

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

by

Udo F. Ch. Worschech and Friedbert Ninow

The third archaeological campaign at el-Balu' was carried out from July 7 to August 5, 1991. The excavation was funded by the Unions of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Germany and sponsored by the Theological Seminary Marienhoehe, Darmstadt (Germany). The campaign of four weeks was directed by Udo Worschech with the assistance of Ursula Worschech, F. Ninow, and U. Rosenthal, who served as square supervisors.<sup>1</sup>

The main objective of the campaign was to continue excavations in the Assyro-Babylonian house complex (area CI), to start work at the defence wall (area CIII) at the plateau's northern edge, and to enlarge the excavated area west of the qaşr (area AI).

## Area AI - The House with Courtyard

Because the 1987 season had provided evidence of at least two architectural phases in square A8a/26, a further square (A8d/26) was opened in this year's excavation. This square is located directly south of wall w1 with the blocked doorway. In both squares the Iron Age floor was reached (Fig. 1).

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

The small wall w2 about 0.30 m wide, which extended from the east balk towards

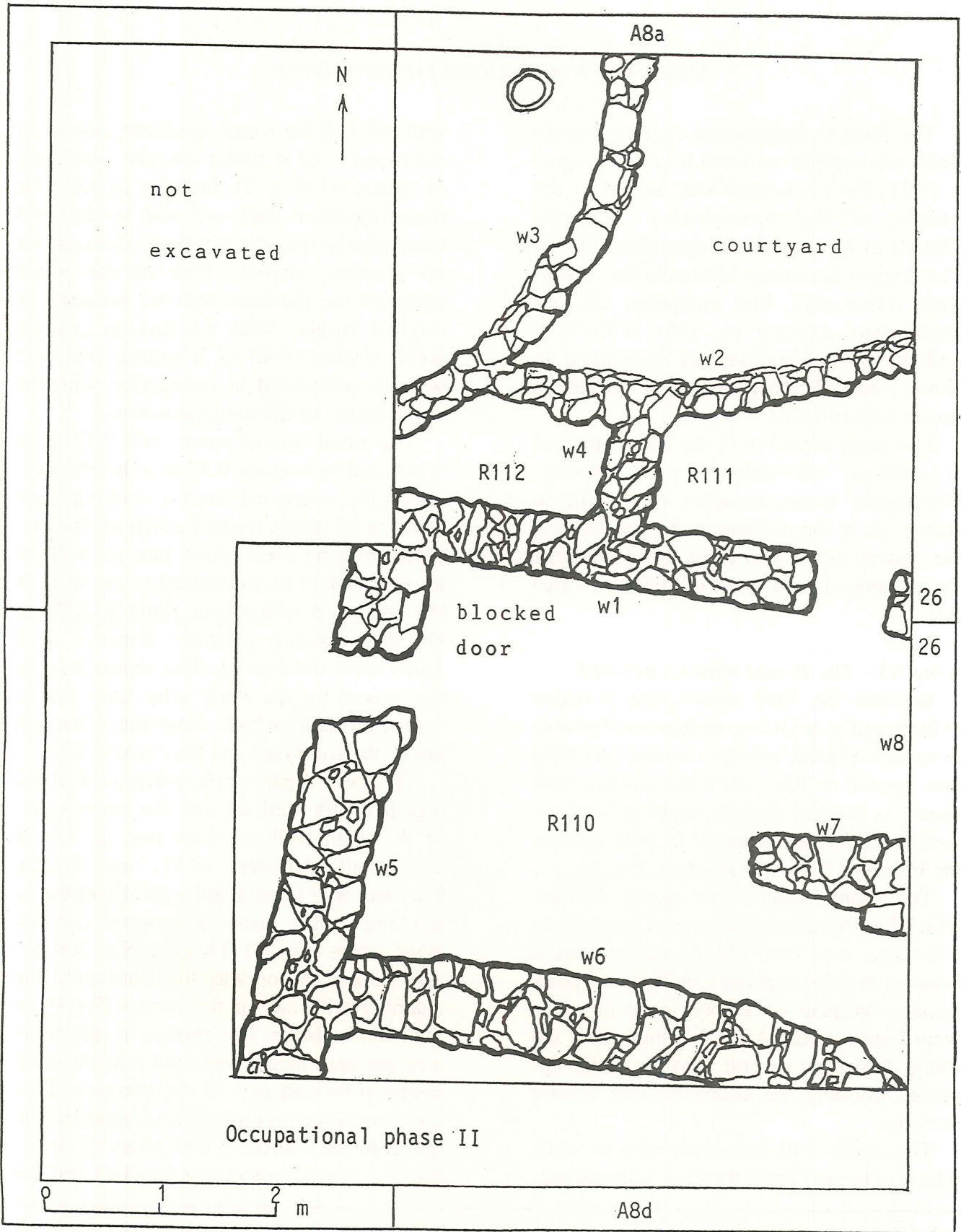
wall w4 and the round structure, continues westward until it meets another small line of stones w3 (Fig. 2). In order to build the round structure wall, w2 was leveled and incorporated into the structure, although for no obvious purpose. East of the round structure the partition wall w2 retained its original height. Wall w4 had an original width of about 0.45 m. It appears that wall w4 was reinforced in connection with the construction of the round structure.

