

THE 1988 SEASON OF EXCAVATION AT ABILA OF THE DECAPOLIS

by
W. Harold Mare

Introduction

The fifth season of excavation at Abila of the Decapolis-Qweilbeh (Fig. 1 and Pl. I, 1), northern Jordan,¹ was conducted between June 18 and August 6, 1988, with Dr. W. Harold Mare, Director, and Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, as principal investigators. The excavation season was also sponsored by Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary, Ohio, The Free University, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, and Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages, Oklahoma. The excavation was under the direction and able leadership of Dr. Adnan Hadidi, former Director General of the Department of Antiquities of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Dr. Mohammed Hammouri, former Minister of Culture and National Heritage. Additional valuable assistance was given by Dr. Ghazi Bisheh the then Director General of the Department of Antiquities, and Mr. Sultan Shureidah, the Irbid Inspector of Antiquities and department representative for the 1988 Abila excavation season.

The 1988 Abila Excavation also received valuable help from Dr. Fawzi Zayadine, who spoke to the staff at one session of the excavation's educational program on the subject of Roman religion.

The American staff of twenty-five members² was very valuably aided by the Department Representative, Mr. Sultan

Shureidah, augmented by the local staff cook and his assistant and by the thirty local workmen hired for the various labor tasks in the field and in camp. The Department of Antiquities of Jordan graciously provided an additional eight local workmen for the month of July. Again, the American staff was able to use the Khureibah Boys School (Mr. Ibrahim Mustafa Ibrahim, Principal) located about 1.5 kilometers south of the site. The school was graciously provided through the Department of Antiquities and the Ministry of Education of Jordan. As in 1986, the Khureibah Boys School proved most adequate in providing for the housing and research needs of the excavation.

The objectives set forth for the 1988 season of excavation at Abila of the Decapolis, as submitted to the Department of Antiquities, were three: 1) to do pure research into the physical materials available at the site (i.e., ceramic evidence, stratigraphic profile, architectural remains, human skeletal remains, geological, faunal and floral evidence, numismatic specimens, inscriptional evidence, soil analysis, etc.), which would be of help to understand the cultural history of the site; 2) to perform cultural research management in doing salvage archaeology, by retrieving and preserving as much as possible of the physical remains exposed or disturbed by unlawful digging, as, for example, has occur-

1. Abila/Qweilbeh on Wadi Qweilbeh is an archaeological site located about 15 kilometers north-northeast of Irbid and 4 kilometers south of Wadi Yarmouk.

2. The staff members and their positions were as follows: Director, W. Harold Mare; area supervisors, John Wineland, area A supervisor; Bastiaan Van Elderen, Area B supervisor; W.W. Winter, Area D supervisor; Amy Deeds, Area F supervisor; Robert Smith, Area H tomb excavation supervisor; and Harold G. Stigers, chief architect and surveyor. Square supervisors included: Regan L. Barr, Cynthia H. Beard; Glenn A. Carnagey, Sr., Glenn A. Carnagey, Jr., Jennifer Davis, David F. Graf,

Robert H. Kyle, John R. Lee, James P. Lester, Timothy S. Meneely, John D. Pleins, Gerald R. Quinn, Deomar Roos, Timothy Snow and Gerda van der Poel. The specialists were: Ceramicists, W. Harold Mare, Bastiaan Van Elderen and Glenn A. Carnagey, Sr.; osteologist, Robert H. Kyle, M.D.; geologist, Reuben G. Bullard; photographers, Rick Bullard and Regan Barr; registrar, Lorna Smith and many on the staff giving assistance in the Registry; educational director, W.W. Winter, and Robert Smith, assistant; architect-surveyor, Harold G. Stigers and several staff assistants; camp manager, Robert Smith and John Wineland, assistant; medical advisors, Robert H. Kyle, M.D., and Lorna Smith, R.N.; and the cook and his assistant.

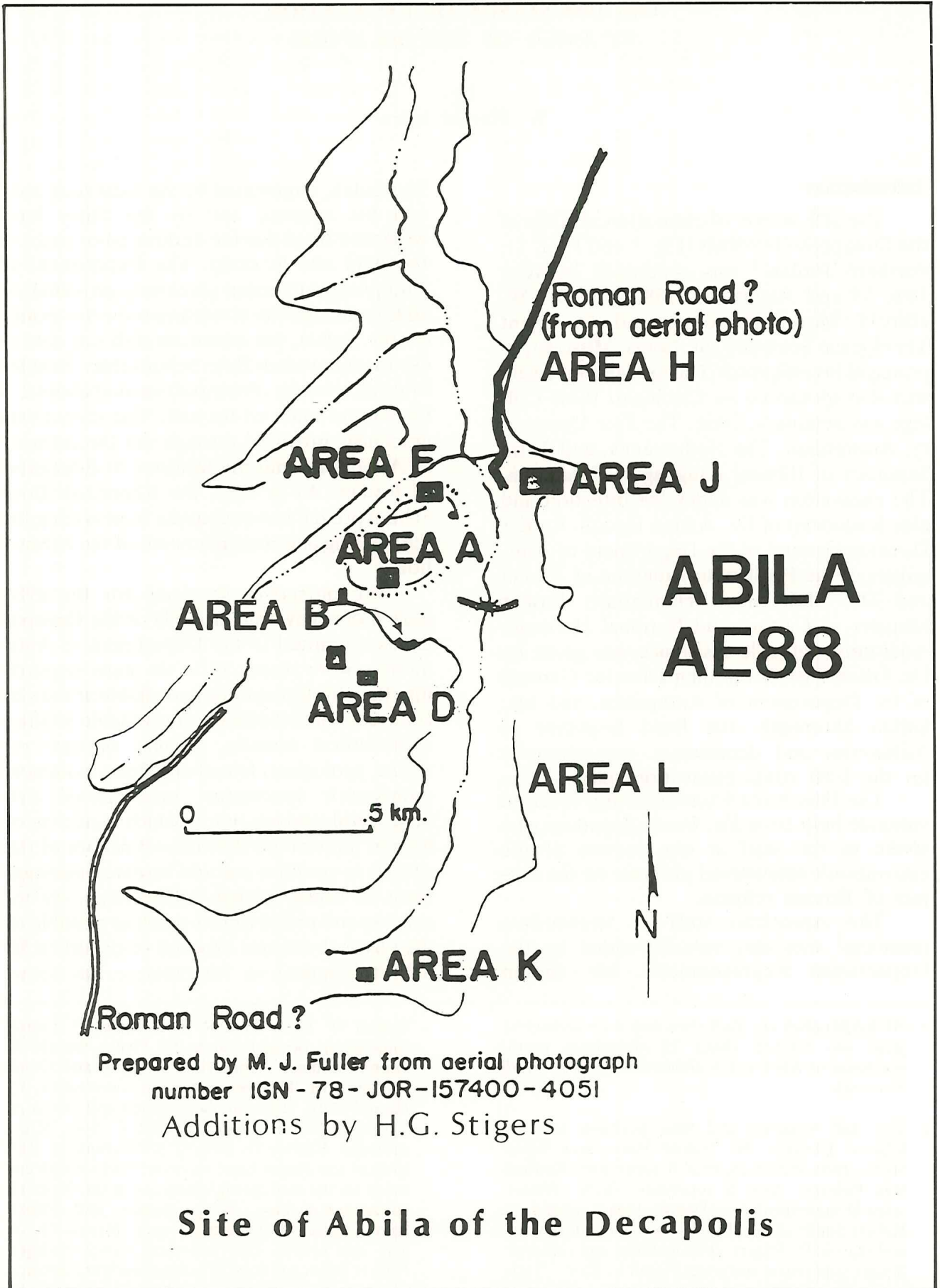


Fig. 1. Plan of Abila.

red extensively in the tombs; and 3) to continue our intensive educational program consisting of bi-weekly lectures in camp and an extensive educational touring program of Jordan on weekends, to aid the staff in understanding better the archaeological cultural history of Jordan and how this integrates with the culture and history of Abila of the Decapolis. Part of the educational program also included provision for regular college or graduate school archaeological courses, including a practicum in the field for which three to four hours of credit could be earned.

It was determined that the sixth century A.D. basilica on Tell Abila needed further excavation for additional defining of the nature and functions the structure was put to in its varied religious and possible secular history. In addition, the probe, just to the northeast of the basilica, needed further deepening to understand better the importance of the Hellenistic wall structures there as well as the Iron Age wall(s) beginning to be exposed in this trench. Late Bronze, Middle Bronze and even Early Bronze Age materials had already been recovered from the deeper soil layers of this probe.

