

THE EXCAVATION OF 2010 AT THE WĀDĪ ḤAMARASH-SUWAYF (GHAWR AŞ-ŞĀFĪ)

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The excavation at Wādī Hamarash-Suwayf (31.016 783 Latitude 35. 542 582 Longitude) in Ghawr aṣ-Ṣāfī continued during February and March 2010 by the Aegean University, after initial collaboration with the Society for Near Eastern Studies in 2008 and 2009 (Politis 2009; Sampson n.d.). The project was directed by Prof. Adamantios Sampson and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan was represented by Mr. Imad Al Drous.

The excavation focused mainly in the large rectangular building in Area IV (Figs. 1, 2) which had been located the previous year (Sampson n.d.). Excavation advanced meticulously by spits of 10cm and the internal space was separated in squares. The building, with external dimensions 10.60 x 9.50m, does not comply with the orientation of the rest of the buildings in the settlement. It constitutes an independent building that does not relate with the dense layout of other buildings in Areas I and II.

The masonry of the external side is exceptional and is constituted of slab stones combined with great consistency (see Fig. 4). In the southern part, the foundation wall reaches a depth of 1.65m, while in the northern part, the foundation was revealed at a lesser depth. The weight of the very thick walls was probably the cause of subsidence of the deposits in the western and northern side. Even though it looks as a rectangle or roughly square in shape, there is no absolute symmetry in dimensions (Figs. 3, 4). Hundreds of stones fallen from the walls were found both in the interior and the exterior space, indicating the walls were of considerable height. Two main doors with stone thresholds exist in the building, in the western side and in the SW corner, with widths 0.95m and 0.90m respectively. Three narrow openings are found at small

distance from each other in the western side.

In the interior, the walls bear niches of irregular thickness for the reception of wooden poles. Nine similar niches have been preserved, which do not present symmetry. It is characteristic that the niches splay towards the interior in order to retain the wooden poles better (Fig. 3). Obviously, the roof must have been wooden, inclined, supported by a lot of stakes so as to cover the wide opening of building that reaches 10m. The floor was found at a relatively shallow depth (0.65-0.75m.) in the southern and western side, while in the northern area, due to the subsidence mentioned, it was found lower. The construction of the floor was intricate and included three phases. Initially there was a substratum of big stones and slabs. Then, small gravel mixed with earth was placed, and finally it was covered with white plaster. Unfortunately, the plaster was preserved in only a few areas, whereas the layer of gravel at a greater extent. In very few cases was the plaster on the walls preserved.

