

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE THIRD CAMPAIGN  
AT THE ANCIENT SITE OF EL-BALŪ' IN 1991

by  
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The third archaeological campaign at el-Balū' was carried out from July 7 until August 5, 1991. The excavation was funded by the Unions of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Germany and sponsored by the Theological Seminary Marienhoehe, Darmstadt (Germany). The campaign of four weeks was directed by Udo Worschech with the assistance of Ursula Worschech, F. Ninow, and U. Rosenthal, who served as square supervisors.

The main objective of this year was to continue excavations in the Assyro-Babylonian house complex (Area CI), to start work at the defence wall (Area CIII) at the northern edge of the plateau, and to enlarge the excavated area west of the *qaṣr* (Area AI).

#### Area AI-House with Courtyard (Figs. 1-2)

Since the 1987 season had given indication of at least two architectural phases in Square A8a/26<sup>1</sup>, a further square (A8d/26) was opened in 1991. This square is located directly south of wall w1 (Fig. 1) with the blocked doorway. In both squares the Iron Age floor was reached (see Fig. 1 for the following comments).

The round structure in Square A8a/26, which had been interpreted provisionally as a furnace, was removed. In this process it became obvious that the structure was not a furnace. No firing room or ashes were found inside. After the removal of the round structure several smaller walls appeared dividing the courtyard into several sections.

The small wall w2 about 0.30m wide, which extended from the east balk towards wall w4 and the round structure, continues westward until it meets another small

stoneline w3 (Pl.I,1). In order to build the round structure, wall w2 was levelled and incorporated into the structure for no obvious purpose. East of the round structure the partition wall w2 remained at its original height. Wall w4 had an original width of about 0.45m. It appears that this wall w4 was reinforced in connection with the construction of the round structure.

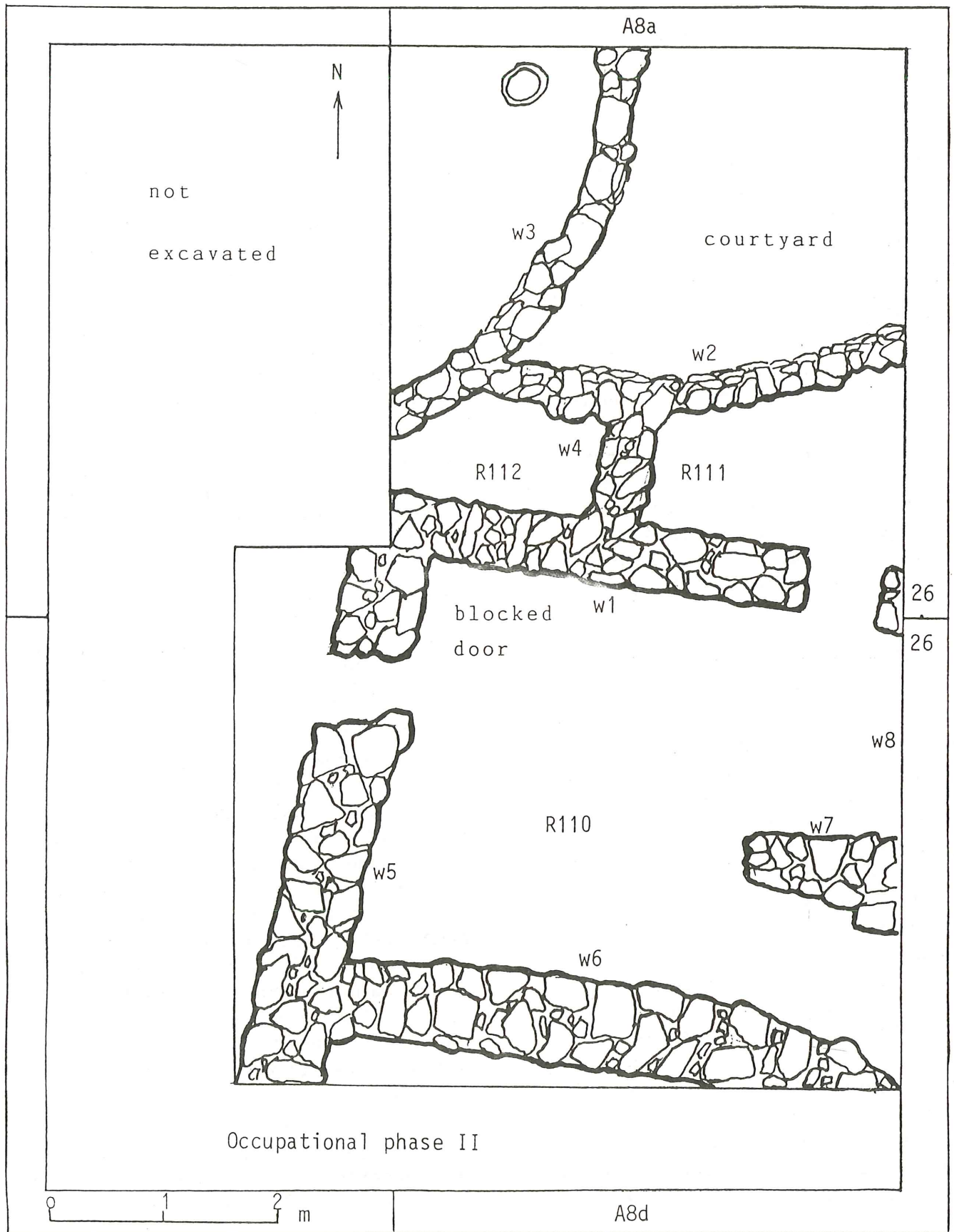
The small stone line w3, 0.32m in width and at an average of 0.35m in height, separated the courtyard from a cooking area. The stone line formed a step for the elevated cooking area which had an average level of 844.17m against the level of the courtyard which was about 843.77m. On this cooking platform remains of a *ṭabūn* were discovered. This *ṭabūn* may be the reason for the thick ashy layer mixed with fine sand which constituted the fill above the courtyard and the cooking area.

