour map (scale 1: 300 and elevation 0,50m) (FIG. 7), the whole surface of the tall (45hectares) had been sherded systematically and produced a great number of various finds (pottery sherds, fragments of stone vases and tools, flint implements and a few metal objects, indicating an almost continuous habitation of the site from prehistoric to Byzantine and Islamic periods, with the greatest concentration during the EBA and the LBA/Iron Age I-II periods.

During the next season (November 2002), after preparing a detailed excavation grid, work started in three trenches (L18, N18, P12) near the top of the tall, where some stone foundations of structures were visible. Several walls of undressed stones and mud bricks have been revealed belonging to a building badly destroyed by earthquake and fire. Of great importance was the discover, in trench L18, of carbonized wooden beams, belonging to the fallen roof of the building and of an apsidal plastered wall in trench N18 of unknown use and purpose. Equally important were the architectural remains in trench P12, part of a retaining wall, destroyed and collapsed, and a room with mud-paved floor. Finds include flint blades, grinding stones, clay loom weights and abundant pottery of Iron Age I-II date.

Excavation continued in the following season (June 2003) in trench L18 and in a new one, L17, near the top of the hill. Apart from the architectural remains of a structure, built of irregular stones

and mud bricks (FIG. 8), more carbonized pieces of wooden beams have been found together with a quantity of carbonized seeds of wheat, an Islamic intramural cist tomb, several small finds and Iron Age I-II pottery.

During the next season (March 2004)², excavation at Tall al-Kafrayn continued for three weeks. It was restricted to a small part of the top of the tall, where two new trenches were opened and to its S-SW slope, in two new trenches and in a third one, partly explored in the previous seasons.

As regards the two new trenches (L16 and M16) on the top of the hill they produced very few finds, mainly common Iron Age pottery, a broken board-gaming stone with two parallel rows of six circular impressions each (FIG. 9), i.e. of a type found in Umm Saysabān north of Petra (Lindner *et al.* 2001: 291, fig. 9) in Arad (Israel) (Amiran 1992: 76-77; Hübner 1992: 67-71) and Episkopi-Phaneromeni (Cyprus) (Meyers 1997: 380-1) and some scattered bones thrown into a deep and irregular cavity of the bedrock.

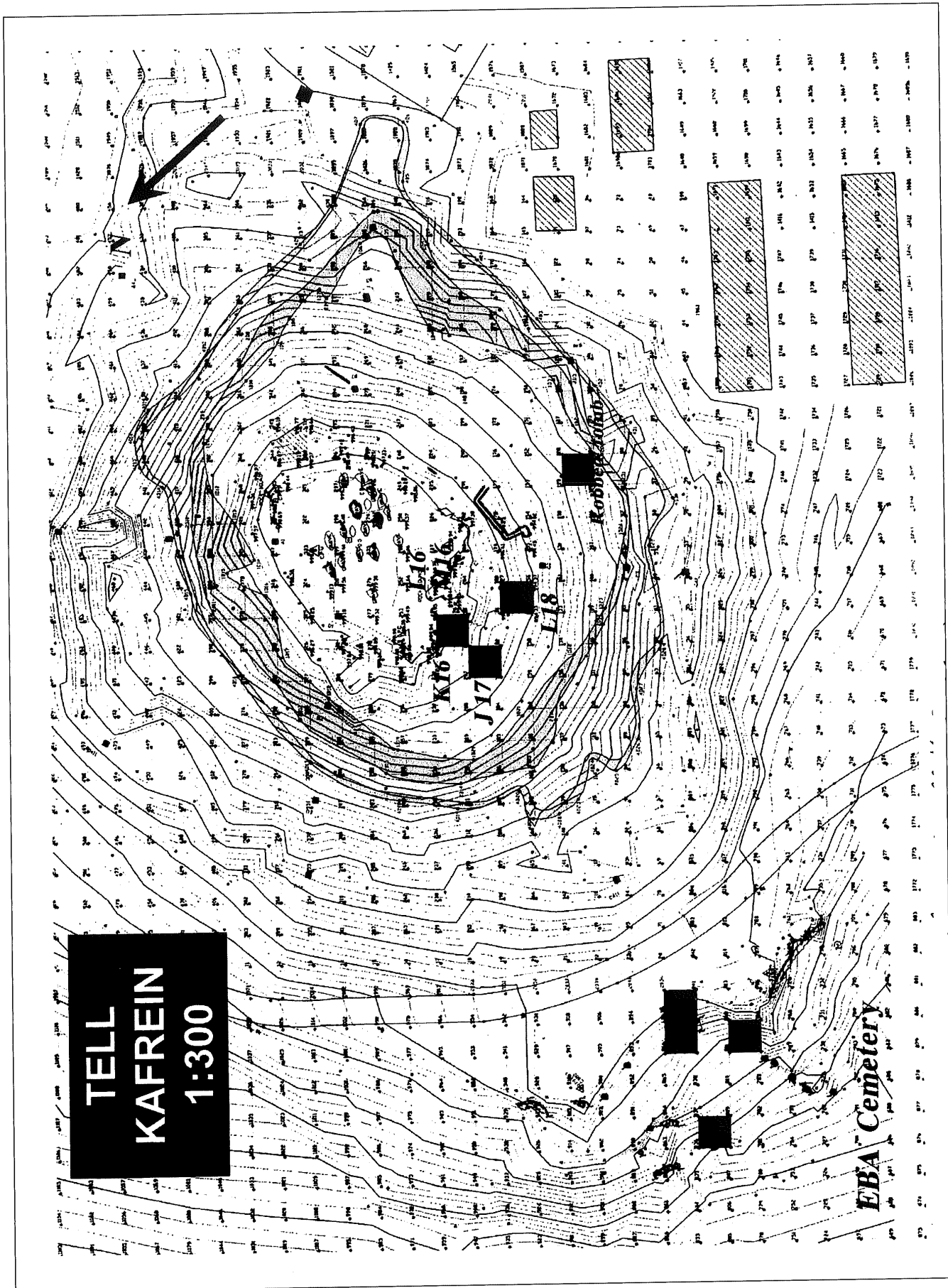
Work continued in trench L18, revealing a tripartite domestic building divided into three rooms by intermediate stone and mud brick walls (FIGS. 10-11). Two successive stratigraphic layers have been discerned, corresponding to two building phases of the house. Finds include sherds of LBA and Iron Age I-II pottery including fruit bowls decorated with horizontal rows of solid triangles, pithoi(s), bowls, cooking pots (cf. Homes-Fredericq and Franken 1986: 142: 371; Amiran 1969: pls.81, 66:10, 62:23, 24, 75-76; Hendrix *et al.* 1997: 151:172, 169: 210-211, 175: 215, 217), a limestone grinder, a round glass-paste pin-head (FIG. 12), more fragments of carbonized wood beams and seeds of wheat.

