

SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT THE BRONZE AGE CEMETERY OF KHIRBET UMM ZAYTUNA, WADI KUFRENJEH

by

Mohammad Waheeb, Gaetano Palumbo
and Mohammad Abu Abileh

Background

The cemetery of Khirbet Umm Zaytuna was found accidentally during some quarrying operations on the steep slope above the Kufrenjeh-Jordan Valley road, at Palestine grid coordinates 210.32 185.57 (map 3154.IV.SE), at an elevation of approximately 160 m above sea level. The site is listed in JADIS under number 2118.043.

The cemetery probably should be viewed in connection with the nearby site of Khirbet Umm Zaytuna, at P.G. 210.4 185.5 (JADIS 2118.020), but the surface pottery there belongs to the Iron Age I and II, Abbasid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods, according to Greene (1986: site 063), who visited the site as part of his Ajlun-Kufrenjeh survey, Mittmann (1970: 89, site 222), and our own observations. While it is still possible that earlier periods of occupation might be located at the site, it is also possible that a late third-early second millennium B.C. village could have existed in a separate location, not distant from the shaft-tomb cemetery belonging to these periods that will be discussed in this preliminary report.

A salvage excavation was conducted at the cemetery by the Department of Antiquities under the direction of Dr. Mohammad Waheeb, with the participation of Ajlun inspector Mohammad Abu Abileh and Ajlun office employees. four tombs were excavated, at the edge of the bulldozer cut that had already partly damaged them. The cemetery was used during the EB IV and MB periods, as evidenced by the material cultural remains found in association with the burials. In particular, tombs 1 and 3 are exclusively EB IV, tomb 4 exclusively MB, and tomb 2 has a mixed EB IV-MB deposit.

Description of the Tombs and Their Grave Goods

Tomb 1 (Fig. 1): The chamber is of irregular shape, cut in chalky bedrock, 2.2 m long by 2 m wide, and 1.6 m high. The shaft was located to the north of the chamber, but its shape and dimensions could not be determined, since it was bulldozed. The irregular outline of the chamber suggested little concern with architectural features. Two layers were found on the floor. Layer 1 was a gravel surface, brown to red in color mixed with small stones to a depth of 0.9 m. Layer 2 was a red smooth hard-packed soil containing broken bones, 60 cm deep. The bones were disarticulated and in bad condition due to water infiltration. No evidence was found of a bedding layer, but the floor of the chamber was quite even, and probably did not need further preparation. No evidence of chisel marks on the wall or roof of the chamber was observed.

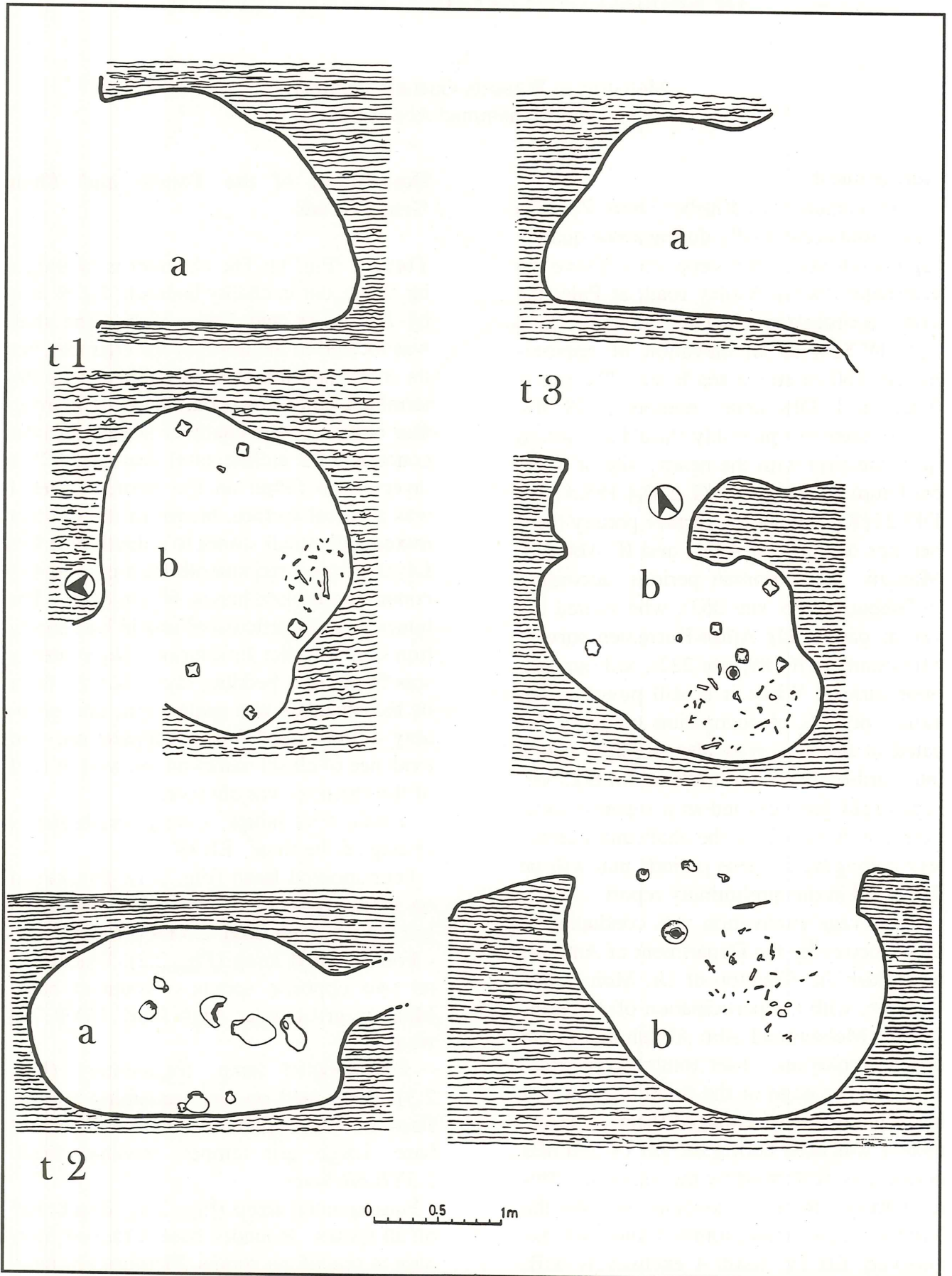
Finds: Five lamps, a small amphoriskos resting on the floor. EB IV.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 2:1): Blackened on three spouts. Rounded base. Medium grit temper, high fired. 2.5YR 6/6 ware.

