

# Two Seasons of Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla, 1976- 1978\*

by

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(Fig 1-14)

## Introduction and background

After an interval of nearly ten years, excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla, in the Jordan Valley, have been reassumed. The previous five seasons of excavations were between 1960 and 1967, and had been executed by Dutch teams under the direction of Dr. H.J.Franken from the University of Leiden.

In the two seasons of 1976 (27th Oct.-16th Dec.) and 1978 (1st Jan.-28th Feb.) excavations were carried out by a joint expedition of the Department of Antiquities in Amman and the University of Leiden. The directors were Dr. H. Franken and Dr. M.M.Ibrahim of the Department. The other members of the team were: Mrs. Franken-Burggraaff (household, registration of finds 1976, 1978), Mr. Hubert de Haas (Photography and drawing 1976, 1978), Mr. Flip Pronk and Mohammad Yousef (draftsmen 1978) Site supervisors were:- Mr. Bram van As (1976), Mr. Chiv Chirimar (1978), Mr. Mohammad Darwish el-Ghoj (1978) Mr. Ibrahim el-Haj Hassan (1978), Mr. Mohammad el Jamrah (1976, 1978), Mr Gerrit van der Kooij (1976-1978), Mr. Mohammad Murshed Khadijah (1976), Dr. Marshall Martin (1976), Mr. H. Eduard LaGro (1978), Mr. Mujahed el-Muhaisen (1976-1978), Mr. Tim Potts (1978), Mr. Nabil el Qadi (1978), Mr. Ali es-Sa'idi (1978), In addition to two Archaeology-students from the University of Jordan: Miss Basmah Jarallah and Miss Mozeh el-Heddi who joined the dig on part time basis.

This co-operation between Amman and Leiden was not only limited to team membership, but was extended to discussion of ideas and financial support. The expenses were covered by the Department of Antiquities in Amman, the University of Leiden, and the

Netherlands organization for the advancement of Pure Research (Z.W.O), which had financed all the previous expeditions at the site. Besides this mention should be made of the use of household equipment kindly put at our disposal by several Jordanian and foreign archaeological organizations. Special thanks are due to Dr. Subhi el-Qasim, Dean of the Agricultural Faculty of the Jordan University who supplied the housing and facilities available at the University Farm. (fig. 1)

Tell Deir 'Alla is a large mound in the Jordan Valley, close to the Zerqa river; cf. H.J.Franken, *Excavations at Tell Deir 'Alla I*, Leiden, 1969; see also fig.1 and plate 1:1

Previous excavations have shown intensive occupation during the L.B. Age and the Iron Age (I and II). Several Iron Age phases could be distinguished, ranging from phase A-O (A being the lowest). During the L.B. Age the main part of the site (E) was taken up by a sanctuary (see H.F.Franken in *V.T.* XI, 1961, and XVI, 1964). This was probably also the case during the Iron Age.

## Aims and methods

Excavations at Deir Alla were started in 1960 with the aim of studying well-stratified pottery, especially that belonging to the later part of the L.B.Age and the earlier part of the Iron Age. The result of this, after four seasons of digging and much homework, has been published by H.J.Franken, *op.cit.*, 1969, as far as the main part of the Iron Age is concerned. The publication of the L.B. pottery is forthcoming.

In 1967 a new series of digging seasons started with the main aim of uncovering more of the L.B. sanctuary area.

However, the accomplishment of this aim

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\* This report was prepared in co-operation with all sitesupervisors, including Gerrit van der Kooij with whom stratigraphic problems were discussed. Mr. van der Kooij worked also hard on the preparation of major top-plans, drawings and palaeographic remarks.

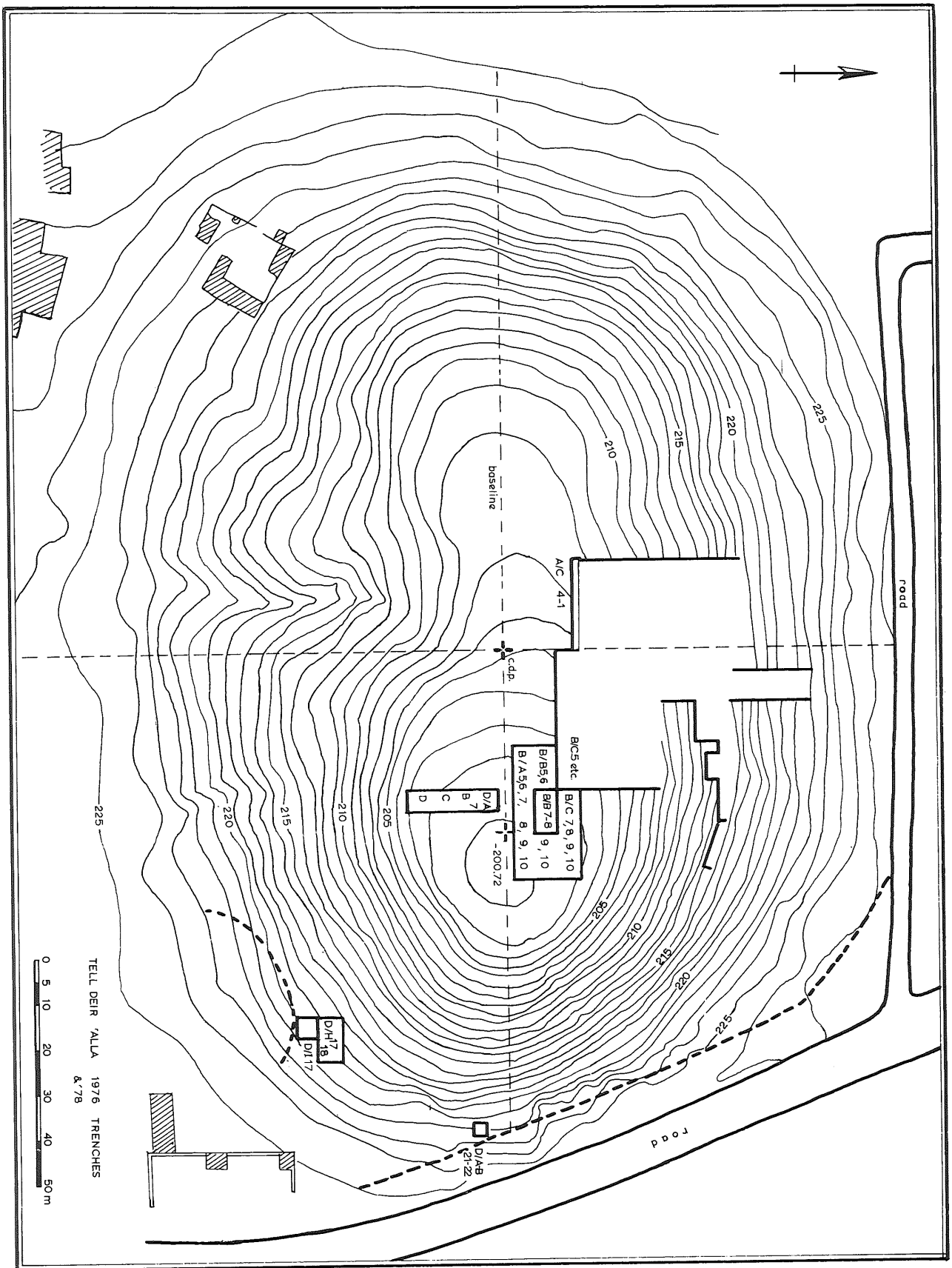


fig.1 Tell Deir Alla excavation trenches.

was delayed by the discovery of a probable sanctuary area attributed to phase M. The importance of this phase was stressed by the discovery of Aramaic texts (see J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir Alla*, Leiden, 1976). The hostilities of 1967 stopped this series of seasons.

The specific aims in 1976 were as follows:

-Training archaeologists in interpreting the stratigraphy of a mud-brick tell (squares A/C1-4 were especially opened for this purpose; digging there should also help to solve some outstanding problems in the adjacent area excavated earlier).

-More information should be obtained concerning the immediate stratigraphic context of the Aramaic plaster texts uncovered in 1967, also more samples for C14 dates connected with this should be looked for (excavations in square B/C5 and surroundings).

-More general information than is now known about the formation, history and type of occupation (including function) of the site as a whole should be obtained (for this squares D/A-B21-22, D/I17, H/7-19, B/A 5-10, B/B5-10, B/C 7-10, D/A 7, D/B 7, D/C 7, D/D7) were opened; at the top of the tell which would also clear a wider area for digging in phase M.).

-Furthermore the study of pottery, especially from the earliest and latest phases. In camp Dr. Franken registered all the sherds from these squares in a detailed system which, in particular, included technical marks, fabrication methods and date for working out statistically. A selection of these sherds and all the sherds coming from the other trenches, except A/C1-4 were sent to Leiden for a primary study. The complete pots are going to be studied in Amman. Also sampling for both soil and material analyses selected among sherds was not forgotten, because this could be helpful in determining the use of pots. The Royal Scientific Society in Amman was found interested in this type of research. It is also keen to do analyses of bones, metal, clay, and vegetable material, including impressions of this. Apart from this importance was attached to finding more data about the position of Deir Alla among contemporary and other sites in the Jordan Valley, especially those in the vicinity. For the under-

standing on this aspect, several lectures and excursions were undertaken (see M. Ibrahim, J. Sauer, K. Yassin, *The East Jordan Valley Survey*, 1975 in BASOR 222, 1976; 1976 (Forthcoming)).

The basic concept in our approach to the site became clearer during various discussions we had in camp. Tell Deir Alla was to be taken as a site *per se*. The archaeologically obtained data should speak for themselves without any imposed theory derived from more or less historical sources. Working hypotheses are, of course, necessary in the interpretation of data, but contradictory data should not be angled into them but should either modify or destroy them. The fundamental requisites of working in this way are a sound and detailed stratigraphy recording and an open mind. (It seems important to pronounce this rather self-evident attitude.)

#### **The Excavations**

Work was done in a number of small squares. Much of the dump soil was used to make small dykes following the contour lines of the tell, to prevent a rush down of rain water—the tell surface had been weathered quite a lot since 1967.

The two season's dig was seen as the first of a new series, in which excavation area unconnected with the old trenches would have to be chosen. Therefore it was felt necessary to adopt a new reference number system for the trenches. A system was chosen in which the old trenches fitted well. A grid of 5x5m squares was spread over the horizontally projected tell surface with two imaginary main lines. One going EW through the length axis of the tell is called the base line (it was already in use during the previous excavations and was indicated on the tell surface by iron pegs and heavy stones at 10m distance from each other). The other goes NS perpendicular to the base line through the middle of the site. The cross point (called central dividing point-c.d.p.) was marked by one of the heavy stones mentioned above. On both sides of the base line, 1.50m had to fall out of the 5x5m grid. The NW part of the tell is labelled A, the NE part B, SWC, SED. The 5x5m squares are indicated by letters of the Roman alphabet on the NS line (on both sides

of the base line starting with A), and by Arabic numbers on the EW line (also starting at the c.d.p to both sides). It should be emphasized that this grid is meant as a reference aid and not to define where to dig. The leveling was done (as in the previous expeditions) from a fixed point (indicated by an iron tube) on top of the tell which was taken as 220m. below sea level.

Phasing: Temporary phasing system was applied to the stages identified during the last two seasons, on top as well as at the south east bottom, of the tell. Phases were given capital Roman numbers starting from the top, while deposits or loci Arabic numbers. This was made to avoid overlapping with the earlier phases designation.

#### Squares A/C1-4

For stratigraphical training a special area was chosen in the SW part of the previously excavated area. The worn south sections of trenches B 100, B200, A100, A200 (cf. Franken, *op. cit.*, 1969 p. 13) at 16.50m from the base line were cut back 1.25m towards the S, i.e. 15.25m from the base line. In this way digging was done in squares A/C1-4 (new grid).

