

AL-BASIṬ NEOLITHIC SITE IN SOUTHERN JORDAN

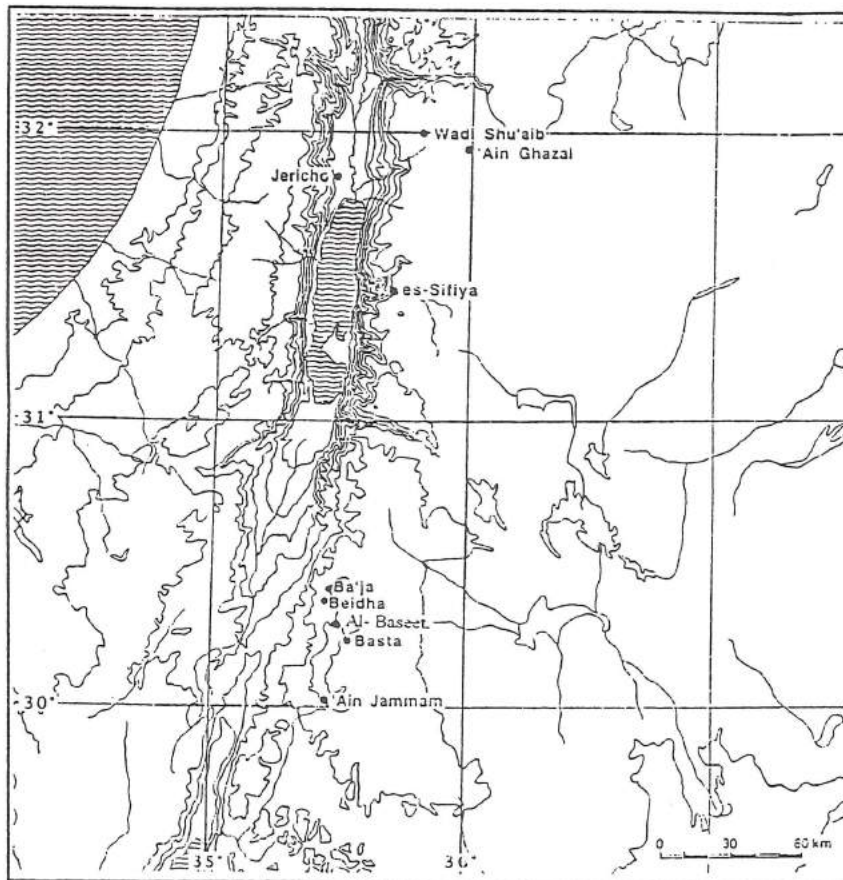
by
Nazeh Fino

Introduction

The Neolithic settlement of al-Basiṭ was discovered during the archaeological survey of the Wādī Mūsā water supply and wastewater project area in October-November 1996 ('Amr *et al.* 1996: 41-42 site Wādī Mūsā 8; 1998). The significance of this site was recognized then and an archaeological excavation was recommended to take place at the site before more of it is lost through construction activities ('Amr *et al.* 1996: 42). Such construction activities — for the building of a house — destroyed a further part of the site in July 1997. By chance, the symposium on Neolithic settlement patterns in Central Jordan was being held at Wādī Mūsā at the same time, and some of the par-

ticipants (H. G. K. Gebel, G. O. Rollefson and L. Quintero) dated this site to the Late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B period (LPPNB) on the basis of recovered surface artifacts (Fino 1997: 13). Because the site was endangered, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan decided to extend the Khirbat an-Nawāfla Project ('Amr and al-Momani 1998) to include excavations at the adjoining site of al-Basiṭ from 6-24 August and 10 October-25 November 1997. The excavation was directed by the author with Sa'ad Tweissi and Lina 'Arabiyat as square supervisors.