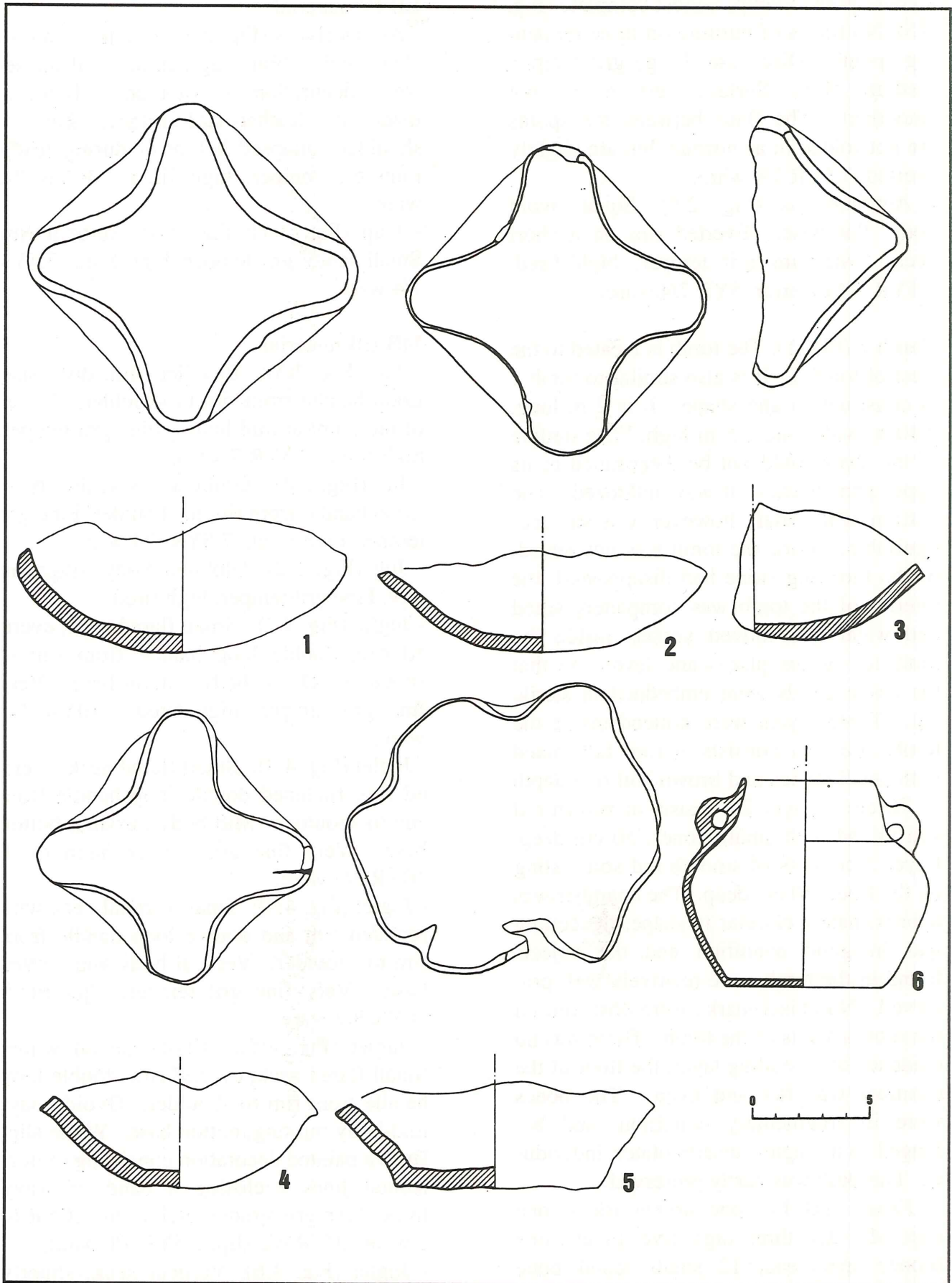
- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 2:2): Blackened on two opposite spouts. Rounded base. Medium grit temper, high fired. 10YR 7/4 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp, fragmentary (Fig. 2:3). Blackened on two remaining spouts. flaps between spouts Vertical. Rounded base. Large grit temper, medium fired. 2.5YR 6/6 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 2:4): Blackened on all spouts. Rounded base. Cracked from base to one of the spouts. Medium grit temper, high fired. 10YR 7/4 ware.