Northwest of trench L18 and just below the tall's top, the area of new trench K16 was much disturbed and divided into three units by a thick stone wall, while its western part was sub-divided by a partly preserved mud brick wall. It produced very few finds, namely a fine flint blade, an iron javelin head, a stone cylindrical button with incised decoration (FIG. 13) and sherds of common Iron Age II pottery (cooking pot, bowl, cf. Amiran 1969: 75:11, 63: 5).

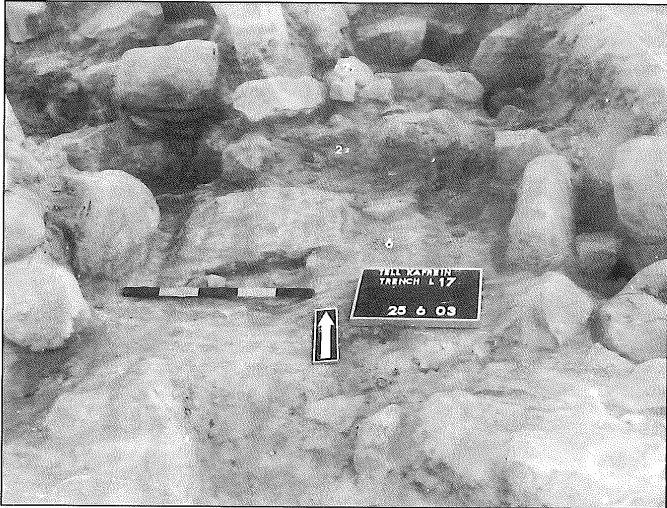
The second new trench J17 was the most prob-

² Trench supervisors were the following post-graduate students in archaeology of the University of Ioannina and close collaborators to our digs in Greece: K. Paschalidis, D. Basakos, E. Papadopoulou, A. Tsonos, St. Oikonomidis, K. Theodoridis, D. Meggidis and

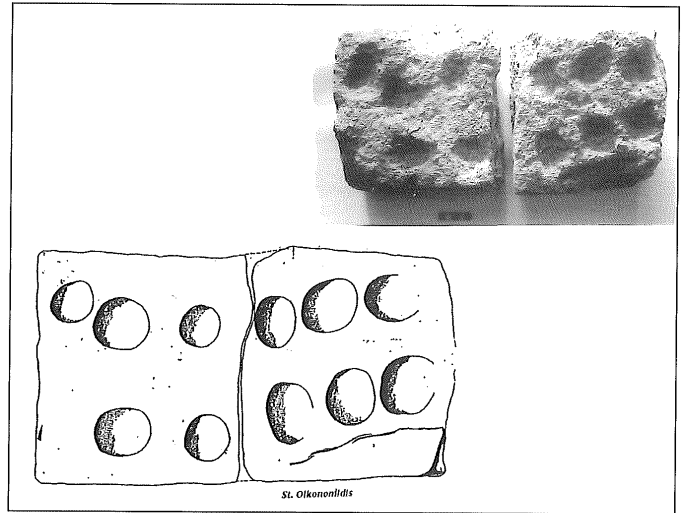
G. Nikolakaki, assisted by a team of more than 30 undergraduate students (S. Thermos, G. Panoutsopoulos, E. Dio, K. Lambri, M. Sofikitou *et al.*).



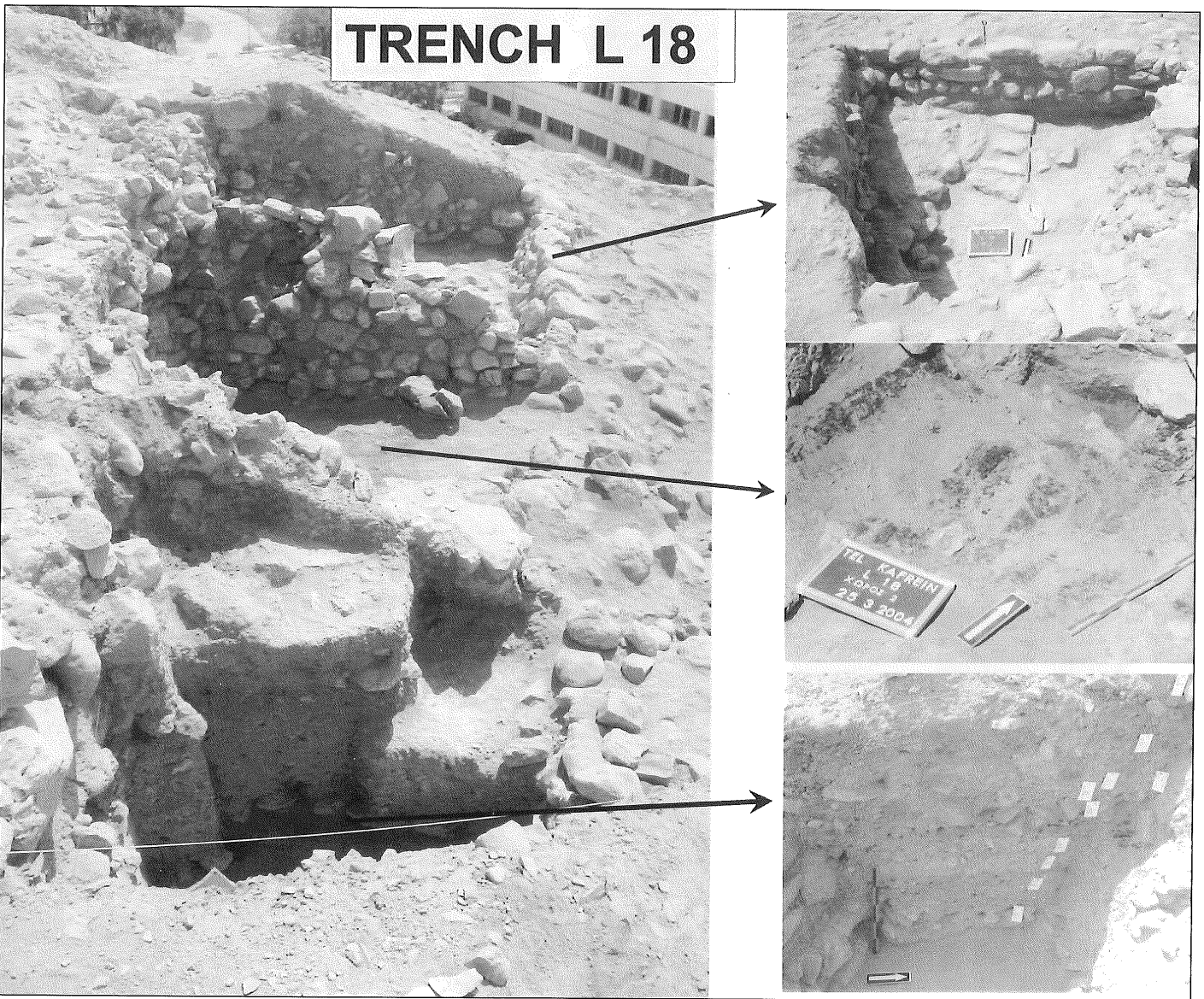
7. Tall al-Kafrayn. Topographical plan (by Samir Abdel Mohsen).



