

**PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE
SECOND CAMPAIGN AT THE
ANCIENT SITE OF EL-BĀLŪ' IN 1987***

by
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The second campaign at the famous site of el-Bālū' in central Jordan was carried out from June 20 to July 21, 1987. The excavation was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in cooperation with the Department of Antiquities of Jordan. The campaign of five weeks was directed by U. Worschech, Darmstadt (Germany).

The main objective of this year's campaign at the ancient site of el-Bālū' was to survey and map the entire site and to gain an understanding of the many architectural remains visible on the surface. The Iron Age site covers an area of ca. 550 x 300 m. If one includes the Mamluk settlement on the western side of the Iron Age city the entire east-west axis of the site is ca. 800 m. In 1987 the eastern quarters and the Mamluk settlement to the west were not examined, but provisions were made to include those areas in the map of el-Bālū' in the future. The map (Fig. 1) presents the most important architectural remains which allow tentative interpretations. It should be remembered, however, that the visible wall lines are most likely those of the closing Iron IIB-C periods, and are thus only representative of the architecture of the later Moabite times when the country was under Assyrian-Babylonian and possibly Persian rule. The earlier periods of the Iron Age have not been reached as yet, but are evidenced by the pottery from that time.

During a brief survey of the region another Iron Age site was discovered at the foot of the northern escarpment on a plateau ca. 100 m wide and 300 m long forming the south bank of the Wadi

el-Bālū'. Here mostly Iron I sherds were found. Some wall lines can be seen belonging to a possible lower city of el-Bālū'. There is another small Iron Age settlement on a plateau ca. 2 km east of the main site at the confluence of the Wadi el-Bālū' with a smaller wadi coming from the south.

Comments on the map of el-Bālū' (Fig. 1)

There is a large (ca. 12x16 m) tower (no. 1) at the east side of the Mamluk settlement. The preserved height of the tower is ca. 4-5 m. There is a lintel visible at the west side. Wall lines on the top indicate room units in the upper part of the building (stories?). A strong wall is next to the south side dating possibly to the Mamluk period. Some well-hewn blocks can be seen on the east side suggesting post-Iron Age rebuilding, substantiated by the presence of Nabataean-Roman and Byzantine sherds in the vicinity.

The architectural remains of no. 2 do not allow any interpretation at this time.

The most impressive building is, of course, the so-called Qaṣr of el-Bālū' (no. 3 and Pl. VII) with its tremendous walls standing 4-6 m high erected of huge, partially hewn blocks. Inner wall lines are visible, but they are covered by a heavy accumulation of large blocks. It is likely that the entrance on the east side of the Qaṣr was rebuilt in Nabataean or Roman times. During a careful survey of the remains around the Qaṣr it became clear that a large 2 m thick wall coming from the Qaṣr and going to the east encloses a large area with two most interesting remains: a large ca. 16 x 20 m rectangular courtyard

* This article is a brief summary of the campaign in 1987. The stratified pottery is not presented here because it is being examined at Leiden (Netherlands). However, the forms are close or identical to those already published in Udo Worschech,

U. Rosenthal and F. Zayadine. 'The Fourth Survey Season in the North-West Arḍ el-Kerak, and Soundings at el-Bālū' 1986', *ADAJ* 30 (1986), p. 285-310.