Additional excavation was needed at the seventh century A.D. basilica located on Umm el-'Amad. Earlier excavation here had revealed the triapsidal nature of the structure (ca. 20 m wide and 41 m long) and had uncovered the column bases and a number of the columns and capitals in the eastern sector of the basilica. The western half of the structure needed probing to see the pattern of the building and how the very large column and capital pieces there fitted into the pattern. Only *opus sectile* flooring had been revealed so far, but large numbers of tesserae had been found.

The evidence coming forth from the theater cavea had been tantalizing: substantial walls had been found, and a stairway leading into an arch, as well as a second arch. Excavation needed to be done to see just how these walls and arches related to the theater and other structures.

We had left the initial probe at the north city wall on Tell Abila unexcavated in 1986. Questions regarding the date and structure of this wall demanded attention in the 1988 season.

Significant amounts of material had been excavated in the earlier seasons in the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine cemeteries. In 1988, further work needed to be done in salvaging looted tombs and excavating unopened tombs. Further investigation was also needed to find earlier Iron and Bronze Age tombs.

Area A:

The Excavation on Tell Abila (Supervisor, John D. Wineland)

Major attention in 1988 was placed on excavation of the western sector of the sixth century A.D. triapsidal basilica, as well as further probing within the debris left from the 1986 season in the central apse, and deepening the probe to the north and east of the basilica in which pottery evidence from before the Byzantine period had been found in the previous season. The finely laid pre-Byzantine pavement (possibly Roman) in the central apse collapsed during the seasons of excavation and left a deep pit, suggesting an underground passage, possibly connected to the passage under the north apse. The new squares opened in the west sector of the basilica uncovered additional evidence of the *opus sectile* flooring within the main building, and uncovered remains of the extension of the north and south stylobates, the stubs of which had been earlier excavated at the west portions of the arcs where the north and central, and south and central apses joined. At these points we were still unable to determine the exact nature and size of the earlier (Roman temple?) building, a part of which was used in the building of the basilica. Up to this point we have not found any mosaic floors *in situ* within the basilica.

The following periods were evidenced in the probes in Area A in the 1988 season: Post Umayyad, Umayyad, Umayyad/Byzantine, Byzantine, Roman, Hellenistic, Persian, Iron Age and Bronze Age.

The excavation of Squares 17-30 in the western sector of the basilica and further excavation in the central apse continued to reveal evidence of Islamic presence. In the Post Umayyad period, Stratum I (A.D. 750 to the present), a number of Abbasid sherds were found within the central apse and the west end of the basilica as well as a few within the central part of the structure; their pre-

sence suggests domestic re-use of the *opus sectile* floor. Large quantities of Umayyad pottery, Stratum II (A.D. 661-750), were found within the western sector of the basilica in addition to evidence of Umayyad secondary walls built within all parts of the western sector of the basilica, some of more substantial nature often re-using basilica column bases and capitals for founding courses, as well as roughly cut column drums and limestone blocks. In one western square a limestone roller to pack floors and roofs was found. This Umayyad re-use of the building with its series of small rooms points to domestic re-use of the building, with no evidence that the building was used as a mosque.

The Byzantine period, Stratum III (A.D. 324-661) was represented in several loci of the western sector of the basilica, with a probe under the *opus sectile* floor showing the floor to have been laid in the Byzantine period; a basalt wall and threshold were found at the west entrance, as well as parts of the north and south stylobates or their plinths lying on top of them (many of the column bases had been removed and used as founding stones for the Umayyad walls), enough to determine that there were twelve columns each on the north and south stylobates, with intercolumniation between column bases of 1.65 m. Part of the fine pre-Byzantine plaster floor found in the central apse was also found in the north apse, and the secondary probe in the debris of the central apse proved to be Byzantine. The discovery of a basalt threshold at the entrance to the north aisle suggests that the basilica had three entrances on the west, and the fine basalt wall beyond the stylobates on the west suggests that this was the western boundary of the nave. The lower blocks of stone to the west of the nave suggest a staircase leading from a narthex or plaza to the nave. A probe at the western sector of the basilica supports the thesis that this basilica with basalt walls and apses was built upon an earlier limestone building. This impressive and prominent basilica (Fig. 2) on Tell Abila may have been the cathedral church for the bishop at Abila (cf. the Umm el-‘Amad Tunnel Inscription which mentions a bishop at Abila in A.D. 568).³

The Roman/Hellenistic periods, Strata IV and V (63 B.C.- A.D. 324; 332-63 B.C.), have been found to be represented primarily in the limestone walls upon which the apses of the Area A basilica was built and the fine limestone pavement evidenced in the central and north apses which was built over a large chamber under the basilica. These architectural features may point to an earlier phase of the church basilica or to a Roman temple (cf. the chambers found under the Jarash temple of Artemis). Other evidence for these periods was found in Area 22 where a stamped Rhodian amphora jar handle carrying the name of the manufacturer, Hellanikos, and the Rhodian rose (date, ca. 200 to 150 B.C., the time of Seleucid control of this region) was uncovered. Further evidence for this period was seen in the north-south Area A 1 and 2 trench just to the northwest of the apses of the Area A basilica, where Hellenistic and Roman sealed loci and walls (Walls 1024, 2019, 2023 and 2095) were found.

Materials of an earlier period, Iron Age, Stratum VII (1200-586 B.C.), were also found in Area A 1 and 2 (an Iron Age wall had been found in an earlier season). An Iron IIC/Persian, Strata VII and VI (586-332 B.C.), burial of a male 45 to 50 years old was found on the west side of Area A 1, and several new Iron Age loci were uncovered, all of which suggests an Iron Age domestic occupation in A 1 and 2.

Evidence of Bronze Age, Strata VIII-X (3100-1200 B.C.), pottery was also found in Area A 1 and 2, and large quantities of Middle Bronze Age pottery in particular were found in A 1 both above and below hard packed surfaces, as well as a number of pieces of Early Bronze IV pottery sherds, leading to the conclusion that there was a considerable habitation in this sector in the Middle Bronze and Early Bronze periods. Expanded excavation here will help determine the extent of this habitation.

Area F:
The Tell Abila North City Wall
 (Supervisor: Amy E. Deeds)