The eastern part of the partition wall w2 together with wall w4 and the eastern part of the main wall w1 form one (R111) of two small chambers (R111 and R112). Chamber R111 contained a great number of working stones, grinders, mortars and flat stone tables (Pl.I,2). This chamber had access through a doorway into one of the rooms (R110) of the main building. The corners of this doorway are very well built. A huge basalt doorstep formed part of the entrance. This doorway is the second of two entrances which led from the courtyard into room R110 before the first doorway was blocked and the courtyard modified.

The other small chamber R112, west of R111, yielded no special objects except a small quantity of sherds. It was probably used for storage. Although this chamber did not

1. In 1987 only one square was opened; it had no specific designation except for the general area term AI; see: U.F.Ch. Worschech, 'Preliminary Report on the Second Campaign at the Ancient Site of el-Balū' in 1987', *ADAJ*

33(1989), p. 111-121; U. Worschech, 'Ergebnisse der Grabungen auf der Hirbet el-Balū' 1987. Ein Vorbericht,' *ZDPV* 106 (1990), P. 86-113.



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Fig. 1. Area A1 with occupational Phases I-III.

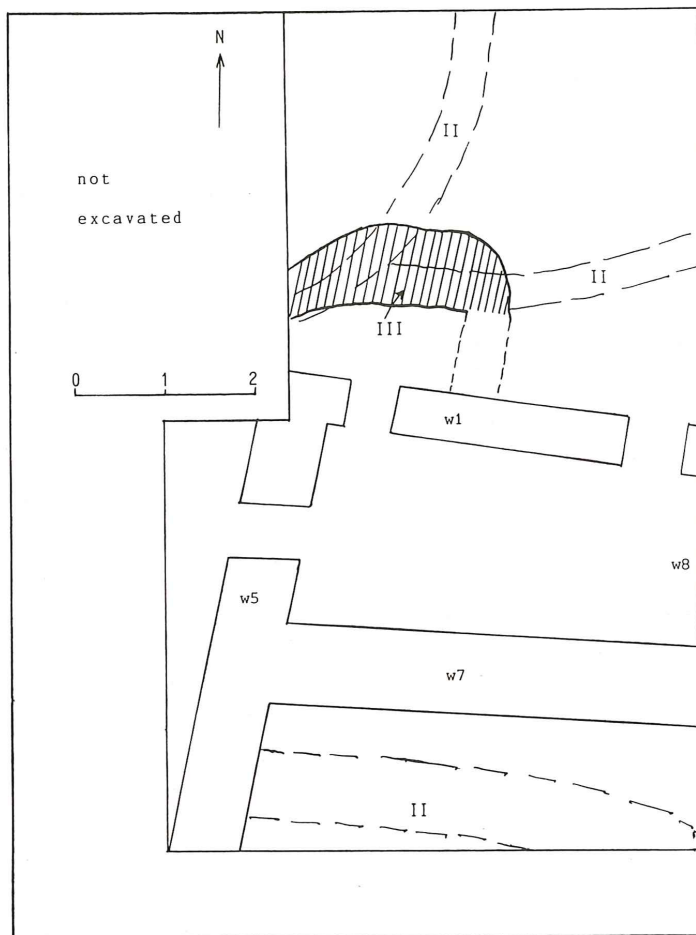


Fig. 2. Sketch of Area A1 with all the building remains of the different phases.

have a specific entrance, it was easily accessible from the cooking area over the stone line w3.