1. Tombs 1-3. a: section; b: plan.



2. Tomb 1: EB IV four-spouted lamps.

- Four-spouted lamp, almost complete (Fig. 2:5). No traces of burning on three remaining spouts. Disc base. Large grit temper, medium fired. Surface very rough, not smoothed. The flaps between the spouts are not folded in as normal, but are slightly everted. 7.5YR 7/4 ware.

- Amphoriskos (Fig. 2:6): Squat ovoid body, flat base. Everted rim on a short neck. Medium grit temper, high fired. 7.5YR 7/4 exterior, 5YR 7/4 ware.

Tomb 2 (Fig. 1): The tomb is located to the west of tomb 1. It is also similar to tomb 1 in construction and shape. It is 2 m long, 2.40 m wide, and 1.5 m high. The outline of the shaft could not be determined in its upper part, because it was bulldozed. The bottom of the shaft, however, was still recognisable. Since the tomb was not sealed, or the blocking stone had disappeared, the interior of the tomb was completely silted and water had moved vessels inside the tomb to various places and levels, so that the grave goods were embedded in sterile silt. Three layers were noticed inside the tomb. Layer 1 consists of roof fall mixed with small stones and brown soil to a depth of 70 cm. Layer 2 consists of brown-red soil mixed with small stones, 50 cm deep. Layer 3 consists of smooth red soil resting on the floor, 30 cm deep. The chamber was approximately circular in shape; the ceiling was in good condition and the objects found in the tomb were relatively well preserved. No chisel marks were observed on the roof or walls of the tomb. There was no evidence of a bedding layer, the floor of the chamber was flat and even. The bones were in fragmentary condition, and belonged to a single, disarticulated individual. The skull was partly preserved.

Finds: EB IV: one amphoriskos, one cup; MB IIB: three jugs, five juglets, one bronze spearhead, 12 small round bone beads, mixed in the silt deposit.

EB IV material:

- Amphoriskos (Fig. 3:1): Everted rim on a short neck. "Ear" lug handles and incised wavy decoration on shoulder. Incisions made on a leather-hard surface. Rim and shoulder collapsed before or during firing. Fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 7/2 ware.

- Cup (Fig. 4:1): Flat base, vertical rim. Small sandy grit temper, high fired. 7.5YR 7/4 ware.

MB IIB material:

- Jug (Fig. 3:3): Bevelled rim, disc base. Loop handle from rim to shoulder. Traces of red paint at mid-body. Fine grit temper, high fired. 7.5YR 7/4 ware.

- Jug (Fig. 3:4): Globular body, disc base. Loop handle from rim to shoulder. Fine grit temper, high fired. 7.5YR 7/4 ware.

- Jug (Fig. 3:2): Globular body, fragmentary. Fine grit temper, high fired.