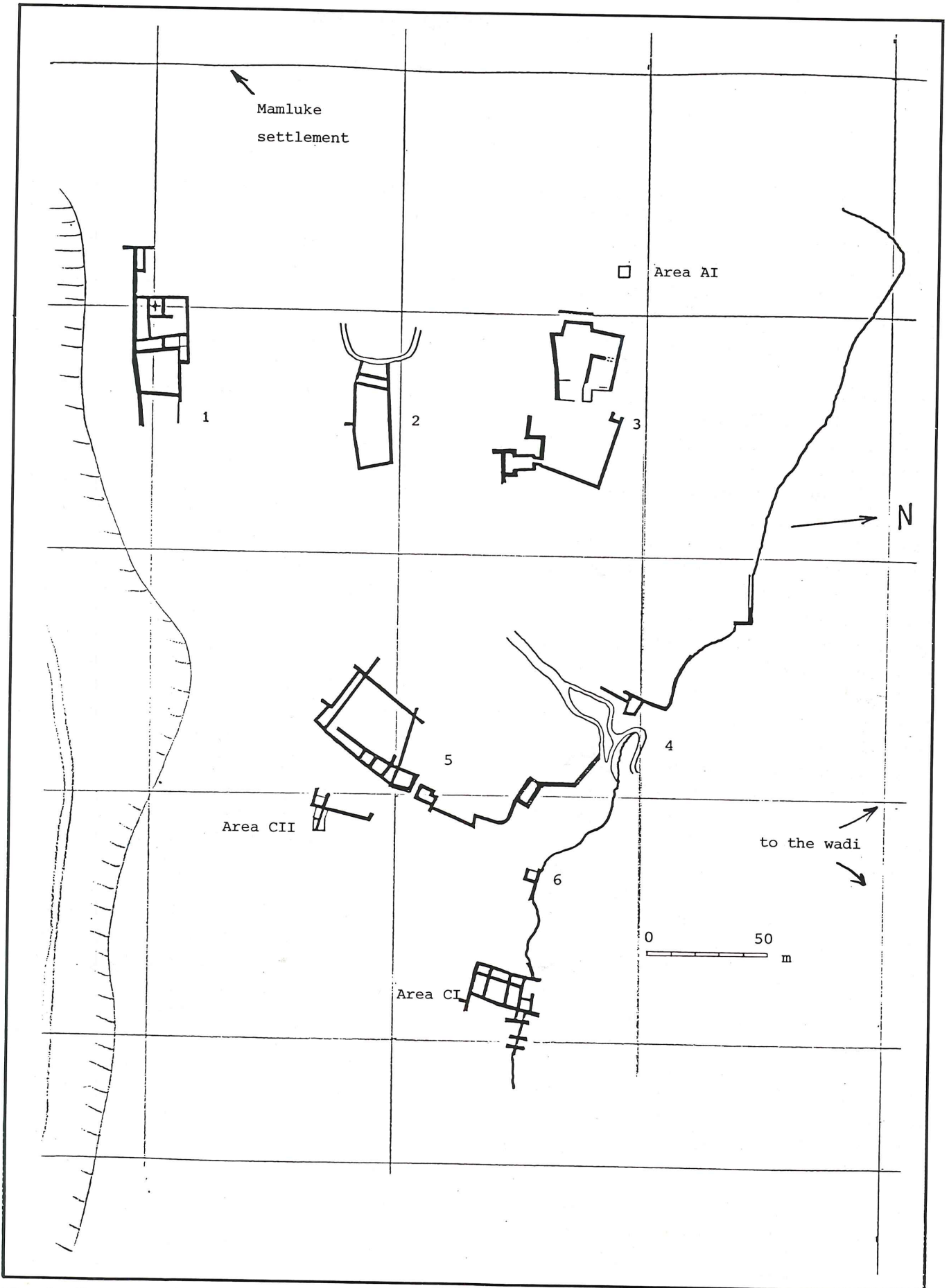


Fig. 1. General Map of el-Bālū'.

east of the Qaṣr from which one can enter a longroom on its southeastern side that opens into a broadroom (3 x 6 m) to the south; and a niche a little off center in the south wall, of which only the upper part can be seen. This compound encircled by a 2 m wide wall is thus set apart from the rest of the general city area and may belong to a typical palace/temple-arrangement which is well known from similar compounds in Syria-Palestine.¹ This, however, is only a tentative interpretation that can only be substantiated by excavations.

Of the road (no. 4) winding up into the city from the springs and the Wādī el-Bālū' below, the pavement and the towers are still visible as well as possible fronts of houses which are now buried under the debris. The road into the city can be followed for at least 200 m to a possible junction near the walls of no. 2. It is possible that future excavations will unearth entire fronts of houses lining the "main street" of el-Bālū'.

The eastern defence-works (no. 5) of the Iron IIA-B city are most likely represented by the high wall with casemate-type rooms visible standing 4 m above ground when one approaches the city from the east where the ground is rather level. There is a gateway leading into the city from the east. The walls of the possible defence-work turn to the southwest and then straight west. It cannot be followed any further than the plan shows; however, it may link up with the tower of no. 1.

No. 6 on the map is J.W. Crowfoot's sondage of 1934² with the possible casemate-wall structure. However, the area of the sondage was enlarged to the west but no crosswall of the supposed casemate-wall was reached even after 6 m had been exposed. Here future excavations must clarify the validity of Crowfoot's conclusions.

This description of the architectural

surface features at el-Bālū' is by no means final. There are many more wall lines which, however, do not link up to form meaningful architectural units. Therefore, these were not included on the map.

The Excavated Areas: AI, CI and CII

Room 1 (Fig. 2) of the large (16x24 m) "administrative" building (area CI) situated at the wadi edge was excavated down to bedrock. The two installations which were unearthed during last year's soundings, the *ṭabūn* and the bin, were largely destroyed by the heavy rainfall in the winter of 1986/87 despite the protective covers installed. However, the northern part of the room yielded a number of objects which suggest that this room functioned as an area in which various hand-crafts were performed, such as cooking, baking, weaving and, as is shown by the heavy 7.5 kg counterweight, also the pressing of olives.