In Square A8d/26, room R110 was cleared until the Iron Age plaster floor was reached. At the western end of wall w1 another wall w5, about 0.76m in width, extends to the south. Since the outer side of this corner is still hidden in the balk, one cannot say if wall w1 continues to the west or ends and forms a corner at this point.

A doorway interrupts wall w5 leading from room R110 to another room or courtyard. Wall w5 continues further south beyond the square. Remains of it can be traced on the surface of the area south of the square.

Just before wall w5 disappears into the balk another wall w6 almost 0.80m wide extends from it to the east. Towards the east, wall w6 curves and turns to the south-east. At the edge of the square, it forms—together with the remains of wall w7 which had an original width of about 0.70m—a relatively wide entrance into room R110 (Pl.II,1). It

appears that in the process of enlarging room R110, wall w7 was torn down—except for the remains which form the entrance—and wall w6 was constructed.

At the point where wall w6 extends from wall w5, a small doorway was blocked in wall w5. This doorway may have led into another room south-west of room R110. From wall w7, another wall w8 extends north to complete room R110. The internal face of wall w8 corresponds exactly with the line of the eastern balk. Therefore, nothing can be said about its width. A stone table (0.40m × 0.71m) was situated on the plaster floor right against wall w1.

Based on the architectural remains, three building phases can be identified: Phase I (Fig. 2) consisted of a building complex with at least two rooms. Each room could be entered by a doorway, the southern room at the western, the northern room at the western and southern side of the building. Due to destroyed architectural remains inside the

building, it could not be determined whether both rooms were connected by yet another floor interior doorway. North of that building the courtyard had a hard packed beaten earth floor.

In a later phase (Phase II, Fig. 1), one of the northern doorways was blocked and the courtyard north of the building divided by several smaller walls. In front of the northern wall w1 of room R110 two small chambers or areas were separated from the main courtyard by partition walls. Further to the north extended a cooking area with a *ṭabūn*. This area had a higher level than the courtyard. The yard may have housed animals like sheep and goats.

Inside the building the northern room was enlarged. Only a small section of the Phase I dividing wall w7 remained, which was integrated into an eastern doorway. The western entrance of the southern Phase I room was blocked.

The round structure in front of the blocked northern doorway belongs to another phase (Phase III, Fig. 2) which followed the alteration of the courtyard. Up to this point nothing can be said about the purpose or function of the round structure. Further excavation should bring more light about this installation.

#### Area CIII - The Casemate Walls (Fig. 3)

During this season two squares were opened at the defence walls immediately at the escarpment to Wadi el-Balū'. The excavation revealed a parallel wall construction with two heavy walls partitioning the double wall of the casemate system.

During W.F. Crowfoot's sounding in 1933, a wall was uncovered at the east side of the sounding area. Crowfoot neither did excavate the wall nor did he excavate east of it. In 1991 we continued east of the wall w200 and unearthed a wall of unhewn but well set stones. This massive wall structure was 1.60m wide and extended about 3m down to bedrock. Wall w200 is set between the parallel walls of the casemate system, which is at this point 3.50m wide. The outer defence wall is ca. 1.20m thick. Parallel to it the southern wall w300 has a width of 2m.

From wall w100 the excavation continued east ca. 2m. The wind-blown sand had accumulated with no substantial stratification indicating later disturbances. However, when excavating the southern wall w300, a "Mamluk" wine press was uncovered consisting of a treading area (ca. 1.50 × 1.30m) and a basin (ca. 50cm in diameter and ca. 30cm deep; see Pl.II,2). No pottery was found except for a broken Mamluk pipe. The whole installation was built on the top row of the stones of the southern parallel Iron Age wall w300.

The two metre wide area east of wall w200 was excavated down to bedrock. The pottery is Iron II throughout with no earlier sherds.