8. Trench L17.



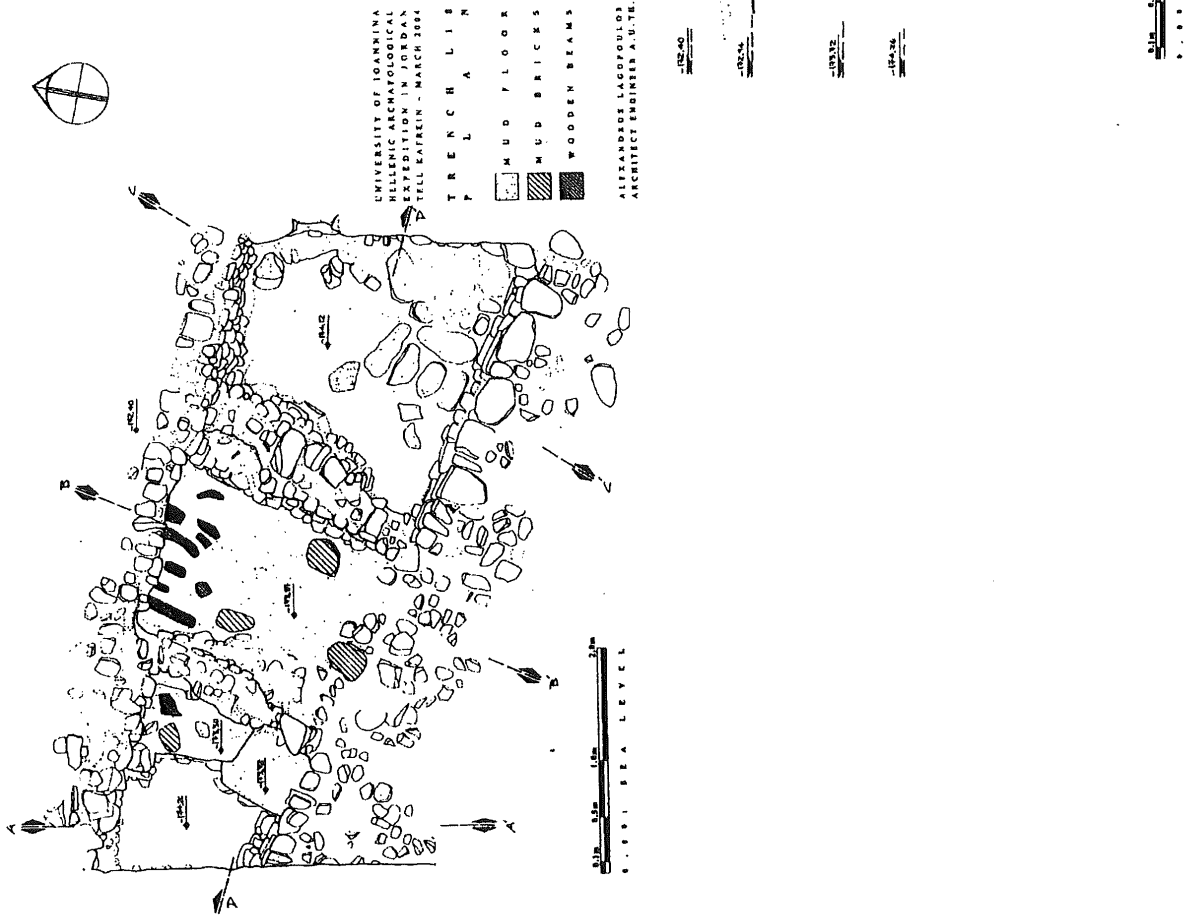
9. Board-gaming stone.



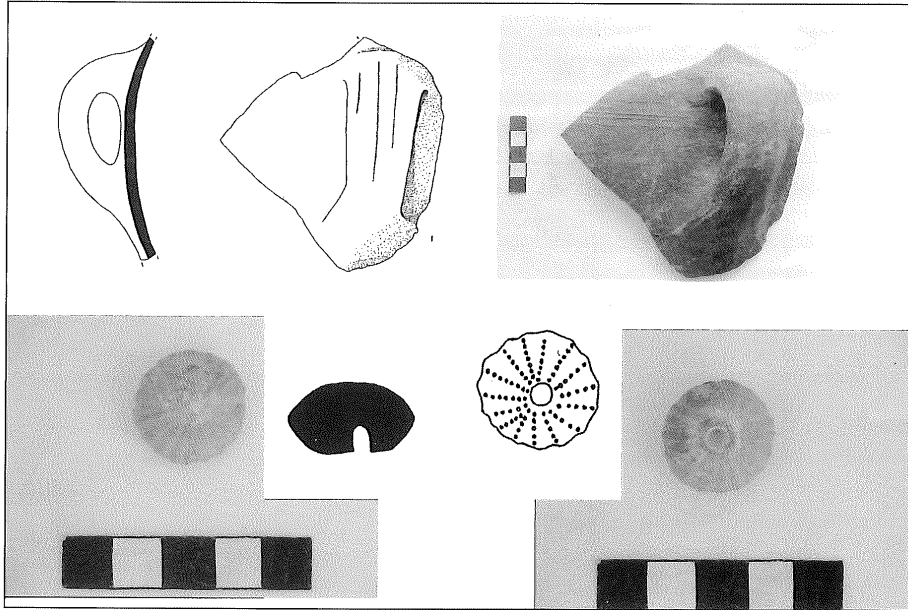
10. Trench L18: Tripartite building.

