

JABAL MUṬAWWAQ 1986

by

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Introduction

A brief season of excavation and survey was conducted in March 1986 at the Early Bronze Ia site of Jabal Muṭawwaq, near Jerash. Team members were Sue Colledge, Alex Creswell, Torla Evans, Stephen Hart, Vicki Montagu, Pam Watson, and the author. Equipment was loaned by the University of Sydney excavations at Pella and by the British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History. I am particularly grateful to Andrew and Rachael Garrard of the BIAAH for their help. The Department of Antiquities was exceptionally supportive on this occasion.

Jabal Muṭawwaq is a large hill rising steeply, at times sheer, above a bend in Wadi ez-Zarqa near the village of Qneyah some fifteen kilometres southeast of Jerash (Fig. 1 and Pl. XV, 1). The hill lies at the sharp interface of the Red Mediterranean *terra rossa* soils to the west, and the Yellow Mediterranean soils to the east. Equally sharp is the contrast between the Mediterranean environment to the west, permitting mixed farming of wheat, orchards and flocks, and the steppe vegetation to the east of the site. Rainfall is around 250 mm per annum, rising rapidly to the west of the site towards the 'Ajlun hills (Fig. 1). The immediate environs of Jabal Muṭawwaq are extremely fertile, with two springs, and watered alluvial deposits in the Zarqa and Qneyah valley bottoms.

Jabal Muṭawwaq was first reported by Glueck (1951: 73), though the site was misnamed Tell Mughaniyeh (Tell Mughaniyeh is in fact a small Iron Age site on the east side of Wadi Kharaysin). The site was later revisited during the Jerash Region Survey in 1984 (Hanbury-Tenison 1985). The first attested occupation of the hill is in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B; a 36 hectare site, called Kharaysin, has recently been discovered on the north bank of Wadi

ez-Zarqa (Edwards and Thorpe, 1986; Edwards, forthcoming).

The Early Bronze Ia settlement at Jabal Muṭawwaq consists of a walled town of twenty eight hectares, containing 300-400 oval houses, on the south-facing upper slopes of the hill. Further houses are scattered singly over a similar area outside the town wall. The entire town plan is visible on the surface (see Fig. 2 for a schematic layout of the structures on the hill). The houses are 6-10 m long, built of irregular large stone slabs set on their side. There is a narrow door in the centre of one of the long sides, flanked by upright pillars. Only the foundations remain; there is no evidence for a superstructure of stone or brick, nor for any packing within the walls.

Soundings were made in two houses. In one (Fig. 3 and Pl. XV,2), the walls were resting directly on bedrock, without evidence of an artificial floor. In the other the soil was disturbed, and no deposits were found *in situ*. Very few artefacts (sherds and lithics) were found in these two houses, and none in a stratified context.

The perimeter wall of the town is of undressed stones 1-4 m long, set end to end in a single course one stone wide. To the south, east, and west the wall runs at the edge of the cliffs along the crest of the hill. North of the settlement the hillside slopes upwards, so that the summit of the hill overlooks the town. This fact, the lowness of the wall (as it now stands), and the number of houses outside the wall, suggest that defence was not a prime consideration.

Two gates were surveyed 50 m apart on the south side (Fig. 4 and Pl. XVI,1). The wall runs along the edge of the cliffs, but both entrances are at a point where access is possible from the Wadi Kharaysin below. The gates are narrow openings, flanked by upright pillars, set flush to the town wall. Both gates are at a bend in the wall, putting the entrance at right angles to