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

The eastern part of the partition wall w2 together with wall w4 and the eastern part of the main wall w1 form one (R111) of two small chambers (R111 and R112). Chamber R111 contained a great number of working stones, grinders, mortars, and flat stone tables (Fig. 3). This chamber had access through a doorway that connected the chamber with one of the rooms (R110) of the main building. The corners of this doorway are very nicely built and a huge basalt doorstep formed part of the entrance. This doorway is the second of two entrances that led from the courtyard into room R110 before the first doorway was blocked and the

1. In 1987 just one square was opened; it had no specific designation except the general area term AI; see Udo F. Ch. Worschech, 'Preliminary Report on the Second Campaign at the Ancient Site of el-

Balu' in 1987', *ADAJ* 13 (1989), pp. 111-121; cf. U. Worschech, 'Ergebnisse der Grabungen in el-Balu' 1987: Ein Vorbericht', *ZDPV* 106 (1991), pp. 86-113.

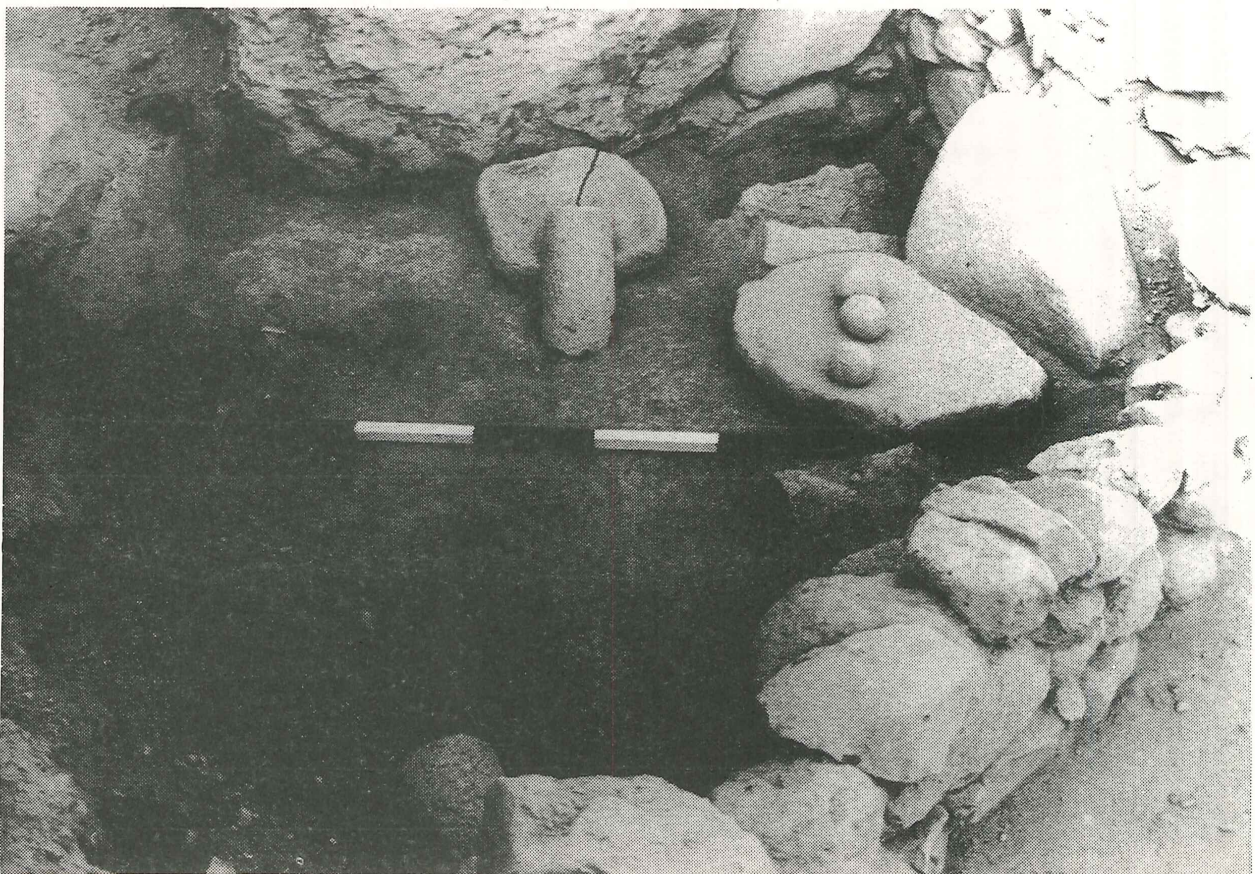


1. Area AI.

1:50



2. Courtyard in Area AI with walls w2, w3, and w4.



3. Working area (R111) with door into R110 at upper left.

courtyard modified.

The other small chamber R112, west of R111, yielded no special objects except for a small quantity of sherds. It was probably used for storage. Although this chamber did not have its own entrance, it was easily accessible from the cooking area over the line of stones w3.