Work was resumed in 1988 in Area F at

3. Bastiaan Van Elderen, 'Umm el Amad Tunnel Inscription,' *NEAS Bulletin*, New Series, 32-33 (Winter 1989), p. 2-5.

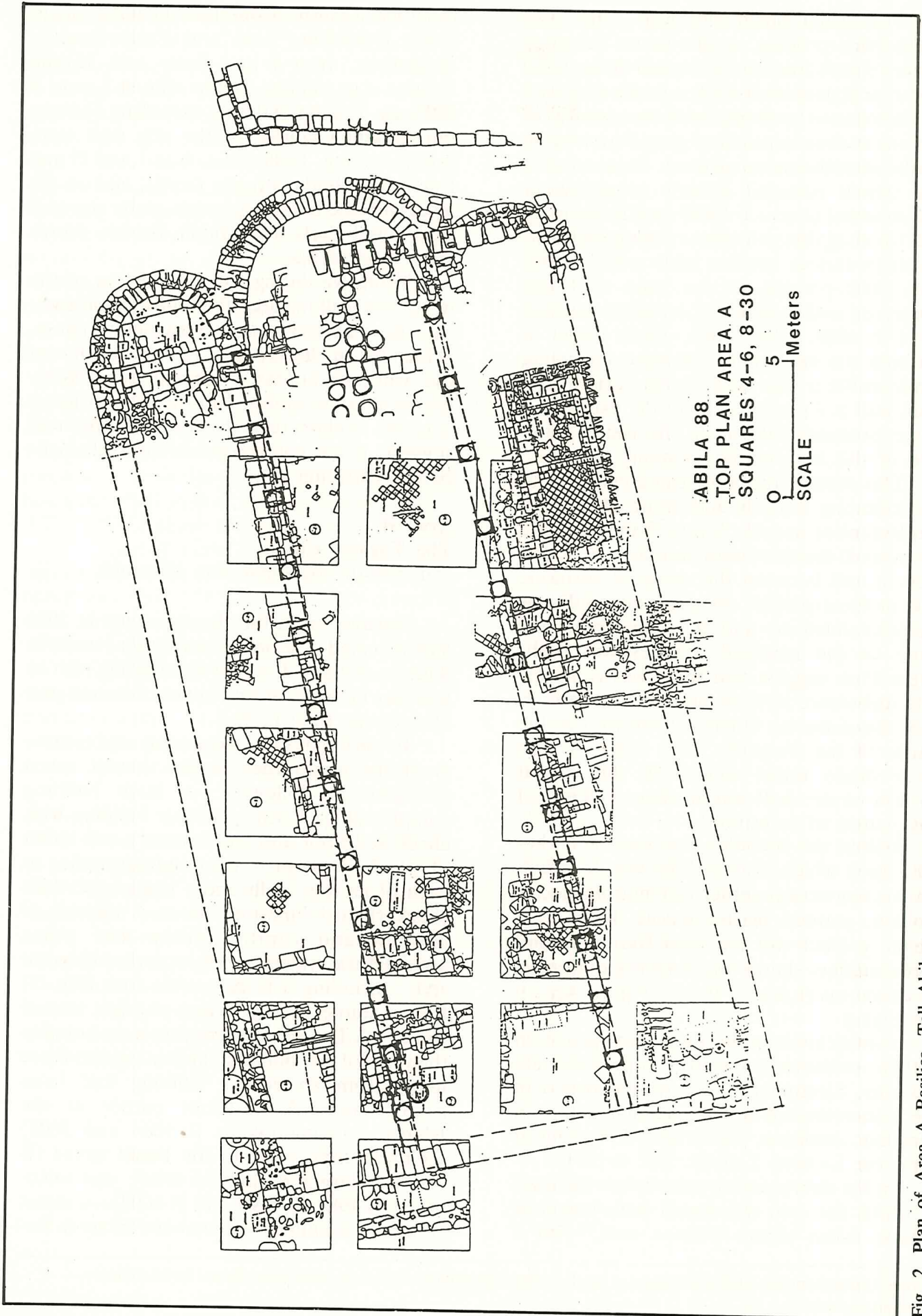


Fig. 2. Plan of Area A Basilica, Tell Abila.

the Tell Abila north city wall. The 1984 preliminary probing in this sector revealed pottery sherds from the Umayyad through the Iron Age II periods. In 1988, a probe (5 m by 5 m) was opened up at the inside face (south) of this city wall (composed of gray limestone in header-stretcher construction). Excavation in this trench revealed crudely rebuilt/repair wall material (Locus F 1004) astride the main wall which at this point was running eastwest, and then farther south a wide wall (F 1002 and 1005) parallel to the main wall was uncovered with a series of metalled surfaces (Loci F 1007, 1008, 1012, 1015) found in between the two walls, a feature indicating considerable traffic here in this period. The main wall is ten courses high; the excavation probe proceeded down on the inside south face of this wall to the founding course.

This Area F probe revealed evidence of the following periods and strata. Umayyad and Byzantine periods, Strata II and III, were uncovered; sherds of both periods were found here in and between the metalled surfaces; thus in these periods the main city wall was repaired/added to and the subsidiary wall south of the metalled surfaces was built. These finds suggest that there was considerable turbulence in these periods of transition from Byzantine to Umayyad control (*cf.* the Battle of the Yarmuk, A.D. 636). A flint spear blade found lodged in the rebuilt portion of the wall was further evidence of this period of transition.

Below the metalled surfaces, a darker soil, upon which Wall F 1005 was founded, was encountered together with marble pieces, molded, painted plaster pieces, lamp fragments, a black ash lens and Byzantine and earlier pottery sherds and evidence of domestic structures (Locus F 1014). (Fig. 3, Area F top plans).

A little lower in this excavation probe, in F 1016, evidence of the Roman period (Late Roman, Stratum IV) was demonstrated in the excavating of a Late Roman coin, in excellent condition, No. A 88.097,⁴ a coin of Emperor Licinius I (A.D. 307 to 324).

In the debris and courses below the level in which the coin was found were layers of debris, fallen stones from a wall, with a

quantity of plaster from the wall and a mix of Early Byzantine, Late and Early Roman, Hellenistic, Iron I and Early and Middle Bronze Age sherds. Below this in Locus F 1025, *ca.* 1 meter in depth, extending down to the founding course of the city wall were found Roman, Hellenistic, Iron I and II and Early and Middle Bronze sherds, and on the level with the founding course of the city wall Iron I and Early and Middle Bronze sherds were in evidence.

Tentative dating for this portion of the north city wall includes the following periods: an Umayyad/Byzantine and Byzantine phase, evidenced in the topmost rebuild portion of the wall, and at least a Roman and possibly earlier phases exhibited in the several lower courses; architectural features of the wall suggest it was constructed in the Hellenistic period (Stratum V).

Area B:

The Theater Cavea

(Supervisor: Bastiaan Van Elderen)

Excavation in the theater cavea in 1986 had revealed a series of substantial walls in Squares B 3 and 4, a staircase leading into an archway in B 3, a second arch in B 4, and part of a basalt road in B 2.

In 1988, extensive excavation and removal of the overburden in the theater cavea revealed the following: A large building complex (Fig. 4, Early Islamic building with checkered floor and basalt street), one room of which (B 4) proved to contain arches in each of its four walls and a black and white checkerboard limestone floor. A number of column and capital pieces and other architectural fragments of an earlier classical style, including a large marble foot (Fig. 5) from a statue, and a portion of a late second century A.D. Greek inscription were found in the ruins of this building, indicating that these items from an earlier building had been reused later. A northeast corner of the Islamic building (Walls B 5004 and 5005) seems to have cut into the basalt street (B 2004), a larger portion of which was uncovered in 1988 (B 5007 and B 6003)—a street generally running northwest-southeast in be-

4. See 'Coins from the 1988 Excavation at Abila of the Decapolis,' *NEAS Bulletin*, New Series 32-33 (Winter, 1989), p. 6-9.

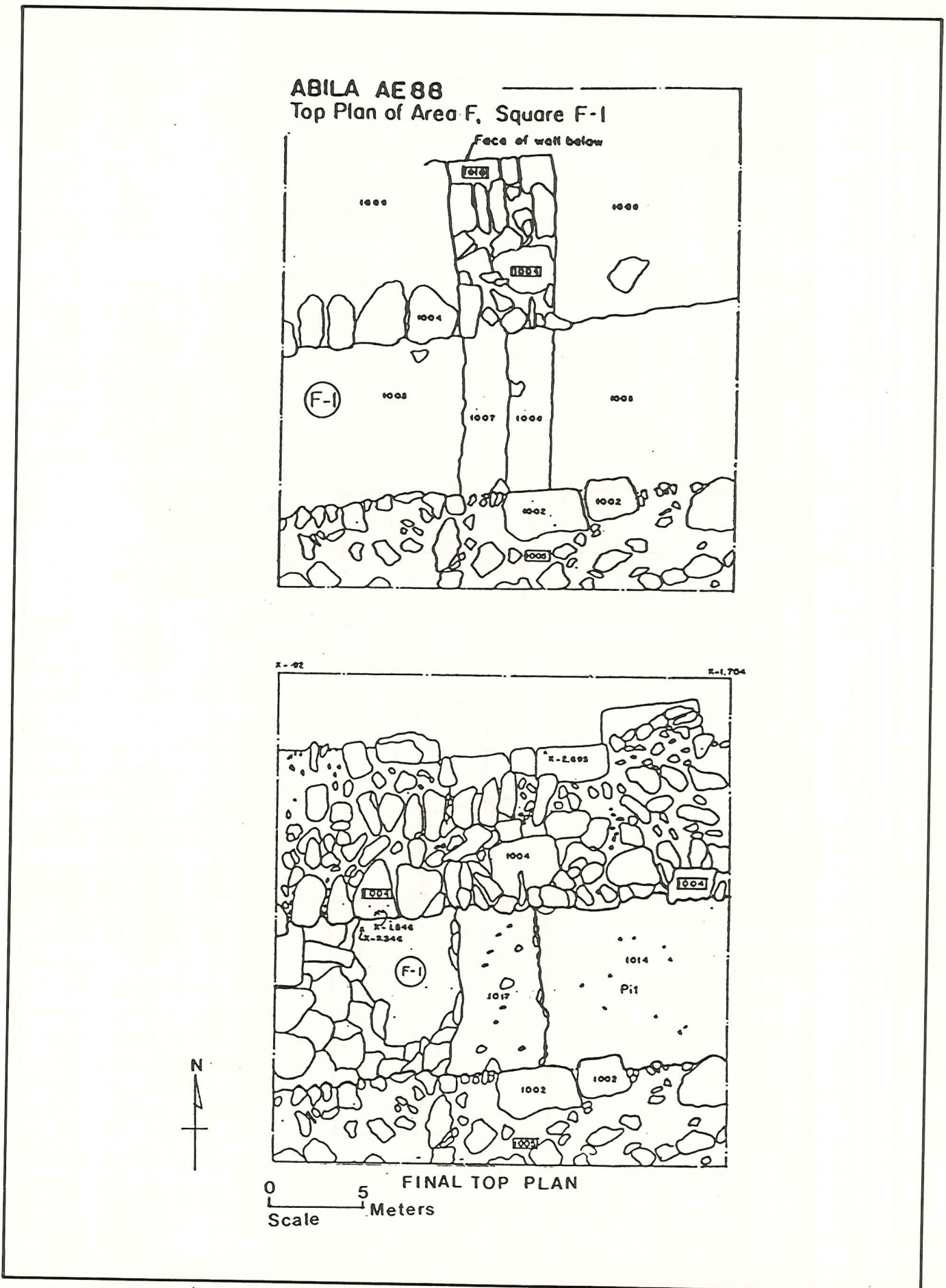


Fig. 3. Area F top plan, Tell Abila, north city wall.