The old sections included phases G-L which are discussed by Dr. Franken *op. cit.*, 1969 pp.48-63 (cf. fig.81) The area provided many stratigraphical complexities, especially in the W part (A/C4), which during the previous excavations had remained rather obscure.

#### Squares A/C1, 2 (site supervisor A. van As).

Parts of the newly made section drawing are reproduced here (fig.2), namely the section in A/C1, parallel to the old section at 15-20m. The NS walls, H18 and H17 (see Franken, *op.cit.*, 1969, fig.81), as well as H15 (mistaken called H19 on section fig. 81) to the E of them still exist, but a connecting EW wall appeared. Also E of wall K4 there seems to be an EW wall. The water hole between walls K3/L2 and K4/L3 still exists, with a continuous sedimentation at its bottom. An EW wall also appeared in the section to the W of the given drawing, W of the NS wall H14. It goes through the new section at a slightly oblique angle; it has a plastered face to the S, connected with a plastered floor. A nicely rounded small oven (ca 60 cm) was built against this EW wall close to NS. wall H14.

Close to it a horse head figurine was found (see pl. XXVI, 2)

#### Squares A/C3,4 (site supervisor M.E.Martin).

The excavated area lies between the old lines O.37 m and 10m. The NS walls H13/J5/K1 and H1/J1 are still clear and a wall on top of J1 in phase K also appeared. It is interesting that these walls have a thin layer of reed at their base visible at several places. The thick deposits of street layers between these accumulations of walls still extended as far as the new S section. Part of an EW wall appeared in section W of the NS wall H1 (see fig. 3). Wall 4 (see fig.3) probably belongs to phases H and J, and wall 3 to phase K. A thick rusty coloured floor (level c.-209.60m) was found; it stopped just before the new S section against mud-brick debris. It probably belonged to phase J. The thick deposits of rubble and ashy layers between the walls belong to phase K or L. Wall 1 (phase L?) seems to have been dug into the contemporary surface of the tell and was based first on a row of flat stones, which were also lying more to the SW. It was connected with an EW wall running about 1m N of the new S section. Stones had also been put obliquely against the base of these walls (cf. Pl.XXVII.1). On top of the stone pavement, clay debris had fallen and the fill was continuously used for pits (e.g. graves). (Pl-XXVII.1) shows the pavement consisting of flat stones, with stones standing against and partly inside the base of two walls that are forming a corner. The complex is in the process of being unearthed-looking towards the WSW.)

#### Square B/C5 and surroundings (site supervisor G. van der Kooij)

B/C5 equals the 1967 square EE300, in which the Aramaic plaster texts were found (cf. especially Hoftijzer, Van der Kooij, *op. cit.*, 1976. In the following paragraphs frequent reference will be made to this publication, using the abbreviation *Aramaic Texts*). Many obscurities in the stratigraphy immediately connected with this find made it necessary to do some additional digging without really extending the excavation area. The 1976 dig gave some suggestions which seem to be important for the interpretation of the texts. This is reason enough to report rather extensively about the excavations in this area.

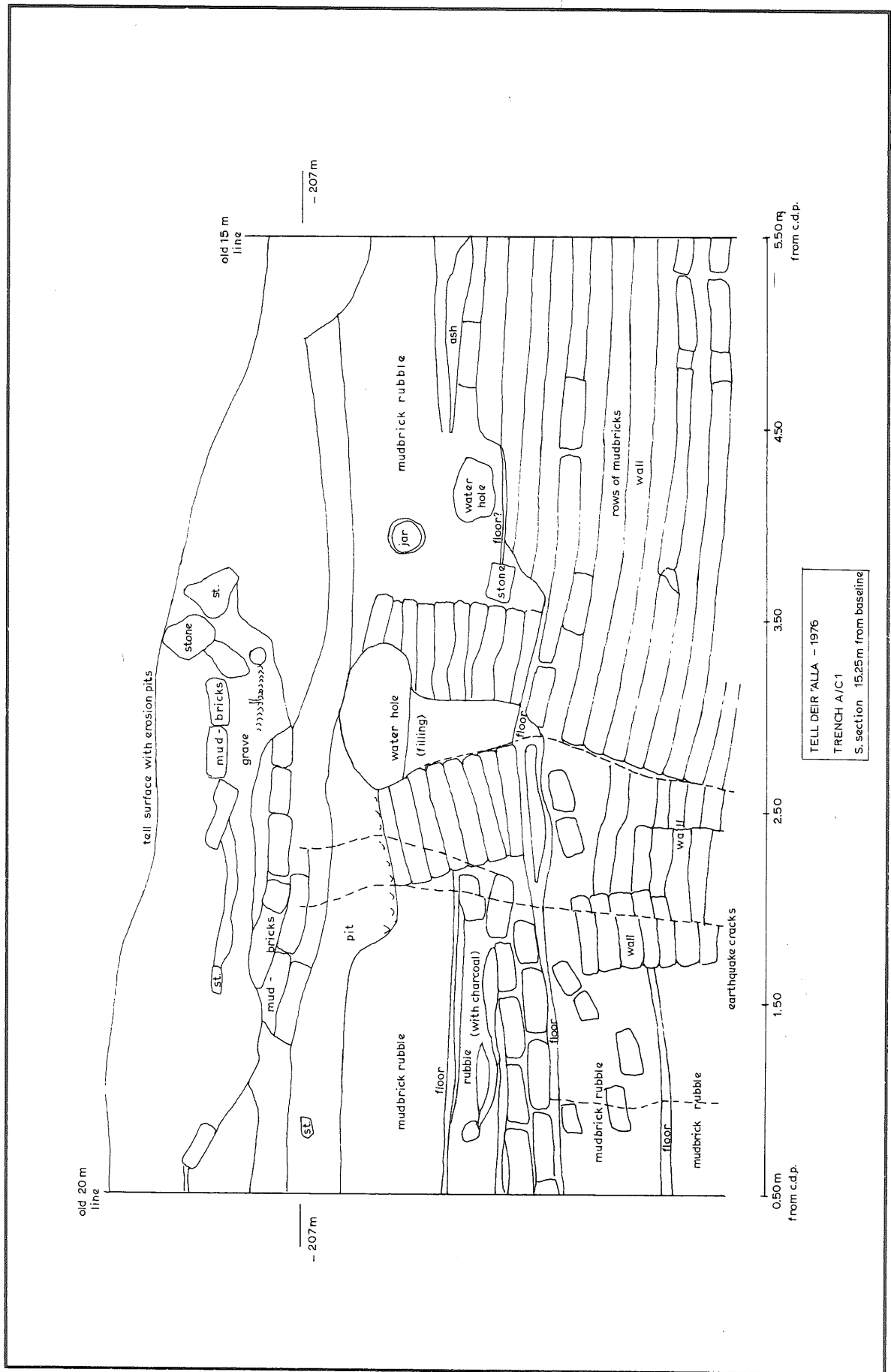


fig.2 Square A/C1,S section.

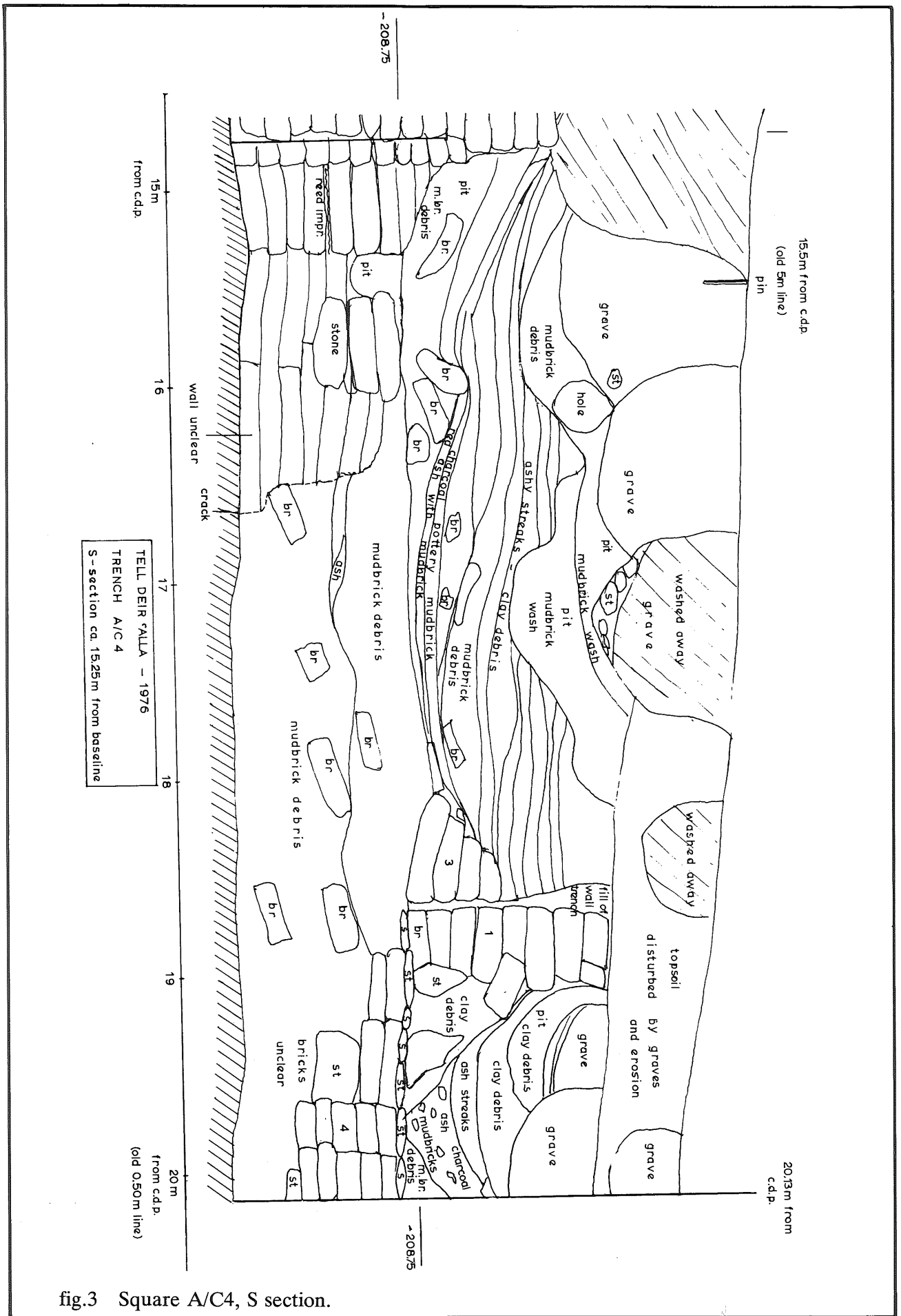


fig.3 Square A/C4, S section.