In order to examine the subfloor layers of the room the plaster floor was cut ca. 1 m from the western wall to the room's center. This side was chosen because the walls of the entire room are set on cut bedrock with the plaster floor at the western wall running up against the bedrock. It was then discovered that at least this part of the house was erected over a possible quarry, which was filled up with alternating layers of ashes, *ḥuwwar*, and sand that extended underneath the entire surface of the floor, thus forming the subsurface of the plaster floor (Fig. 3)³.

From room 1 another door led through the northern city wall into another room which is now entirely destroyed and its walls washed down into the wadi. This room, together with another one to the east, formed a bastion-like fortification which extended ca. 4 m outside the city wall, the same as the north wall of the

1. Compare the ground plan of the Ba'al-temple from Ugarit: F. Schaeffer, 'Les Fouilles de Ras-Shamra. Cinquième campagne (printemps 1933). Rapport sommaire', *Syria* 15 (1934), p. 122, Fig. 14.
2. J.W. Crowfoot, 'An Expedition to Balu'ah',

PEFQS (1934), p. 79 f.

3. It is interesting to note that alternating layers of ashes, sand, and *ḥuwwar* were also used for constructing the subsurfaces of the houses in the Kerak region during the last century.

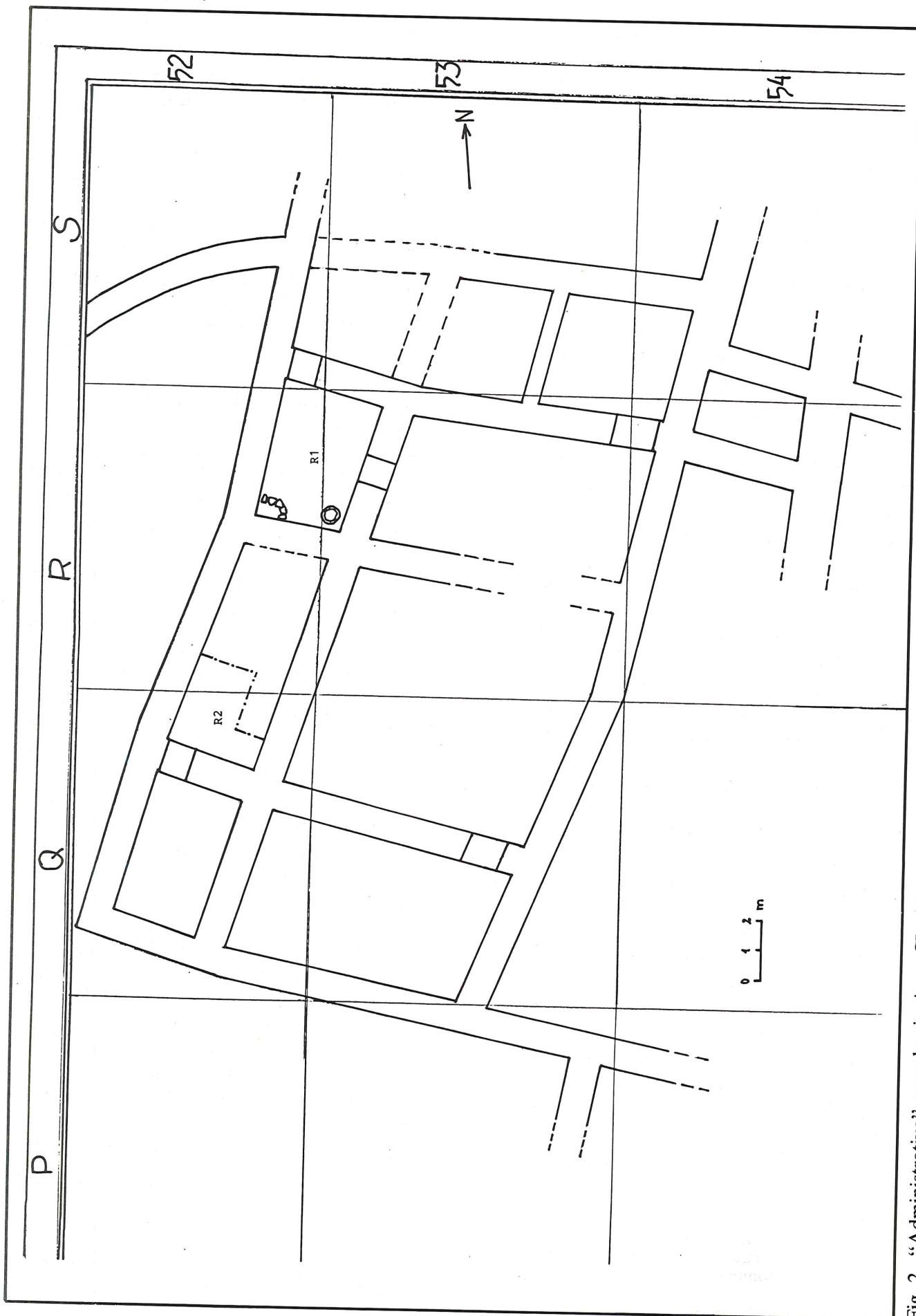


Fig. 2. "Administrative" complex in Area CI with excavated rooms 1 and 2.