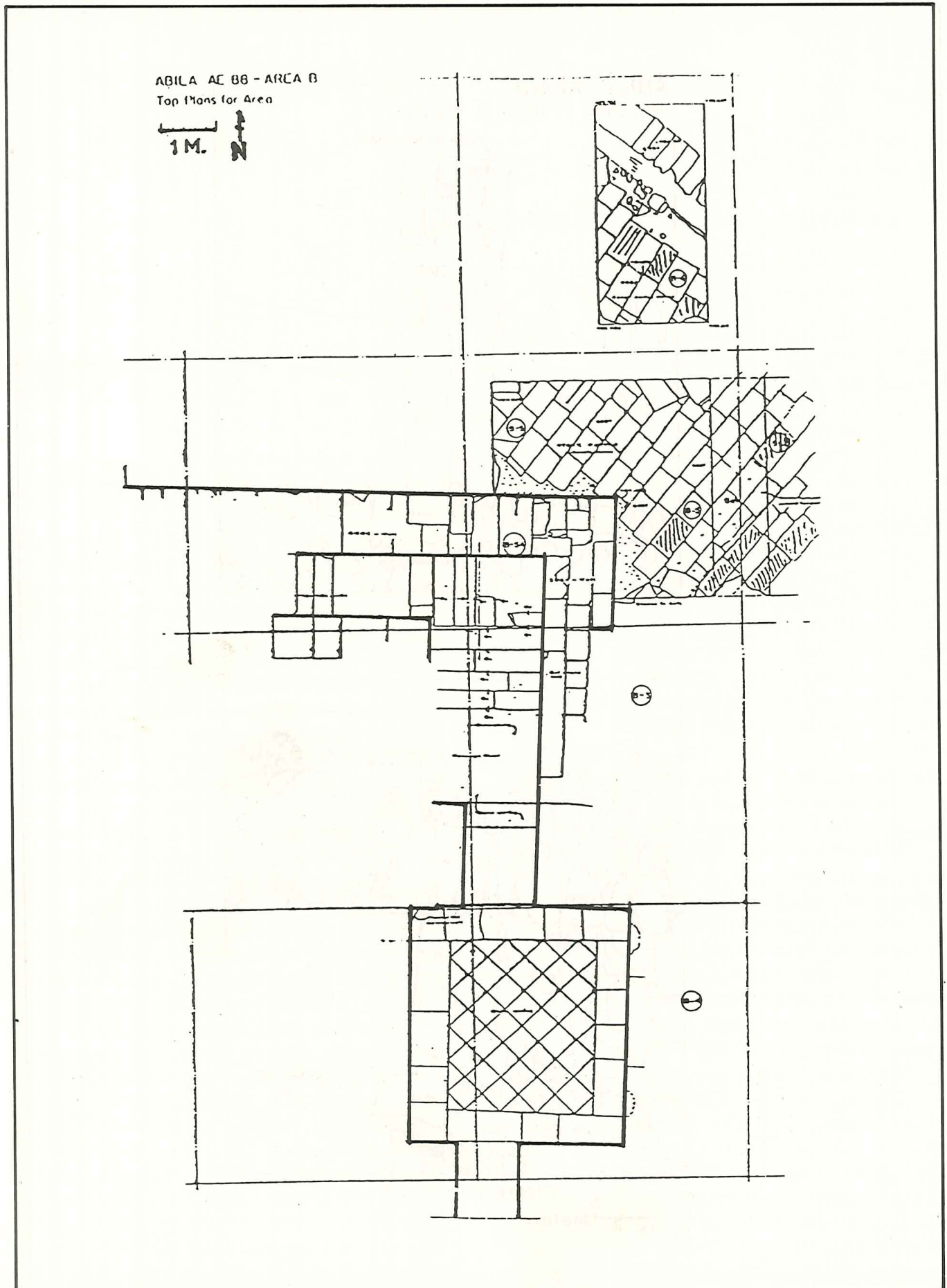


Fig. 4. Top plan of Area B (Theater Cave) Islamic building, with basalt street and checkerboard floor

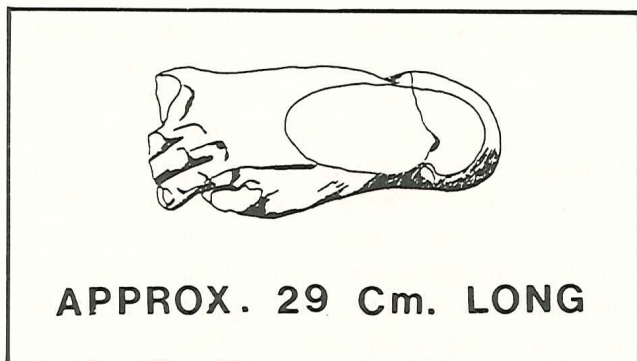


Fig. 5. Marble foot, Area B (Theater Cavea).

tween the large building complex and the bath complex (?) just to the north.

In the excavation of the basalt street, B 5007 and B 6003, and a further probe, running diagonally across B 2 and B 5 and just into B 3, beneath ten pavers under that street (Square B 7), revealed a deep channel cut into the bedrock and lined with limestone; in the fill debris in the channel Byzantine sherds predominated, with some Late Roman and Umayyad also found. Evidence from the soil layer between the basalt pavers and the top of the limestone slabs lining the channel suggests that the basalt street and the channel/drainage system were not part of the same system. From evidence gained thus far the earliest possible date for the street is Byzantine.

As indicated above, the large building complex is to be dated to the Early Islamic period. The staircase with four steps leading north, up from the archway in B 3 reached a landing, and then three other steps proceeded west to an upper level, where about a meter of debris was removed. Among predominantly Umayyad sherds found in the entrance way here were also Abbasid and a few Ayyubid ones — the Abbasid and Ayyubid sherds indicated that there was some later Islamic phase in this part of the building.

Extensive excavation of Square B 4 was carried out, where in 1986 the east-west Wall B 4004 on the south side, and the north-south Wall B 4005 on the east side and its emerging arch B 4007, had begun to be excavated. In the 1988 season excavation exposed Wall B 4014 a few centimeters into the west balk and Wall B 4015 a few centimeters into the north balk, which with the Walls B 4004 and B 4005 enclosed a room 4.30 m north-south by 3.75 m east-west. A room of these dimensions

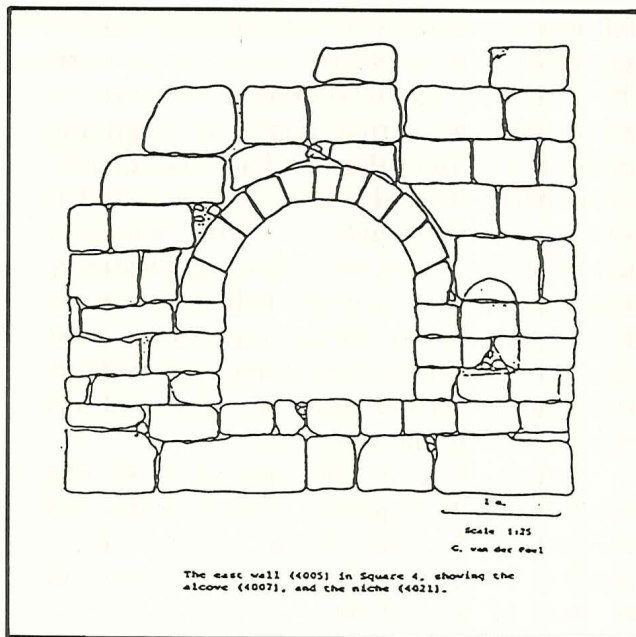


Fig. 6. East wall and arch in Area B 4 in room with the checkerboard floor.

provided a natural square to excavate, and stratigraphic excavation continued down to the floor level in this room. Encountered were a brown soil layer (B 4008), a secondary north-south Wall (B 4010), in the middle of the square, and then a 1.00 m ashy soil layer (B 4009) in the eastern half of the room in which were found numerous *ṭabun* fragments and two intact *ṭabun* bases; Ayyubid and Mamluk sherds were also found in this ashy layer, all indicating that after the abandonment of the room, the eastern half was later used as a cooking area. Under the ashy layer (B 4009) a brown soil layer containing numerous large dressed building blocks (B 4017) covered the entire square; the sherds in this locus were mainly Byzantine with a few from the Umayyad, Abbasid and Ayyubid periods. Below this brown soil layer a checkerboard black and white limestone floor (B 4020) with a surrounding black border 0.60 cm to 0.70 cm in width covered the entire square.