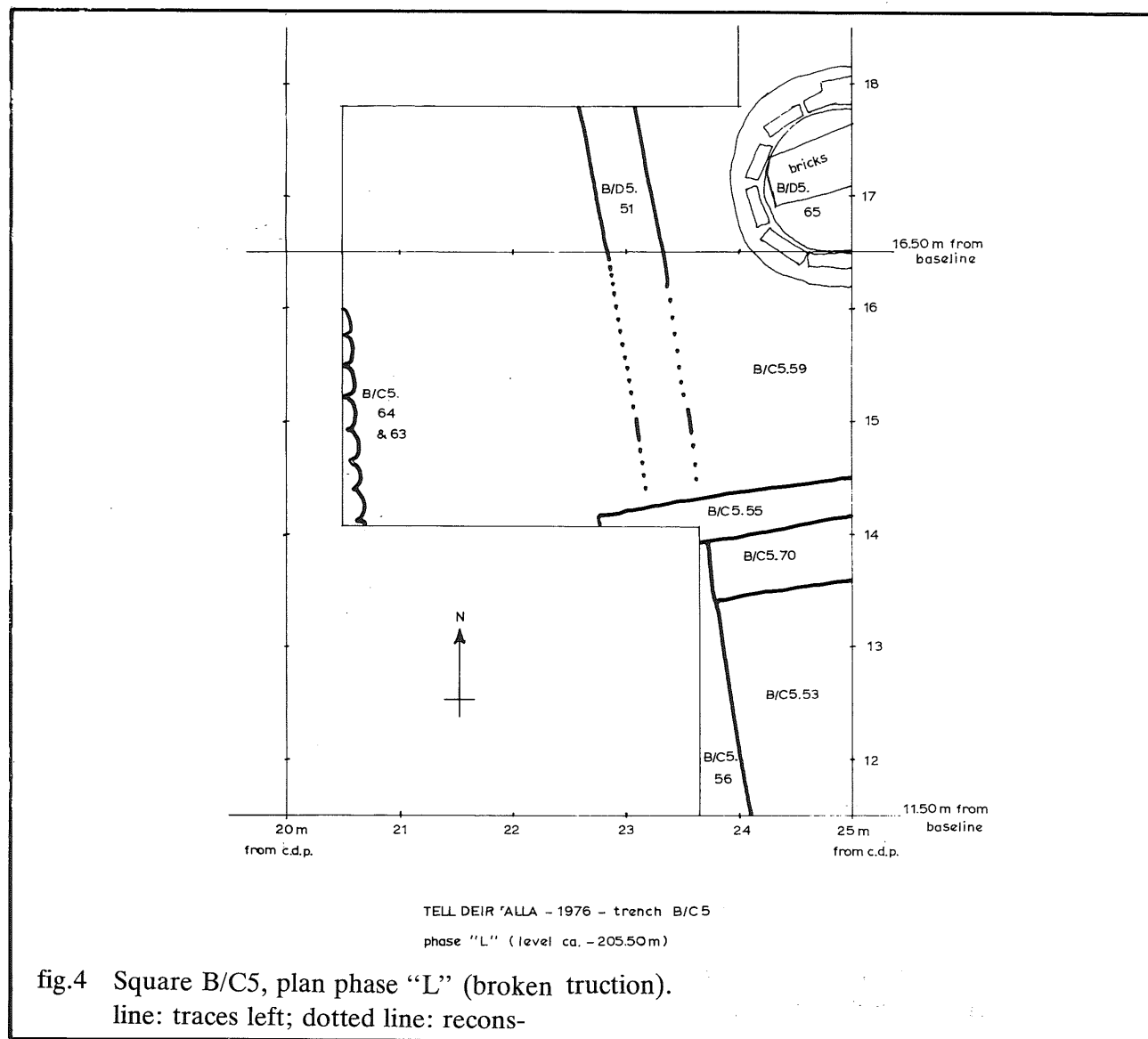
Firstly, a general presentation of the stratigraphy of the area.

In 1967 excavations were carried out in the area reaching the earthquake and fire destroyed phase M - the top of it being c. 2.25m below the tell surface at that spot. The stratigraphy has not yet been published, but some of it has been described in *Aramaic Texts*, pp.8-10, and 26-27. (A full report of it can be expected after more of this phase has been unearthed). This season work concentrated on the stratigraphy in the immediate surroundings of the plaster texts find spot. In '67 the plans of the walls in the area had many lacunae-no time was left for a thorough study then. What was known was published - provisionally - in *Aramaic Texts*, cf. Pl. 17b (N.B.: The NS grid-lines of the '67 excavations 40.50 and 45.50 m about equal the new

grid-lines 20 and 25 m from c.d.p. The EW lines-4.50 and 0.50 m equal 11.50 and 16.50m from the base line). This 1976 season excavations penetrated somewhat deeper at a few places than what is labelled phase M (in '67 too digging had gone deeper than this phase at a few small spots). it seems useful to give a short description of the chronological order of the excavated deposits and the phases. (Date from '67 combined with those from '76)

a. The earliest deposits touched are charred wash layers, which presumably have to be attributed to phase L.

b. Some structures were built; provisionally they are also taken as belonging to phase L ("L"). Their walls have been excavated, but their floors generally not (see figs.4 and 6-plan and section). The S extension of wall B/D5.51 is



uncertain. In '67 a few bricks had been seen at the place indicated by two short parallel lines. There was, however, another indication of this extension: the mat of reed leaves (see below) was seen and described in '67 as going upwards at that spot. Wall B/C5.55 was, apparently, built against the stump of a still older wall (B/C5.70); the same may be true for wall B/C5.56 (still to be excavated). Wall B/C5.63/64 consists of a row of stones with mud-bricks on top of them.

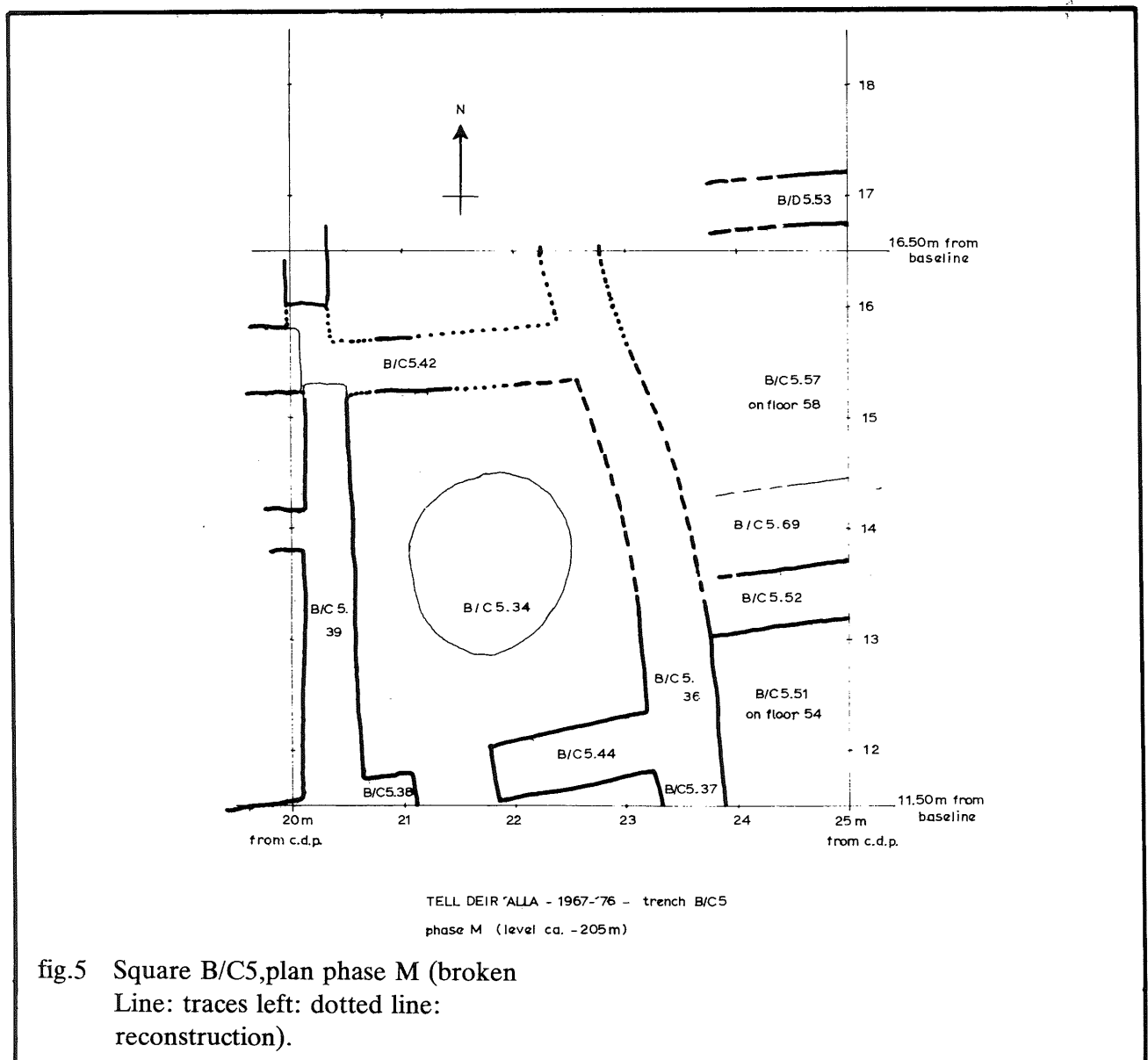
The building was burnt and destroyed.

c. After the destruction much weathering had taken place, which may indicate several years' exposure. Pit B/D5.65 was constructed (a hole was dug, and the pit was constructed of clay bricks and lined with three layers of clay plaster,

coloured grey, yellow and red-B/D5.64; the room outside this structure was filled in again).

Then this well made pit was filled with a wall of mud-bricks, some brick rubble, and vegetable material, which shrunk considerably after some time (no traces of another function for the pit were found). Then the heavily charred earth of B/D5.52 was deposited together with some stones.

d. After an apparently short time new buildings were erected (taken as belonging to phase M). The surface, however, still bore traces of the old walls. A glance at figs. 4 and 5 shows that at least parts of the old "L" plans were used. It became clear in '76 that the joint between walls





B/C5.39 and 38 was made with differently coloured mud-bricks than had been used for the walls themselves. (The bricks of the walls contained much of the locally found banded clay; the bricks of the joint did not have this clay at all, but a lot of straw temper; they were grey, the others yellow) A crack in the W extension of this wall 38 had been penetrated by fire, which proves that the fire and crack existed at the same time - probably both caused by an earthquake. In the plan of fig.5 the same difference in brick type is presumed to have been used at the joint between walls B/C5.39 and 42. The N extension of B/C5.36 is unclear. Its existence is probably testified by bricks seen and drawn (in '67) at the point where it crosses the 16.50 m line, and is strongly suggested by the sloping position of the fallen mat of reed leaves seen and photographed in '67. Very little was seen of B/C5.42 in '67. B/D5.53 probably (not certainly) was a row of fallen bricks. Wall B/C5.52 was built on a layer of reed stems (not leaves). B/C5.69 is a structure made of mud-brick clay on top of the stump of "L" wall B/C5.55. Two "floors" should be mentioned: the one of room B/C5.34 with a rounded pit with a graduated sloping edge (see *Aramaic Texts*, Pl.17a), and floor B/C5.58 which is clearly visible. Judging from the rubble on top of floor 58 there certainly was no permanent roof above it. There was, however, a large mat woven from reed leaves, at least five layers thick. The size of the mat was roughly 3.5 m (NS) to 5.5m (EW) (a small EW trench had been made, supervised by A.van As, in B/D6, NE of B/C5, which produced this evidence).

Then some destruction occurred, with fire. In B/C5.34 burning rubble (with brick clay and wood) tumbled down, possibly the roof or something coming from a higher place (so Franken). The heat penetrated into the unplastered floor and the wall bases. Burning rubble also fell into the room SW of this room 34, but NE of it very little burning rubble fell on floor B/C5.58. Brick rubble (unburnt) fell on B/C5.69, and probably by now the B/D5.53 bricks had been deposited. Very little weathering took

place, and then a complete destruction followed. At first the mat of reed leaves came down, but it was immediately followed by the chalk plaster with (and without) writing and whatever object it adhered to, and parts of the walls. No burning occurred, but some of the bricks were still charred, apparently by the previous small scale destruction. The main rubble deposits are B/C5.30 (on top of 34) with combination 1 of the plaster texts and B/C5.57 with combination 2.

Cracks inside the deposits indicate earthquake shocks. The destruction was complete, though some of the walls were still standing 1 m high; rubble engulfed them. Erosion and wash affected the surface and this made phase M clearly distinguishable from layers deposited later.

A special paragraph has to be devoted to a **reconstruction of the original position of the plaster texts**, deduced from the data from '67 and '76 (see fig.7).