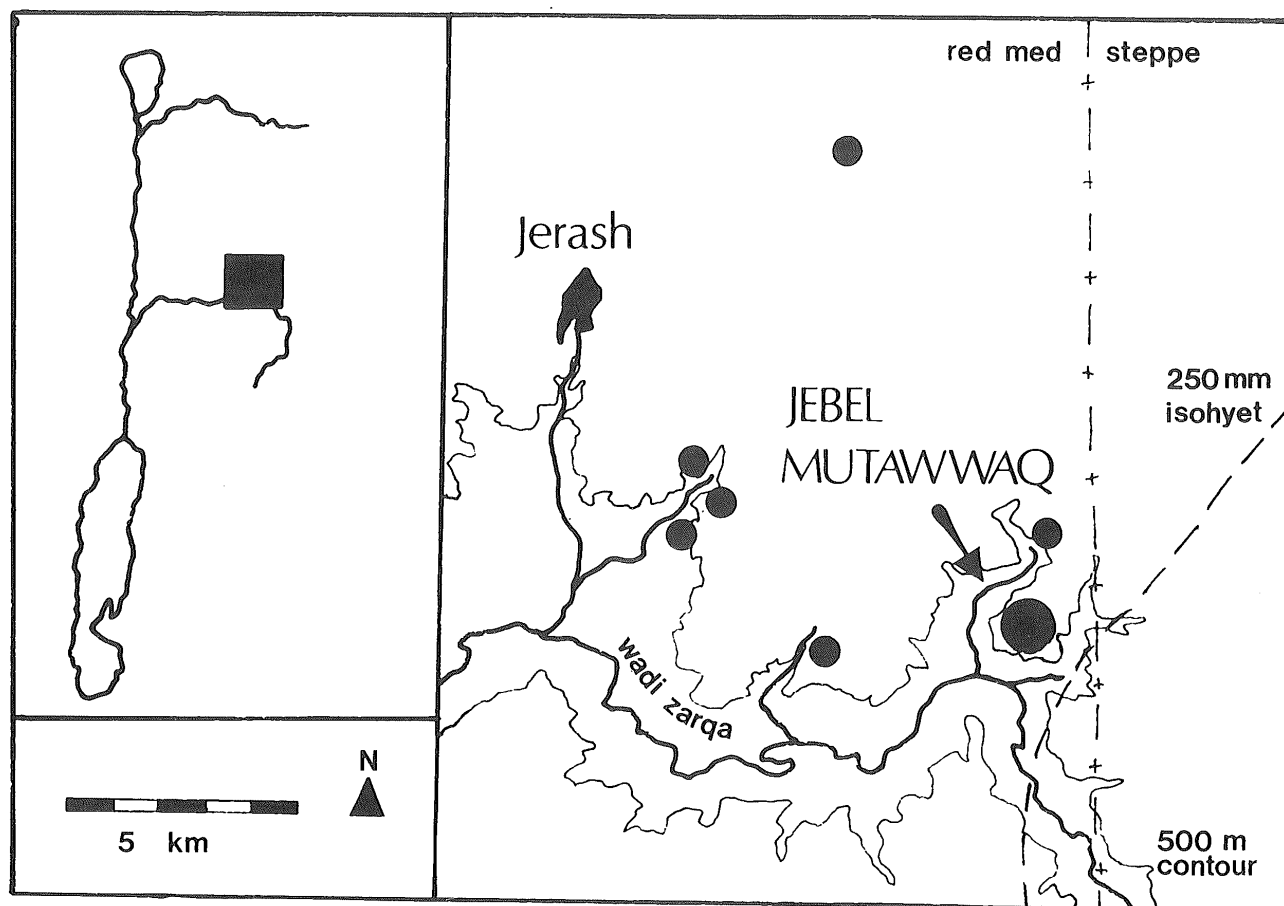


Fig. 1. Location of Jabal Muṭawwaq and the six other Jawa-type sites in the Jerash region.

the slope. A large cistern was cut in the rock outside the wall, just downhill from one of these gates.

One gate was visible on the north side of the town. Again it is a narrow entrance flanked by pillars, this time flush with the straight line of the wall, and opening onto the uphill slope to the summit. No other gates were noticed during the superficial surveys. The main scatter of artefacts lies within the wall, and there is no problem dating the site (see below).