Another square was opened ca. 10m east of wall w200. Here an abundance of sherds belonging to large heavy jars of various Iron II rim types were found. The jars were entirely destroyed by the fallen walls with only one jar *in situ* (Pl.II,3). A thick layer of black ashes was found on the floor ca. 2m south of wall w100. The fire had also charred wall w500, which is another partition wall of the casemate system.

Among the rims of the various jar-types found in the storage area, three rims of the "collared-rim jar" type came to light (Fig. 4). This is of importance for two reasons: 1) the discovery of this jar type south of Wadi el-Mujib is remarkable, since up till now only the central and eastern highlands of Palestine were thought to be the "home" of this jar-type (as far east and south as Saḥab). It is possible that these jars may have been imports at el-Balū'. 2) the fact that these jars turned up in an Iron II context is also remarkable since the collared rim jars were thought to have been manufactured during the early Iron I period. However, if the collared rim jars of el-Balū' were locally made, it is likely that this jar type continued to be produced in the Iron IIA/B period in Eastern Palestine.

#### Area CI - The Assyro-Babylonian House (Fig. 3)

Before continuing in room r3, the floor of room r2 (the "reception hall") was cut at the east wall. In an elliptically shaped crevice in the uncovered bed rock the remains of a secondary burial were found. The disarticu-