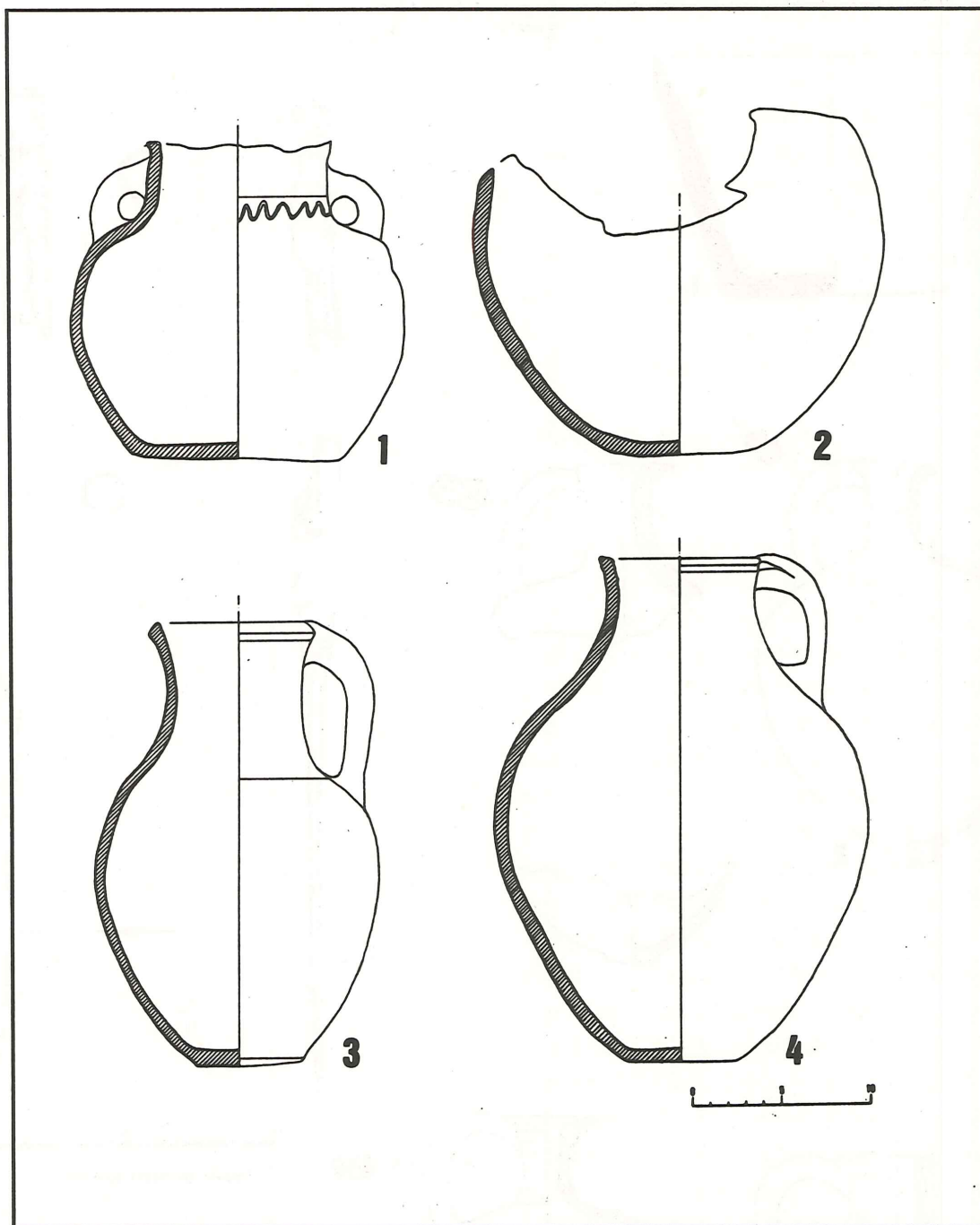
- Juglet (Fig. 4:2): Small flared neck, everted rim, double loop handle from rim to shoulder. Ovoid body, button base. Very fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 6/2 ware.

- Juglet (Fig. 4:3): Small flared neck, everted rim, flattened double loop handle from rim to shoulder. Mid-body missing, button base. Very fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 8/3 ware.

- Juglet (Fig. 4:4): Small vertical neck with rounded rim and double loop handle from rim to shoulder. Vertical body and curved base. Very fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 8/2 ware.

- Juglet (Fig. 4:5): Chocolate on white. Small flared neck, everted rim, double loop handle from rim to shoulder. Ovoid body, mid-body missing, button base. White slip. Brown painted decoration consisting of horizontal lines enclosing a band of wavy lines. Fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 6/1 ware, 10YR 8/2 slip, 2.5YR 4/6 paint.

- Juglet (Fig. 4:6): Vertical neck, slightly everted rim, double loop handle, carinated