A few metres inside the wall from the north gate is an artificial cave 3.5 x 4 m, with access at the south end by a stone-lined shaft 3 m deep. The cave had been partially cleared by local villagers, and no further excavation was undertaken by the author. The loose soil in the tomb brought up a number of Early Bronze Ia pottery fragments, and some human bones. The human bones are:

- a left and a right proximal femur (both unfused)
- two distal metatarsals (subadult or

adult)

- a proximal radius (fused)
- a proximal ulna (fused)
- two astragali (different individuals)
- a femur head (fused)
- pelvis, vertebra and cranium fragments.

I am grateful to Andrew Garrard for this information.

Shaft tombs are the standard burial form of the Early Bronze I. It is likely that this, and not the dolmens, represents the burial practice of the Jabal Muṭawwaq inhabitants.

About a thousand dolmens lie, without consistent orientation, along the perimeter of the hill summit, overlooking the sharp drop to the valley below. They also cover a number of other steep hills to the east of Jabal Muṭawwaq. The dolmens are scattered between the houses, both inside and outside the town walls. Their date is uncertain, and there is as yet no archaeological evidence to disprove the association of dolmens and houses.

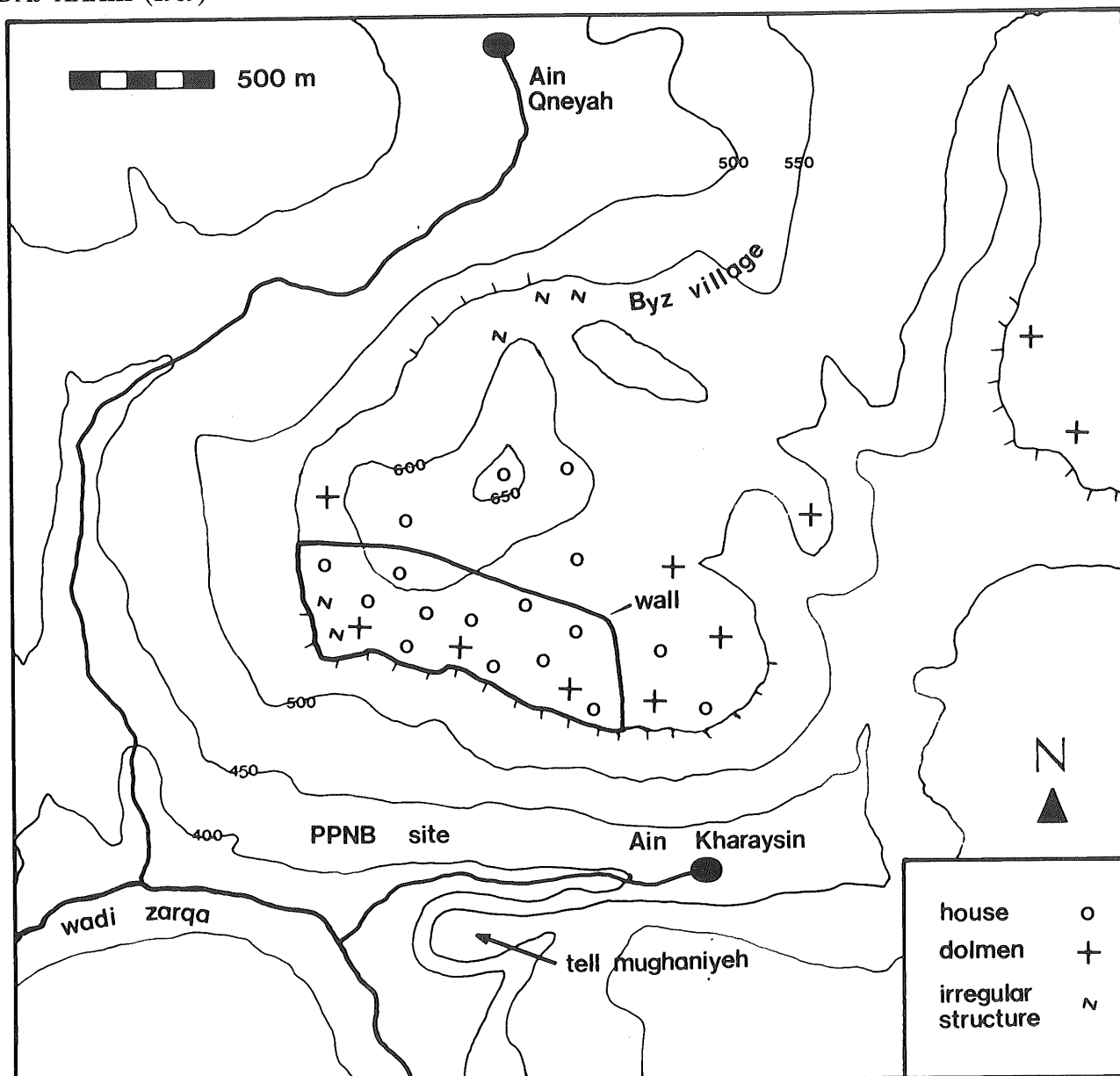


Fig. 2. Plan of Jabal Muṭawwāq, showing the schematic distribution of the different structures on the hill. Contours in metres.

The majority of the dolmens are plain single trilithons set on a platform of smaller stones. Some dolmens are set in pairs, side by side. There are no dolmens with windows, such as are found at Ala Safat (Stekelis 1961). One dolmen was partially cleared and excavated (Fig. 5 and Pl. XVI, 2). The stone platform was sunk into the ground, and there was no evidence of a lower chamber beneath the main trilithon. The floor of the chamber was of stone pavings 20-40 cm across, set into the natural soil. A few worn sherds and some sheep bones were found, but the soil fill was all unstratified wash.

A number of dolmen fields have been

excavated in Transjordan, notably at Ala Safat in the Ghor where a range of dates, including the Early Bronze I, has been suggested without satisfactory context or argument (Stekelis 1961; Yassine 1985).

The only detailed treatment of the dolmen question comes from Claire Epstein's work in the Golan. Her typology (Epstein 1985) covers a range of dolmen forms, only one of which (type 1a) is found at Jabal Muṭawwāq. Epstein's date for the dolmens is Early Bronze IV, but this is only a *terminus ante quem*, and applies unequivocally only to some dolmens. No artefacts were found in the Golan type 1a dolmens, and thus a date at either end of

