

# PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE 2013 EXCAVATION SEASON AT THE EB I SITE OF JABAL AL-MUTAWWAQ IN MIDDLE WADI AZ-ZARQA

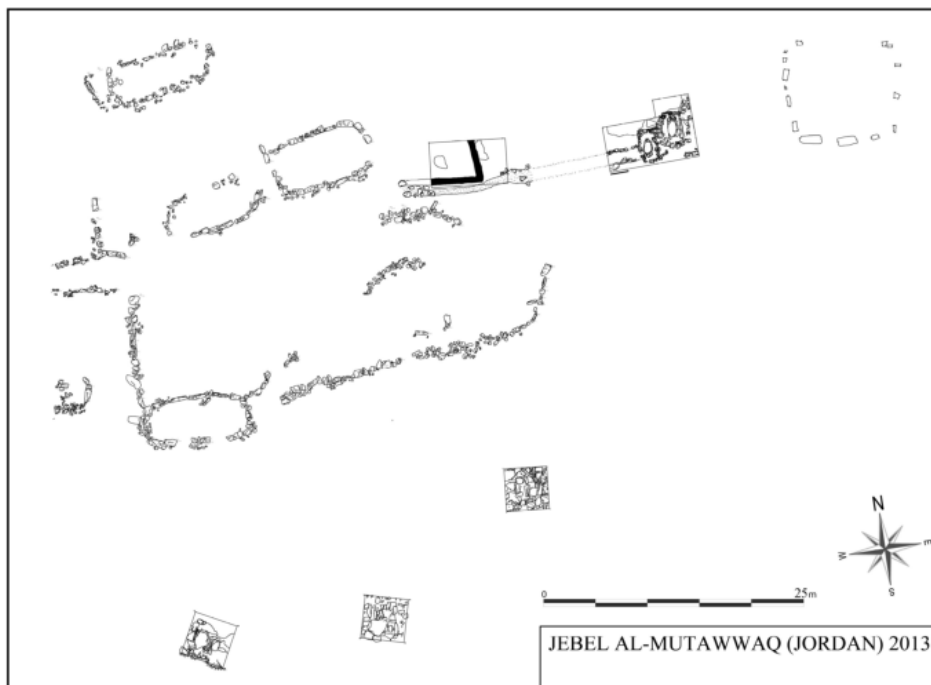
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Jabal al-Mutawwaq (32°12'36" N; 35°59'54" E) is located on the middle Wādī az-Zarqa, at the confluence between Wādī az-Zarqa, Wādī Hmeid and Wādī Deber, close to the spring of Qreisan and the modern village of Qunayah. The 2013 excavation, carried out by the Pontificia Facultad San Esteban of Salamanca and Perugia University, focused on two different areas of the south-eastern part of the Early Bronze (EB) I village, viz. Area A and Area B (**Fig. 1**).

## **Area B: Dolmens and Street L.21**

In Area B, a 5 x 10 m excavation trench centred on two dolmens (nos 317 and 321; see

**Figs. 2 and 3**) was opened. These two dolmens, with their entrances oriented to the north, were perfectly intact with the tumulus covering the entire structure to the height of the capstone<sup>2</sup>. In each case, the tumulus was supported by a retaining wall around the dolmen, with the gap between them being filled with layers of small and medium-sized stones to the full height of the lateral slabs. The retaining wall of dolmen 317 was straight on the left and curved on the right, giving it a distinctive apsidal shape. Dolmens 317 and 321 had different dimensions: the former had a tumulus of 2.8 x 4 m, the latter one of 2.5 x 3.7 m. Both entrances were sealed



*1. Plan of the 2013 excavation area.*

1. Pontificia Facultad San Esteban of Salamanca, Spain; Perugia University, Italy; Professional Association of Independent Archaeologists, Asturias, Spain.