Al-Basiṭ is a medium-sized village, c. 5-10 ha. in size, located within the town of Wādī Mūsā near Petra (Fig. 1) at the following UTM grid coordinates: 738413E;



1. Al-Basiṭ and other large LPPNB settlements.

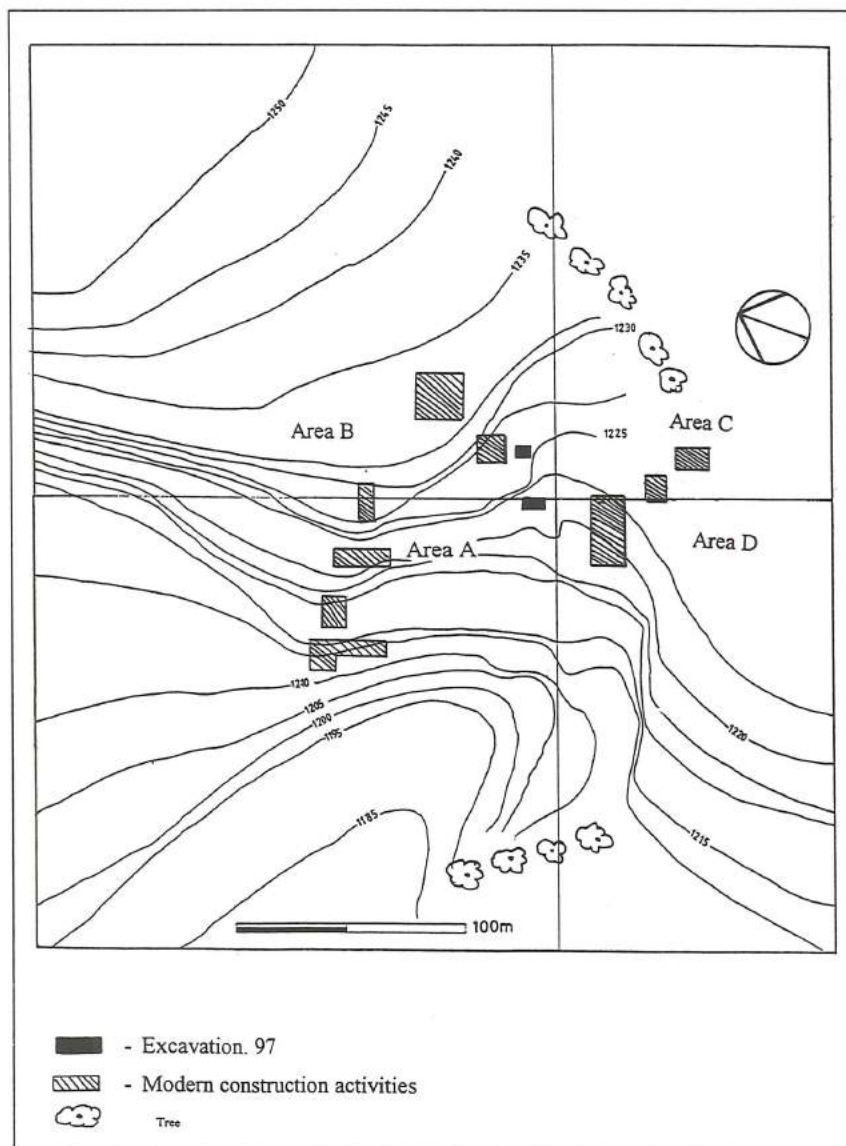
3358021N-738632E; 3357932N - 738766E; 3358166N-738793E; 3357954N. This settlement varies in elevation from 1195 to 1235m asl, and is located between two geographic units. Towards the east lie the steep slopes of the Eastern Arabian plateau with a series of springs located in the middle and upper parts of this area. The area to the west is characterized by sandstone areas of modest relief (Gebel 1988: 70, 71).

Stratigraphy and Architecture

After a contour map of the site was drawn, the site was divided into four areas: A, B, C and D (Fig. 2). Excavations were conducted in Areas A and B during the

1997 season. The excavation of square 02 in Area B revealed that the stratigraphic deposits in this portion of the site were 195 cm in depth, thus revealing a stratigraphic sequence which was divided into two phases from top to bottom (Phases I and II; Fig. 3). The upper Phase I is composed of agricultural layers, whereas Phase II is characterized by deposits from the LPPNB period. A description of the loci in Phases I and II is found in Table 1.