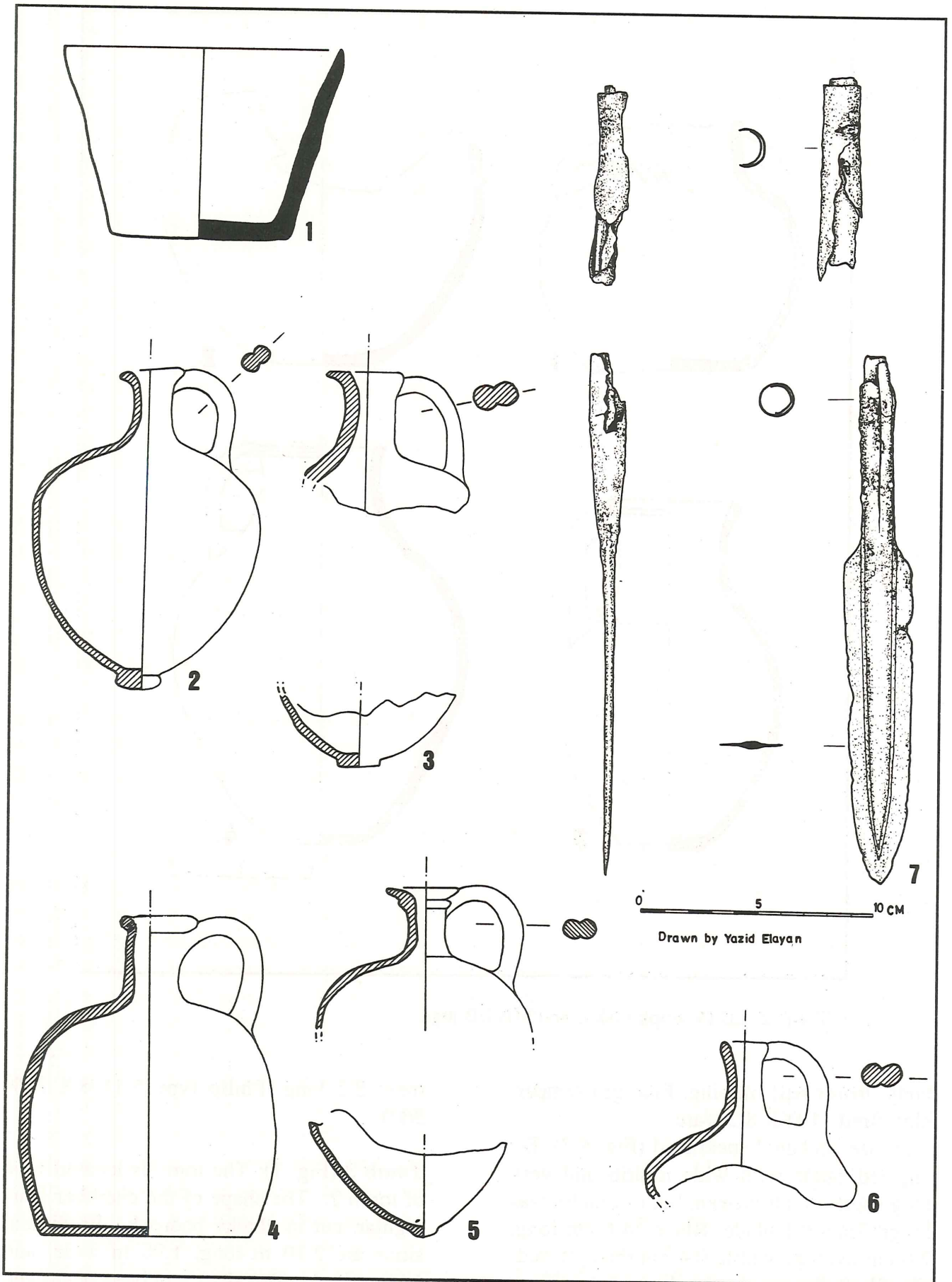
3. Tomb 2: EB IV amphoriskos and MB IIB jugs.

body, lower half missing. Fine grit temper, high fired. 10YR 8/2 ware.

- Bronze socketed spearhead (Fig. 4:7): Elongated blade with wide midrib and very long shaft. Shaft broken, but originally was longer than the blade. Blade 14.6 cm long, 2.6 cm average width, 0.4 cm thick at midrib. Shaft 8.4 cm long, plus another frag-

ment 8.2 long. Philip type 5 (1989: 359-360).

Tomb 3 (Fig. 1): The tomb is located west of tomb 2. The shape of the chamber is irregular, cut in chalky bedrock. Its dimensions are 2.10 m long, 1.90 m wide, and 1.80 m high. The shaft had been destroyed



4. Tomb 2: EB IV cup and MB IIB pottery and spearhead.

by bulldozing and could not be detected. The tomb and its content were affected by the buildup of silt deposits inside the chamber. Two layers were found in the chamber. Layer 1 is composed of brown rough soil mixed with small stones, 100 cm deep, Layer 2 is characterized by red smooth soil resting over a flat floor of *huwwar*.

Finds: six lamps scattered over the floor around a pile of disarticulated bones, one copper awl. EB IV.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:1): Blackened on all four spouts. Large inverted flaps between spouts. Disc base. Small grit temper, high fired. 5YR 6/4 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:2): No traces of burning on the four spouts. Large inverted flaps between spouts. Disc base, surface cracked. Small grit temper, high fired. 5YR 6/6 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:3): Fragmentary. Blackened on the two remaining spouts. Disc base. Large grit temper, medium fired. 10YR 7/3 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:4): Blackened on one spout only. Large inverted flaps between spouts. Disc base. Very small sandy temper, high fired. 10YR 7/3 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:5): Blackened on the three remaining spouts. Small flaps between spouts, slightly inverted. Disc base. Large grit temper, medium fired. 5YR 7/4 ware.

- Four-spouted lamp (Fig. 5:6): Blackened on the three remaining spouts. Small flaps between spouts, slightly inverted. Tool marks on lower part of body. Disc base. Small grit sandy temper, high fired. 7.5YR 7/3 ware.

- Copper awl (not shown.): Square section on top, round section remaining parts. 6.9 cm long, 0.2 cm diameter.

Tomb 4 (Fig. 6): This large tomb had an irregular oval shape. Like the other tombs it was cut in the soft chalky bedrock. Since it was difficult to trace the wall lines of this

tomb, the measurements of this tomb may not be fully accurate due to roof and wall collapse, piled in the center of the chamber. The measured dimensions are 4.60 m long, 5.30 m wide, and 2.60 m high. Excavations started near the entrance, but the shaft had disappeared during the bulldozing of the hill slope. The chamber floor was covered with a layer of marl roof fall, about 0.6 m near the entrance, and up to 1.2 m near the center of the chamber and the southern wall of the tomb. A fine sandy white gravel just above floor level may have served as a bedding. Because of continuous roof fall, work was discontinued in the tomb. Little bone fragments were found.