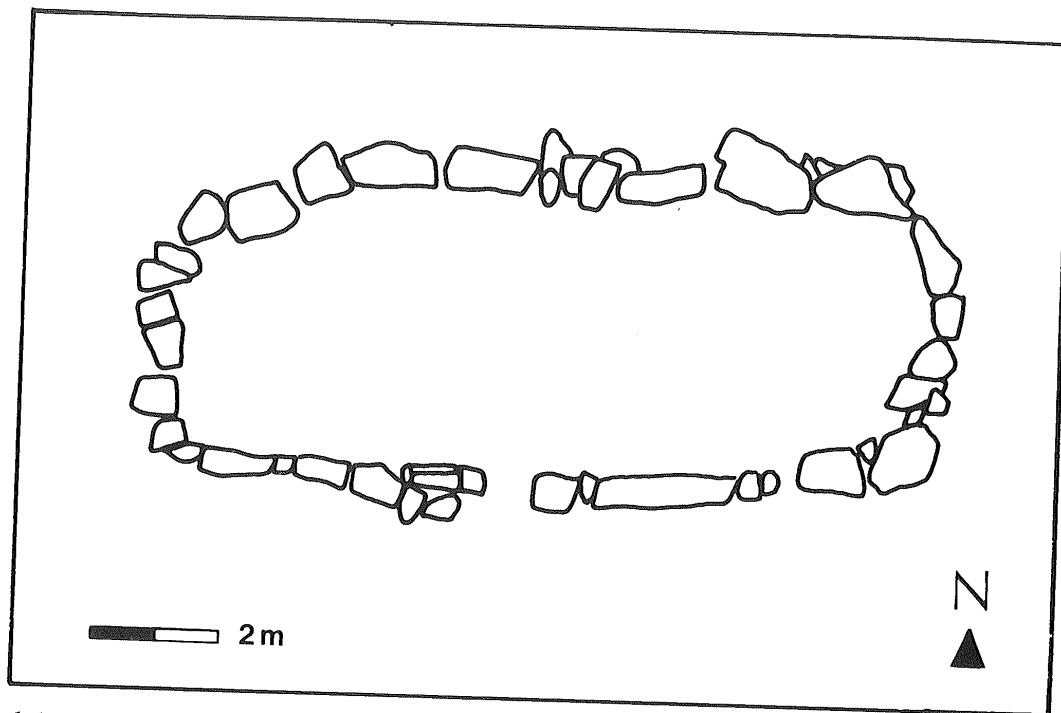


Fig. 3. Oval house at Jabal Muṭawwaq.

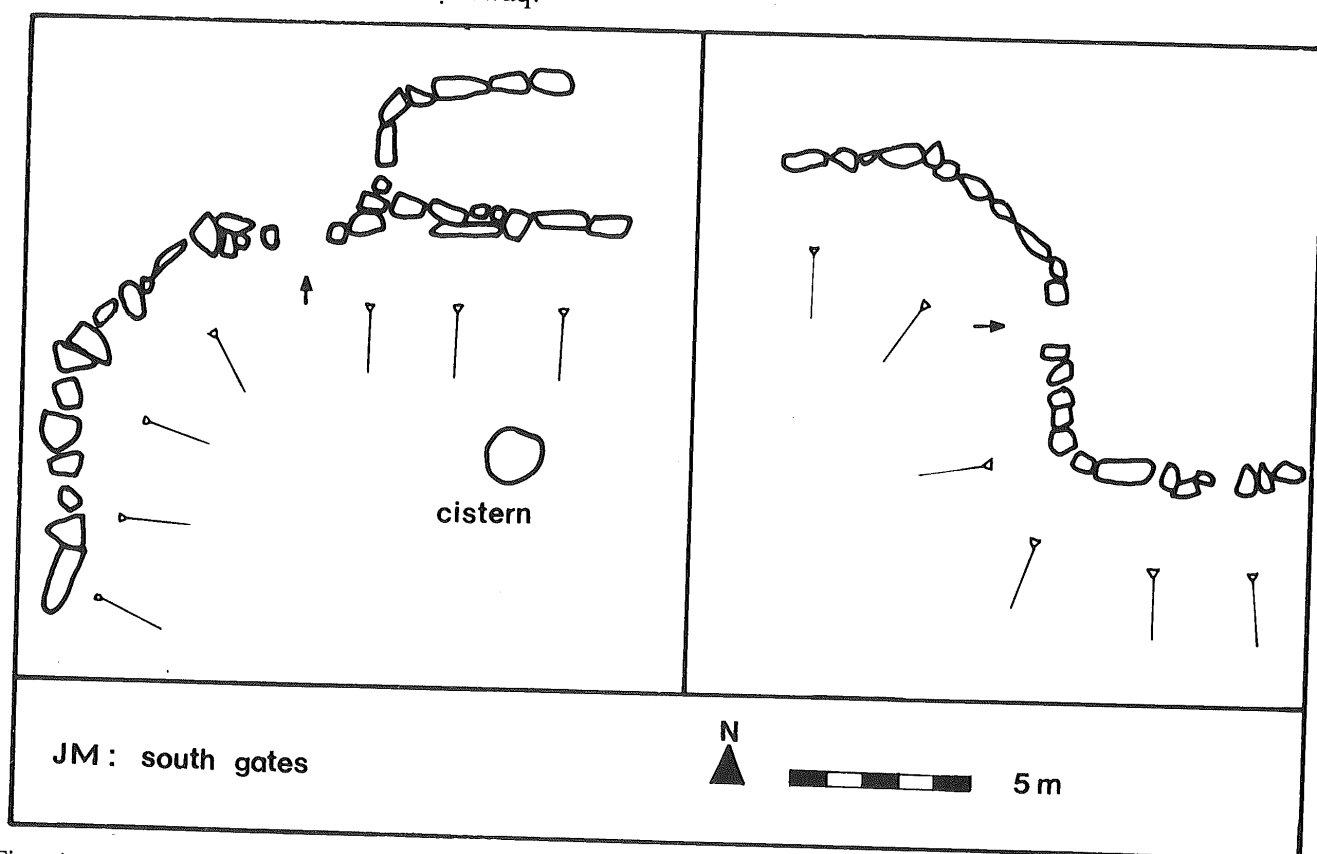


Fig. 4. South gates at Jabal Muṭawwaq.

the Early Bronze Age is possible for Jabal Muṭawwaq.