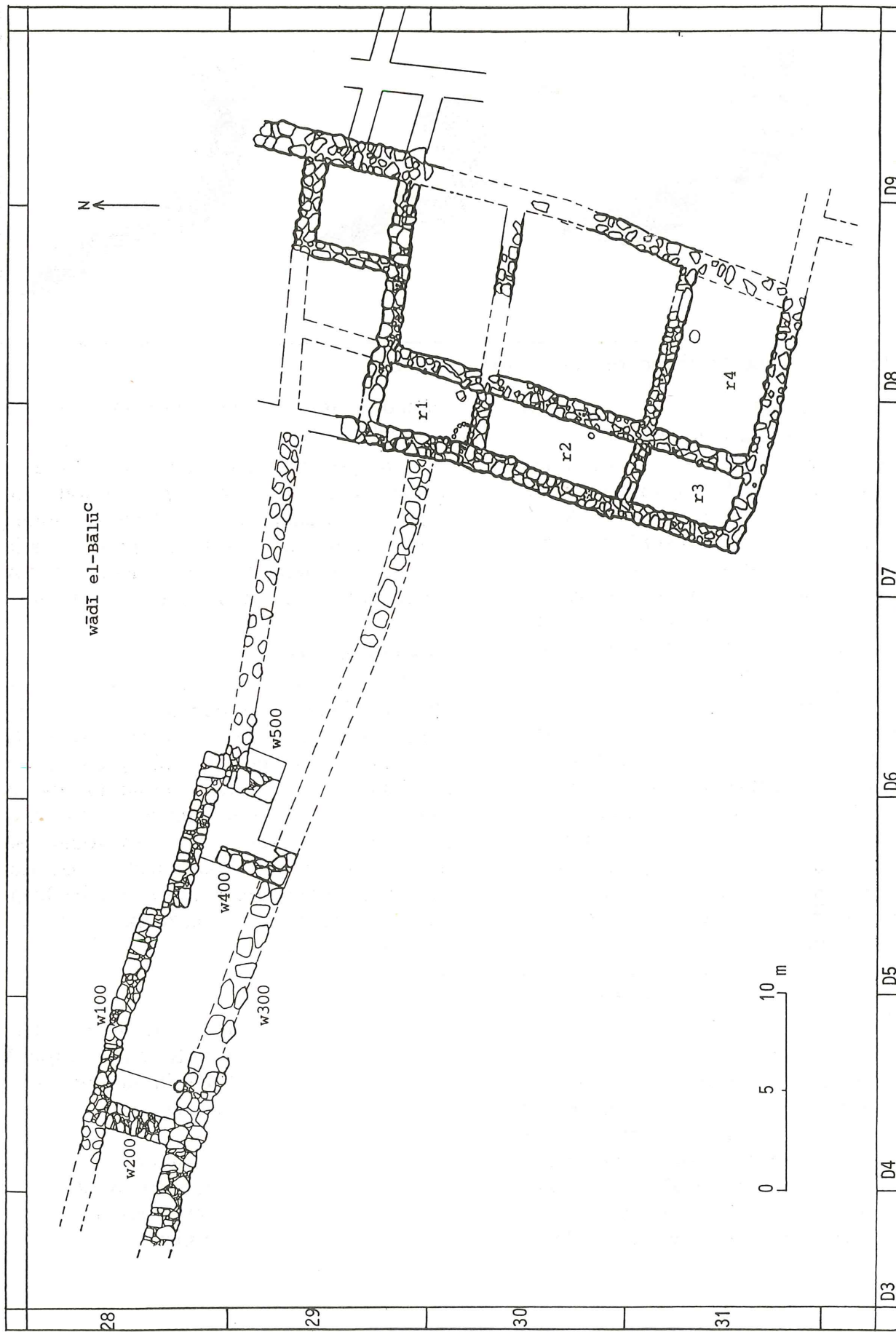


Fig. 3. Area CI and CIII with the house complex and the casemate wall.

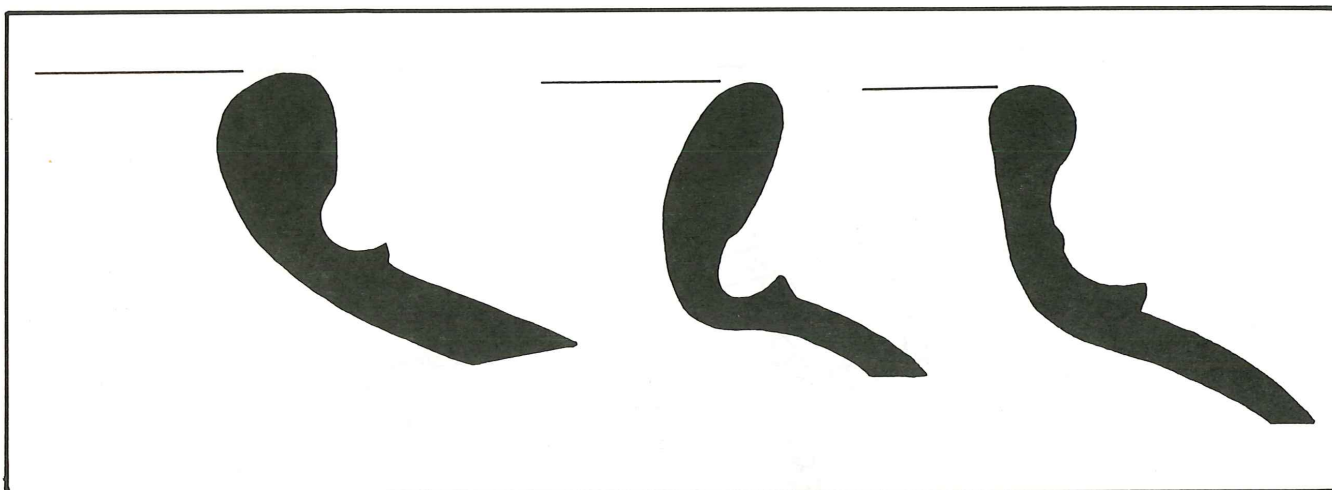


Fig. 4. Profiles of the “collared rim jars” from el-Balū’.

lated bones were only few. The only sherd found belongs to the Middle Bronze Age as evidenced by the “half-moons” decorating the neck of the sherd belonging to a large Middle Bronze Age jar or krater. A lower human jaw with all teeth “*in situ*” (two with extensive caries) was also found in this burial. There was no evidence of any disturbances of the grave when the Iron Age house was built. The floor was laid over the Middle Bronze Age burial with no knowledge of the existence of the latter.

Room r3 was cleared down to bedrock. As already observed in rooms r1 and r2, the walls were set on a layer of plaster over the cut bedrock which served as foundations. This room contained two large grinding stones, one broken and one complete trough, several working stones, and loomweights. The soil was removed inside the doorway leading from room r2 to room r3. Its two lintels were *in situ*. After removal of the soil in room r3 the bedrock was reached ca. 1m below the floor.

A small sounding in the eastern half of room r4 revealed a *ṭabūn*. (0.50m in diameter) which was well preserved and located close to the entrance leading from the court into room r4. About 1m below the lintel, remains of a burial were found with no grave offerings in it. It is likely that this was a bedouin burial at a time when the lintel

formed a shelter above ground over the accumulated sand.