Finds: one "teapot", one jar, a piece of bronze (part of a belt?). MB IIB.

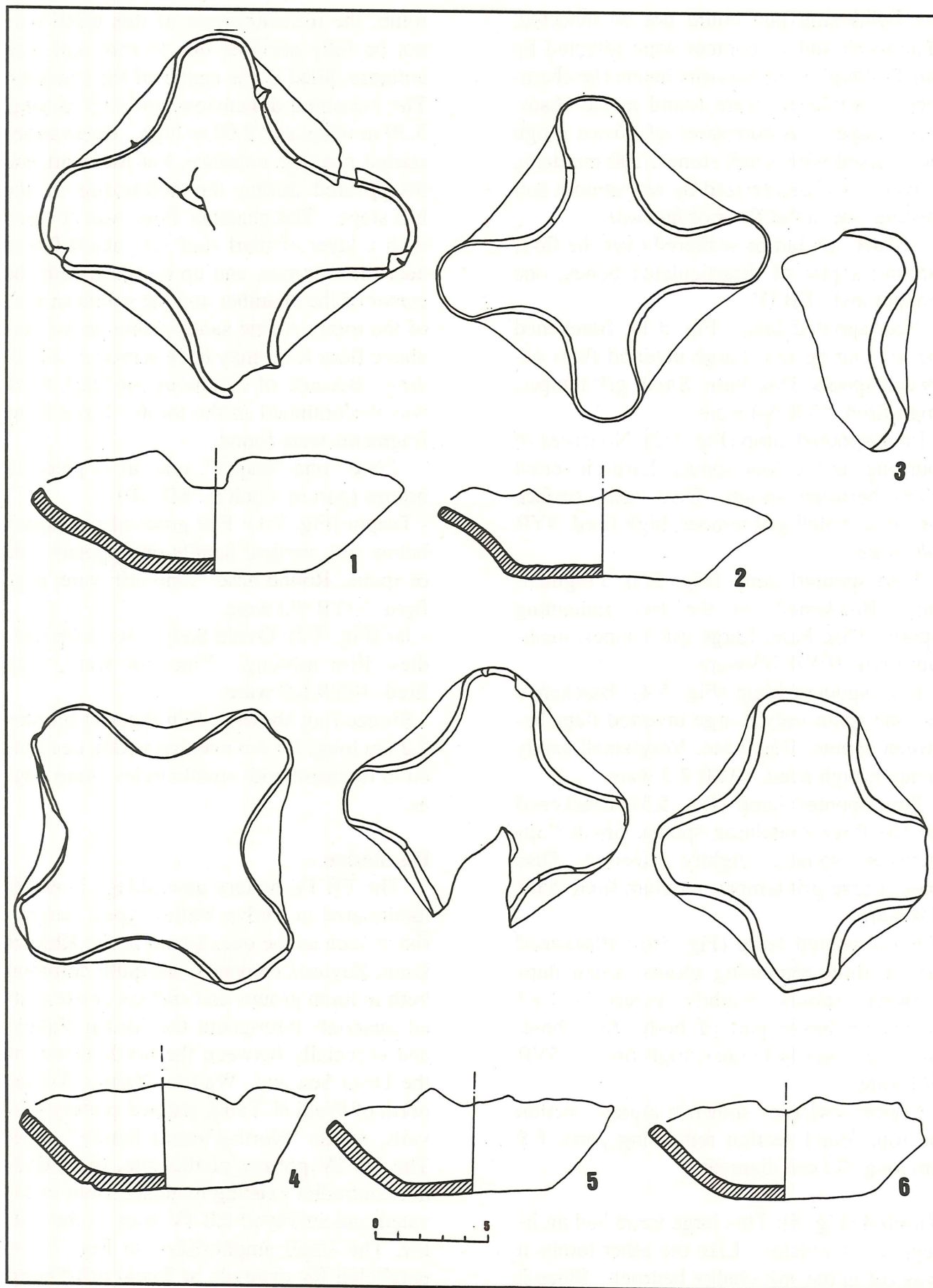
- Teapot (Fig. 7:1): Flat grooved rim, spout below rim, vertical handle on opposite side of spout. Round base. Fine grit ware, high fired. 10YR 8/2 ware.

- Jar (Fig. 7:2): Ovoid body. Two loop handles. Rim missing. Fine grit ware, high fired. 10YR 8/3 ware.