TRENCH L18

Plan and section

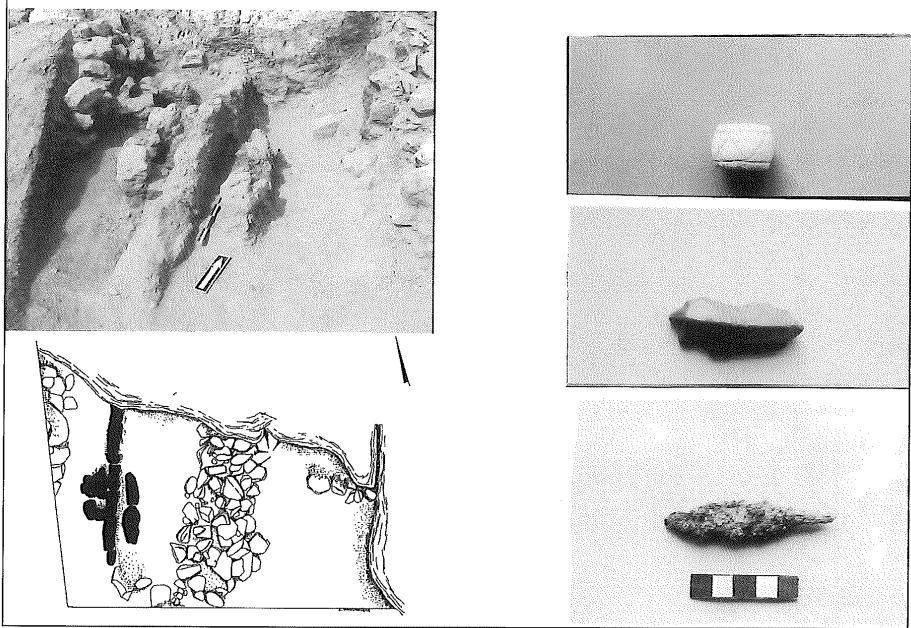


11. Trench L18: Plan and Section.



12. Finds from trench L18.

TRENCH K 16



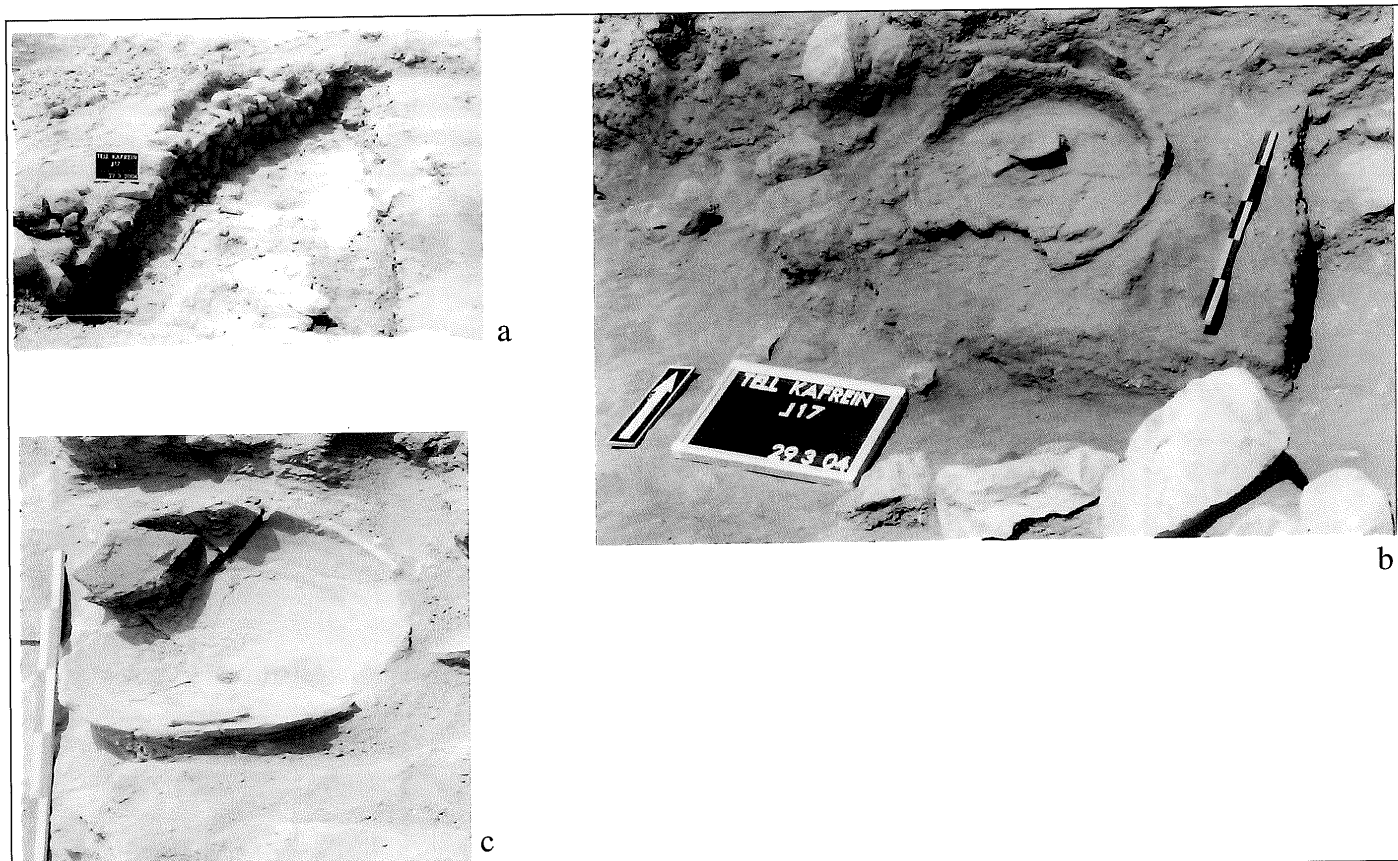
13. Trench K 16 and finds.

lematic, productive and important (FIGS. 14-15). Although much disturbed on its upper surface layer, it revealed in the lower strata architectural remains of great importance, dated from Iron Age I-II down to the fourth century BC. In addition to abundant sherds of local common Iron Age I-III pottery included jars, pithoi, lamps, juglets, bowls (cf. Amiran 1969: pls. 82, 77, 100, 88, 67; Hendrix *et al.* 1996: 167: 209, 175: 216, 181, 189, 195; Worschech 2003: 170: BUD 27-30, 87-88) (FIG. 16e),