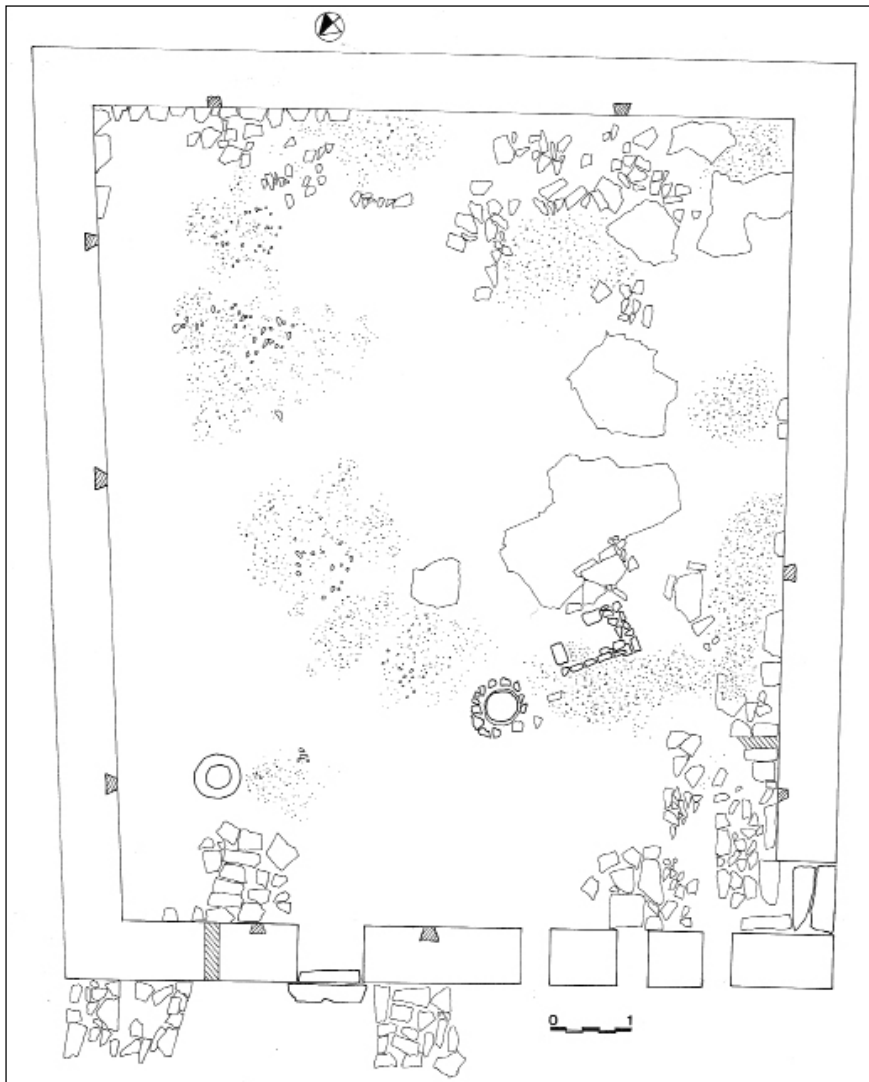
It is also characteristic that in the building few artifacts were found, such as some grinders and parts of blades, and not in the level of the floor. More were found around the building, including big concentrations of blades and ground stone tools, especially near the southern entry. A stone ring made of sandstone (see Fig. 16: e) was found in Opening 1 of the western side on the external face. In the northwest corner in Sq. 62, at 0.40m depth, there was a big quern with a diameter of 0.43m, and height 0.40m, which stepped onto the floor. At the same level, two grinders were found as well as an ashy layer. In the same area of the building the plaster of the floor has not been preserved, but the substratum of big slabs was. In a part of the western wall, at floor level, a hole was found with height of



1. Wadi Hamarash: the grid of the site.



2. *The rectangular building and cluster of buildings in Area II.*



3. *Ground plan of the rectangular building.*



4. The rectangular building from the southwest.

0.15m and width of 0.18 m that must have had disposal or sewage use.

The only feature inside the building was a rectangular hearth of dimensions 1.00 x 0.80m, in Square 24, that presents an asymmetry with relation to the walls (**Fig. 3**). Near the hearth, (Square 33) a circular pit surrounded with small stones was revealed in the floor level, containing a flint nodule (**Fig. 5**) of roughly spherical shape (diam. 0.43m and height 0.35m). On one side of the stone there was a flat surface with circular dents with diam. 0.17m, and below it there were two similar incised symbols existed resembling the Greek letter Ψ (**Fig. 6**). A similar



5. The flint nodule from the rectangular building.



6. Incised symbols on the flint nodule.

spherical nodule was found outside the building, placed at a small distance from the southern entry. Its dimensions were smaller, with diameter of 0.36m and height of 0.20m (**Fig. 7**).

In general, the floor of the building has suffered considerable destruction after its abandonment due to the shallow depth of overlying deposits. In several spots, pits with concentrations of large stones exist.

Area II

Excavation also proceeded to the area between the symbolic building (Area IV) and Area II, excavated in 2008. A wall with northern orientation begins from Area II, encompassing an extensive area, within which loci 22, 23, 24 were found (**Figs. 8, 9**) that communicate through doors. Obviously, it is a separate property, which must have included also the small loci 3 and 4. All areas were excavated to the depth of 0.30-0.40m and yielded a large number of ground stone tools and chipped artifacts. Extraordinarily elongated is the locus 24 to which lead two doors.

The northern wall, which has a narrow entry from the open area 21, forms a circular corner and is directed easterly towards the symbolic building. This open area is created in front of the southern entry of the symbolic building. In this point an extraordinary configuration of walls creates a bench on which a flint nodule was placed on a big slab (**Figs. 7, 8**).