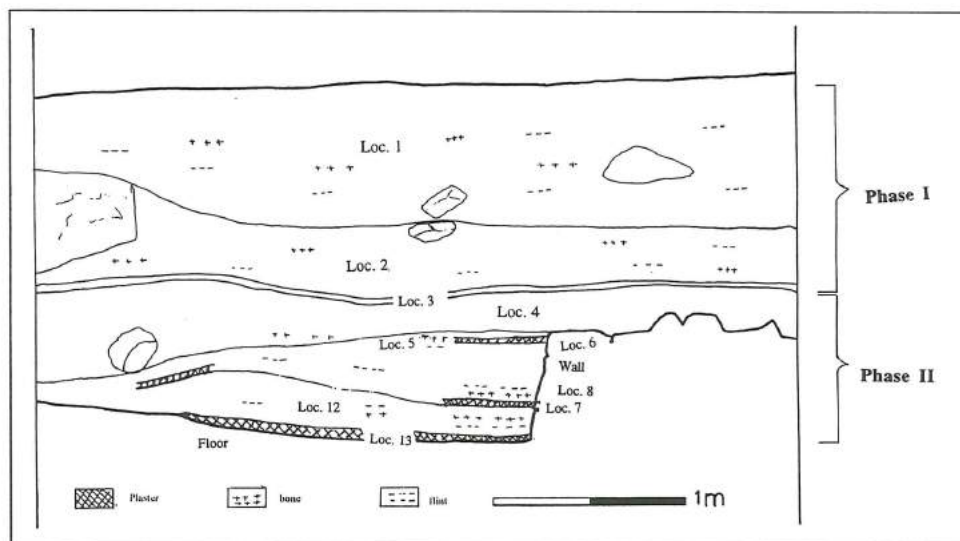
Phase I: Loci 1, 2 and 3 in square 01, Area A, and squares 01-02, Area B, are agricultural layers, with pottery dating to the MB(?), Iron II, Nabataean and Byzantine



2. Al-Basit 1997 excavation.

Table 1. Description of the loci in Phases I and II.

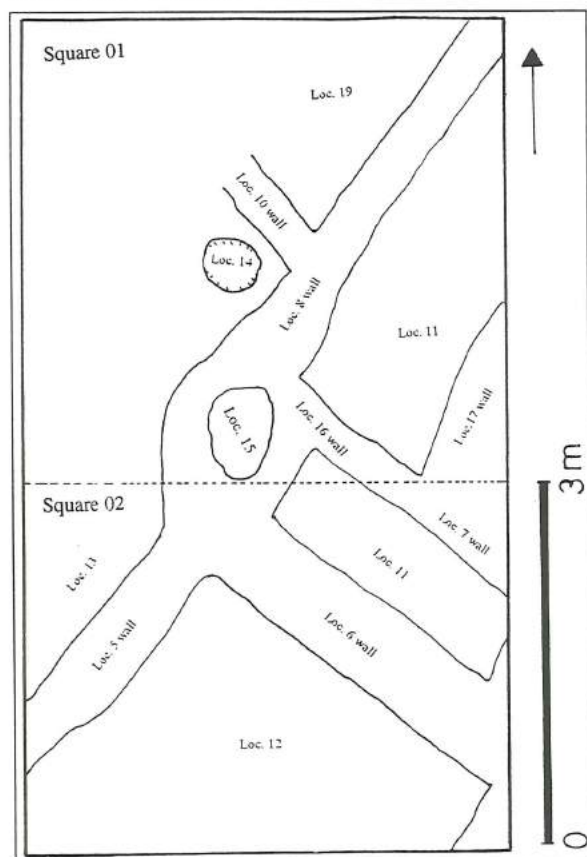
Phase Area Square			Locus	Description			
I	A	01	0	Top surface.			
			1	Yellow soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			2	Dark brown soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			3	Washed yellow soil, fill over all the square.			
I	B	01	0	Top surface.			
			1	Yellow soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			2	Dark brown soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			3	Washed yellow soil, fill over all the square.			
II	B	01	4	Dark greyish brown soil, loose, fill mixed with small limestone pebbles, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			5	Brown soil, compact, may be roof, in the western part of the square.			
			6	Plastered floor, in the western part of the square.			
			7	Plastered floor, in the western part of the square.			
			8	Wall NE-SW, built with undressed limestones, in the middle of the square.			
			9	Dark greyish soil, fill mixed with flint, bone fragments, in the eastern part of the square.			
			10	Wall E-W built with small limestones.			
			11	Yellow greyish soil, compact. Surface, in the eastern part of the square.			
			12	Dark greyish soil, loose, fill mixed with flint, in the western part of the square.			
			13	Plastered floor, in the western part of the square.			
			14	Hearth, in the western part of the square.			
			15	Small stones built in circular shape, bin.			
			16	Wall E-W built with small limestones, in the southern part of the square.			
			17	Wall N-S built with small limestones, in the southeastern part of the square.			
			I	B	02	0	Top surface.
						1	Yellow soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.
						2	Dark brown soil, fill mixed with pottery shards, flint, bone fragments, over all the square.
3	Washed yellow soil, fill, over all the square.						
II	B	02	4	Dark greyish brown soil, fill mixed with flint, bone fragments, over all the square.			
			5	Wall NE-SW, built with undressed limestones, in the western part of the square.			
			6	Wall E-W, built with small limestones, in the eastern part of the square.			
			7	Wall E-W, built with small limestones, in the northeastern part of the square.			
			8,9,10	Dark greyish soil, loose, mixed with flint, stone vessels, bone fragments.			
			11,12	Yellow greyish soil, compact. Surface in the eastern part of the square.			
			13	Plaster floor.			