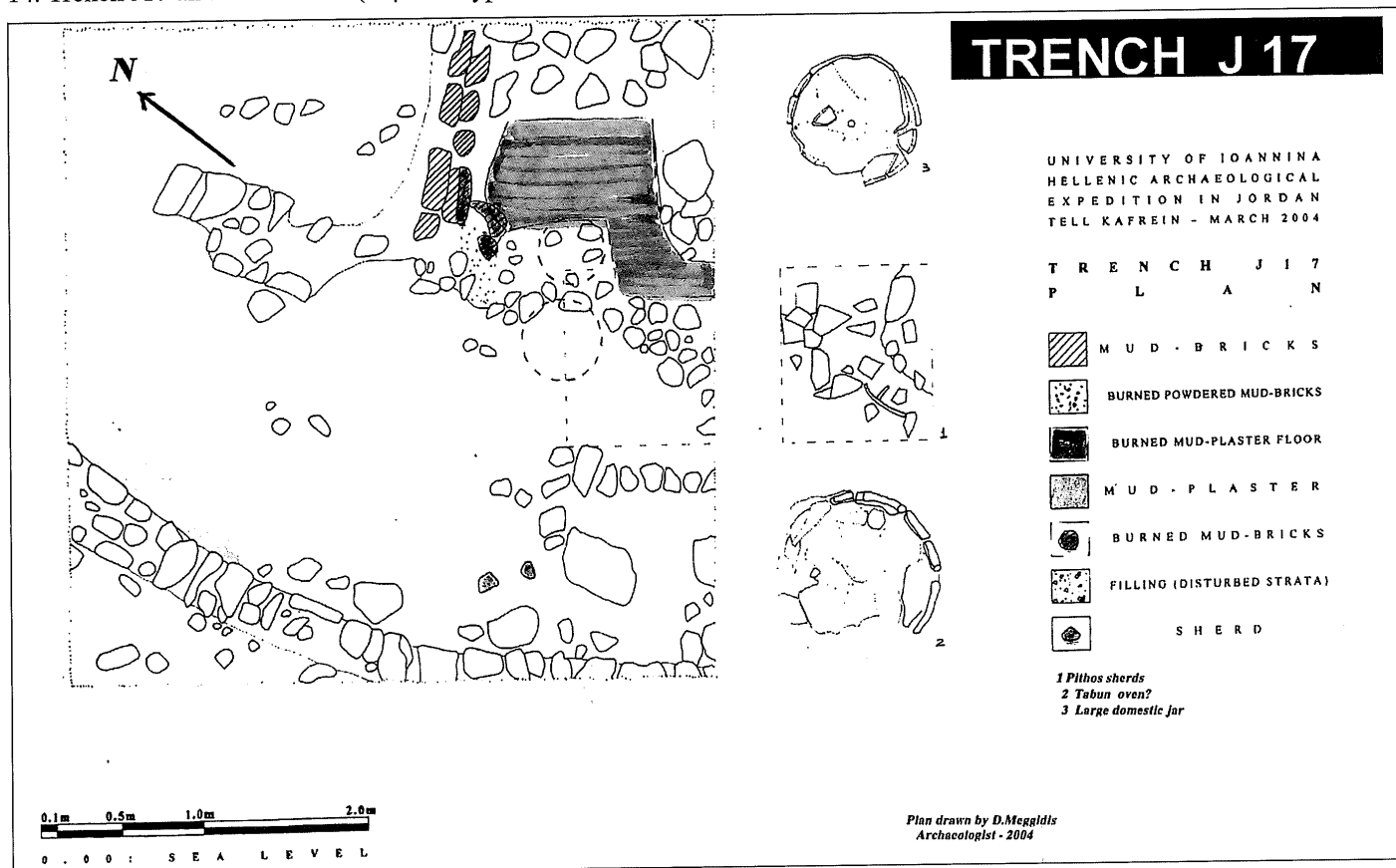
basalt grinders, imported attic black-glazed ware, and, the most exciting and important find, an fine Attic red-figured sherd of the Classical period (second half of the fifth century BC) showing a seated lady wearing an elaborate garment (FIG. 16b). This last piece can be assigned to the works of the famous Washing Painter (cf. British Museum, ARV2 1931.1-14.3; Richter 1936: pls.144-48; Boardman 1989: 97, figs. 207-212; Robertson 1992: fig. 234; Sabetas 1993)³.

³ We warmly thank our colleagues Prof. P. Valavanis and M. Tiverios, as well as our post-graduate student D. Meggidis for their

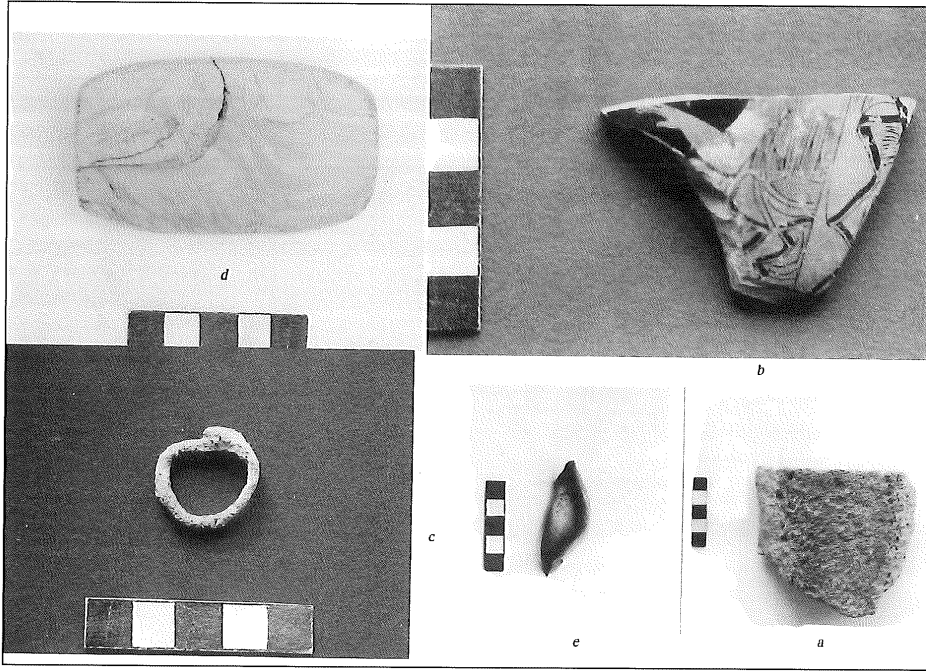
help in dating the sherds.



14. Trench J17 and finds *in situ* (b: *ṭabūn*-type oven, c: domestic jar).



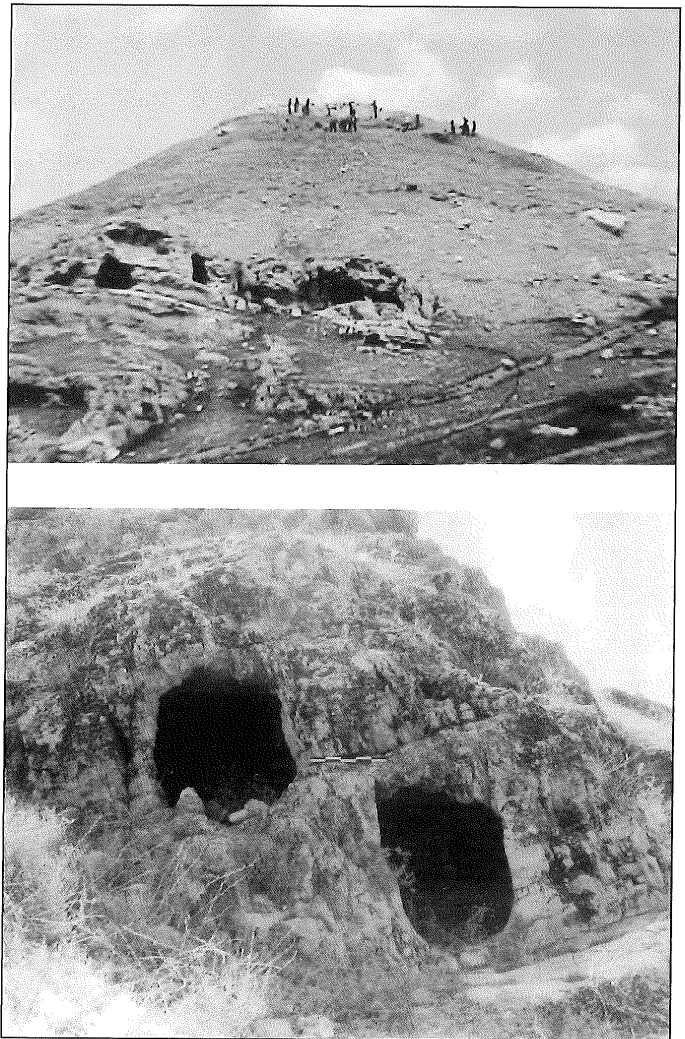
15. Trench J17.