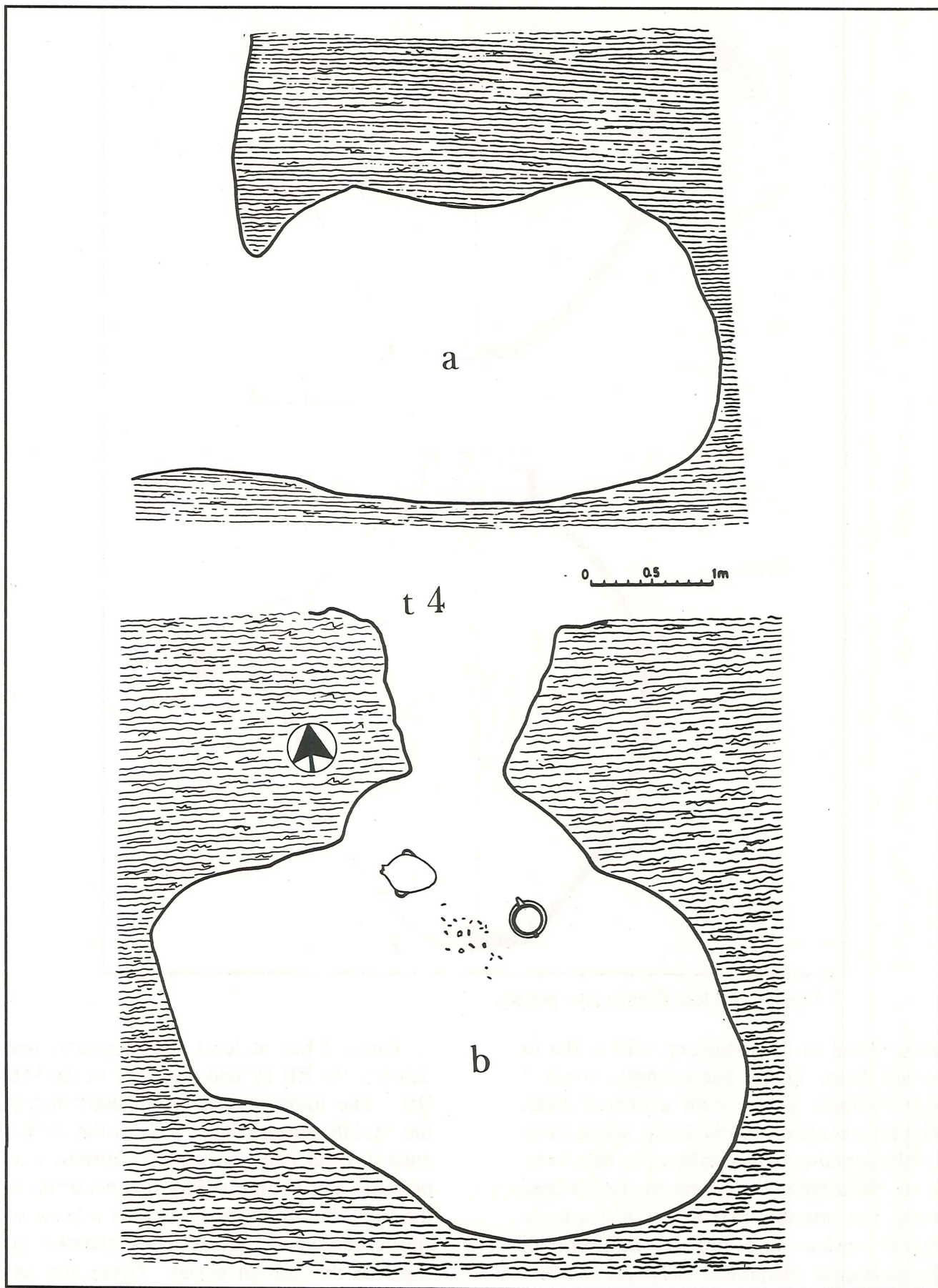
- Bronze (not shown.): thin sheet of bronze, 6.2 cm long, 1.1 cm average width, decorated in repoussé with small circles along edges.