The walls of this room averaged 4.00 m in height; with an arched entrance on the north (B 4015) and the hallway and staircase described above, and also, an arched entrance on the south (B 4011), blocked, which evidently led into another room (the flagstone floor extended south under the blocked arch). The arch on the east wall (B 4007) was an alcove (with small niches on either side), 1.50 m wide and high and 1.20 m deep and a recessed window at the back (Fig. 6); the east

wall was inscribed with a circular wall which may have been a defense tower on the east. The west wall (B 4014) showed evidence of two phases: an earlier phase in which the southern 3.00 m of the wall had a large arch, half of which was visible in the room and is preserved to the height of 4.00m. The west wall (B 4014), which was originally plastered, extended north to meet the hall and staircase of B 3; the 4.00 m vertical joint in the west wall, with two kinds of workmanship evident, points to the second phase when the various walls of the room were built.

Square B 8, to the west of B 4, was excavated on through the surface debris and fill, and at the end of the season only a squatters' secondary wall was uncovered in the west of the square.

Although the large building complex, a part of which is described above, can be generally dated to the Early Islamic period, as the presence of Umayyad and Abbasid sherds showed, precise dating is not yet possible. However, three phases can be seen in the use of the building. The earliest phase was seen in the earlier part of the west wall (B 4014) with its large arch now blocked up, which seemed to have been connected with a building to the west. The second phase was represented in the elaborate checkerboard floor (B 4020), the adjoining rooms (as to the south), and extensive walls adjoining the staircase (B 4015) which led into another higher complex to the west, all representing possibly the Late Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The third phase was the later re-use of the eastern part of B 4 as a cooking area (*cf.* the *ṭabun* material found in the ashy layer, B 4009) in the Ayyubid/Mamluk periods.

Although the exact relationship of the basalt street to the large building complex is not yet clear, the second phase of the building complex (Late Umayyad/Abbasid) seems to post-date the street since the building seems to have disrupted the south part of the street. The street then may be associated with the first phase of the building complex.

Quantities of Byzantine sherds found at the site suggest a sizeable Byzantine occupation. Further remains of this occupation as well as that of the Roman period may be resting under the ruins of the Islamic building. The suggested periodization of the theater cavea area is as follows: Late Roman/

Byzantine (Strata IV and III), possibly represented by the remains of the street and drainage system; Late Byzantine/Early Umayyad (Strata III and II, Phase 1 of the building's use), evidenced in the wall and blocked arch in the southwest of Square B 4; Late Umayyad/Abbasid (Stratum II, Phase 2 of the building's use), evidenced in the hall and stairway leading to the upper level to the west; and Ayyubid/Mamluk (Post Umayyad/Abbasid, Stratum I, Phase 3 of the building's use), seen in the *ṭabun* remains which point to the eastern part of Square B 4 being used as a cooking area.

Area D:

The Area D Basilica

(Supervisor, Willard W. Winter)

Excavation done at the Area D basilica on the crest of Umm el-'Amad in 1984 and 1986 exposed the eastern half of the ruins of the seventh century A.D. basilica, a structure which Schumacher in 1888 suggested might be a temple. Evidence of crosses inscribed on some of the capitals of the basilica showed that the structure was a Christian basilica. It was also seen that this building had been built upon the foundations of an earlier building. In between seasons in 1987, the Director and the Department of Antiquities, which provided a crane, were able to erect numbers of column drums and capital on the bases on the north and south stylobates in the eastern sector of the basilica.

Excavation in 1988 concentrated on exposing the ruins of the western sector of the basilica. Squares D 26 to 39, each 4.00 m by 4.00 m, were excavated, laid out to the west of the section of special octagonal pink star and marble disk floor (1.25 m by 2.75 m), near the center of the nave; these squares extended west to the area of the massive column drums and capitals at the entrance of the basilica. In the process, many bases, column drums and capitals were found; the bases, except for one, were all found *in situ* on their respective north and south stylobates. The basilica had twelve columns in turn on the north and south stylobates. Floor material in the nave and the side aisle continued to be *opus sectile* in pattern. The surface and upper loci excavated in the respective squares produced Umayyad

sherds, and the loci below and on top of the *opus sectile* flooring produced Byzantine sherds. It was in the excavation of Squares D 31 to 33 that the western nave wall was encountered, with a large central basalt threshold (3.00 m across by 0.60 m wide) in evidence and a smaller south threshold as well. The central threshold showed evidence of two swinging doors, and fallen across the threshold lay a large section of a red marble column. At the southern extremity of Square D 27, just outside the south aisle of the basilica, a section of mosaic in geometric design was found. Additional parts of mosaic floors, in red, white, blue and gray, were found outside the nave of the basilica, in the narthex in Squares D 34 to 36, as were mosaic floors in red, white and blue, just to the west of the central monumental columns in Square D 38. This evidence leads to the hypothesis that mosaic floors were reserved for side rooms, the narthex and the porch area of the basilica.

Excavation in the western sectors in Squares D 34 to 36 uncovered a number of massive column drums (up to 1.00 m in diameter) and further exposed two of their capitals. Two central double torus column bases with plinths *in situ*, connected with the stylobate were uncovered. Another double torus base and plinth and a section of the founding stylobate were found not *in situ* in Square D 37 to the north of the two central bases; these were able to be replaced *in situ* based on the measurements derived from the *in situ* positions of the two central bases. Likewise the position of the column drums for the column to the south of the two central columns was also calculable. By the end of the 1988 season, parts of four columns and two capitals were excavated; and at the end of the season, through the kindness of the Department of Antiquities and its crane, these were erected, along with the column drums (average diameter ca. 55-57 cm) and capitals on the north and south stylobates in the western part of the nave (Fig. 7; Pl. I,2). It is to be noted that there may be additional column drums and capitals to be found buried in the debris west of the entrance of the basilica, but this will have to wait until the 1990 season of excavation.

In the narthex and area to the west, the pottery in the surface and upper loci was

Umayyad, showing an important Umayyad presence; the loci below and on the flooring was Byzantine. In summary, the preponderance of the pottery sherds found in the basilica in 1988 was Byzantine, with a quantity also of Umayyad, as well as a number of sherds from the Roman period, and even from the Bronze Age. Additional probing was done at the very end of the 1988 season in Squares D 40 and 41 within the central apse. In the deeper probe of Square D 40, in Locus D 40016 (at a 1.25 m depth) the following mix of sherds was found: three Early Bronze, six Middle Bronze, one Hellenistic white ware, and six Byzantine. Further probing in this sector is necessary to determine the extent of earlier habitation in this area.

Area H:

The Tomb Excavations

(Supervisor, Robert W. Smith)

In 1988, as in previous seasons of excavations in the tombs, we planned to do salvage excavation and excavation in undisturbed tombs of the Hellenistic/Roman/Byzantine periods and also to make an intense search for Iron and Bronze Age tombs in the area. Excavation in 1988 was planned in Area H along the east ledge of Wadi Qweilbeh, just northeast of Tell Abila, the area where in 1982 we excavated Tombs H 1 and 2, and in 1986 Tomb H 3. In Area H, the tomb excavation members were able to excavate tombs representing four periods: Pre-Hellenistic, Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine.

Tombs of the Pre-Hellenistic Periods. Middle Bronze, 2100-1550 B.C.; Iron Age, 1200-586 B.C.