3. Al-Basit 1997: North section in Squares 01-02, Area B.

periods (mixed).

Phase II: LPPNB, separated from Phase I by Loc. 4 in squares 01-02, Area B (very dark greyish brown soil, 0.80 m thick with architectural remains, flint, animal bones and stone vessels) (Table 1 and Fig. 4).



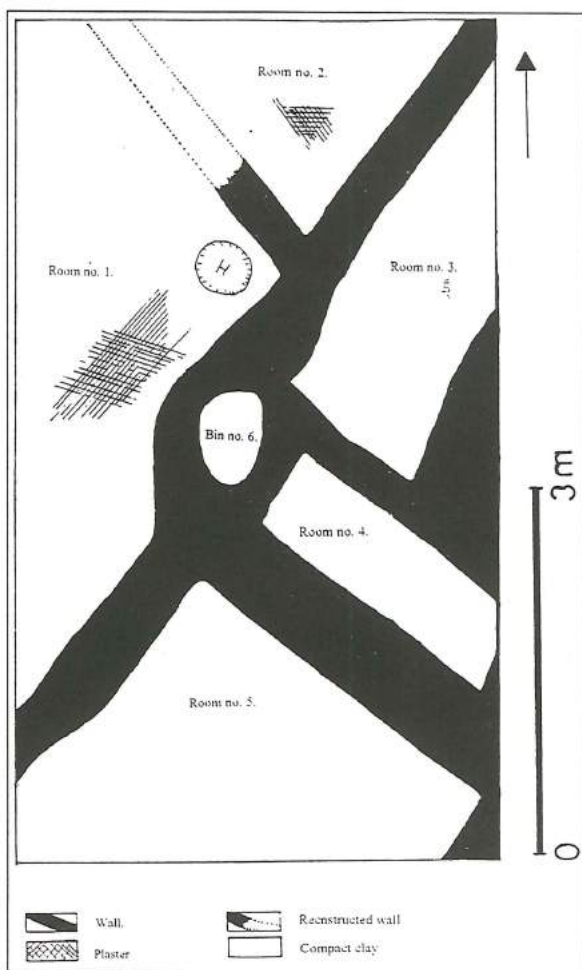
4. Al-Basit 1997: The main loci in Squares 01-02, Area B, Phase II.

The excavations in LPPNB deposits unearthed architectural remains which were not well-preserved due to destruction from later periods. That is to say that the architectural remains in this area are characterized by walls which were built of large undressed limestones that do not exceed 2 courses in height. These walls formed rectangular rooms, which abutted one another. The dimensions of the excavated rooms are not clear due to limited exposure (Figs. 4 and 5).

The interior walls and floors of Rooms 1 and 2 were covered with lime plaster (Fig. 5). In Room 2, the plaster floor was renewed at least three times. The plastered walls of both rooms were painted with red pigment. In the eastern corner of Room 1, there was a circular hearth set into the plastered floor. In contrast to Rooms 1 and 2, the floors of Rooms 3, 4 and 5 were covered with compact clay.