Detailed work at Jabal Muṭawwaq should solve the dolmen question. In the meanwhile it is unlikely that the dolmens and the town on Jabal Muṭawwaq are contemporary:

1. The dolmens cover the escarpment of the whole of Jabal Muṭawwaq and several hills to the east, and are therefore not directly related to the walled town.
2. No other contemporary site in the Transjordanian or Syrian steppe has

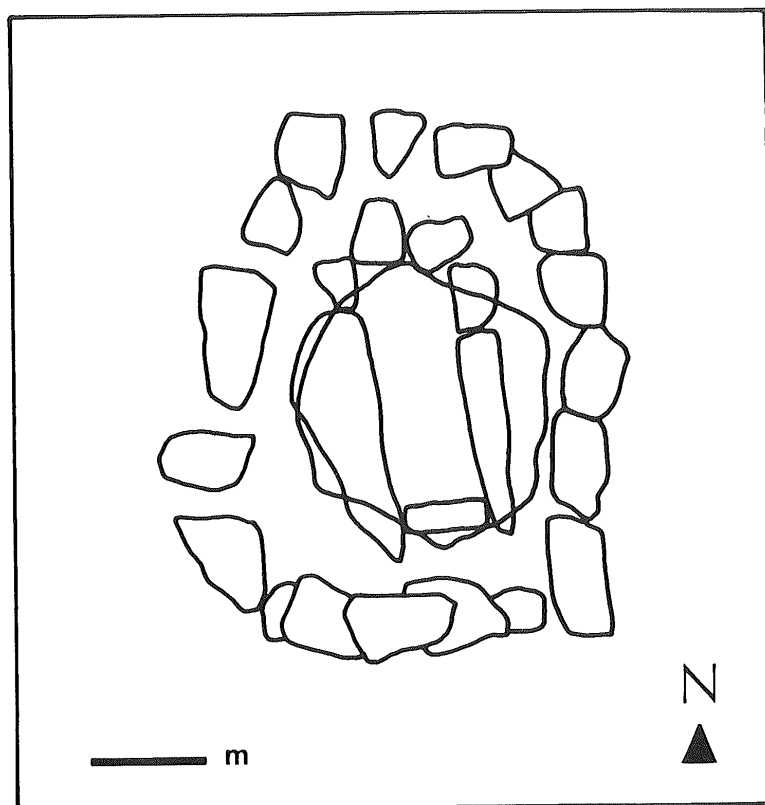


Fig. 5. Dolmen at Jabal Muṭawwaq.

associated dolmen fields.

3. The pottery and bones from the cave beside the north gate suggest that, in common with other Early Bronze Ia sites, shaft tombs were the standard form of burial.

There are irregular groupings of large stones, 4-8 m across, on the southwest and northwest corners of the hill. There are no artefacts specifically associated with these possible structures.

At the north end of Jabal Muṭawwaq, where a saddle of land joins up with the high hills behind Qneyah, are fragments of carved capitals and other remains of an early Byzantine village among the modern olive groves.

Discussion

There are at least six other Early Bronze Ia sites in the Jerash region, all less than six hectares (Fig. 1). Further downstream in Wadi ez-Zarqa are other contemporary sites with regional variations in an otherwise similar material culture (Helms 1986; Gordon and Villiers 1983). The Early Bronze Ia of Transjordan is still

barely outlined, but is quite distinct from the Early Bronze Ia (grey burnished ware) material culture of northern Palestine.