Discussion

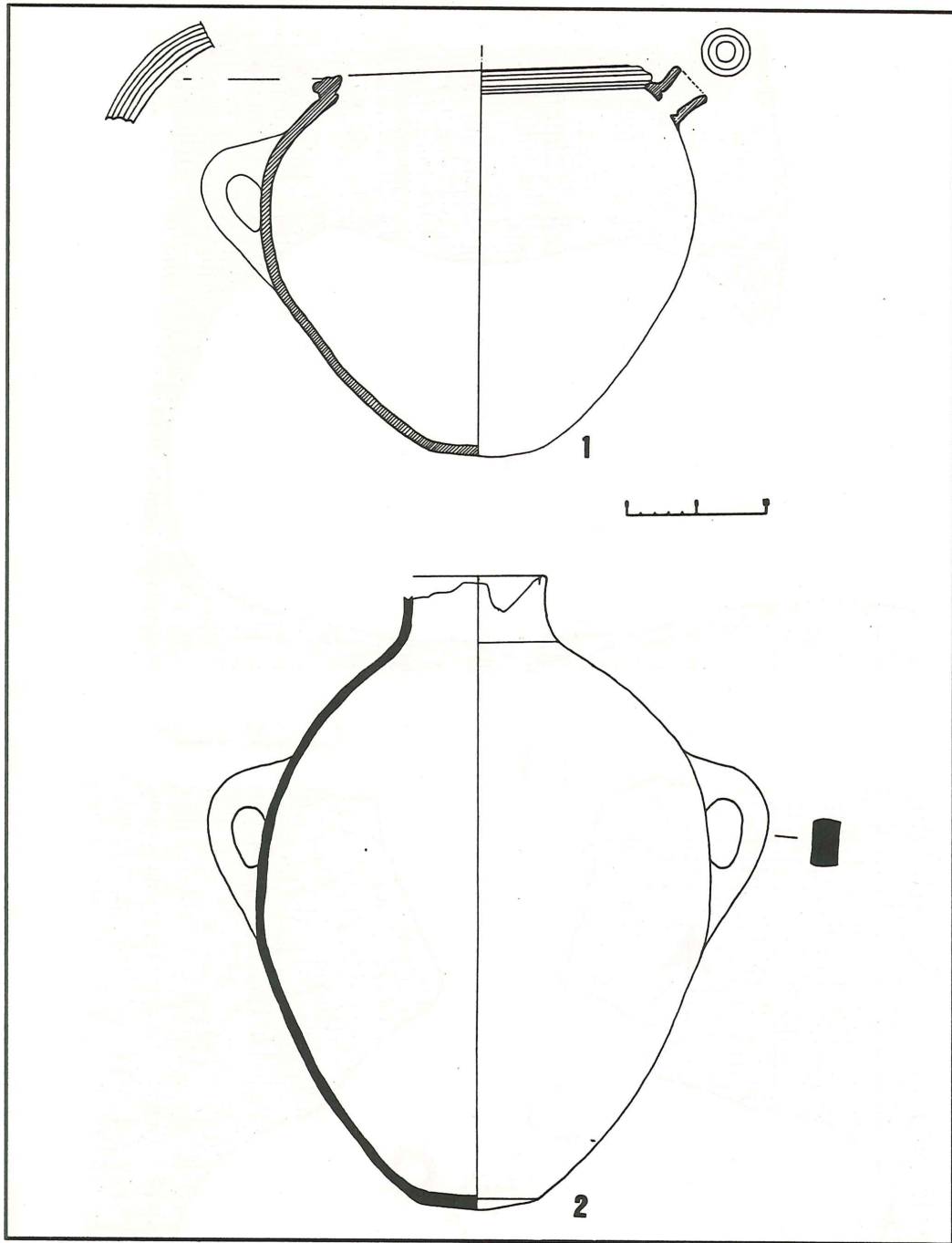
The EB IV pottery assemblage is easily assimilated to Jordan Valley types: amphoriskoi such as the ones found in the Khirbet Umm Zaytuna cemetery are quite common both in tomb groups and surface or excavated materials throughout the Jordan Valley, and especially between the north shores of the Dead Sea and Wadi al-Yabis. To the north of Wadi al-Yabis, painted pottery prevails, in the "North-Central family" style. The EB IV pottery of this site, then, does not contradict existing evidence from excavated and surveyed EB IV sites in the valley. The small amphoriskos in Fig. 2:6 is paralleled for example at Tīwal ash-Sharqi (Tubb 1990: 47, fig. 32), as are both lamp



5. Tomb 3: EB IV four-spouted lamps.



6. Tomb 4. a: section; b: plan.



7. Tomb 4: Middle Bronze Age pottery.

types found in the cemetery, with a flat or curved base. Quite interestingly, tomb 1 only contains lamps with a curved base, with the exception of one lamp, while tomb 3 only contains lamps with a flat disc base. Since these types do appear in similar contexts, it is possible that this is just a typological variant and not an indicator of chronological difference between the two groups.

Tomb 2 has at least two deposits, one dated to the EB IV and the other to the MB IIB. The tomb was clearly reused during the Middle Bronze Age. Given the difference in level between the two burials, it is possible that natural silting had occurred in the tomb before its reuse, unless a layer of sterile earth was placed in the chamber to separate the second burial. Given the nature of the soil deposit, the first hypothesis

is preferable. As a matter of fact, silting continued after the Middle Bronze Age burial, up to filling completely the room.

The Middle Bronze Age material is also quite typical and has a number of parallels both in the Jordan Valley, the plateau, and the Jezreel Valley. At Megiddo the best parallels for the jugs and juglets come from stratum XI and XIIa (Kempinski 1989:52-61, see especially the juglets in figs. 22:15, 23:7-11, and 24: 5-6,17). The socketed spearhead with a long shaft is an early type, found in MB IIA and early MB IIB contexts at Ḥama, Megiddo, Ras Shamra, and Tell Mardikh (Philip 1989: 359-360, with bibliography). The Megiddo pottery parallels and the spearhead type confirm an early MB IIB date for this tomb group. Tomb 4 should also be dated to a late MB IIA or early MB IIB period.

In conclusion, given its location above Wadi Kufrenjeh, it is possible that Khirbet

Umm Zaytuna or a nearby undiscovered site mark the location of a site controlling access from the Jordan Valley to the Ajlun mountains during the late third and early second millennia B.C.

Given the salvage nature of the work, it was not possible to conduct soundings in other sections of the cemetery or of the settlement site, but further research should be conducted at the site, which continues to be threatened by expanding agricultural activities, further road and quarrying work, and heavy slope erosion.

M. Waheeb
Department of Antiquities

G. Palumbo
ACOR

M. Abu Aboleh
Department of Antiquities

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