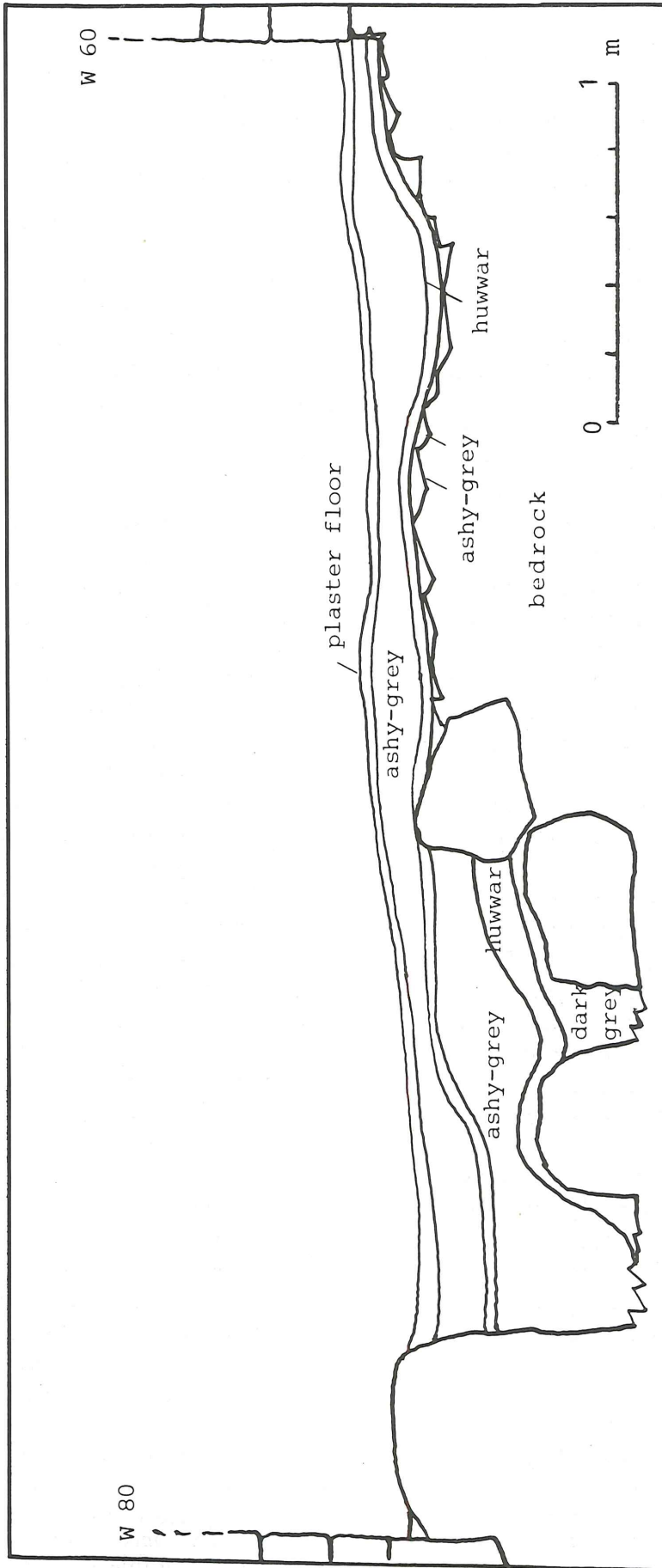


Fig. 3. Section through floor in R1 with alternating layers of ashes and huwwar.

house unit as was already discovered in 1986.

The profiled rim sherds which were taken from above and under the floor as well as from the subsurface layers date to the Iron IIB-C periods. They are not essentially different from those forms already published. Therefore, this room and possibly the entire house complex must be dated to the Assyrian and Babylonian periods.

Due to the heavy destruction that the rainfall had caused in 1986/87 the area immediately south of room 1 was not excavated. Instead the room close to the towerlike structure in the southern part of the house was excavated, resulting in the discovery of another door leading from the tower into this room. As in room 1 here also the walls were set on bedrock which must rise up suddenly from room 1, which lies ca. 2 m deeper than room 2.