Another unit consists of loci 16-19, 25, which, upon removal of the first spit, yielded

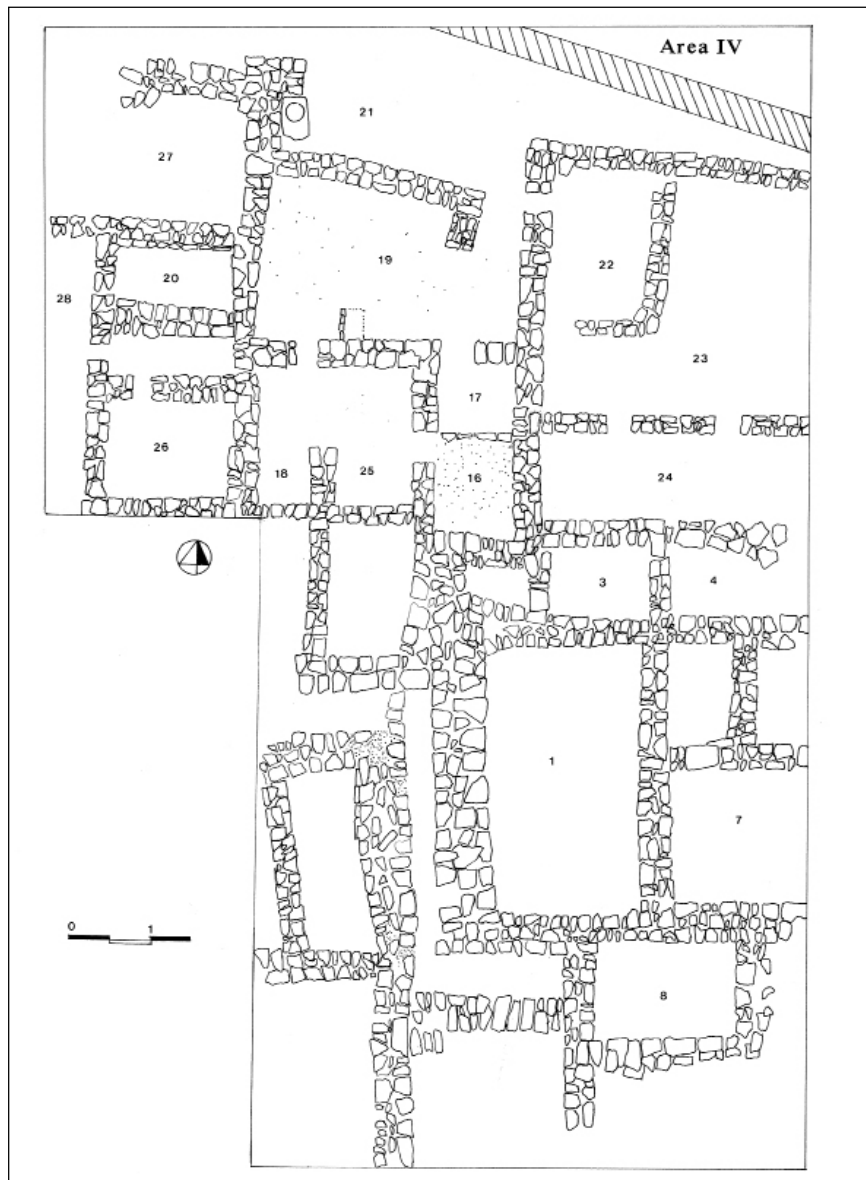
numerous ground stone tools and lithics. The loci communicate through relatively narrow openings. In the small space Locus 16, a floor of slabs with traces of plaster was found at the depth of 0.35m. The most important room was Locus 19, with a trapezoidal ground plan (**Figs. 10, 11**). Two entries lead from Rooms 17 and 18 to its interior, while another entry, not clearly distinguishable, probably provided access to the open area 21 in the entrance of the symbolic building.

Locus 19 constitutes the second area in the settlement in which plaster was found on floor and walls. However, the floor is destroyed in the central part, but it is preserved in a much better state than that at the symbolic building. The lime plaster was better preserved mostly on the floor near the walls and had a beige/grey shade, different from that of the big symbolic building which had a white color. In several areas, blue-green color exists that probably derives from original coloration. In the deposit of the room many ground stone tools were found. At the depth 0.45m, a smoothed discoidal object of flint existed with a small hole in the centre. In the 6th layer, in the centre of the room, an ellipsoid stone object colored with red and yellow was found, similar to that from Locus 20 (see **Fig. 16: a, c**).