A tentative interpretation is that Rooms 1, 2 and 5 were used for domestic activities, whereas Rooms 3 and 4 were used for storage. This hypothesis is based on the layout of these rooms. A small storage bin, 0.60 m in diameter, was constructed in between the walls of Rooms 1, 3 and 4 (Bin no. 6 in Fig. 5).

The layout of the LPPNB building remains at al-Basit is similar to the archi-



5. Al-Basit 1997: LPPNB architecture in Squares 01-02, Area B.

architecture found at the sites of 'Ayn Jammām (Fino 1996; 1997), 'Ayn Abū Nkhaylah

(Kirkbride 1978: 1-10), Ba'ja (Gebel 1988: 85) and Bas̄a (Gebel *et al.* 1988: 109).

Artifacts

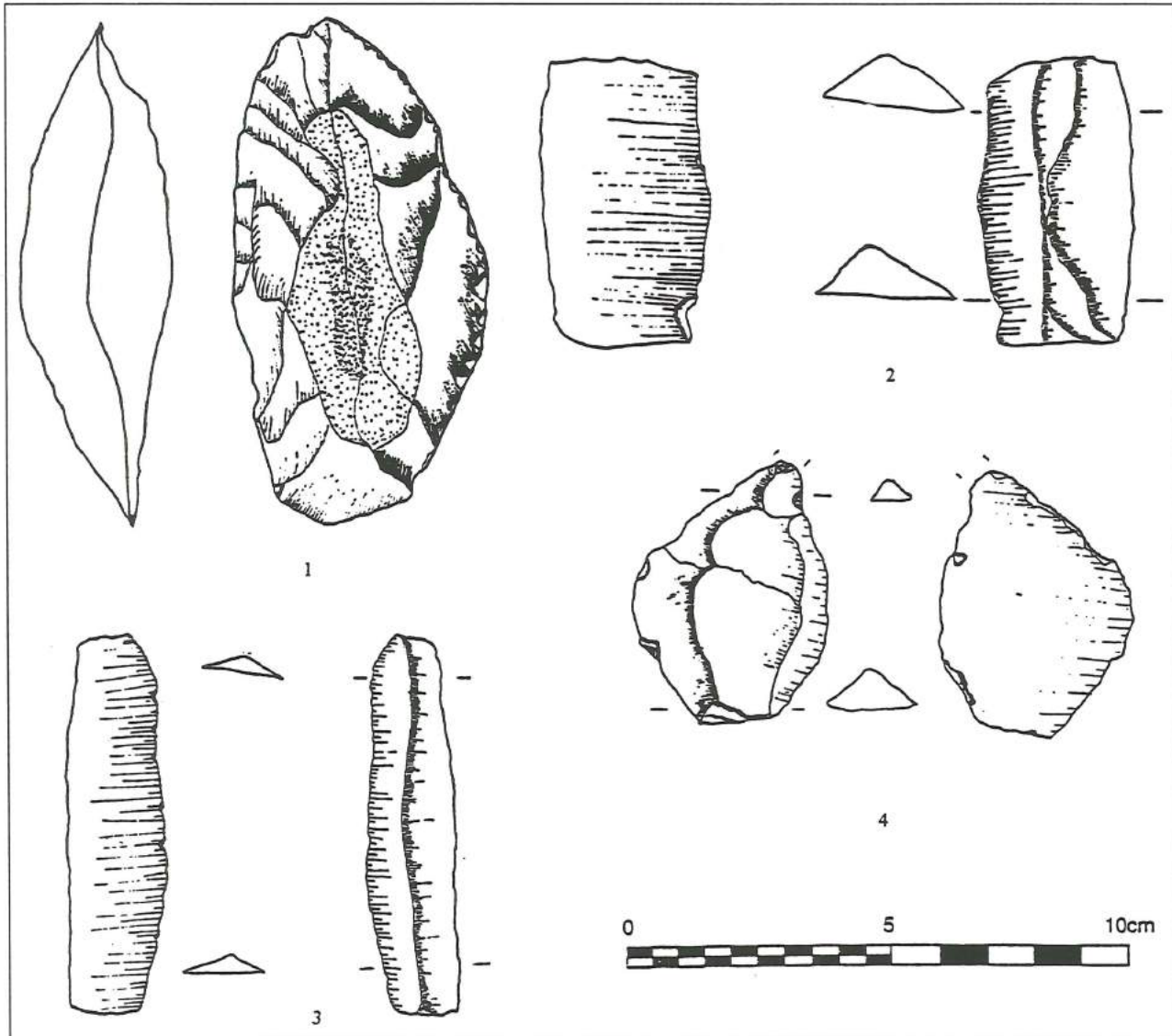
Excavation in Phases I and II unearthed more than 6064 pieces of chipped stone. Most of this material is made of flint, however there are also pieces of limestone and quartzite in the assemblage. The technical features of this assemblage are indicative of a LPPNB occupation. Table 2 illustrates the types and quantities of stone tools found in Phases I and II (Figs. 6 and 7).