In this room a well preserved plaster floor was reached, on which large sherds of an Iron IIC pithos or krater were found. Close to the pithos a clay-bulla with a rather eroded surface was discovered. It shows the typical Egypto-Phoenician motif of a lion attacking a man (Figs. 4a; 4b). In the cartouche the name of mn-k³-r' can be read.⁴ Mykerinos is a preferred name on Phoenician seals dating to 750-656 B.C., although this motif together with this name is new.⁵ The bulla (2 cm in diameter and 0.5 cm thick) was attached to documents, as is evidenced by the string holes going through the convex side of the object. This find gives even more reason to interpret this building as an administrative complex. The remains of fairly large body sherds of differing wares and firing suggest that this room served as a possible storage area. Further excavations must clarify the connections this room had with the northern units.

In area CII, where the inscription on a basalt bowl had been found in 1986, work continued on the west side of the large wall

(100) running north-south (Fig. 5). Here, wall lines on the surface suggested a room, which was verified when excavating the area. Unfortunately, this room, the western wall of which has not been found as yet, yielded no objects of any kind and produced only very small quantities of pottery. Instead the amount of fallen rocks was tremendous. However, after reaching a depth of 2 m a fine plaster floor was unearthed. A probe in the southeast corner of the room revealed two phases of the living area. The first-phase floor was laid on virgin soil after the construction of the walls. There is no evidence for any earlier strata.

The same two phases of the living area were discovered when the area north of the ca. 10 m long east-west wall was opened. The walls, as well as the plaster floor of the first phase, were laid down and built on virgin soil. This fact strengthens the argument for a large Iron IIB-C extension of the city of el-Bālū' in the Assyrian-Babylonian periods. But here, as in the west room of this large unit, no specific objects were found to suggest a possible function of this area. However, as appears from a large column base *in situ* resting on the first floor, it seems possible that the area north of the east-west wall may be a portico. Its extension and relation to a wall line to the east need to be determined by further excavations.

A new area (Area AI) was opened ca. 25 m northwest of the Qaşr (Fig. 6). Here wall lines above ground were barely visible, but by the appearance of the area it seemed that there was heavy soil accumulation deserving controlled stratigraphic excavation in connection with walls. After the removal of the top soil (ca. 0.45 m) a thick ashy layer mixed with fine sand was reached and followed to a depth of ca. 1.20 m. The ashy layers are the dump of a furnace built in a courtyard, the floor of which was exposed partially on the last day of this season. Ca. 0.60 m behind the

4. For the identification and reading of this name I am indebted to Prof. Dr. M. Weippert and Prof. Dr. O. Keel.

5. Communicated to me by O. Keel; for compari-

sons see also E. Hornung, E. Staehelin, *Skarabäen und andere Siegelamulette aus Basler Sammlungen* (Mainz 1976), p. 199-200, no. 45-47, and p. 47.



Fig. 4a: Seal impression from R2 in Area CI.



Fig. 4b: The seal impression (bulla).