In square A8d/26, room R110 was cleared until the Iron Age plaster floor was reached. At the western end of wall w1 another wall w5, about 0.76 m in width, extends to the south. Since the outer side of this corner is still hidden in the balk, one cannot say if wall w1 continues to the west or ends and forms a corner at this point. A doorway in wall w5 leads from room R110 to another room or courtyard. Wall w5 continues further south beyond the square, where it can be traced on the surface.

Just before wall w5 disappears into the balk, another wall w6 almost 0.80 m wide extends from it to the east. As wall w6 extends to the east it curves and turns to the southeast. Before it leaves the square, it forms – together with the remains of wall w7, which had an original width of about 0.70 m – a relatively wide entrance into room R110 (Fig. 4). It appears that in the process of enlarging room R110 wall w7 was torn down – except the remains that form the entrance – and wall w6 was constructed.

At the point where wall w6 extends from wall w5 a small doorway was blocked in wall w5. This doorway may have led into another room southwest of room R110. From wall w7 another wall w8 runs north to close room R110. The line of the inner face of wall w8 corresponds exactly with



4. Doorway (?) between w6 and remains of w7 with w8 adjoined to w7 in the balk.

the line of the eastern balk. Therefore, nothing can be said about its width. A nice stone table (0.40 m x 0.71 m) was on the plaster floor right against wall w1.