The arrowheads, constituting 0.5% of the stone tools (Table 2), are divided into four types: Helwan, Jericho, Byblos and Amuq Arrowheads (Fig. 7). Helwan and Jericho Arrowheads usually appear in early PPNB deposits (Gopher 1994: 194, 260). At al-Basit, Amuq and Byblos projectile points constitute 80% of the arrowheads in the assemblage (Table 3). The composition of the arrowheads in this assemblage is also found at LPPNB sites such as 'Ayn Jammām (Fino 1996; 1997), Bas̄a and Ba'ja (Gebel 1988: 92-93).

The ground stone industry is very limited, and the ground stone tools sample collected during the 1997 season may not be a good representative of the site. Never

Table 2. Main type of flint tools.

	Phase I		Phase II					
Arrowhead	3	0.6	-	-	25	0.9	25	0.5
Sickle blade	2	0.4	6	0.2	-	-	6	0.1
Core	31	5.9	28	0.9	17	0.6	45	0.7
End scraper	1	0.2	6	0.2	4	0.1	10	0.2
Side scraper	15	2.8	26	0.8	9	0.3	35	0.6
Borer	7	1.3	149	4.5	54	1.9	203	3.3
Drill	1	0.2	2	0.1	-	-	2	0.03
Chopper	1	0.2	5	0.2	-	-	5	0.1
Chisel	-	-	7	0.2	8	0.3	15	0.3
Retouched blade	88	16.7	487	14.9	244	8.8	731	12.1
Retouched flake	99	18.8	387	11.8	225	8.1	612	10.1
Burin	-	-	59	1.8	22	0.8	81	1.3
Adzes/ Axe	-	-	3	0.1	-	-	3	0.04
Debitage	279	52.9	2109	64.3	2179	78.2	4288	70.6
Total	527	100%	3277	100%	2787	100%	6064	100%



6. Flint tools: 1. adze; 2-3. blades; 4. flake.

Table 3. Type of arrowheads.