On the floor (depth 0.65m) near the north wall, a big oval quern 0.38m long and 0.25m wide was revealed, while next to it, a fragment of a gazelle skull was also found preserving the



7. The other flint nodule near the southern entrance of the rectangular building.



8. Cluster of buildings between the Areas II and IV.

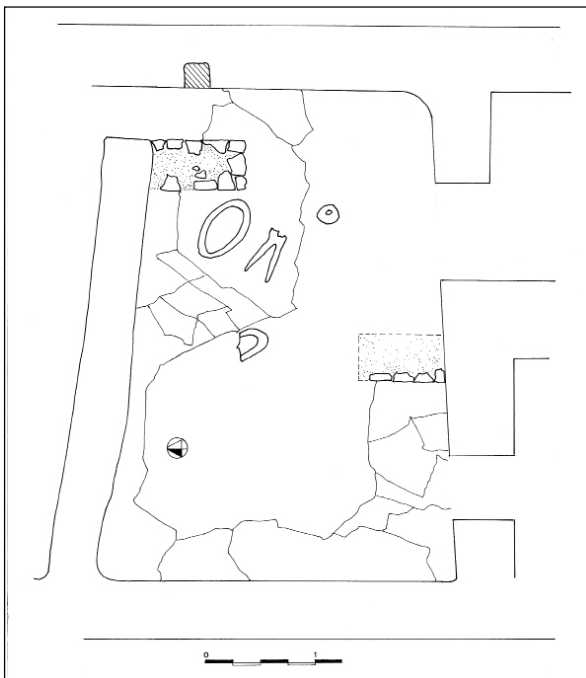
antlers, suggesting a ritual use for this room (Fig. 12). At two points in the room, two rectangular benches existed, of which one was only partly preserved. Near the northern entry, a narrow niche 0.32m high and 0.21m wide existed but it whether communicated with Locus 22 was not clarified.

To the west of the Room 19 another unit includes Loci 20, 26, and 27. Room 20 is roughly square and has been excavated down to the depth 2.20m. In the northern wall two successive buttress walls were found at depths of 0.65 and 0.95m respectively (Figs. 13, 14). The northern and eastern walls extend down to 2.20m, where-

as the southern and western walls are founded much higher. Consequently, Locus 20 had two floors and communicated through narrow openings with the two ground Rooms 26 and 28 (Fig. 14). Locus 27 was excavated partly at a shallow depth and does not appear to communicate with locus 20. In Locus 26, which reached a depth 0.45m, many ground stone tools were found, and finds were abundant Locus 20. At a depth 0.40m two parts of big stone basins were found, as well as smaller containers. At 1.10m depth, an ellipsoid stone with a hole was found, with an incised symbol similar to those found in the flint nodule; also, two oval grinders, part of a



9. Buildings between the Areas II and IV from the west.



10. Locus 19. Ground plan.

stone vessel, and a handful of flint blades were recovered. In the next layer (12) two stone vessels were found, as well as bones of small animals and blades. At -1.40m depth, a stone with phallus form, a grinder, and parts of stone vessels were found.

The Finds

The spherical stone objects were usually found in limestone rocks in different regions of



11. Locus 19 from the west.

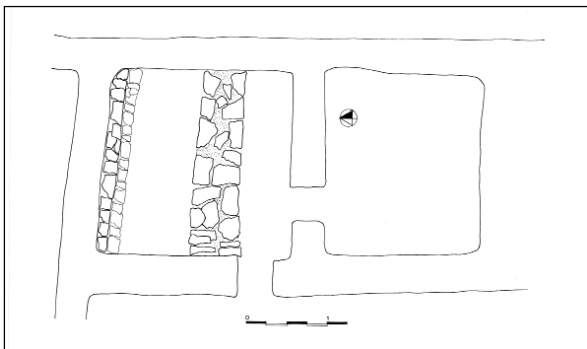


12. Locus 19. Plastered floor.

Jordan, but up to today have not been known in the region of Wādī al-Ḥasā. They also occur in



13. Locus 20.



14. Locus 20. Ground plan.

the eastern desert of the country (Black Desert) in argil sediments (**Fig. 15**). These extraordinary stones obviously attracted the interest of residents of the settlement which transported them there from perhaps a great distance and placed them in a prominent place. According to Gebel (2004: 59) the flint nodules, which usually are not reported in the publications, are connected with sociobiological and metaphorical/symbolic functions. Their collection belongs to a universal possessive behavior and is connected to the “effectance of competence motivation”. Their use could have occupied a range