Both of the Pre-Hellenistic tombs excavated were salvage projects. Tomb H 13 was located at an intermediate point down the wadi slope below the agricultural road which angles through Area H to the wadi bed. With an entrance width of only 0.70 m, and a little more than a meter of floor space and less than a meter of head room in the roughly hewn chamber, this Middle Bronze/Late Bronze tomb produced the following MB/LB materials: three metal rings, three whole juglets, and two incomplete juglets, one complete bowl, two large fragments of bowls, and the

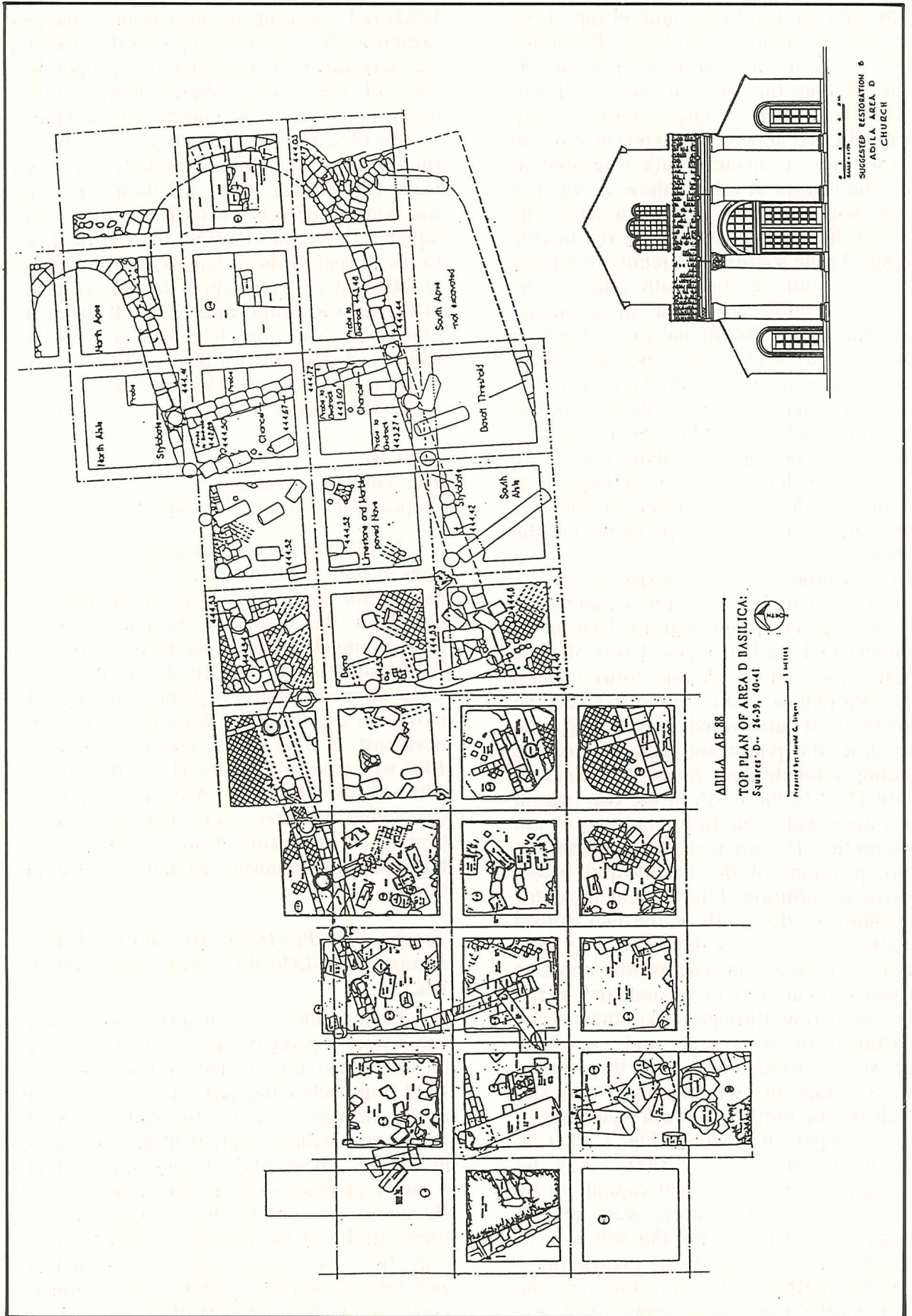


Fig. 7. Plan of the Area D Basilica and Projected Restoration of the Facade and Porch, Umm el-'Amad.

bases of two other bowls, an oil lamp, a hollow ceramic object, interpreted as a rattle; (cf. a similar Pella "rattle,") and a bronze dagger.

Tomb H 10, a Late Bronze/Iron I tomb, located at the crest of Wadi Qweilbeh, had been recently looted with the result that potsherds (Late Bronze and Iron I sherds, and remains of a perforated object, possibly a bronze lantern from the large pit 6.00 m in diameter and 3.00 m deep) were scattered around on the surface; below the meter of loose soil was the burial chamber 1.15 m high, 0.72 m wide and 2.2 m long (two thirds of the roof was caved in), with a large sealing stone, 0.93 m by 0.47 m, covering most of the entrance. The burial chamber contained only skull fragments (the body was oriented with the head to the west), but it also contained many Bronze and Iron Age pottery fragments (Fig. 8, Bronze Age dagger and Bronze and Iron Age pottery).

Hellenistic Tombs. (330-63 B.C.)

Tomb H 8, a shaft tomb, was located at the crest of Wadi Qweilbeh, in an area where there were a number of shaft tombs. Below the Byzantine sherds found in this top soil layer, were 0.60 m of soil within the cut shaft, and four sealing stones were found resting over the rest of the shaft; the burial chamber (2.15 m by 0.67 m and 0.90 m deep), devoid of human skeletal remains, did preserve three fragile Hellenistic unguentaria (Fig. 9), one of which was made of fine clay.

Tomb H 9 (presumably Hellenistic), also a shaft tomb (0.70 m by 2.13 m) located 1.00 m from Tomb H 8, on a different axis, resembled H 8 in design. Following the removal of 0.40 m of topsoil in which there were found seven Byzantine sherds, and the lifting of three limestone sealing blocks, the shaft grave itself was uncovered containing very poorly preserved osteological remains of one adult oriented to the south and two other burials, one of an adult and one of an infant; there were no pottery remains.

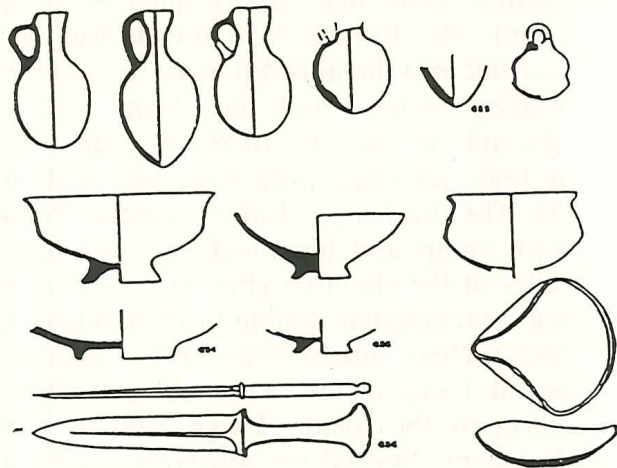
Roman Tombs (63 B.C.-A.D. 324)

Tomb H 11, Roman (Early second century ?), located in the middle of a gully halfway down the slope of Wadi Qweilbeh, was a complex tomb, with a lower single

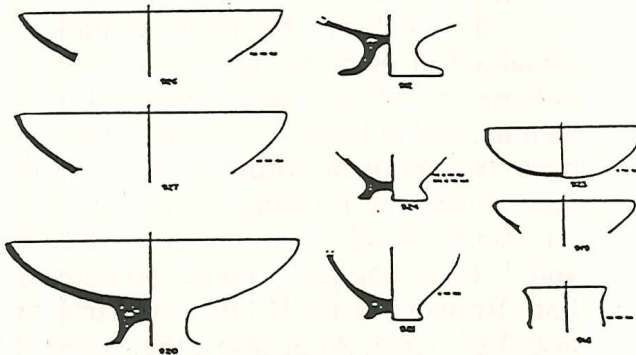
loculus tomb near the dromos of the main tomb. The dromos (1.56 m wide and cut 2.55 m back into the hillside), was covered by four sealing stones, and led down four steps through an entrance (0.86 m wide and 1.28 m high doorway with a recessed arch above it). The doorway led into a central chamber, with sump and ten loculi cut into the four sides of the chamber (Fig. 10); eight of them were rectangular double loculi and had recessed arched lintels over each loculus, and seven lamp niches were cut symmetrically between the loculi. Large Roman bag jar fragments littered the southern corner of the tomb chamber. Although the tomb had been recently looted, with entrance gained another way, the seal of the tomb chamber had remained in place for centuries. Only a few millimeters of soil was deposited in each loculus, and in loculi 2, 4, 5 and 8 the residue from two wooden coffins in each could be seen. From the remains of the Late Roman jar sherds found at the entrance of Loculi 1 and 2, three bag jars were reconstructed (cf. Late Roman bag jar H 11002.02, yielding the inscribed name, Apotizesos, the owner of the vessel). The finely cut low arched ceiling was decorated on its north side with a raised relief of a bird with an 0.80 m wing span, and with a carved face looking down into the pit at the back of the sump. In Loculus 3, sixteen beads and a small scarab were found, the only artifacts found in the loculi. A whole oil lamp, with flared spout (in H 11013) found near the south side of the door, suggests that the tomb was cut in the middle of the second century A.D. Geoarchitecturally, the tomb was finely cut at one time with a 15 millimeter tool and was probably a family tomb. However, at some time a narrower tool was used to destroy a third base relief, ca. 0.12 m wide, in the ceiling over the entrance.