The direction in which the pieces had fallen has been reconstructed already (see *Aramaic Texts*, pp.26f.) by indications given by the positions of the different fragments. The result was that the original position must have been around the NE "corner" of room B/C5.34 (=EE334 of the old grid) The plaster of Comb. 1, the upper part of a column, and some other pieces, had fallen inside room 34, together with unburnt brick rubble on top of the previously fallen burnt rubble. The pieces of Comb.2, the lower part of a column, had fallen together with rubble B/C5.57 on top of the NW corner of floor B/C5.58 (slightly more to the E than indicated on Pl.17b in *Aramaic Texts*). Most probably there was a continuous wall between 34 and 57, namely wall B/C5.36 (see above), although a doorway cannot be excluded for certain.

Combination 2 must have been fallen from a very short distance (this can be deduced from the arrangement of the fragments in situ). Comb.1. came from a greater distance (the

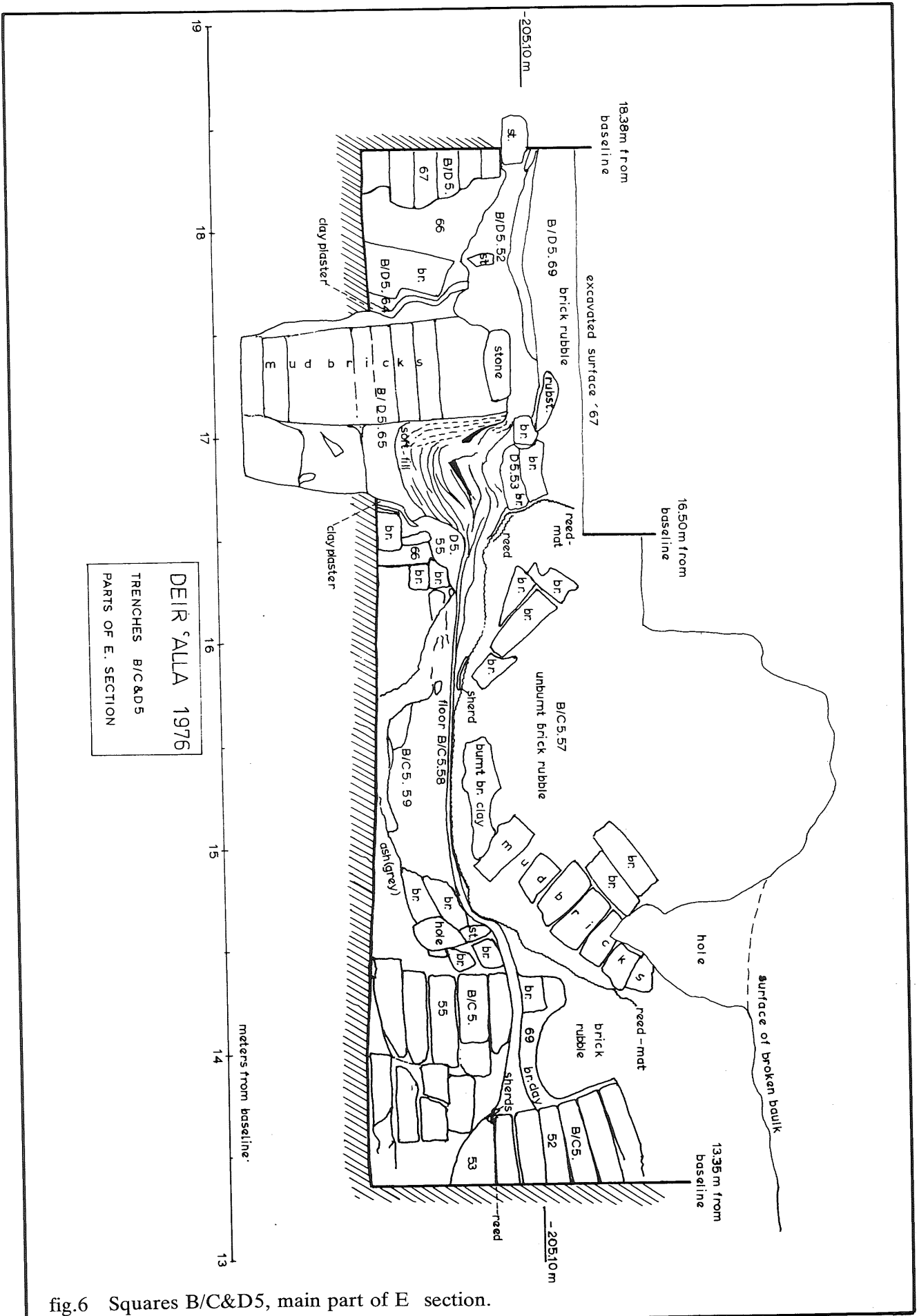


fig.6 Squares B/C&D5, main part of E section.

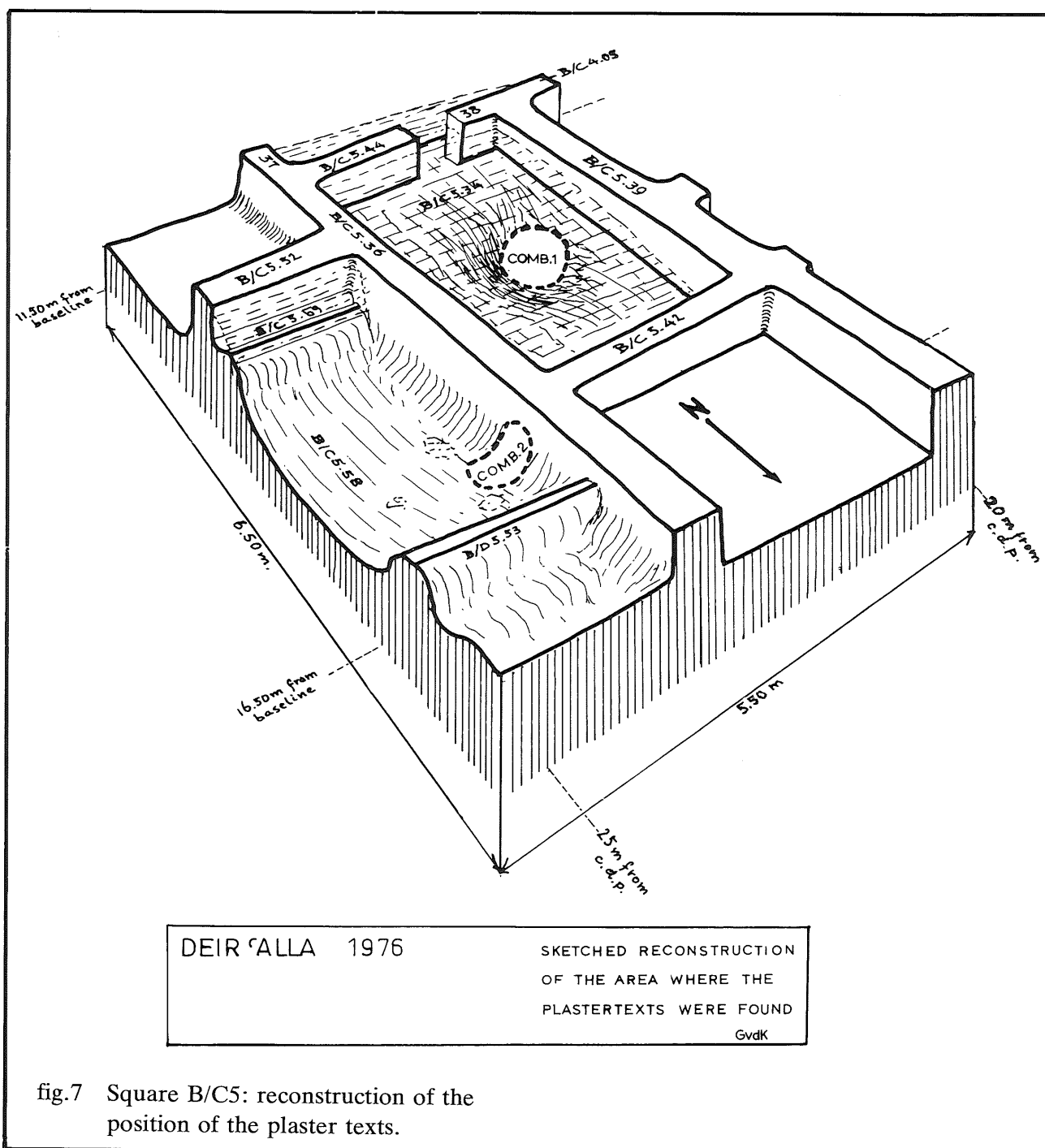


fig.7 Square B/C5: reconstruction of the position of the plaster texts.

fragments were lying together quite unrelated). Comb.2 was apparently lying against the slope of the stump of old wall B/D5.51 and the new wall B/C5.36 (some rubble had fallen in between).

Consequently it most probably had been attached to something flat standing against the E face of this wall (The flat object may have been solidly connected with the wall, e.g. just projecting a little bit out of it; there are reasons enough to maintain the idea that the plaster was

attached to something else than just a wall, see *Aramaic Texts*, pp.25ff.). It is reasonable to assume that all the writing and reading was done at one side only as the texts with related contents are close together. This would mean, that Comb.1. had been originally rather high up on the object against the E side of wall 36, and had fallen, together with parts of the wall, towards the W or SW inside room 34. The conclusion from this would be that the texts were written on plaster applied to something flat standing high

up against the E face of wall 36. The wall (this part being c.3m long) formed the W end of an area which was bordered to the S by wall B/C5.52 and structure B/C5.69 along the base of this wall; to the N it was bordered in one way or another by the bricks of B/D5.53 and /or a wall standing there or slightly more to the N. The area stretched about 5 m towards the E. Its floor B/C5.58 had clearly often been used (indicated by numerous thin floor layers; in the NW part some large sherds and a complete lamp were found). The woven matting cover has been described above. Only the W end and the N edge of this area has been excavated. Doorways have not yet been found.

The surroundings of the area are partly clear: rooms border it to the W (34, with a strange pit-floor) and S (probably a room, with some useful finds - see below) and at a greater distance, at 5m from bricks B/D5.53, also to the N (the complex of four rooms excavated in '67; see *Aramaic Texts*, Pl.16a); the area in between is unclear.

It is not clear how long the plaster with text had been in existence. However, it can be taken for certain that it was there already before the first small scale destruction with fire took place, by which room 34 got the burnt rubble on its floor, and the few pieces of burnt and some unburnt rubble fell on floor 58 and structure 69. The weathering of the rubble on or close to floor 58 was negligible and less than that of rubble 34. Probably no roof covered 34 after the first destruction (this is indicated by the fact that there was very little or no rubble between the lowest pieces of plaster and the surface of the burnt rubble). So rain could do its work in 34. Above 58, however, a new woven matting cover was quickly placed (it is possible also that the old matting cover was not destroyed at all). The writing on the plaster of Comb.2 had a lot of damage, probably caused by water. Most or all of this damage was done during the time before the collapse (the

places on the different fragments where this damage occurs indicate this). Comb 1 also had water damage, but very little, and this may have happened after the collapse, as the fragments were lying in the apparently wet rubble, or during the destruction (the matting cover had fallen just before the plaster came down). This would mean that it was raining during the final destruction.

A few *finds* from B/C5 and surroundings should be mentioned:

A tiny thinly made juglet (see Pl.XXVII,2) from phase M floor B/C5.54 (cf. fig. 5).

-A small hand shaped spoon made of black stone (generally connected with incense) found on floor B/C5.54 (phase M), lying against wall 37 (see Pl. XXVIII).