There is an intriguing contrast between the concentration of sites in Wadi ez-Zarqa, and the broad scatter of comparable sites across the Transjordanian and Syrian steppe. The massive walls at Jawa (Helms 1981) and Leboueh (Maqdissi 1984) cannot definitely be attributed to the Early Bronze Ia, though both sites were certainly occupied at that date.

The other sites of the period are Khirbet Umbashi and Hebaryieh in the Safa (Dubertret and Dunand 1954) and possibly Mumasakhin, near Yabrud (Nasrallah 1938). Mumasakhin is unwalled, and on the slope of a hill like Jabal Muṭawwaq. It also has loosely constructed oval houses, slightly smaller than those of Jabal Muṭawwaq. Umbashi and Hebaryieh have underground houses with corbelled roofs, very similar to Leboueh. But unlike Leboueh, their town walls are formed by linking the outer ring of houses with stone walls to provide a circuit.

The argument that Jawa is unique, or that it represents an *ad-hoc* response to a

specific and temporary phenomenon, can not be sustained in the face of new evidence. There are now eighteen sites with Jawa-type material known from northern Transjordan and southern Syria. They now place Jawa in the context of a walled town culture of massive sites in the semi-arid steppe.

Artefacts

Very few artefacts came from the soundings in the two houses and the dolmen, and all were unstratified. The majority of the objects retrieved in 1986 (Fig. 6) were from surface collection within the walled town. Only the shapes that

differ from the collection of the 1984 season (Hanbury-Tenison 1985, Fig. 9) have been published here (Fig. 6). Some interesting sherds came from the cave by the north gate.

Holemouth jars and flaring rim jars again predominate. Handles are both the squat square protruberances, and the pushed-up lug handles on the necks of vessels. Decoration is generally incisions in a line around the neck of the vessel. New shapes are the small jars with shallow handles found in the cave, and a double loop handle found on the surface. Both these are mainstream Early Bronze Ia features.

The lithics were again similar to 1984.

Figure 6: Description of Finds

All ceramic objects are hand made and low fired.

From the cave:

1. Bowl, rim 14 cm, red throughout, basalt and chert inclusions, poor mix, wet-smoothed faces.
2. Jar, rim 5 cm, pink faces, pink/buff core, basalt and chert inclusions, well mixed.
3. Jar, rim 7 cm, pink/buff throughout, basalt inclusions, well mixed, coil made, smoothed neck int.
4. Jar with lug handles, rim 4 cm, pale pink/buff throughout, slightly reduced core, many small basalt inclusions, well mixed, coil made.
5. Loope handle, dark red throughout, many basalt inclusions, poor mix.

From the surface:

6. Jar with loop handle, rim?, pale buff faces, reduced core, limestone and grog inclusions, poor mix, wet-smoothed faces.
7. Loop handle, red throughout, many basalt some chert inclusions, well mixed.
8. Squat ledge handle, pink ext., buff int., reduced core, limestone and grog inclusions, wet-smoothed faces, poor mix.
9. Pushed-up lug handle, pale buff throughout, many chert inclusions, poor mix.
10. Holemouth jar, rim 18 cm, red throughout, many chert some limestone and grog inclusions, poor mix, line of incisions ext.
11. Flaring rim jar, rim 14 cm, buff faces, slightly reduced core, grog and limestone inclusions, wet-smoothed faces.
12. Bowl, rim 26 cm, pale orange/buff throughout, many grog some basalt inclusions, poor mix, wet-smoothed faces, ledge handle ext.
13. Basalt bowl, rim 19 cm.
14. Basalt bowl, rim 21 cm, knobs ext.
15. Basalt bowl, rim 22 cm, knobs ext.