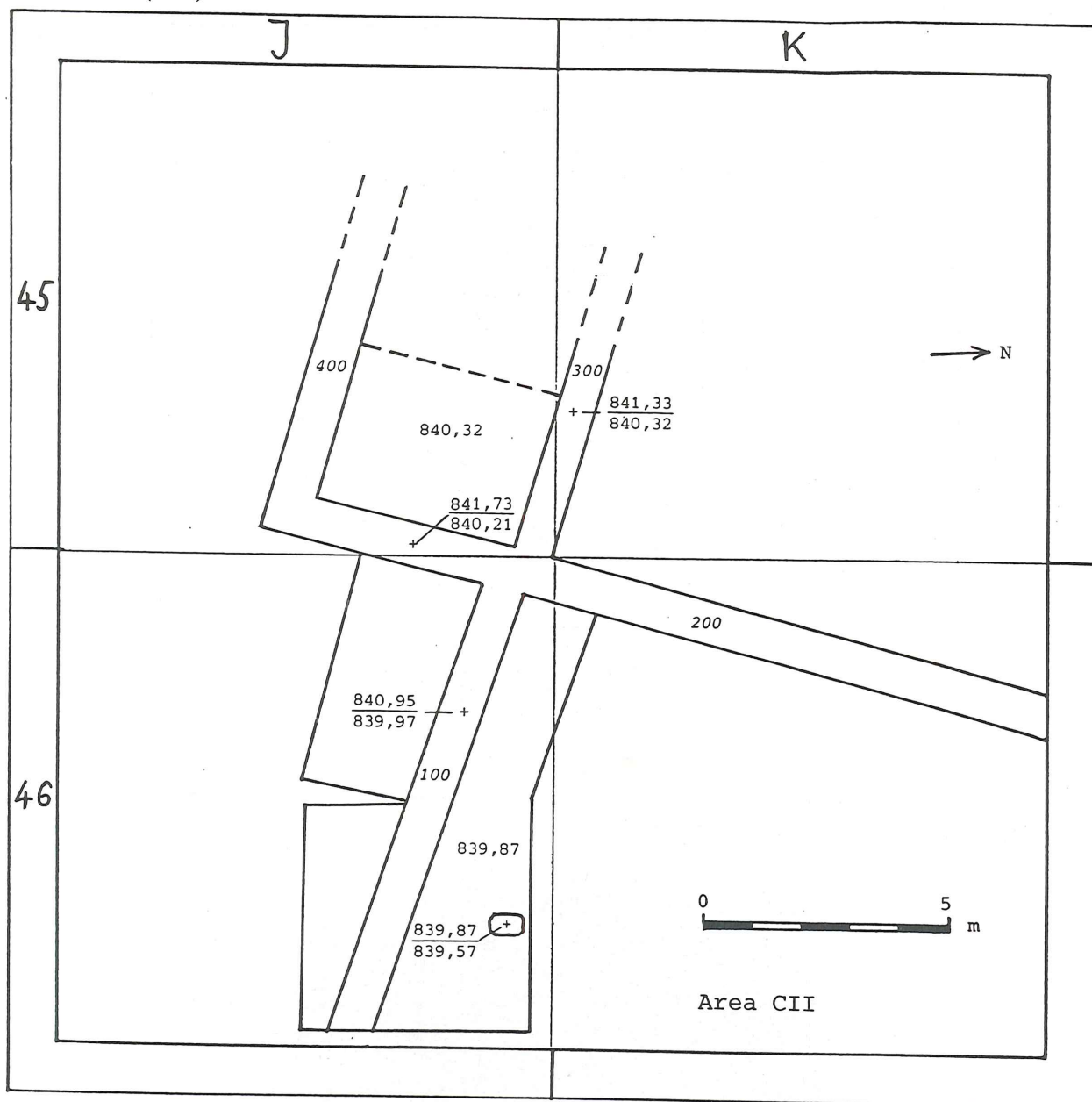


Fig. 5. Area CII.

furnace an east-west wall (10) with a blocked doorway (Figs. 7a; 7b) was unearthed. There is no lintel but the doorposts are clearly visible filled with fist to head-sized stones. After ca. 4 m the wall turns 90° to the south and disappear into the balk. However, there is a small wall about 0.30 m wide extending from the east balk towards the main wall. Because of its size this wall may just be a partition wall in the courtyard. The furnace is definitely later since it is built against the partition wall.

The most important finds of this area were made in the ashy layers. The most interesting object is the Eye of Horus,

carved in ivory, which may have been worn as an amulet since it is pierced through along its long axis (Pl. VIII,1). The object is only 10 mm long and ca. 3 mm thick. There is also the torso of a male figurine with its left arm clenched to its chest and its right arm extending from its body as if holding something (Pl. VIII,2). Other objects were a metal scale of armor, needles, beads, working stones, loomweights, spindle whorls, and a knife sharpener.

The pottery dating the installations in Area AI is typical of the Iron IIB-C periods with occasional Iron I sherds. For future excavations we plan to open the