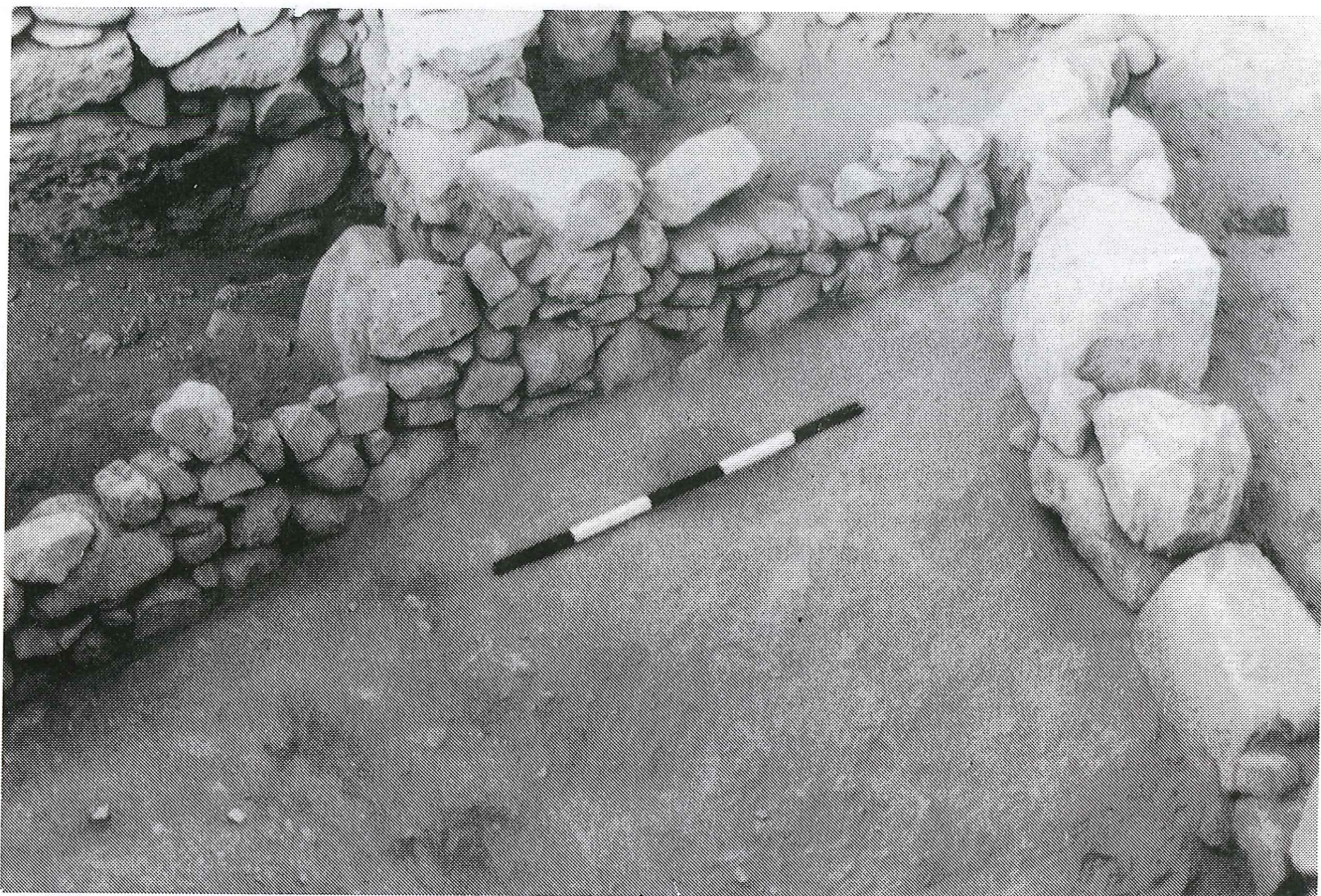
The pottery found in rooms r3 and r4 belongs to the late Iron IIB/C period with some good examples of the band-decorated Moabite ware, as well as the typical Samaria ware. There was still no evidence of any destruction layers in the excavated rooms.