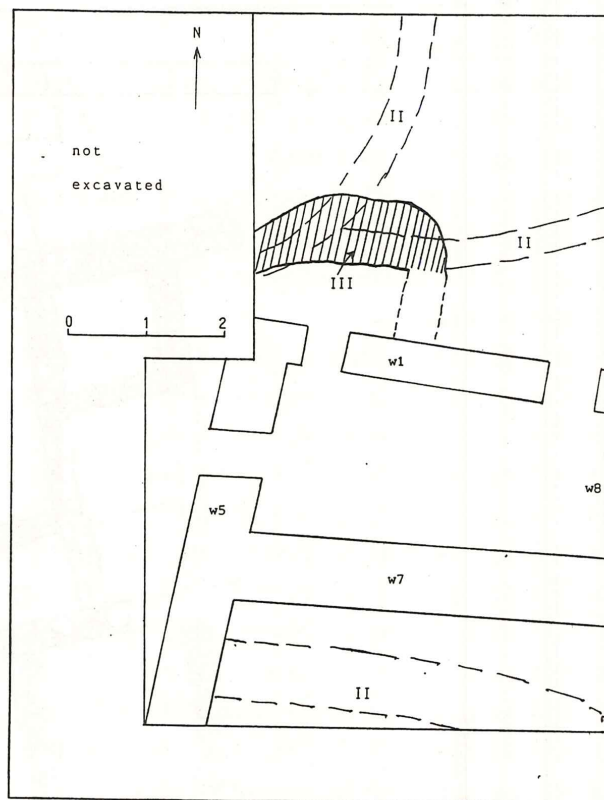
Based on the architectural remains three building phases can be identified. Phase I (Fig. 5) consisted of a building complex with at least two rooms. Each room could be entered by a doorway, the southern room at the western side of the building and the northern room at the western and southern sides. Due to the destruction of the architectural remains inside the building it could not be determined whether both rooms were connected by another interior doorway. North of that building the courtyard consisted of hard packed beaten earth.

In a second phase (phase II, Fig. 1), one of the northern doorways was blocked and the courtyard north of the building divided up by several smaller walls. In front of the northern wall w1 of room R110 two small chambers or areas were separated from the main courtyard by partition walls. Further to the north extended a cooking area with a *tabun* at a higher level than the courtyard. The yard may have housed animals like sheep and goats. Inside the building the northern room was enlarged. No remains of the first-phase separation wall w7 remained except for a small portion that was integrated into an eastern doorway. The western entrance of the southern phase room was blocked.

The round structure in front of the blocked northern doorway belongs to yet another phase (phase III, Fig. 5) that followed the alteration of the courtyard. So far nothing can be said about the purpose or functions of the round structure. Further excavation should shed more light on this installation.