-A short inscription (reg. nr. D'A 2530; see Pl.XXIX,1 and fig. 8) from B/D5.55 (cf. fig.6; apparently dating from just before phase M). Surprisingly only the sherds with parts of the inscription were found in the deposit. The sherds are part of a small bowl, and inscribed on the burnished lower outside. The writing was done after burnishing, but probably before firing, following the curve of the bowl (it is not an ostrakon). At least some of the strokes are made by scratching with the nib of the stylus two or more times, but not always precisely in the same (first) groove. This feature sometimes makes it impossible to decide about the order of writing of the stroke of each sign.

**The signs are:**

*lamed* (the short stroke went too far to the left; to the right some room is left, but no part of a sign)

*šin* (damaged, but no other identification possible; there is some room to the right, but in the lacuna no sign except a word divider would be possible).

*'alef* (note the two thin separate scratches to the left)

*het* (defective, but no other possibility seen. The main groove of the left hand stroke is broken because of a small piece of stone in

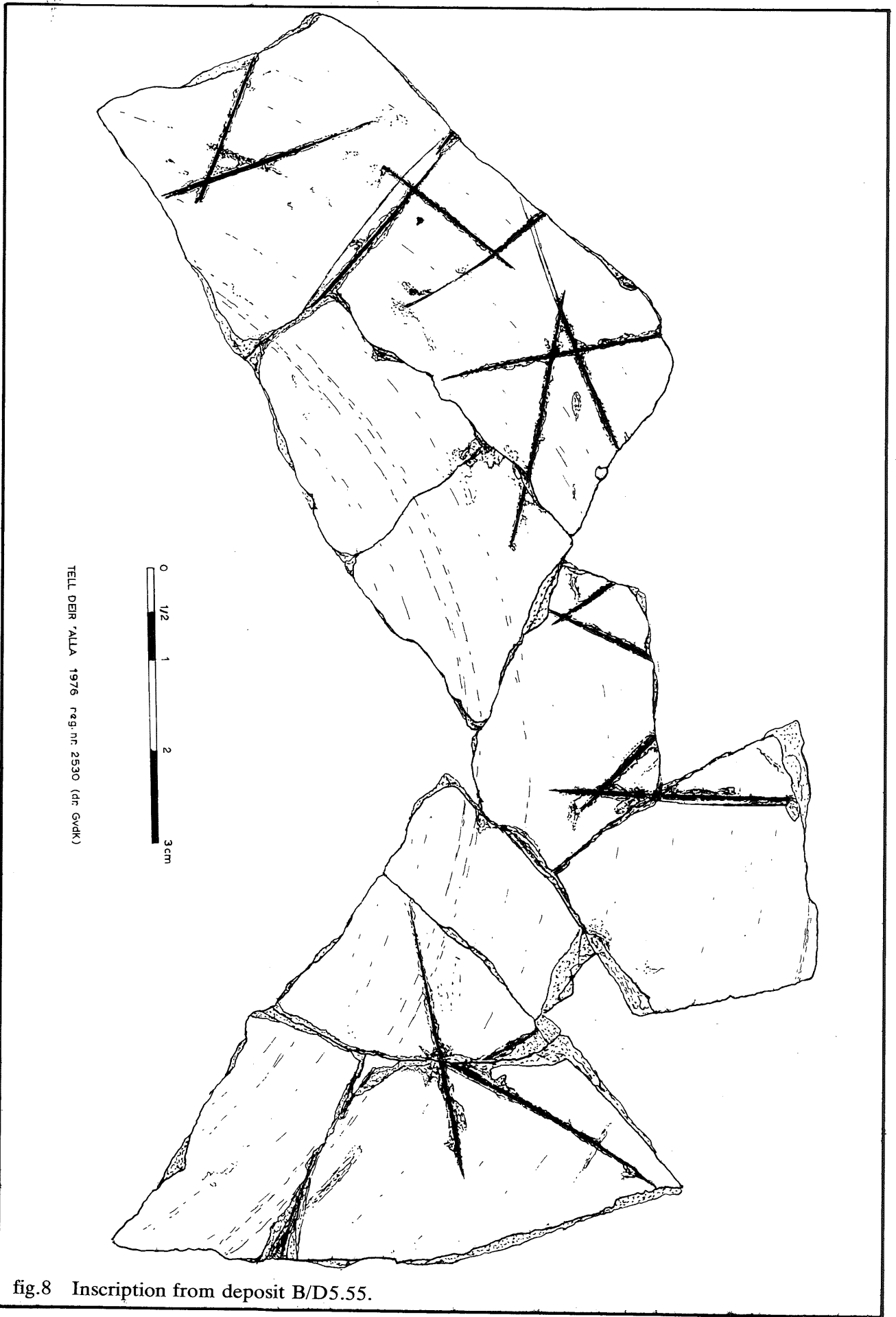


fig.8 Inscription from deposit B/D5.55.

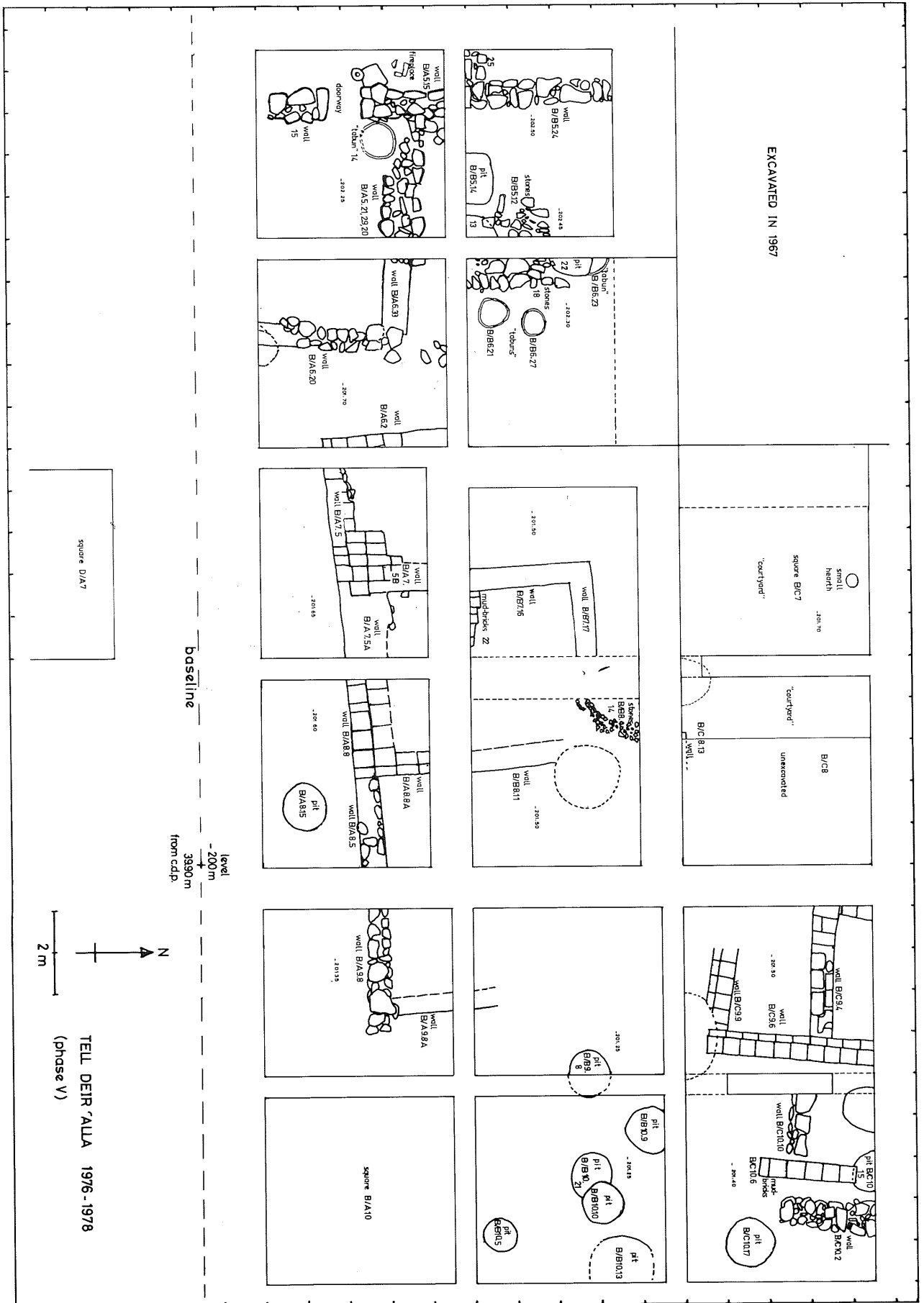


fig.9 Plan of phase V

the clay; a thin continuing scratch besides it stresses it being meant as one line. The right hand vertical stroke is shorter than the left hand one. The composition of the sign on the line suggests two rather than three horizontal lines).

*zayin*, *yod* or *lamed* (the first one is improbable if the script has a close relation with scripts found in 1967, see especially Hoftijzer, Van der Kooij, *op. cit.* 1976, Plts. 20 and 33. The short crossing "groove" is a pock in the surface of the sherd).

For an interpretation of this short inscription see the *note* by Prof. J. Hoftijzer on pp....

-Some bones have been collected (especially from deposit B/D5.52) and two samples of burnt vegetable material have been taken for C14 dating. One from phase "L" (from deposit B/C5.53) and one from phase M from a deposit in the room W of B/C5.34.

#### PHASE I

The excavations of the last two seasons and earlier ones show that the mound including the slopes was used intensively as a cemetery during the Islamic period, apparently contemporary with the settlement of the nearby Tell Abu Gourdan.\* Graves found during the 1976 and 1978 seasons were dug into the upper layers of the tell, but a large number of the skeletons were partly visible on the surface, because of weathering of the site.

Generally the skeletons were lying in east-west direction (head to west) with the face towards south. Some of the bodies had been buried with mud-bricks and / or broken sugar pots around them; also stones were used and in one case a large flat stone was covering the grave. In connection with the skeletons, a few beads, ear-rings and bracelets made of bronze were found.

#### PHASE II

This phase is represented, at least in the area excavated, through a number of pits only. Most of the pits were shallow and of irregular shape, while a few others are of the deep silo-type. In some cases it was not possible to attribute pits either to phase II or the earlier phase III. The very large pit in squares B/A9 and 10 measuring ca. 10m. along the south section, is particularly remarkable. The function of this pit and most of

the others is uncertain. No clear indication was given by the fill which consisted of dumped loose grey soil mixed with stones and small mud-brick fragments. Apart from pottery sherds there are no specific finds to be reported. The possibility can not be ruled out that the pits were made to obtain earth for mud-bricks.

#### PHASE III

There must have been a large building on top of the Tell. Stone foundations of some of its walls have been preserved, partly visible on the surface. Apart from these walls and fallen stones, many other parts of stone foundations were excavated close to the surface (Pl. XXXI, 1). The preserved parts of these walls do not yet show coherent plan. Heavy walls in squares B/A8 and D/A7 had sunk down into the soft layers of phase IV. Connected with one of these walls, a floor with unburnt mud-brick tumble on top of it was preserved. Walls in B/A6-7 and B/B6-7 were also associated with floors. The fragmentary character of this phase is due to the fact that no major occupation took phase easy, and to the disturbances of phase I-II. Present evidence does not give indication about the function of these buildings. Preliminary study of the pottery shows that this phase dates from the fifth to early fourth century B.C.

#### PHASE IV

The fourth phase to be distinguished consists merely of accumulation of what may be called "courtyard layers" (Pl. XXXIII, 1). The height of the accumulation is generally less than 1m., but at a few places it is more. The layers consists of red-brown material and at places alternating with grey soil. The red-brown material is very soft decayed vegetable matter; the grey too has much plant matter in it. An analysis of the material may give a clue to the origin of this thick slowly grown accumulation. The layers were found concentrated on the highest part of the mound, at places appearing just under the surface. Related layers, but much less highly accumulated, were found in the N and W part of the excavated area.