#### Acknowledgements

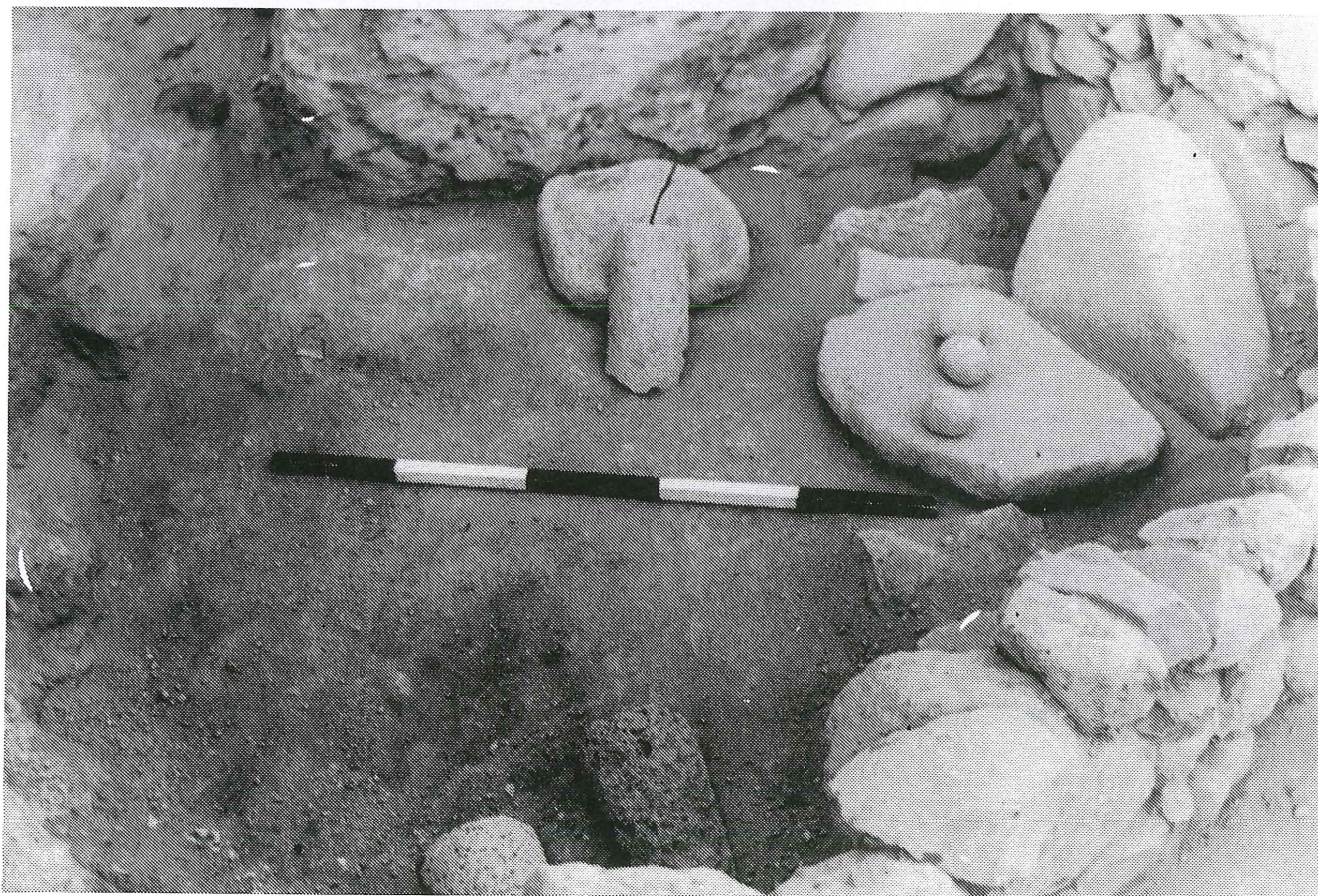
We would like to thank Dr. Safwan Tell, Director-General of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, for his most considerate assistance in supporting this project, for providing the excavation permit for us, as well as for his unbeaureaucratic help when special requests were made. We would also like to thank Mr. E. Massadeh of Kerak, who served as our department representative helping also in many ways to make this excavation a success.

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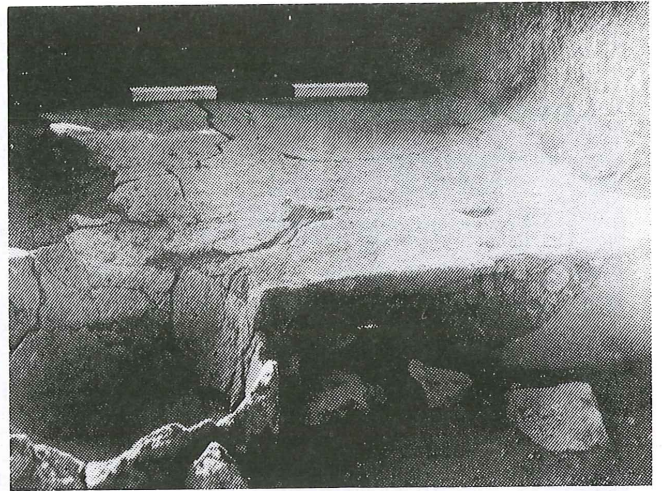
1. Courtyard in area A1 With walls w2, w3 and w4.