16. Finds from Trench J17.

Other important finds are a *ṭābūn*-type oven(?), similar to one found at Dayr ‘Ayn ‘Abāṭa (Politis 1995: 477, 479, fig. 4), probably serving cooking purposes. Just beside it was the lower half of a large domestic jar with a hole at its base, possibly used as a cap of the oven or for libations (FIGS. 14-15), a bronze ring in the form of a snake biting its tail and an alabaster cosmetic palette, probably imported from Egypt (FIG. 16c-d) (cf. Schaub and Rast 1989: 452-56, fig. 261).

During this season (2004), it was decided to extend our investigation of the Tall al-Kafrayn area to the nearby prehistoric cemetery at the base of the hill, in order to save and protect some of the as yet intact tombs from local robbers. As one traverses the cemetery today, opened tombs or abandoned robber trenches are encountered approximately every meter (FIG. 17). Given this situation, we thought that little had to be found *in situ*. Our attention was drawn to the cemetery by some pots and artefacts shown to us by local villagers and our workers during the previous seasons. Since this was a previously unexplored cemetery, we felt that before initiating investigation all visible tombs ought to be mapped and included to the general topographical plan of the site. The tombs belong to two main sectors 1-2, lying to the north-eastern and western sides at the base of the hill respectively. One partly destroyed (there is no entrance and the SW part of its rectangular chamber are missing) and entirely robbed tomb (Tomb II) has been investigated in sector 1,



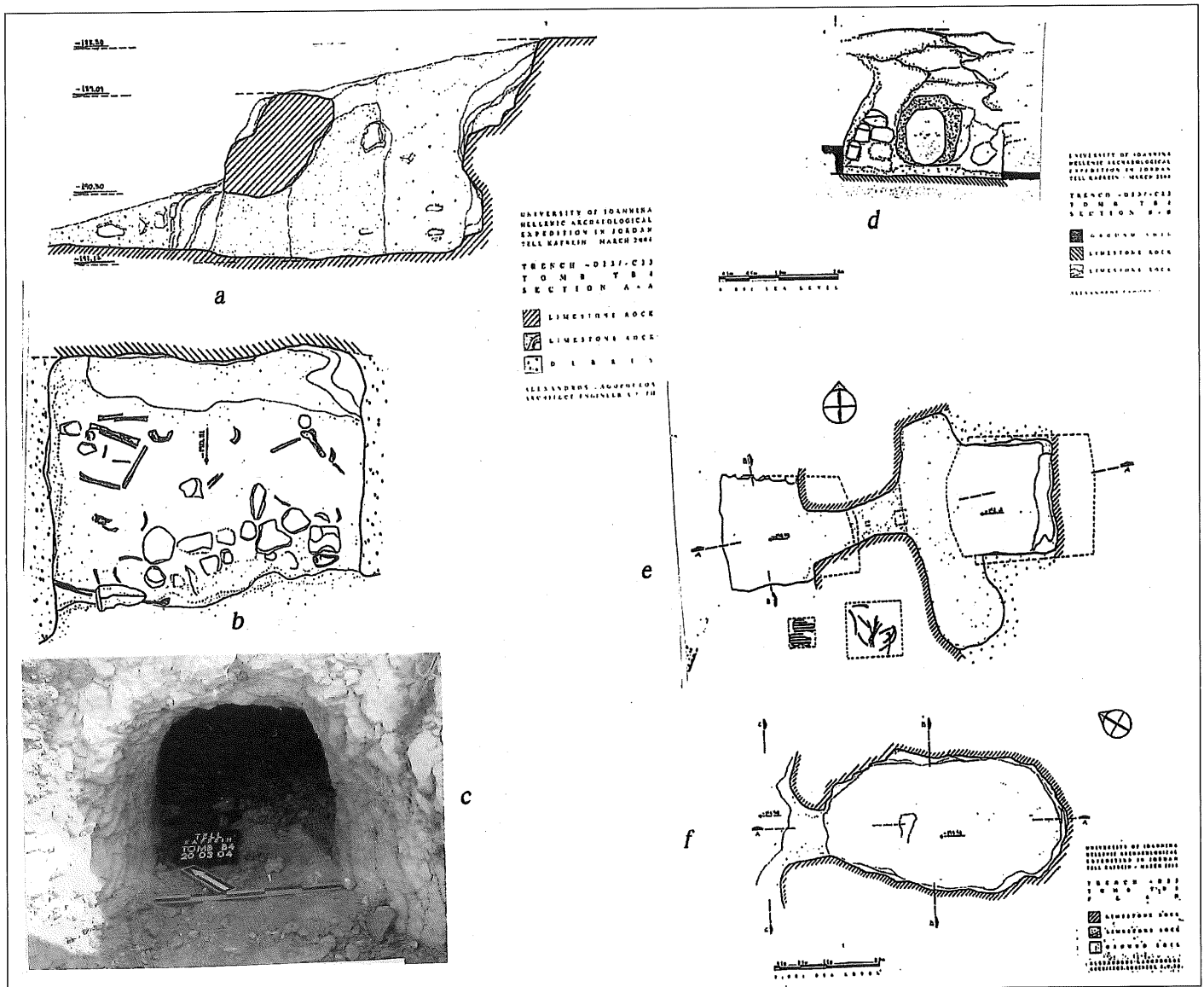
17. Tall al-Kafrayn: EBA cemetery and two robbed tombs, view from W.

which produced a sherd of an LBA (?) deep bowl, some flint blades and scattered human bones. More tombs have been traced in sector 2, belonging to three main groups (A, B, C). They are small rock-cut tombs with low entrances (average height 0,80-1,00m) closed with irregular blocking stones and roughly circular or rectangular chambers, some of them with lateral niches and apsidal ceilings. They are usually arranged in groups of two or three, sharing common interior chamber walls. Seven of them partly or entirely robbed have been cleared out and one (B4) semi-robbed was thoroughly excavated (FIG.18). *In situ* blocking stones were lacking, but several stones outside the entrance of the tomb may have belonged to its original sealing. The only finds from the three lower, intact, strata of the chamber were some scattered skeletal remains belonging to