### Area CIII - The Casemate Walls

During this season two squares were opened at the defence walls along the es-

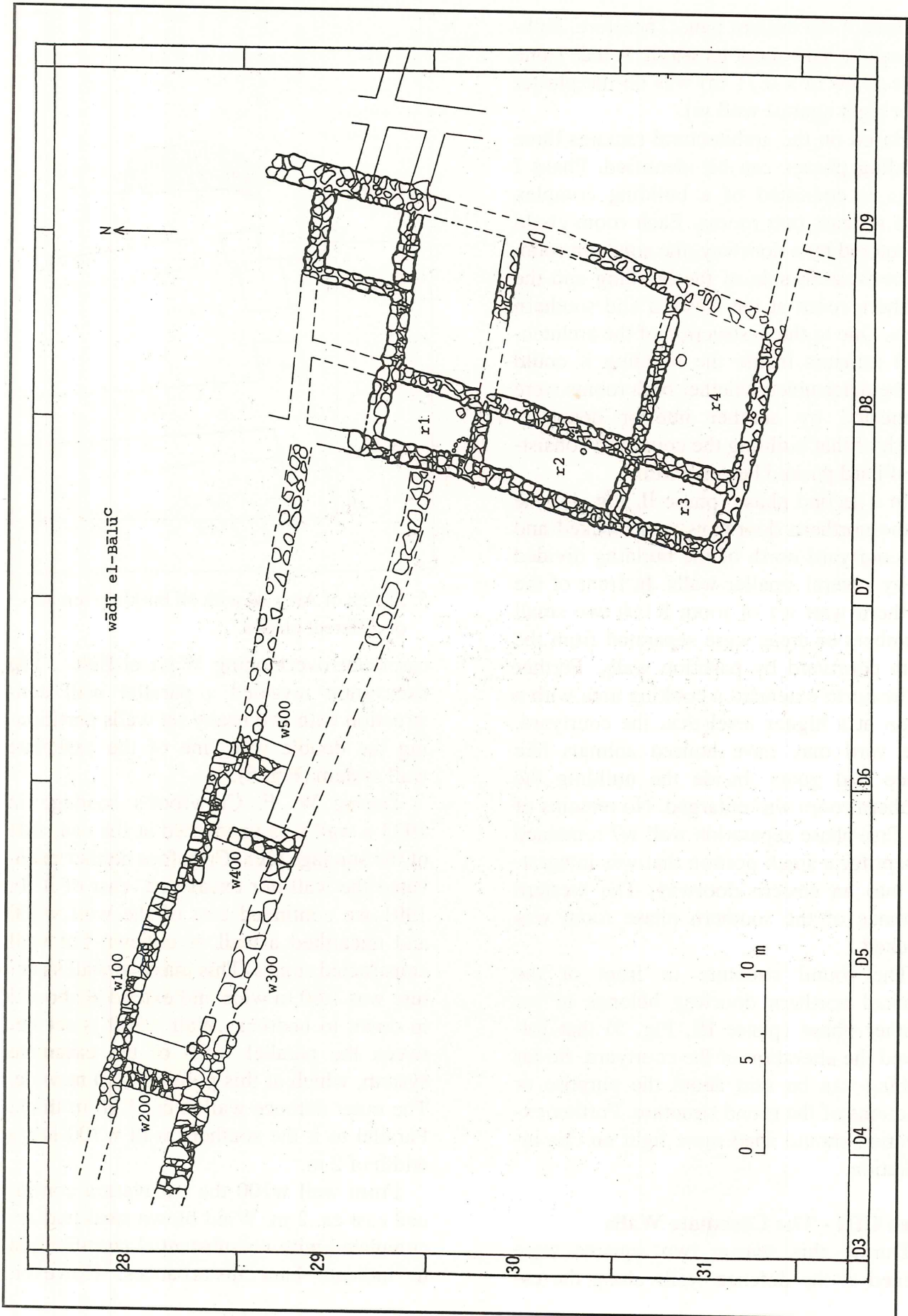


5. Sketch of Area AI with all building remains of different phases.

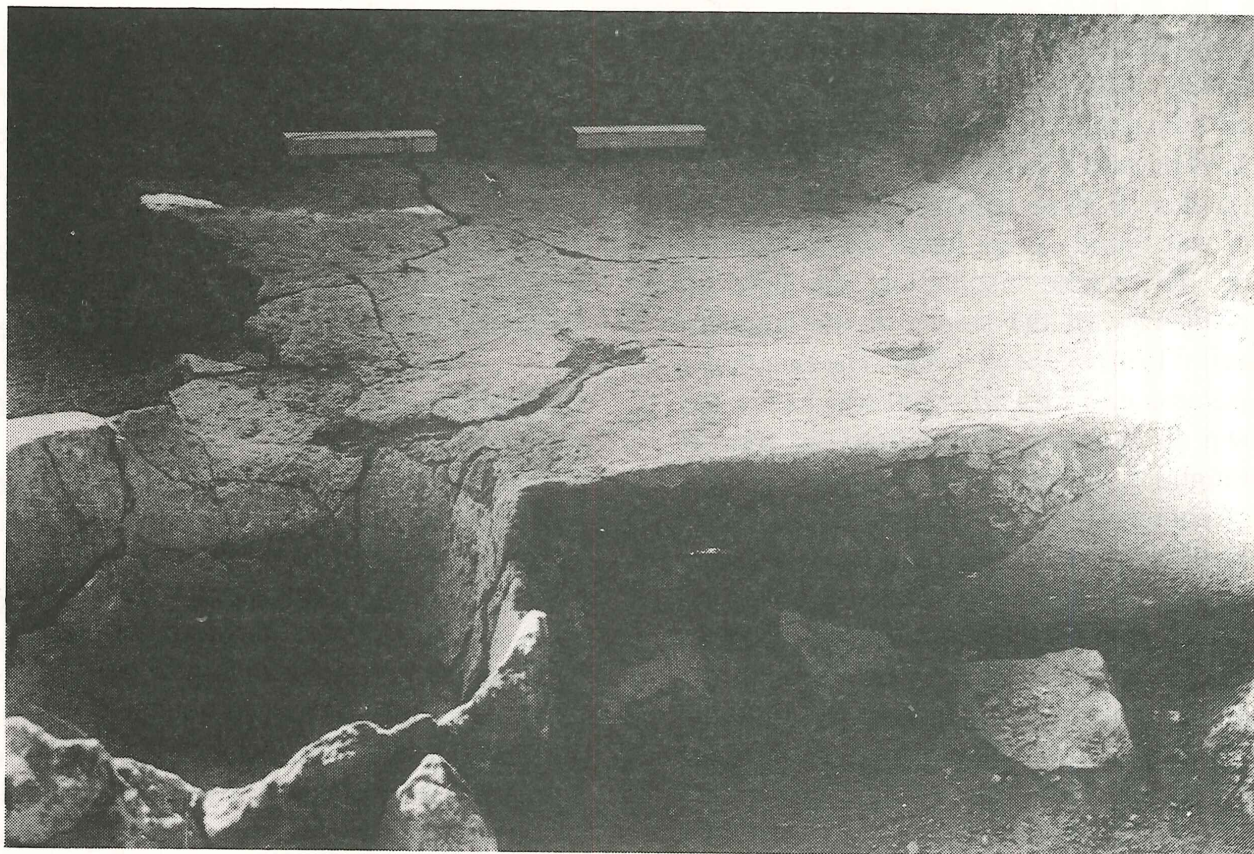
carpment overlooking Wadi el-Balu'. The excavation revealed a parallel wall construction with two heavy set walls partitioning the double wall line of the casemate wall system (Fig. 6).

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

From wall w100 the excavation continued east ca. 2 m. Wind blown sand had accumulated with no substantial stratification to indicate later disturbances. However,



6. Area CI and CIII with the house complex and the casemate wall.



7. Mamluk wine press.



8. Storage jar at east side of wall 500.

during the excavation of the southern wall w300, a "Mamluk" wine press was uncovered consisting of a treading area (ca. 1.50 x 1.30 m) and a basin (ca. 0.50 m in diameter and ca. 0.30 m deep; see Fig. 7). No pottery was found except for a broken Mamluk pipe. The whole installation was built on the top row of the stones of the southern parallel Iron Age wall w300. The two meter wide area east of wall w200 was excavated down to bedrock. The pottery is Iron II throughout, with no earlier sherds.

Another square was opened ca. 10 m east of wall w200. Here an abundance of sherds belonging to large heavy jars of various Iron II-rim types were found. The jars were entirely destroyed by the fallen walls with only one jar *in situ* (Fig. 8). A thick layer of black ashes was found on the floor ca. 2 m south of wall w100. The fire had also charred wall w500, which is another partition wall of the casemate system.