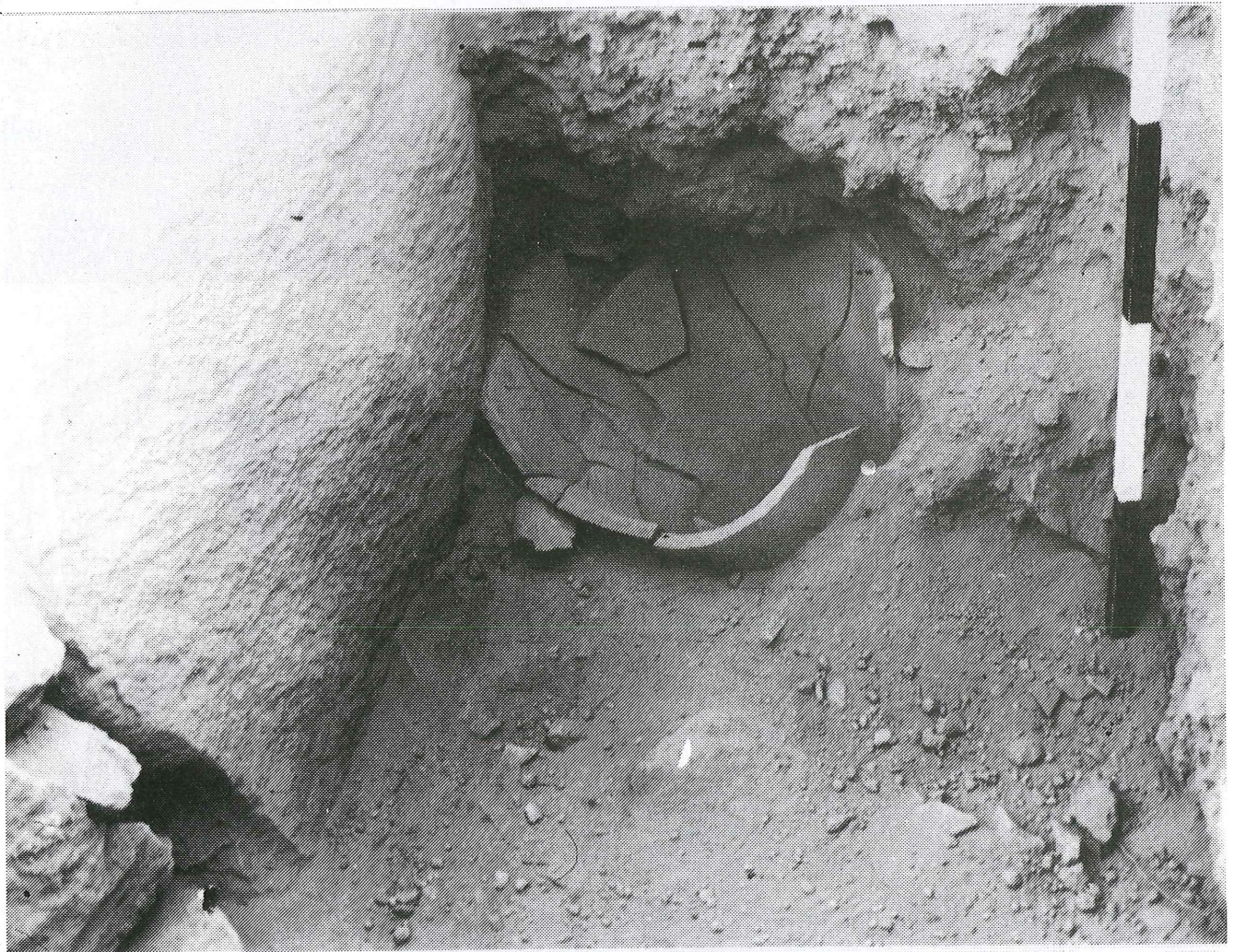
2. Working area (R111) with door into R110 at the upper left hand corner.



1. Doorway (?) between w6 and the remains of w7 with w8 adjoining w7 in the balk.



2. Mamluk wine press.



3. Storage jar at the east side of wall w500.