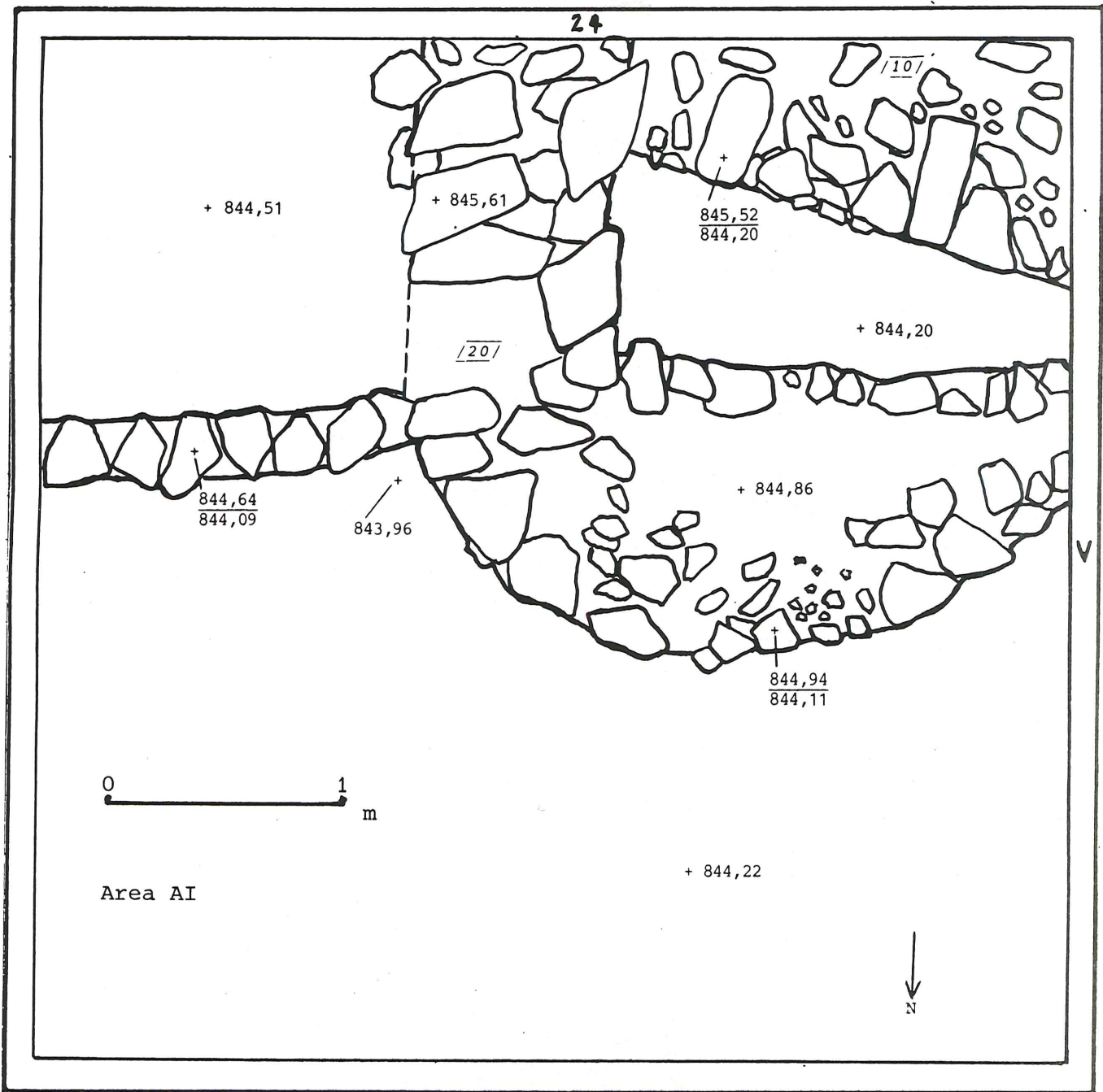


Fig. 6: Area AI - Furnace in front of blocked passageway.

entire 10 x 10 m square, thus working our way against the Qaṣr in order to get a clearer understanding of its construction and foundations and the time period of its earliest building phases.

The campaign at the ancient site of el-Bālū' in 1987 has yielded a wealth of information about the Moabite Iron Age II period. Although these discoveries are still being examined and interpreted it can be stated already that el-Bālū' is of great importance not only because of the objects

found but also for its location and size. El-Bālū' is larger than any known Moabite city and may well have been the capital city of ancient Moab. Maybe Mesha's building activities also caused el-Bālū' to expand in the Iron IIB-C period. The bulla which sealed documents may indicate foreign relations with Phoenicia. It is hoped that further excavations will provide more insights into the important economic, cultural, and historical role the city played in Moab and the surrounding countries.