Tomb H 6 (Late Roman)

Tomb H 6, located 60 m below the crest of the east bank of Wadi Qweilbeh, was a salvage project, a tomb which had considerable debris left in it and also had interesting geoarchitectural features. At the interior of its dromos, Tomb H 6 had a large functional basalt door brought from a nearby quarry (cf. a similar one in Tomb K 1). It was 0.92 m wide, 1.25 m high, and 0.20 m thick and



OBJECTS FROM TOMB 13



POTTERY FROM TOMB H10

Fig. 8. Bronze Age dagger and
Bronze and Iron Age pottery.

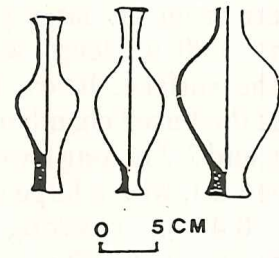
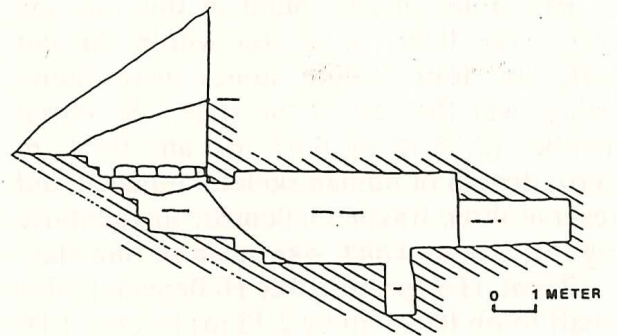


Fig. 9. Hellenistic Unguentaria, Tomb H 8.



SECTION

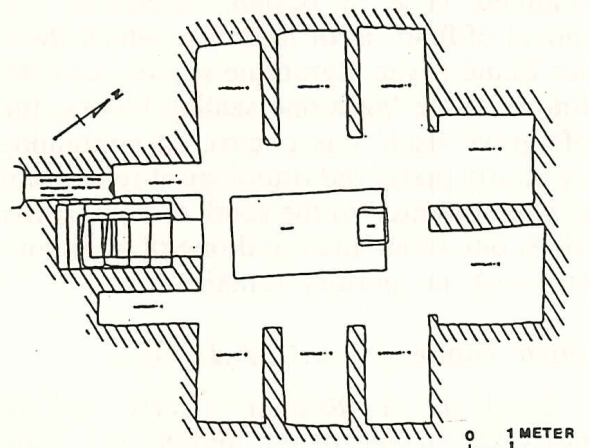


Fig. 10. plan of Tomb H 11.

rotated on sockets in the threshold and lintel); it was richly carved with panels and ornamental bosses, and had a carved out handle, and cuttings in the south door jamb and the door for a locking system, and on the lintel there were two raised four-petal rosettes in relief, one on either side of a two edged battle axe in relief ("The Warrior Tomb"). The basalt door led into a central chamber (4.30 m wide, 5.30 m long, and 3.00 m high) which contained on its floor considerable pottery laden debris and around it three levels of loculi totaling eighteen (Fig. 11). Several of the loculi contained remains of sealing materials of stone and clay, in some cases showing traces of paint (Loculi 3,5,8 and 12), in one case (Loculus 8) revealing remains of a large portrait medallion and an inscription with a dovetailed frame containing the name Dionysias (?) in Greek. A pit cut into the chamber floor led to another loculus. Among the many artifacts found in H 6 were human bones, pottery, glass (including unguentaria), metal, anthropoid busts, earrings (including a gold earring), beads, etc.

The human skeletal remains (poorly preserved and disarticulated) represented as many as seventy four burials, about equally divided between children and adults; a high infant mortality rate was indicated. The multiple burials in most loculi confirmed the practice of the re-use of loculi.

More than 1400 sherds found in Tomb H 6 included fragments of twenty lamps, and also six whole lamps (largely from the Roman period), and a variety of fine Roman bowls and several large bag jars also of the Roman period. On a body sherd of one of these bag jars was inscribed the name (the orthography represents the second and third centuries A.D.) Traianou, indicating either that this was the individual's name buried there (possibly a Roman soldier who had served in the area), or that, accompanied with an offering, the name was inscribed to honor the Emperor Trajan (A.D. 98-112). The pottery of Tomb H was predominantly Roman and Early Byzantine (pointing to the use of the tomb from the early second through the fourth centuries A.D.); the nineteen Byzantine/Umayyad sherds found near the basalt door

point to later intrusion through erosion.

Of the total of at least sixteen anthropoid busts found in Tomb H 6 all but one had little or no facial features, except for eyes, and sometimes nose, mouth and hair in outline; these were busts made of local soft marley limestone. One soft limestone bust depicted a female, with facial features (eyes, eyebrows, the rest partly damaged) and a scarf over the styled hair, and a folded garment covering the upper torso—possibly depicting the person buried in the loculus. In Loculus 17, three busts of different sizes were found, representing the individuals of different ages whose bones were in this loculus. Sometimes a bust was re-used as part of the sealing material of a loculus (Loculus 6). No indication points to these busts being Christian in origin, but the drawn breasts seen on the body portion of one bust may point to a pagan tomb cult in the Roman period.⁵

In the sealing process, the entrance to the loculus was "walled up" with a mixture of small boulders and large cobbles in a clay-based mortar. This helped sanitize the area, and also made provision for the application of plaster and the decorating of the plastered surface with epitaphs and funerary portraits (these latter, at a later time, may have taken the place of the limestone busts which could be then used as part of the sealing material; cf. Loculus 6). Eight different tools were used in cutting Tomb H 6.

Late Roman Tomb H 6 was used by a well-to-do Roman military family over a considerable period of time, as the different tool marks and the resealed loculi and reused anthropoid images suggest.

Byzantine Tombs (A.D. 324-640)

Tomb H 5, a single loculus tomb (2.50 m long, 0.90 m wide, and 1.10 m high) located near the crest of the east bank of Wadi Qweilbeh, showed superficial modern tomb looting, but still it only produced three ribbed bag jar fragments, a human foot bone and some pieces of flat metal, this paucity of grave goods suggesting ancient tomb robbing.

Tomb H 7 (ravaged by modern looters), located just north of H 6, consisted of a dromos (blocked by three sealing stones), an