It became clear that the courtyard layers started just before or immediately after the slow destruction of the buildings of the older phase V. Stumps of the old walls were partly bordering the lower accumulation, and much of the grey soil in between the lower part of the layers originated from the erosion of the walls. So far

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\* Franken Kalsback, *Potters of the Medieval village; Franken, A Catalogue of Finds from the Medieval Arabic Tell Abu Gourdan and Cemetery at Deir Alla (to be published).*

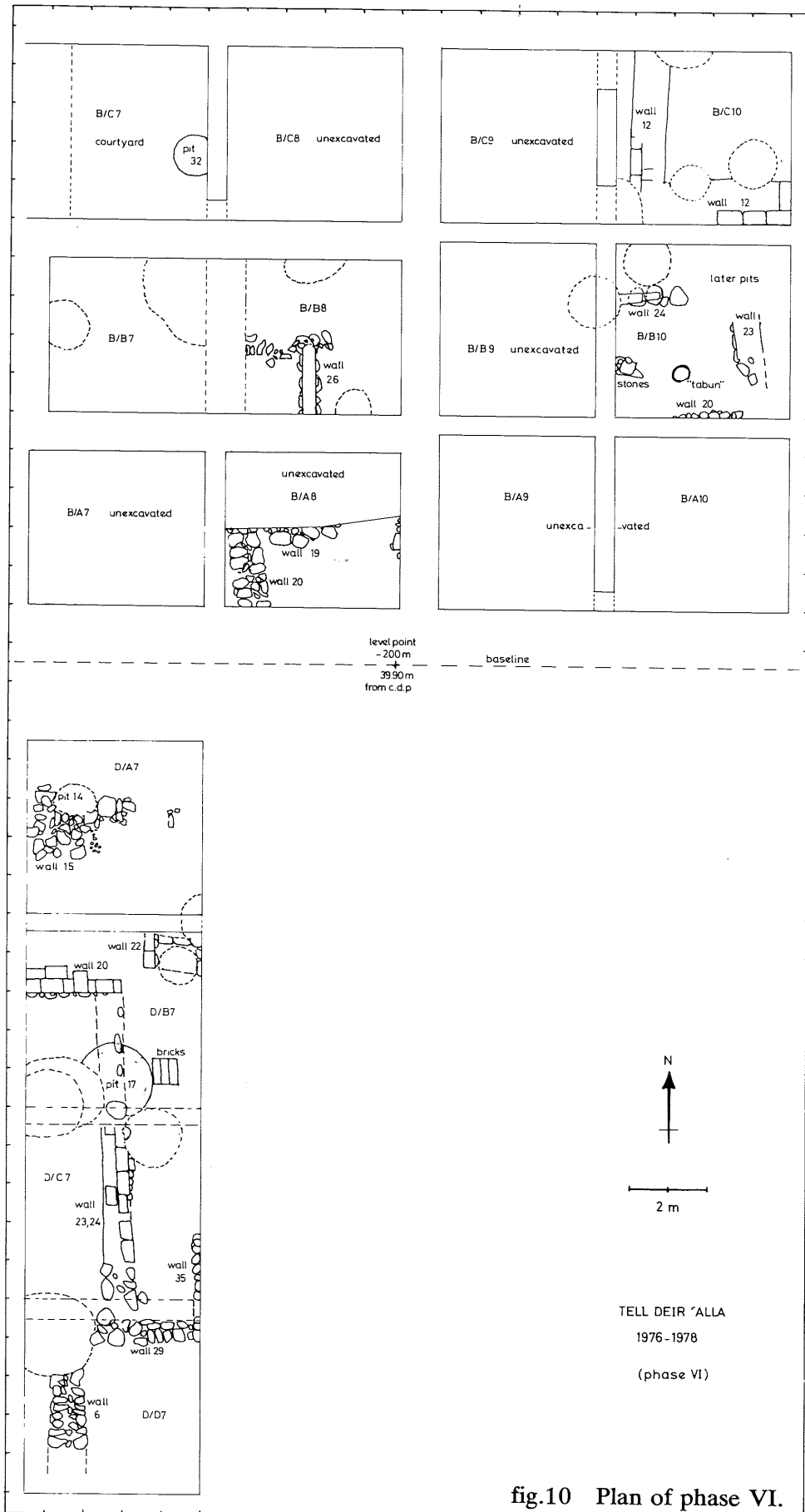


fig.10 Plan of phase VI.



no walls have appeared associated with this phase.

#### PHASE V

Phase V is a building phase (see plan drawing, fig. 9.). However the buildings of it seem to have been concentrated rather on the N part than the S and SE part of the top of the tell. Outside the buildings many clock-shaped silo pits were found. Most of them still had at their bottom a layer of white-pinkish or brown decayed plant matter of sometimes up to 10 cm thick. Samples of it were taken for identification. The walls were mainly built of mud-brick mostly on a foundation of stones, which was sometimes up to four rows high. Square bricks measuring 40x40cm. and half ones (40x20 cm) were used in the walls. Normally the courses consist of two rows of bricks with small and large sizes alternating in position with mortar in between. In some parts of the walls only the stone foundations were preserved, while in some others the bricks were placed on leveled surface only without stone foundation. The average width of the walls is c. 60 cm, but parts of these walls (B/A8.8) measure over 1 m. The large room with thicker walls has a central location and it may have had a special function within this architectural complex.

The western part of the excavated complex had a few tabuns. B/A5.14, B/B6. 23, 21, 27. With B/B6.21 and 27 (Pl.XXXIV,1) the walls of the tabuns were surrounded with an extra layer of clay with large potsherds, partly belonging to one jar which had a seal impression on its handle (Pl.XXX,3).

The parts of the buildings in squares B/C9-10 as indicated on the drawing need some remarks. Wall B/C10.2 and wall B/C 10.10, there was an intrusive row of square bricks of which the Pl. XXXI, 2 function is unclear. The bricks of wall B/C9.6 are drawn schematically. Wall B/C9.9 was built later than the *other wall within square B/C9, but it was taken as belonging to phase V.*

The silo pits indicated on plan fig 9 seem to be located close to each other in the open air, outside the major buildings. The content of these pits, including 4 pits in squares D/A7, D/B7, D/C8 (not shown on the plan), consists of a thick layer of dark brown and whitish decayed vegetable material. This suggests that the pits had been used for storage purposes. Samples of

the vegetable material was taken for analysis. The pits are similar in shape and size measuring over 1m deep and ca.1m in diam. at the top, while they become wider at the middle and bottom. Some of the pits were plastered at the bottom and sides with greenish clay similar to the mud bricks. This storage area had apparently been used by the whole community living in the settlements of phase V since no pits of the silo-type were found within the excavated parts of this phase.

The evidence from the pottery and other artifacts suggests a 6th-5th century dating.

#### PHASE VI

This seems to be a major building phase (see plan fig 10). It was represented in all squares which were excavated to the level of this phase. In some of the squares (B/B5-6, B/A5-7, B/A10, B/C9) only phase V was reached. normally the mudbrick walls were built on foundation of stones. In some areas (D/A7, B/A8), only the foundations were preserved. In square B/C10, the walls reach a height of over 1m.

This phase has a thick tumble of burnt mud. Bricks lying on floors with an ashy occupation layer. Parts of the tumble contained roof material including pieces of wooden beams, some of the floors had a number of objects on which the destruction layer was lying.

Finds of this phase include a few assyrian bottles (Pl.XXXIX,3) storage jars, hole-mouth jars, loomweights, basalt tools. A small weight (Pl.XXXIX,4) found in B/A8 has the number sign for 2-sheqel. A small seal was found in Sq. B/C7. The seal (Pl.XXX,1) shows standing human figures in connection with an animal and a tree. Some of these objects may date from the 7th-8th century B.C.

#### Squares D/I17, D/H17, D/H18

Three 5x5 m squares (I17, H17, H18), were opened at the southeast corner of the foot of the mound. There is a large modern bulldozer cut on the south west side of square H17, which exposed a few mud-brick walls of the early settlement of Tell Deir Alla. One of these walls was standing to a height of ca. 1.50m against which a thick layer of virgin soil had been dumped at the same period as the building of the wall. After clearing part of the area, it

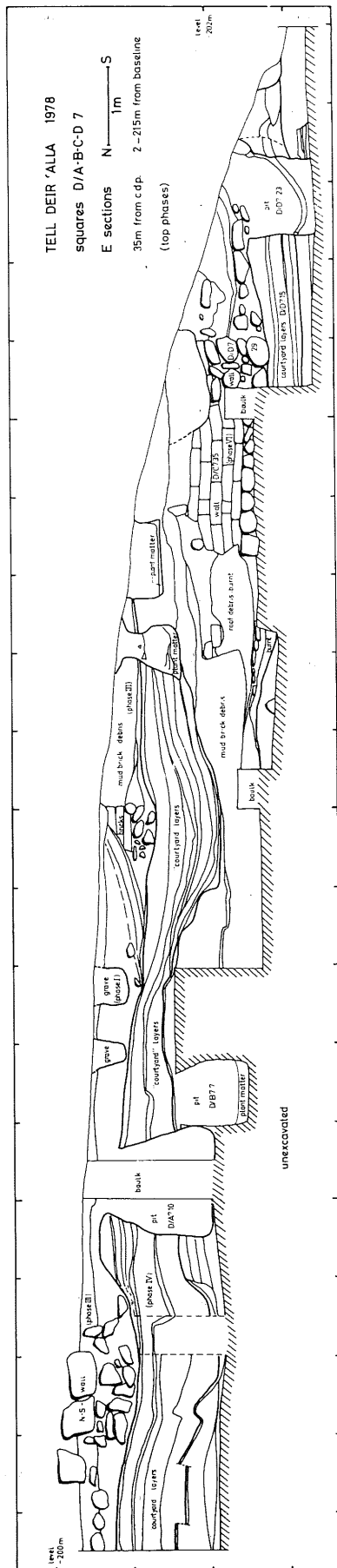


fig.11 Squares D/A-B-C-D7, E sections.

seemed that this wall belonged to a defensive building of the earliest phase which is well represented in the three squares.

The latest deposits to be excavated in this area are a number of Islamic burials of a large grave yard cut through early deposits which started to appear as soon as the thin layer of topsoil was removed.

Four other successive phases including an intermediate phase were differentiated in the area excavated (fig. 13). The upper three phases are well represented in the north section of this square (see fig 13).

The latest (PHASE I) is identified in the north-west corner of sq. HI7 through two walls D/H17. 2, 8, a foundation stone pavement D/H17.16, a series of floors D/H17.15 (Pl.XL,1), and a destruction deposit (Loc.15A). Both walls 2 and 8 were built of one row of large mud-bricks measuring 55x40x11 cm. with a thin layer of mortar between the bricks. Six courses of each wall were preserved. Wall D/H17.2 comes from the north section and meets D/H17.8 at a 90 corner in the SE. The walls were built on a foundation of hard-packed dark brown mud-like soil mixed with lime grits D/H17.17 on top of which a stone pavement D/H17.17. Thin dark grey layers D/H17.15 between the walls, might have served as floors.

The small amount of pottery found in these loci has been provisionally assigned to the MB/LB period. More precise dating awaits further excavation.

#### Intermediate PHASE II:

This phase falls between phase I and III and is represented by a large deep pit D/H17.20 in the west part of the square. The pit was cut into the earlier deposits of phase III and IV.

Its maximum depth in the north west side is 1.20m and ca. 60cm in the south west corner. It was filled with brick fragments, ash layers, lime grits and charcoal. Some of its content seems to be wash fill. This pit is possibly related to a settlement outside this square.

#### PHASE III:

There is a mud-brick wall D/H17.7 and a heavily burnt destruction layer of mud bricks

and charcoal. Both the wall and the destruction layer were cut by the large pit of phases II of wall 7, only one course of bricks was preserved and it consisted of two brick rows. Each brick measures 56x40x10cm. The wall comes from the north section, where it is disturbed by a small modern pit and extends ca.1.80m. towards SW where it was stopped by the large pit. Under wall 7 are two layers of yellowish-red and dark-gray color which were considered as leveling and wash layers. Some of the pottery sherds from these loci may provisionally be dated to the MB/LB period, though further study is still to be made.