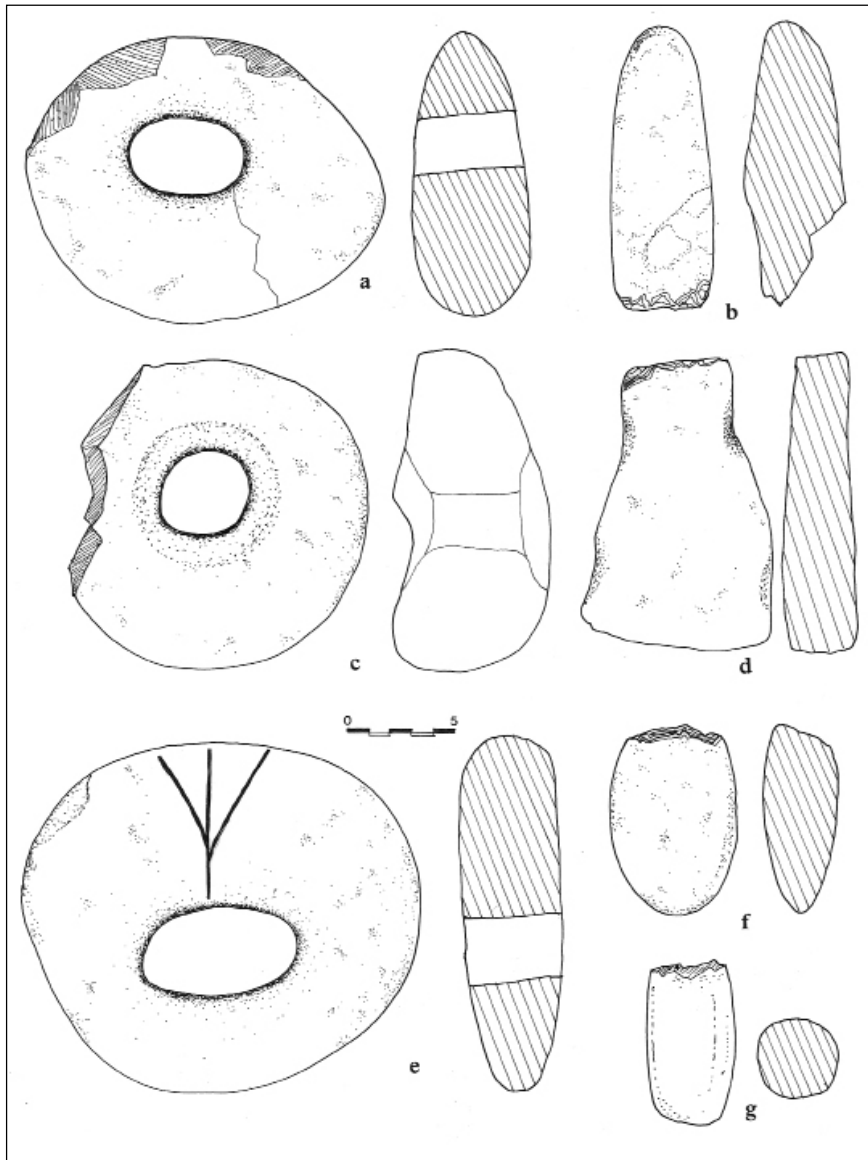


15. Flint nodules in the eastern desert of Jordan.

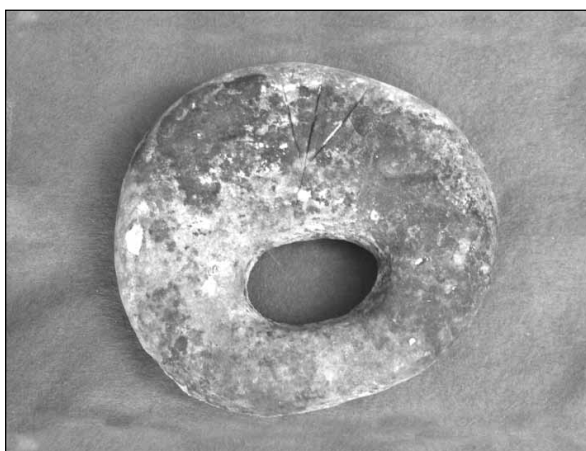
of functions between possessing something attractive/ meaningful/ symbolic/magical and objects used in socially motivated giving/taking/sharing. Furthermore, the incision of two similar symbols on an extraordinary and magical object should have had a greater and particular importance (**Fig. 6**)