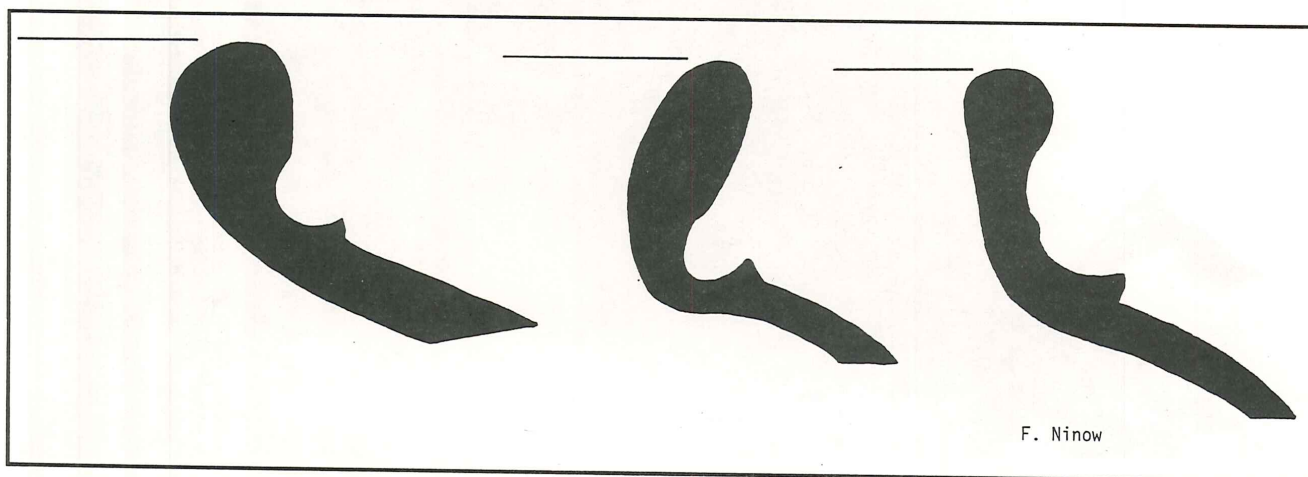
Among the rims of the various jar-types found in the storage area, three rims of the "collared-rim jar" type came to light (Fig. 9). This is important for two reasons. First, the discovery of this jar-type south of Wadi el-Mujib is remarkable, since up till now only the central and eastern highlands of Palestine were thought to be the "home" of this jar-type (as far east and south as Sahab). It is possible that these jars may have been imported to el-Balu'. Second, the

fact that these jars turned up in an Iron II context is also remarkable since the collared-rim jars were thought to have been manufactured during the early Iron I period. However, if the collared-rim jars of el-Balu' were locally made, it is likely that this jar-type continued to be produced in the Iron IIA/B period in Eastern Palestine.

#### Area CI - The Assyro-Babylonian House (Fig. 6)

Before continuing in room r3, the floor of room r2 (the "reception hall") was cut at the east wall. In an elliptically shaped crevice in the exposed bedrock a few disarticulated bones of a secondary burial were found. The only sherd found belongs to a Middle Bronze Age jar or krater as evidenced by the "half-moons" decorating the neck of the sherd. A lower human jaw with all teeth still in place (two heavily carious) was also found in this burial. There was no evidence of any disturbances of the grave when the Iron Age house was built. The floor was laid over the Middle Bronze Age burial with no knowledge of its existence.

Room r3 was cleared down to bedrock. As already observed in room r1 and room r2, the walls here were also set on a layer of plaster over the cut bedrock which served as "foundation wall". This room contained two large grinding stones, one broken, and one complete trough, several working



9. Profiles of the "collared-rim jars" from el-Balu'.



stones, and loom weights. The soil was removed inside the doorway leading from room r2 to room r3. Its two lintels were still *in situ*. In room r3 bedrock was reached ca. 1 m below the floor.

A small sondage in the eastern half of room r4 revealed a *ṭabun* (0.50 m in diameter), which was well preserved and located close to the entrance leading from the court into room r4. About 1 m below the lintel remains of a burial were found, however, with no grave deposits in it. It is likely that this was a bedouin burial at a time when the lintel formed a shelter above ground over the accumulated sand.

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

### Acknowledgements

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

U. F. Ch. Worschech  
Von-Ketteler-Straße 4  
6100 Darmstadt 13  
Germany

F. Ninow  
Heimgartenweg 14  
8900 Augsburg  
Germany