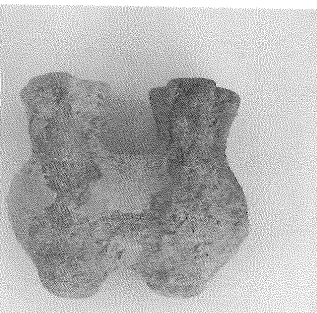
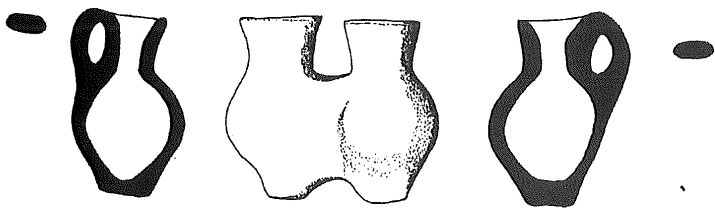
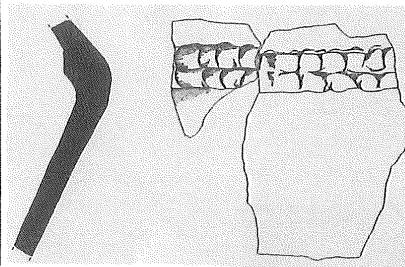
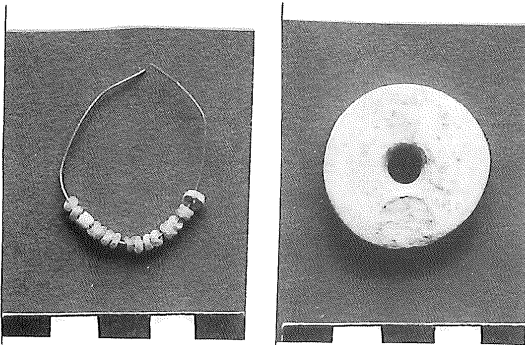
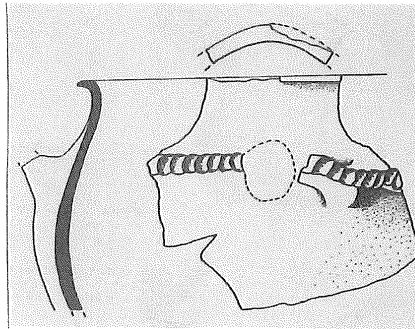
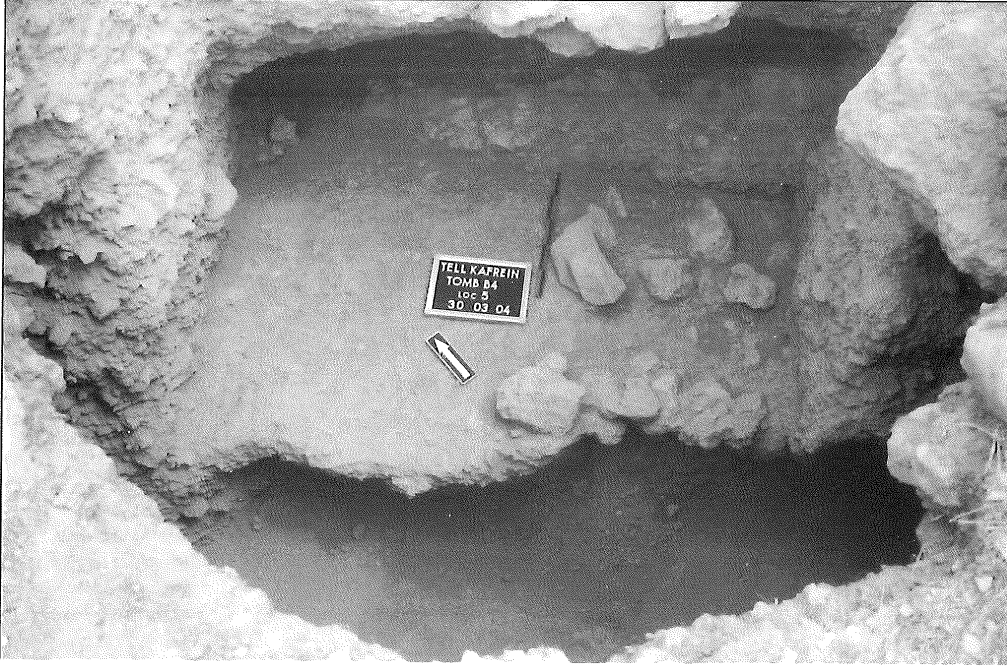
three disarticulated burials furnished with at least five whole EBA I-III vases: a two-handled bowl, a handle-less deep bowl, two amphoriskoi, and a juglet (cf. Amiran 1969: pls. 12:19, 12:4, 13:10, 15:114, 17: 9; Schaub and Rast 1989: fig. 153) and many sherds from other similar pots, a clay spindle whorl, two sea-shells pendants and a number of small glass beads of a necklace (FIGS. 19-20a, d, e). Outside and near the entrance an EBA II-III twin juglet was found (cf. Schaub and Rast 1989: 373, fig. 230: 13-14) together with some other broken contemporary pots (FIGS. 18, 20b, c, f) thrown out by illicit intruders.