Each symbol consists of a straight line with two lines that emerge from this at an angle and could constitute a schematization of human body with upraised arms. Depictions of the human form on clay vessels or in other materials occur in the Neolithic of the Balkans. A human figure with raised hands in Hungary is dated to Bukk phase (Kalicz 1980: Fig. 19). A similar incised symbol occurs on vessels or figurines of the Vinca culture in Serbia and is included in the early Neolithic writing of Balkans (Winn 2009: 56; Pesic 2003: Fig. 5), while similar symbols have been found on ceramics from Troia I (Winn 1981: 248; Haarmann 2008: Fig. 2). In any case, this symbol, to my knowledge, has not been found in the Near East up to today.

A precisely similar symbol was found in Locus 20 on an ellipsoid sandstone object with dimensions 0.10 x 0.16m and thickness of 0.03m (**Figs. 16: e and 17**). Two similar objects without incised symbols were found during this season in Locus 19 (**Fig. 18: a, c**), while in 2008 and 2009 several items were also found in Area I. The use of these objects is for the moment inexplicable; however the presence of the incised symbol on one of them could also characterize the similar objects as items with a symbolic significance. Stone pierced objects have also been found in the as-Sifiyya settlement and are reported as stone weights (Mahasneh 2004), however their size is smaller and the form different. A pierced round stone was found at the level of floor in Locus 19 (**Fig. 18: a**). It is a flint bearing colored shades in successive circles. The intense wear indicates it had been used as a tool for percussion, as if it had a wooden shaft. The axe with a length 0.124m and width 0.048m, found in deep layers of Locus 20 is the unique example, so far, from the settlement (**Fig. 16: b**). In general, these tools do not occur often in the early Neolithic of Jordan. An exception comes from as-Sifiyya, where several similar tools have been found (Mahasneh 2004: Fig. 10).



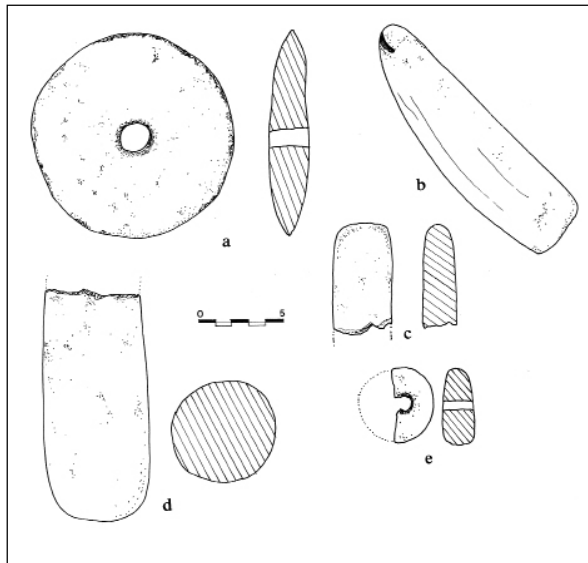
16. Stone objects from Loci 19 and 20.



17. Stone object with incised symbol from Locus 20.

Conclusions

The excavation of the large rectangular building, which is distinguished from the other buildings of the settlement and is found at a prominent place in northernmost part of the site, constitutes something unusual for the PPNB of Jordan. The building differs from the other structures by its size (roughly 100m²), the exceptional masonry, and the existence of lime plaster in the floors and the walls. The lack of domestic finds and even more, the extraordinary spherical nodule with two incised symbols indicates this unusually large building may have had some kind of ritual function. A stone object from another area (Locus 20) with the same in-



18. Stone objects from Loci 19 and 20.

cised symbol bears particular interest. A similar symbol, also engraved on a slab, was collected on the opposite bank of the Wādī al-Ḥasā River on a small plateau situated at lower level from the settlement. It is an area that presents four circular structures of the same period, according to the lithic artifacts.

At the same time, at a small distance from the symbolic building, another room (Locus 19) was investigated, with colored plaster on the floor and walls as well as built benches, which yielded finds with symbolic character. Upon the conclusion of the season's excavations a thick blue plastic tarpaulin was laid on the plastered floors, then back-filled with soil and stones for protection. It is recommended though that care is taken to preserve this rare discovery.

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