5. John J. Davis, 'Abila Tomb Excavations: 1984,' *NEAS Bulletin*, New Series 24 (Winter 1985), p. 72.

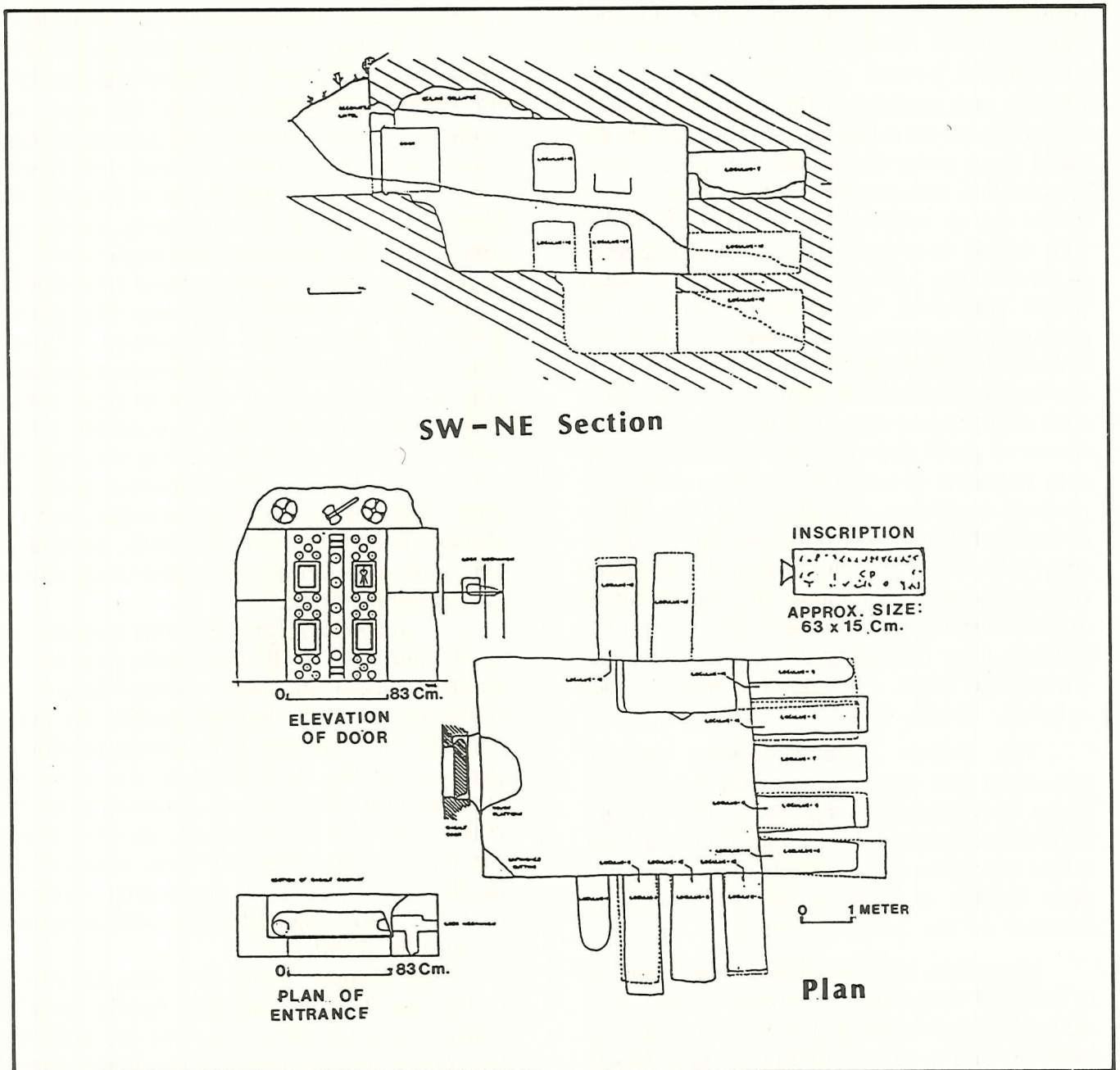


Fig. 11. Plan of Tomb H 6.

entrance, a chamber with sump and eight loculi cut around the perimeter (Fig. 12). The sump yielded some nail fragments and a number of human bones, a secondary deposit from the surrounding loculi. The osteological remains point to as many as twenty-five children and eighteen adults buried here. A small glass container was found and also a quantity of sherds, mainly Byzantine. The varied tool marks and the variety of loculus sizes suggest the tomb was used over a considerable time.

Tomb H 12, a looted tomb located near the crest of the east bank of Wadi Qweilbeh, just below the agricultural road, contained

five loculi (containing much soil) cut around the perimeter of the central chamber, and a grave in the chamber floor. Byzantine pottery sherds and bones from five individuals were found, and a number of nail fragments also found suggest that wooden coffins were used for burial.

Tomb H 14, an early Byzantine tomb on the lower eastern slope of Wadi Qweilbeh, consisted of one irregularly shaped loculus and produced two Late Roman and eight Byzantine sherds, and the remains of a Late Roman cooking pot (Fig. 13).

Tomb H 16 (Early Byzantine), a looted tomb, located on a ledge near the crest of the

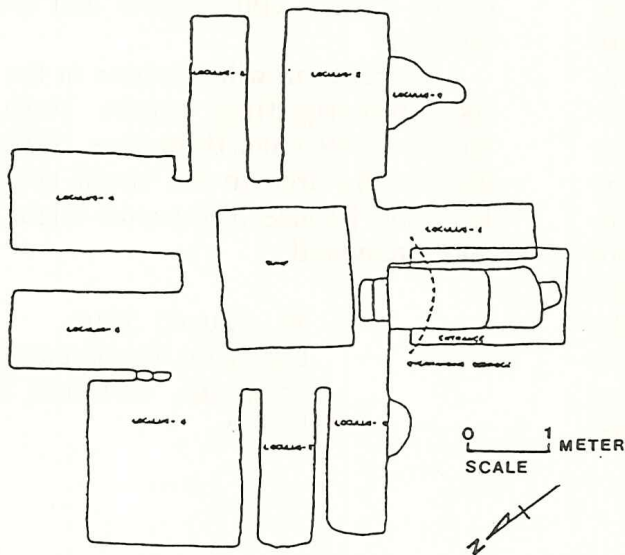
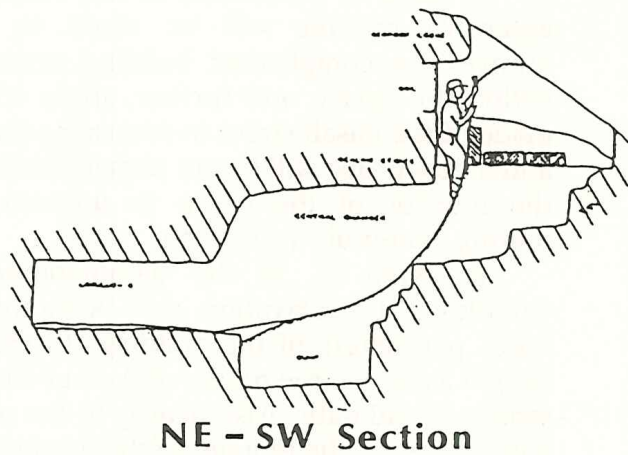


Fig. 12. Plan of Tomb H 7.

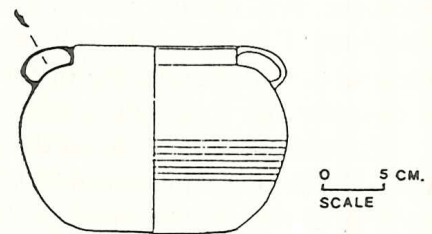


Fig. 13. Late Roman Cooking Pot, H 14001, No. 101; Tomb H 14.

east bank of Wadi Qweilbeh near the agricultural road, was a single loculus tomb, which contained disarticulated bones from one burial, and included Late Roman and Early Byzantine sherds.

Coins of Abila in 1988

Among the eighteen coins found in 1988 (all of them were bronze), were five of particular significance, three Late Roman, one Late Byzantine and one Umayyad. The three Late Roman coins were from Area A (unstratified), one of Emperor Probus (A.D. 276-313), the second of Emperor Constantius

I (A.D. 305-306), and the third from Area F, representing Emperor Licinius I (A.D. 312-313). The Late Byzantine coin (Area B 6002) is of Emperor Maurice Tiberius (A.D. 582-602). Although the inscriptions are indistinct on the Umayyad coin (Area D 28015), a circle and six pointed star are discernable.

Excavation Projects for 1990

In the 1990 season of excavation concentration will continue in the major 1988 areas of excavation. On Tell Abila, the probe in the sixth century A.D. basilica will continue, at the apses to understand better the relationship of the basilica to the earlier building,

in the nave and side aisles to understand better the floor construction and the nature and placement of the columns on their stylobates and the nature and use of the Umayyad secondary walls built there, and in the entrance and to the west of the basilica to understand the nature of the narthex and/or plaza, and the relationship of the whole structure to the *Cardo Maximus* on the west which extended south over the vault onto Umm el-'Amad. Special and separate attention will be given to the probe in Area A 1 and 2 because of the importance of the earlier Iron and Bronze Age materials increasingly coming to light. This area will be called Area AA and will be extended east to see how extensive this earlier habitation actually is. The Area F north city wall project will be continued, with deepening of the probe there to discover the founding period of that wall.

Excavation in the seventh century A.D. Area D basilica will continue with extensive probing in the central apse to determine any evidence pointing to the nature of the religious services there and to see if there is more material pointing to use before the time of the basilica. Excavation will also be done in the side aisles and entrance area of the basilica to uncover any additional column and capital pieces, floor segments, etc., and to determine

the relationship of the basilica to any structures to the west.

In Area B, the theater cavea, continued extensive probing will be made to help unravel the complicated building structures within the cavea, and further, study will be made of the basalt street to determine its age, and a new probe will be cut straight back into the interior of the cavea to uncover any seating material, vaults, etc.

In Area C, at the bath/nymphaeum complex (?), excavation will begin in the outer perimeters of the building, to gain an insight as to the true nature of the building, its structure and date. Also nearby to the northeast of Area C the remains of the newly found basilica (Area E) will be excavated to discover the extent, construction and date of this building.

Excavation will continue in the necropolis, investigating tombs both in the Hellenistic/Roman/Byzantine cemetery, and also in the area to the north where earlier Iron and Bronze Age tombs might be found and excavated.

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1. Abila-Qweilbeh aerial view: Left, Tell Abila; center, saddle with Theater Cavea; right, Umm el-'Amad.



2. Abila-Qweilbeh restored Area D Basilica, 1988, Umm el-'Amad.