Concluding Remarks

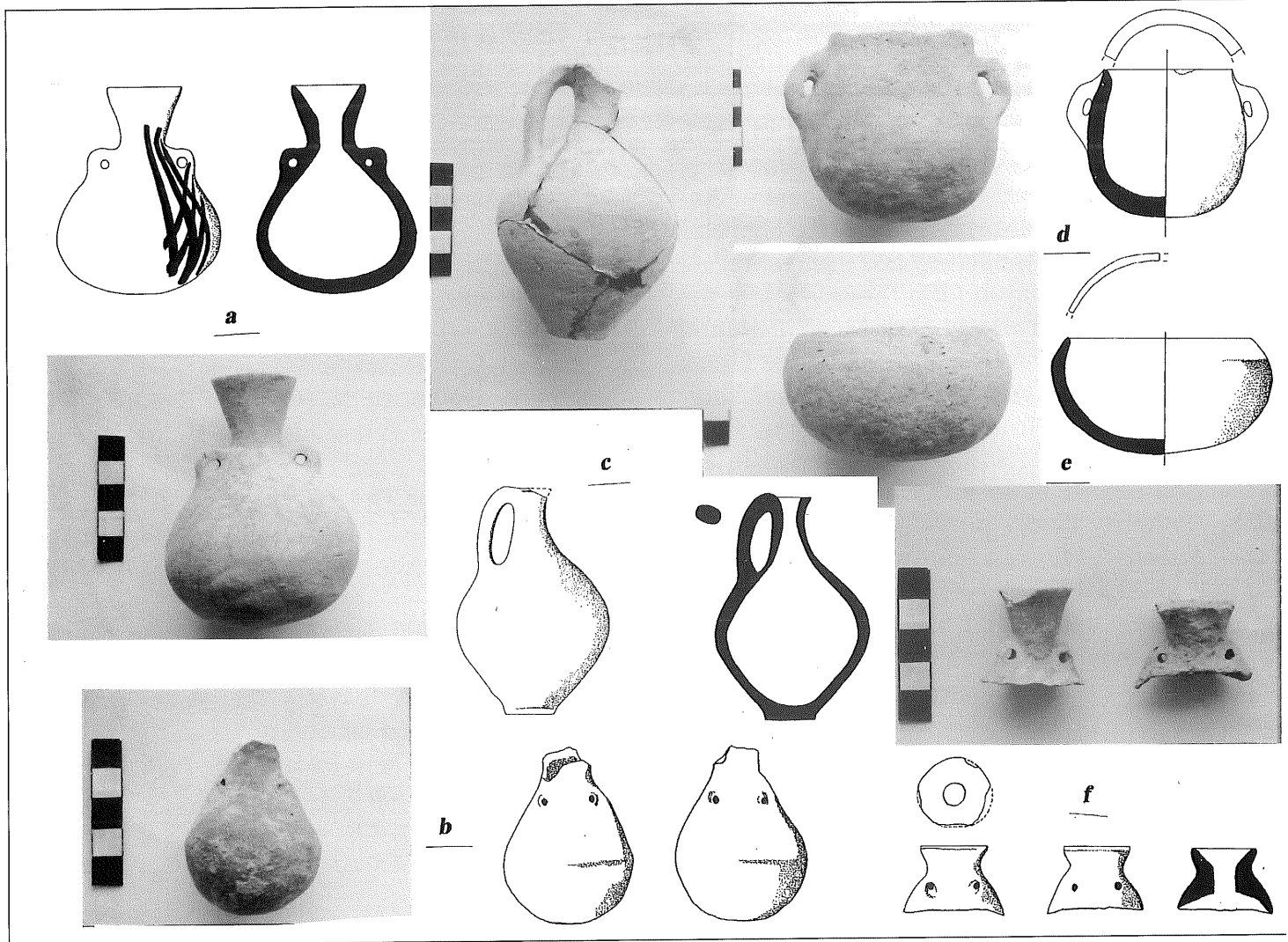
So far the excavations at Tall al-Kafrayn have confirmed the great scientific importance and potential



18. Tombs B4 (a-e) and B6 (f).



19. Tomb B4 and finds.



20. Finds from Tomb B4.

of the site. It has been identified as a multi-period settlement and continued excavation will certainly provide further precious archaeological data on the site's character, periods of construction and its human activities, including connections with other regions, the tomb architecture and burial habits.

On the basis of the available evidence from the tall and the adjacent EBA cemetery one might provisionally suggest that the site of Tall al-Kafrayn has been inhabited since Early Bronze Age times with a floruit during the LBA/Early Iron Age. Of great interest is the discovery of carbonized wooden beams and wheat seeds in squares L18 and K16, as well as that of the *tābūn*-type clay oven, which indicate both domestic activities and the destruction of the settlement by fire during the transitional period LBA/Early Iron Age.

Equally important is the occurrence of some possibly imported objects: the alabaster cosmetic palette, the gaming-board stone with rows of cir-

cular impressions and the decorated sherd of a fifth century BC attic red-figured vase, all of which suggest links with Egypt, Palestine, Cyprus and Classical Greece.

Work will continue next season both on the tall and in the adjacent prehistoric cemetery.

The recent illicit excavation of a wide trench round the tall (at a depth of 15m) has severely damaged the ancient remains. This, in conjunction with the continuing robbery of the nearby prehistoric cemetery, highlights the considerable dangers facing the site. In light of the significant discoveries that have been made so far, it is imperative that our excavation-program should be continued and that the site of Tall al-Kafrayn be fenced in and well guarded by the Department of Antiquities and the local authorities.

Acknowledgments

The project is jointly sponsored and supported by

the University of Ioannina and the Hellenic Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs. Our gratitude is expressed to all these authorities and institutions. We enjoy the firm and constant support of the local Jordanian authorities and especially that of Prof. Dr. Fawwaz Al-Khraysheh, Director General of Antiquities, and the staff of the Department of Antiquities to whom we are very grateful for cooperation and permissions for survey and excavation.

During the first season (2000) our work at the site of an-Naq' and Tulaylāt Qaşr Mūsā al-Ḥamid in the Ghawr aş-Şāfi was sponsored by the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The staff and additional support came from the University of Ioannina. Dr. Dino Politis acting as co-director in the first season helped us in many ways. The Jordan Valley Authority kindly provided accommodation in their *Sakan al-Mazra'a* housing unit. Thanks are also due to AEGEK (General Construction Company, Athens, Greece) and Samir Abdel Mohsen, surveyor, 'Ammān, for making the contour maps of the an-Naq' excavation area and Tall al-Kafrayn respectively.

We also thank Khalil Hamdan, Hussien Al-Jarrah, Ahmad Al-Tawahiah and Yasid Elayan, Department of Antiquities representatives and Widad B. Said, architect, and the archaeologists Maria-Elena Ronza, Siba Ayyoub, Ibrahim Fayoumi, Ahmad Losh, for their help and kind cooperation. Special thanks are due to the Vice-Rector of the University of Ioannina, Prof. Dr. Niki Agnanti, who visited us during the last season at Tall al-Kafrayn and for her manifold support and encouragement and to Prof. Dr. Lutfi Khalil of the Jordan University for his kindness, moral support and scientific help. We are grateful to Mr. Khaldoun Abu Ghonmi, Director of City Planning and Irrigation in the area of South Shūna for offering the basement of his offices for study and temporary storage of the finds from Tall al-Kafrayn.

We are deeply grateful to the Hellenic Embassy in 'Amman for its constant support and help, in particular to H.E.K. Karambetsis (former ambassador) and J. Kambolis, Greek Ambassador in Jordan and the Greek Cultural Attache, Miss A. Papoulia, as well as to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and its representative in Madaba, Bishop Dorotheos, for offering hospitality to the members of the expedition at the "Pilgrim's House" of the Saint George Monastery in Madaba.

Last but not least, we thank the trench supervi-

sors and close collaborators in our digs in Jordan and Greece, post-graduate students in Archaeology of the Ioannina University: K. Paschalidis, D. Basakos, E. Papadopoulou, A. Tsonos, St. Oikonomidis, K. Theodoridis, D. Meggidis and G. Nikolakaki, as well as all participant students of Archaeology for their valuable cooperation and assistance.

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