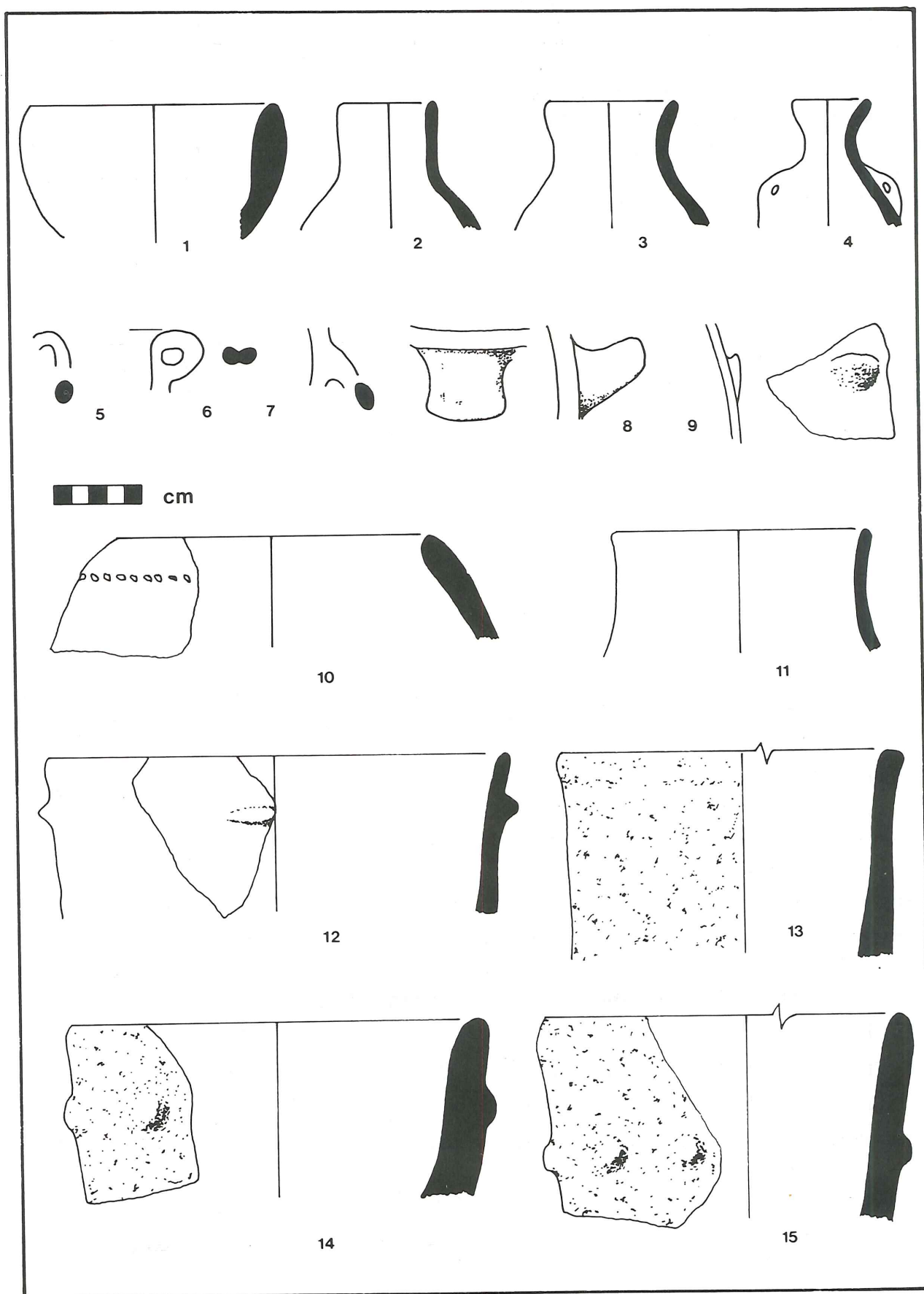


Fig. 6. Selected artefacts from the 1986 season at Jabal Muṭawwaq.

There was a basic assemblage of tabular scrapers, trapezoid section blades ("Canaanite"), borers, and the square-sectioned tongue-shaped scrapers so distinctive of the Jawa-type sites. There is also a strong *ad-hoc* element. Several basalt bowls with upright sides were found, often with a single row of projecting knobs on the exterior. There are a number of basalt querns, mortars, and grinders.

Parallels for the Jabal Muṭawwaq artefacts are found in the Early Bronze Ia, and link up well with contemporary material from Umbashi, Umm Ḥammad and Jawa.

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