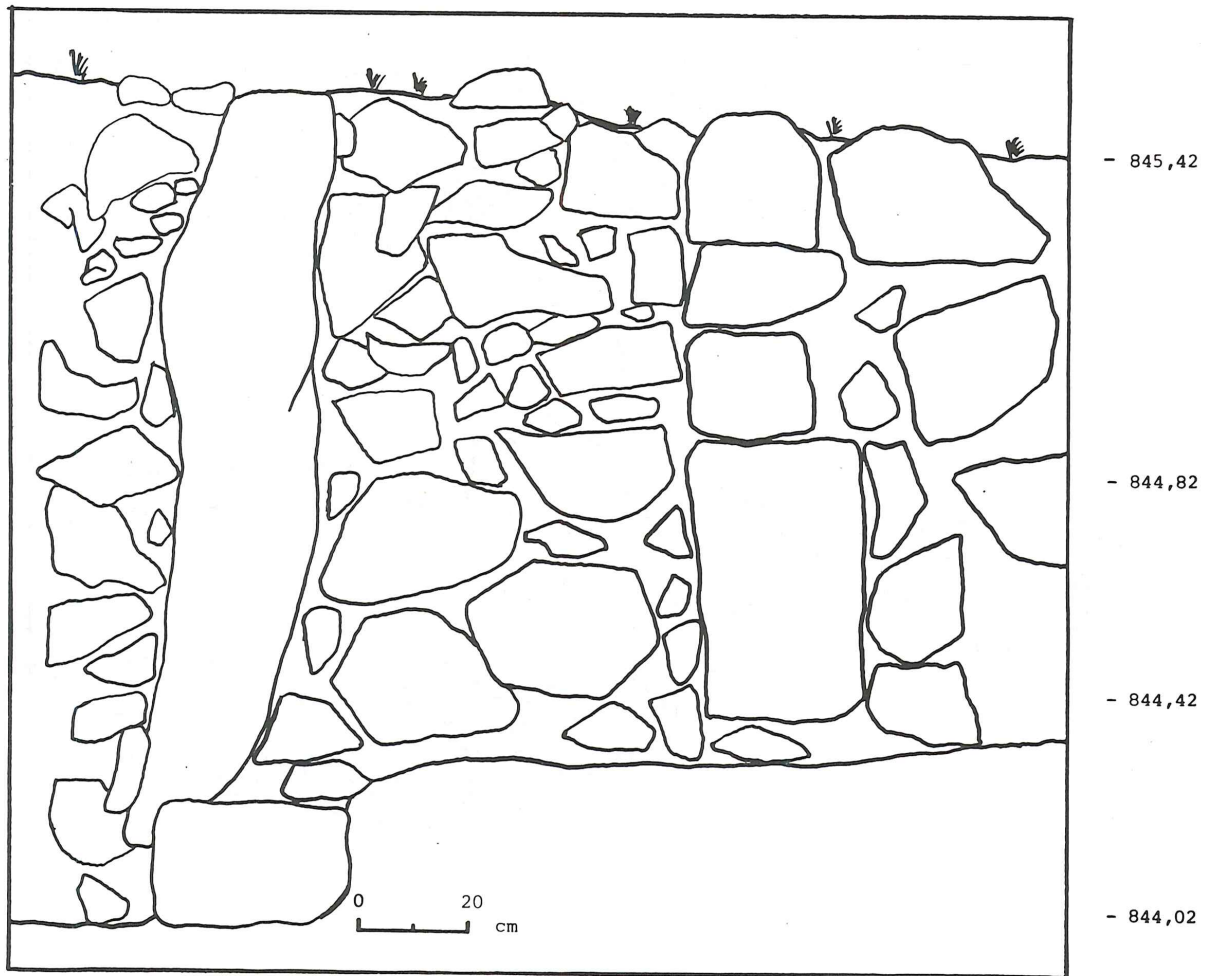


Fig. 7a. Area AI - Blocked passageway in wall 10 (south of furnace).

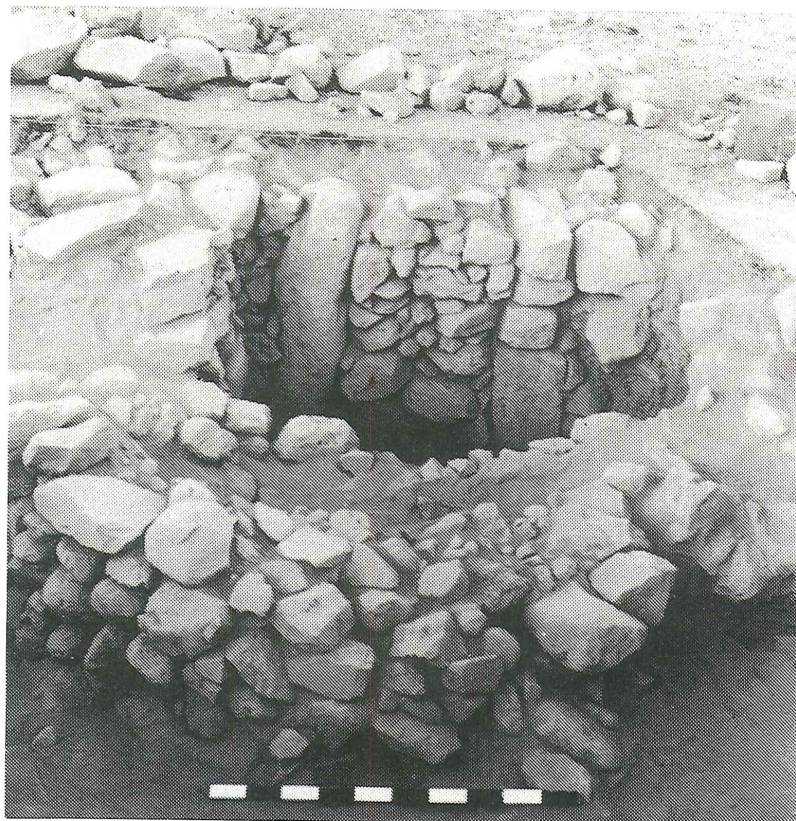


Fig. 7b. Furnace in front of blocked door.

Acknowledgements

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And last but not least I must thank my

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