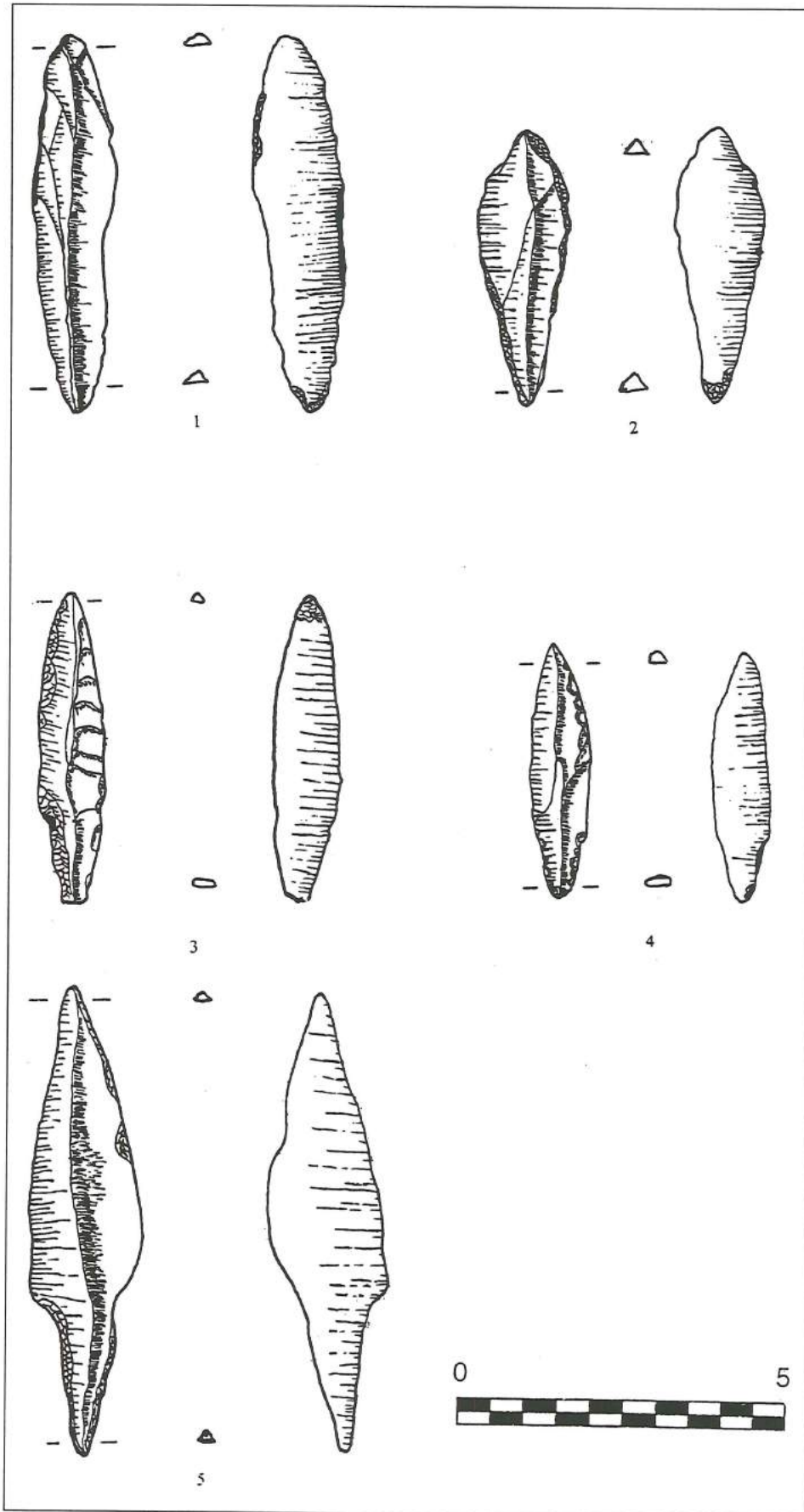
Al-Basit Arrowheads		
Type	No.	%
Helwan	3	12
Jericho	2	8
Byblos	9	36
Amuq	11	44
	25	100%

theless, the finding of a plano-convex grinding stone suggests that crops were processed at the site. Other artifacts in this assemblage include small and large stone bowls (Figs. 8-10).

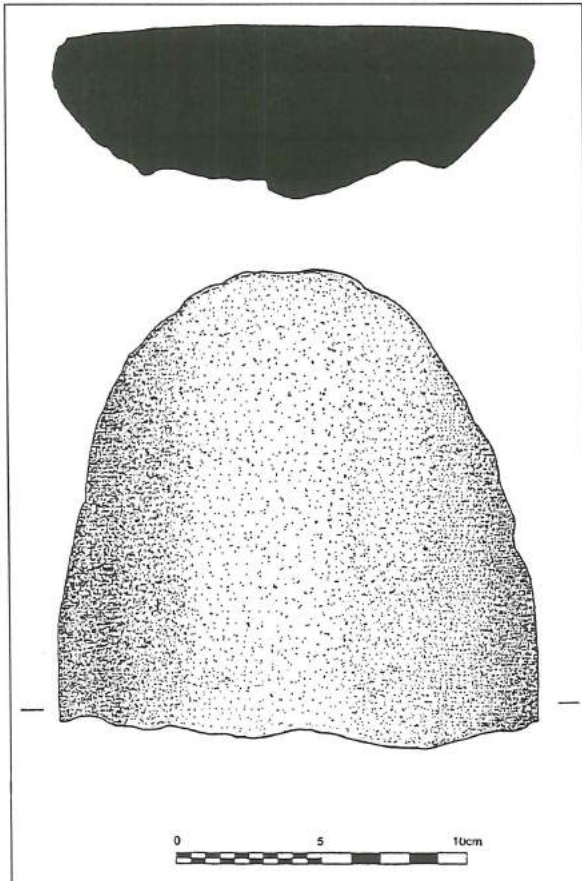
Conclusion

The 1997 excavation season at al-Basit demonstrates that the architecture and material culture of this site is comparable with other LPPNB sites such as 'Ayn Jammam, Basta and Ba'ja. It should be noted that the excavated area was limited and the site is in need of further exposure to be able to get better examples of the architecture and material culture, before the whole area is turned over to modern construction activities.