Phase IV:

This is the earliest and the major phase excavated in this area (fig. 12, Pl. XL, XLI). It is represented in the three squares excavated by several architectural features of a defensive character. During the two seasons, excavation revealed part of a building which has 1m thick mud-brick walls, some of which were standing up to a height of 2-2.5m. The walls were built in two rows of brick (60x40x10 cm) on a stone foundation. The building consists of almost rectangular rooms producing a symmetrical shape. The floors were reached in all squares.

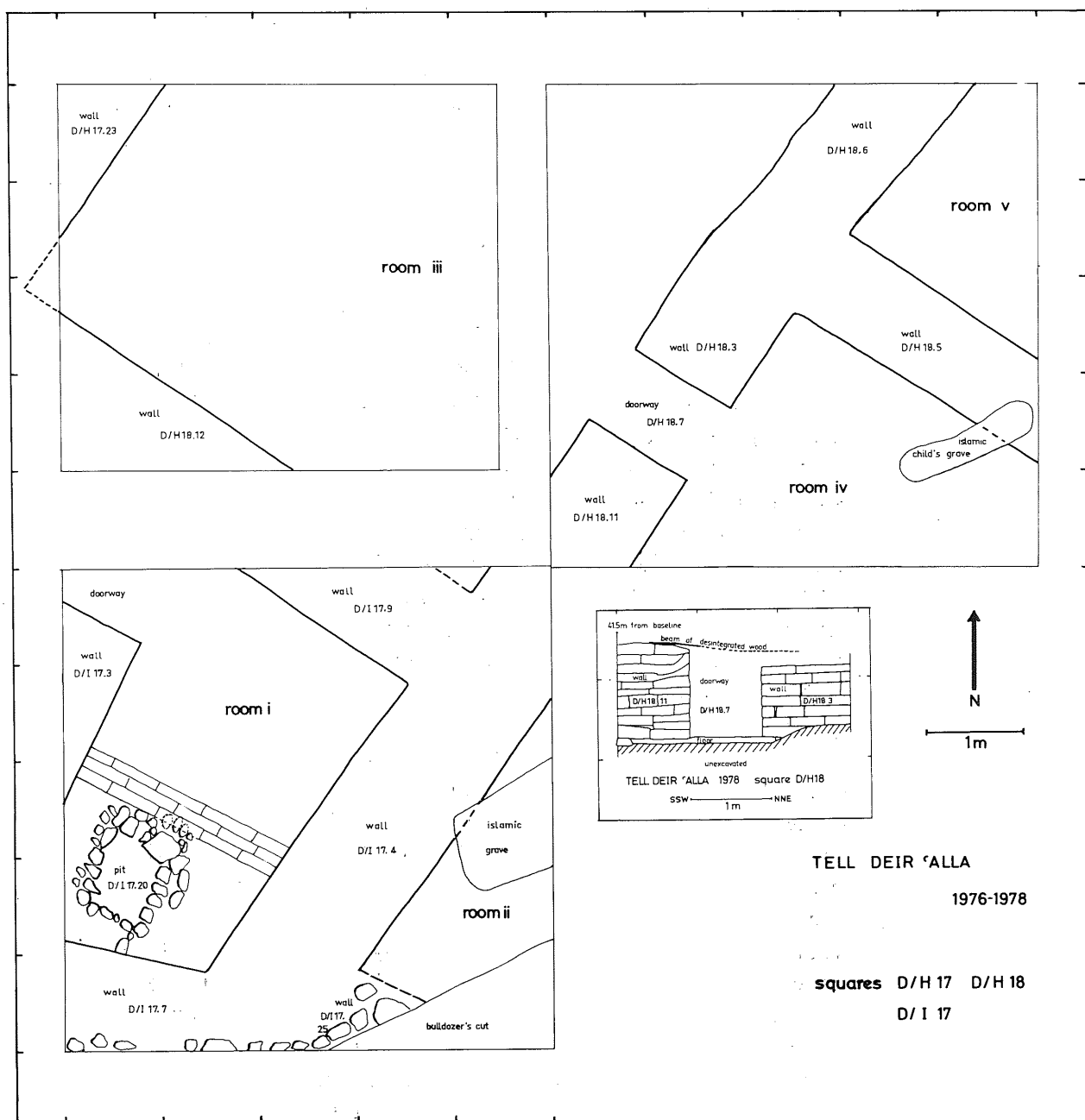


fig.12 Plan of Middle bronze structure (phase IV).

They were made of hard packed dark grey soil mixed with pebbles and small stones. A thin ashy layer mixed with charcoal was covering the floor. Though little pottery was found, most of the sherds and animal bones come from above the floor (Pl. XL11). The small amount of pottery may indicate that these rooms were not of domestic use.

Within the rooms there were thick deposits of a rather homogeneous brick fall which reached in the north and west sides a height of ca. 2.5m. The way the bricks were lying shows that major parts of walls at the edge of the tell to the south and west seem to have suffered from the destruction more than those on the north and west sides.

During the 1976-78 seasons, four rooms of this phase were partially excavated (see top plan). Room I to the south is roughly rectangular; connected with it are walls D/I 17.3, 4, 7, 9, which enclosed a few other deposits to be mentioned briefly.

Wall D/I 17.3 measures ca. 3.5m and it is interrupted at its northern side by a door opening which is ca. 1m high and the width must be ca. 1m, though a small part of it is still in the north balk of sq. I 17. This opening reached the floor. A thin wooden beam, ca. 2m. long, served as a lintel on top of which several brick courses were built. This door-opening is similar to that found in Sq. H 18 (D/H 18.7). The upper loci D/I 17.1, 5, 10, 11 within this room were a mixture of fallen brick (complete and broken) from the walls mentioned above. Among the bricks were thick burnt grey patches mixed with carbonised pieces of wooden beams which probably fell down from the roof when the building was destroyed.

The floor of this room D/I 17.12 was made of hard packed mud and pebbles laid on virgin (?) dark red soil. Between wall D/I 17.3 and wall D/I 17.4. there is a bench which starts in the NW, three rows of mud-bricks rising ca. 15cm above the actual floor level dividing it into two parts. The south part is smaller and includes in the middle a rounded pit lined with stones (pl. XLI, 2). It measures from the inside 70-90 cm; its depth is 1.5 m. Two bronze tools (fig. 14) were found on the floor of the pit\*. The pit was

filled with dark brown loose soil. On top of the floor of the room in the north part a number of MB sherds were found.

Within Sq. D/I 17 a small part of another room II to the east of room I was uncovered. The south east part of it was completely disturbed by the modern bulldozer cut. Wall 4 divides the two rooms. A small part, including one course of mud-bricks on stone foundation, of the south D/I 17.25 in the south west corner was preserved. This wall was built almost on the same line as wall 7 which is most probably the extension of an exterior wall of the settlement. A floor, covered with pieces of wooden beams and other roof destruction material, was uncovered.

Room III seems to be a very large rectangular one; it is ca. 5.5m wide and over 6m of its length along walls D/H 18.3, 11, was excavated. Walls D/H 17.12, 23, and walls D/H 18, 11, 3, 6 are connected with this room. Wall D/H 17 was partly cut from the top by the pit D/H 17.20 and was preserved to a height of ca. 1.5m, while walls D/H 18.11, 3, were preserved to a height of 1.25m. This room was accessible from room IV through a door way D/H 18.7 (pl. XLI:1) between wall D/H 18.11 and wall D/H 18.3. The height of the door way is ca. 1.15m, while the width is ca. 90cm. There was a wooden beam covering the whole of the top of it, extending ca. 50 cm beyond both edges, as that of the doorway in room I. Two courses of bricks were still preserved on top of the wooden beam, which was broken and sloping down from west to east and from south to north. This and the way upper bricks were lying indicated a kind of shifting in both walls D/H 18.11, 3. The doorway was filled with brick material mixed with a few fragmentary lines of plaster but no real bricks could be identified. 1.75m along the north section of Sq. H 17 and the part of the room within Sq. H 18 were excavated to the floor level. There was no clear evidence that this room had been roofed. Only a thin layer (5-30cm) of relatively soft dirt was identified above the occupation layer covering all parts of the floor excavated; this layer becomes thicker along the walls. The small amount of pottery from this area (Pl. XLII) mostly found on top of the floor together with

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\* Observation made by Helga Weippert, concerning the parallels to these bronze tools or weapons, as they were found at Megiddo and Byblos within MB II context, are much appreciated.

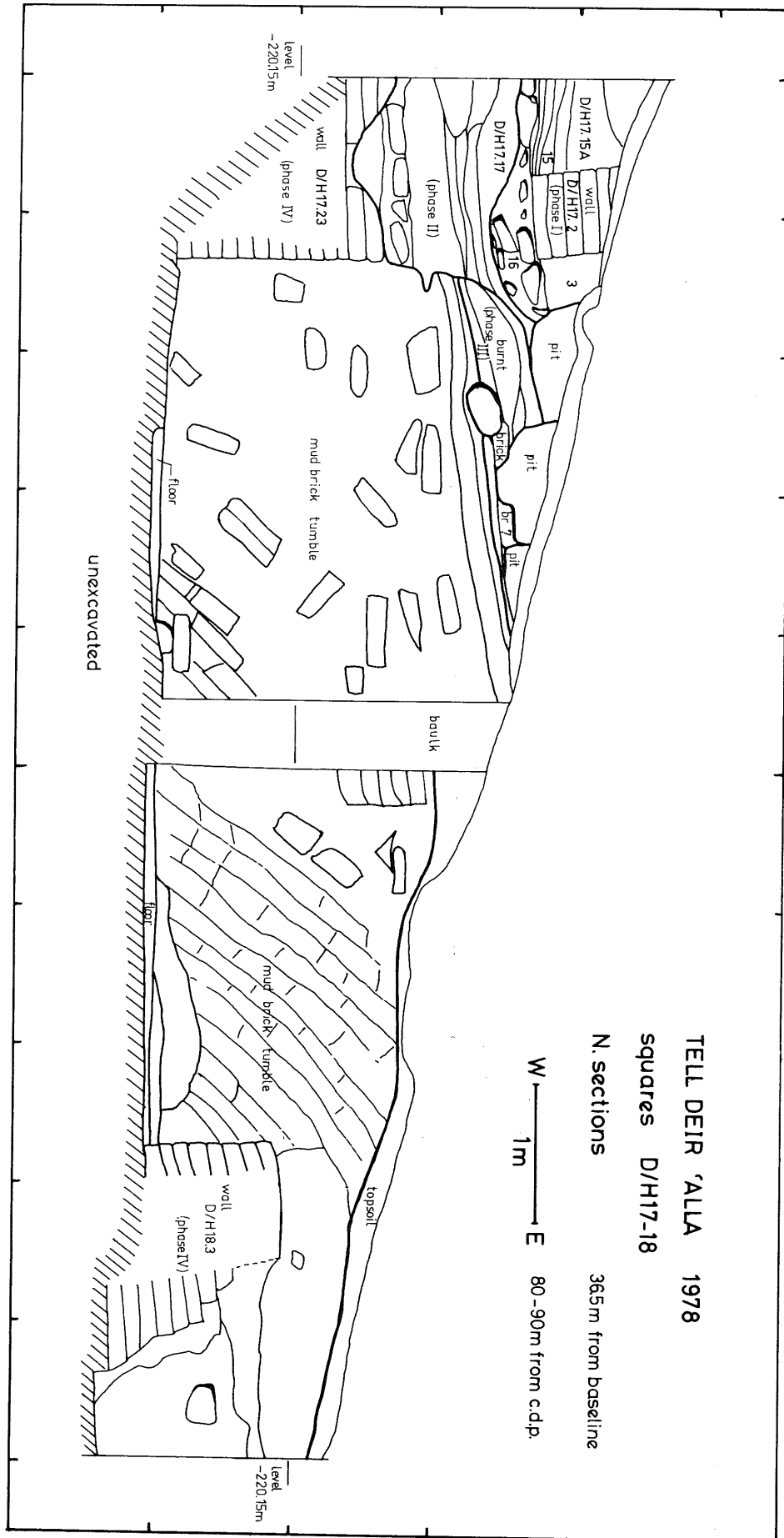


fig.13 Squares B/H17-18, N sections.

ashy patches and pieces of charcoal. The fill inside the room consisted of brick fall over 2m. high, mainly from the east walls as is clearly shown, especially in the north section (see fig.13).