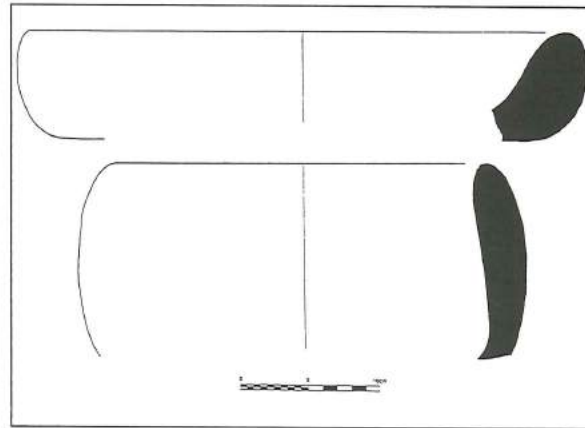
N. Fino
 P.O.Box 3508
 Az-Zarqa-Jordan



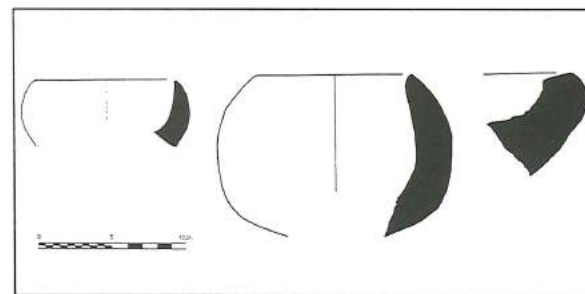
7. Arrowheads: 1-2. Amuq; 3-4. Byblos; 5. Jericho.



8. Grinding stone (of limestone).



9. Large stone bowls.



10. Small stone bowls.

References

- ‘Amr, K., Farajat, S., al-Momani, A. and Falahat, H.
 1996 *Archaeological Studies Final Report for Wadi Mousa Water Supply and Wastewater Project, Stage II - CDM - 002 Tender*. Unpublished report on file at the Department of Antiquities Registration Centre and the Water Authority of Jordan, Amman.
- ‘Amr, K., al-Momani, A., Farajat, S. and Falahat, H.
 1998 *Archaeological Survey of the Wādī Mūsā Water Supply and Wastewater Project Area*. AD AJ 42.
- ‘Amr, K. and al-Momani, A.
 1998 *Khirbat an-Nawāfla Excavation 1997*. Unpublished report on file at the Department of Antiquities Registration Centre, Amman.
- Fino, N.
 1996 *Ain Jammam; An Archaeological Study*. Amman, University of Jordan: Unpublished M.A. thesis.
 1997 Al-Baseet, a New LPPNB Site Found in Wadi Musa, Southern Jordan. *Neo-Lithics* 3/97: 13-14.
- Gebel, H. G.
 1988 Late Epipalaeolithic - Aceramic Neolithic Sites in the Petra Area. Pp. 67-100 in A. N. Garrard and H. G. Gebel (eds), *The Prehistory of Jordan, The State of Research in 1986*. BAR International Series 396 (i). Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

Gebel, H. G., Muheisen, M. and Nissen, H. J.

1988 Preliminary Report on the First Season of Excavations at Basta. Pp. 101-134 in A. N. Garrard and H. G. Gebel (eds), *The Prehistory of Jordan, The State of Research in 1986*. BAR International Series 396 (i). Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

Gopher, A.

1994 *Arrowheads of the Neolithic Levant: A Seriation Analysis*. American Schools of Oriental Research, Dissertation Series, Vol. 10.

Kirkbride, D.

1978 The Neolithic in Wadi Rum: Ain Abu Nekheileh. Pp. 1-10 in R. Moorey and P. Parr (eds.), *Archaeology in the Levant*. England: Aris Phillips Ltd.