This large room seems to have served as an open courtyard among the rooms close to the fortification, probably of the earliest settlement of the site.

Rooms IV and V are located to the east of room III within Sq. H18, they are divided by wall D/H18.5 which links up with walls D/H18.3,6. Wall D/H18.5 is interrupted by a burial of a child from the Islamic period. Other walls belonging to these rooms may lie beyond the present excavation area. Access between room III and IV is gained through a doorway D/H18.7 (see above). The south eastern corner of the square was partially disturbed by the large bulldozer cut, mentioned above, which slopes down steeply towards the east. The fill deposit up to the top of the walls belonging to this room differs from those of the other rooms discussed above. It consists of dumped virgin soil mixed with a few fallen bricks. Apparently this occurred when the east walls collapsed together with the supporting dump. The floors of rooms IV and V, as so far excavated are very similar to those of room I and II. On the top of the floor of room IV typical sherds of MB - II period, including incised examples of black highly burnished pottery and a flat-based hand-made tray with low walls, were found.

The floor in room V seems to be ca.35cm lower than that in room III. Wall D/H18.6 connected with this room becomes thicker (over 1.50m), at the bottom. A flat wooden beam was found against this wall extending from the north section until it reaches wall 5. The situation in this part could not be further clarified during this last season.

Objects with script found in 1978\*

1. Scaraboid seal (see Pl-XXX:2) found on the surface at the top of the tell (reg, nr. 2550). The old aramaic script suggests as date the 8th c. B.C. In between the two lines of writing there is a row of two birds

\* Prof.J.Hoftijzer, University of Leiden, is in charge of the publication of this text material. The aim is to publish all the inscribed objects from this season together.

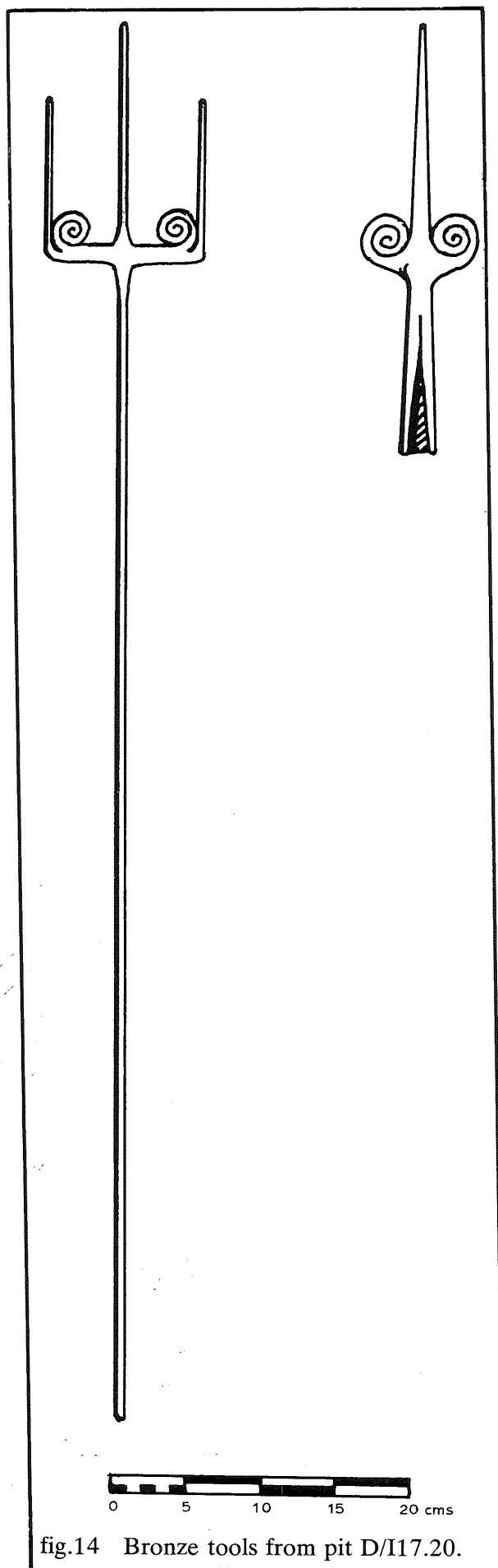


fig.14 Bronze tools from pit D/I17.20.

- and a not yet satisfactorily identified figure.
2. Two sherds of a thick walled jar fitting together (reg. nr. 2555) with four letters in old aramaic script. The sherds come from B/B9.5 (end of phase V, beginning of IV).
  3. A lamp with 8 lightly incised signs at the outside of the rim (parts missing) from B/B6.8 (Phase III), reg.nr.2598. The script is still obscure.
  4. A jar sherd with probably six signs, written in the soft clay, from B/C7.20 /Phase VI), reg.nr. 2599. The script is still obscure.
  4. A jar sherd with probably six signs, written in the soft clay, from B/C 7.20 (Phase VI), reg. 2599. The script is still obscure.
  5. A complete ostrakon (see Pl.XXIX,2), reg.nr. 2600, consisting of four sherds which were found at some distance from one another in B/B5.9 (probably lower part of phase IV). Parts of the six lines in aramaic script written in ink, are still very clear. The writing suggests a date in the 5th. c. B.C.
  6. A part of an ostrakon (jar sherd) coming from B/A8.9 (Phase III, or end of IV) with two lines of small writing in ink. The script, of which only a few letters are well preserved, appears to be the same as that used on ostrakon 2600.

**NOTE ON A NEWLY FOUND TEXT  
FRAGMENT ON A BOWL FROM  
DEIR 'ALLA**

by J. Hoftijzer

The bowl in question and the script of the text are described by G. van der Kooij on p.... It is highly probable that a part of the text is lost.

This conclusion is based on the following considerations. On the part of the bowl preserved for us, one can discern five consonantal signs. The signs 1-4 can be read with certainty; they are *l š' h*. The fifth sign offers more difficulties: it can be either *y* or *z* (or eventually a *l*). Between the first and the second consonantal sign there is quite a distance and it seems excluded that once there stood any sign, except perhaps a word divider. This distance suggests that the *l* is the last sign of one word and that the *š'* is the first sign of the next one, to which also the signs 3-5 belong. Unfortunately it cannot be said with any certainty whether the fifth sign was the last one of the second word. Self evidently only a tentative interpretation is possible for these few signs.

The text is found in a layer which is narrowly related to the one in which the Deir 'Alla plaster texts are found, be it that it must be dated

somewhat earlier. This fact makes it probable that it will be written in the same type of language as the plaster texts, although one cannot be absolutely certain. If indeed the text is written in some type of Aramaic it is highly improbable that the *š'* represents the well known "relative pronoun" *šē'*<sup>1</sup>. Therefore it seems probable that the signs 2-5 (partly) represent either a nominal form or a name (a verbal form seems out of the question). Because I cannot find a reasonable interpretation of them as (part of a) nominal form, I suggest that we have to do here with a name, probably a personal name. In that case the *š'*- can be the theophoric element discussed in length in recent years<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately the difficulties with the fifth sign make a further interpretation still more uncertain. In my opinion there are two possible interpretations. If we interpret the last sign as *y*, one could have to do here with a form of the root *hyy* (e.g. *hay-living*)<sup>3</sup>. If we interpret the last sign as *z*, we probably have to do with a form of the root *hzy*, the more so because we also find an Akkadian parallel<sup>4</sup>.

Of the word of which the first sign was the end, nothing can be said with certainty. One can only exclude the possibility that the sign standing before the *l* had a shaft right to left<sup>5</sup>. I do not dare to decide whether one has to do here with the end of a nominal or verbal form. One could make the suggestion that once there stood here a form of the root *p<sup>6</sup>l*, but all this must remain conjectural<sup>6</sup>.

The suggestions made here are based on the probability that we have to do here with an Aramaic text. If this would not be true after all, the *š* could be the "relative pronoun" and the eventual *y* could be a *mater lectionis*. (In that case I would suggest for signs the 3-5 an interpretation as first element of a personal name).

For the time being the best interpretation seems to be either...*l* Shi' - *ḥāzā* or Shi' - *ḥay*.

Leiden May 1977

#### Notes

1. Originally one presupposed that there were two instances of *šē* in Aramaic texts, namely *KAI* 225:1, 226:1 (both texts from Nerab), see e.g. *DISO sub voce š.*; but St. Kaufman (Si'gabbar, priest of Sahr in Nerab, *JAOS* xc (1970), pp. 270-1 has convincingly shown this to be untrue; see also J. Teixidor, *Bulletin d'epigraphie semitique* 1971, *Syria* xlvii (1971), pp. 453-485 on p.461, and J.C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic inscriptions, Volume 2, Aramaic inscriptions including inscriptions in the dialect of Zinjirli*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 96,97f.

2. See the article of Kaufman quoted in the preceding note. See also e.g. K. Deller, *Neusyrisches aus Sultantepe*, *Or.* xxxiv (1965), pp. 457-477 on pp. 474f.; F.M. Fales, *West semitic names from the Governor' palace*, *Annali della facolta di lingue e letteratura straniera di ca' foscari* (Serie orientale 5) XIII, 3 (1974) pp. 179-188 on p. 186. E. Lipinski, *Studies in Aramaic inscriptions and onomastics* (*Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 1), Leuven, 1975, pp. 63f. (But see also the remarks of R. Zadock in

his review, *BiOr* xxxiii (1976), pp. 227-231 on p. 227). I wish to thank my colleague M. Stol who on this and other points helped with references to literature on Akkadian subjects.

3. One could also think of the possibility that one had to do here with a name like Shi' - aḥi, but names of this type are extremely rare to say the least, see on this point also J.J.Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (=Mitteilungen der vorderasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft 44), Leipzig, 1939, p.301, n.1. One could also think of a name of an Akkadian type, consisting of a) theophoric element - b) nominal element: 'aḥ - c) verbal element. In that case the *y* has to be the first sign of the third element, because in the Aramaic texts from Deir 'Alla *mater lectionis* do not occur within the word, see the author's remarks in J. Hoftijzer and G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla* (-*Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui* 19), Leiden, 1976, pp.284f. if we have to do with a name of Akkadian origin the *y* as first consonant of the third element would offer difficulties. If we have to do with the theophoric element Shi' - and an element from the root *ḥyy*, this last element also could be a verbal form.

4. See the name *Si-e-ḥa-za-a* (probably 7th century B.C.) in K.L.Tallqvist, *Assyrian personal names* (*Acta societatis scientiarum fennicae*, Tom.xliii, n°1), Helsingfors, 1914,p.194.

5. So a *k,m,n,p* and *t* are excluded and it is impossible to read a word like *spl*, meaning *bowl*, which is attested for Aramaic and Hebrew (and also for other semitic languages).

6. If this text is written in Aramaic, it seems less probable that we would have to do with a verbal form of this root, cf. the author, *op. cit.*, p.192, n.19. However, one cannot be absolutely certain, because especially in Deir 'Alla there are quite a lot of instances which show either grammatical or lexicographical features uncommon for Aramaic languages. On this point see the author, *op. cit.*, pp.288f., n.14 and elsewhere