2. The presence of a tumulus covering the dolmen to the

level of the capstone was proposed after the excavation of three dolmens in the 2012 season (see Muniz et al. 2013; Alvarez, Muniz and Polcaro in press a; Muniz, Polcaro and Alvarez in press b).



2. Dolmen 317, from north.



3. Dolmen 321, from north.

with a large flat stone recovered in situ. The architecture of the burial chambers is identical to that of dolmen 228, excavated in the 2012 season, i.e. two lateral slabs supporting a large capstone, with a back slab and floor slab. The burial chamber of dolmen 317 is 1.8 m<sup>2</sup>, while that of dolmen 321 is 0.8 m<sup>2</sup>. Both had a *dromos* entrance, characterised by three steps of large flat stones leading to the burial chamber. These features seem not to be related to the size of the dolmens, but to their topographical position.

Specifically, the structures, oriented to the north, follow the natural slope of the bedrock on this part of the mountain.

South of the abovementioned trench, another was opened; this measured 5 x 5 m and was centered on a third dolmen (no. 316; see **Figs. 4 and 5**). Dolmen 316 was larger than dolmens 317 and 321; its inner burial chamber was 1.8 m wide and 0.7 meters long (externally 2.4 x 2.1 m). The tumulus of this dolmen was not well-preserved and seemed different in construction



4. Dolmen 316, from north-west.



5. Dolmen 316, from north-east; (left) natural bedrock and foundation layer of stones and earth.

to the two other examples excavated in Area B<sup>3</sup>.

In connection with dolmens 316 and 317, an east - west street was identified following the natural level of the bedrock. This was levelled with a layer of small stones, identical to those surrounding the stone slabs of the dolmens. This

street (L.21), made of two rows of large stones and an inner fill of pebbles and compact earth, goes from the necropolis to the village and is *ca* 1 m wide (**Fig. 6**). It seems to be connected to another street (L.22), this one running north - south, that skirts the eastern side of dolmen 317.

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3. The construction of dolmen 316 seems rougher than that of the other two dolmens; the stratigraphy of the area suggests

that it might belong to an earlier chronological phase.

The smaller dolmen 321 was built across street L.21, using the foundations of the street as the first course of the circular retaining wall around the structure. In fact, the stratigraphy of Area B indicates that street L.21, associated with dolmen 316, came first. Dolmen 317 was then built on the junction between L.21 and L.22. Finally, dolmen 321 was erected cutting street L.21, which was clearly no longer in use. This might indicate continued use of the necropolis after the first abandonment of the village<sup>4</sup>.

The internal stratigraphy of the burial chamber excavated in 2013 consisted entirely of layers of stones and earth that almost completely filled the chamber, representing the final sealing of the structure. Just a few sherds and some chipped stone were recovered from these layers. However, in each dolmen excavated, the lowest layer directly above the floor slab yielded small fragments of human bone, such as teeth, finger bones and ribs. A possible hypothesis is that the dead were original interred within the chamber, decomposed and had their remains rearranged. Then, prior to the abandonment of the dolmens, when the people of Jabal al-Mutawwaq started to leave the site, the most important human remains such as long bones, skulls and funerary gifts were removed and the burial chamber was permanently sealed with layers of stone and earth<sup>5</sup>. The only exception discovered in 2013 was in dolmen 317. Here, under three fill layers of stone and earth, a flat stone 30 cm above the floor slab concealed another layer (stratum 51) where an intact burial (designated B.25) was discovered (**Fig. 7**). The burial consisted of a complete human skeleton whose bones, after decomposition of the body, were re-arranged in the chamber with the long bones placed in a pile in front of the tomb entrance. The skull was

placed behind the bone pile, with other small bones from the same individual being scattered over the floor slab of the chamber. In addition to B.25, other fragmentary human bones (mostly teeth and fingers) testify that another five people had previously been interred there and that their skulls and long bones had been moved to another location; the only individual left in dolmen 317 was burial B.25.

Two flint objects associated with the skull represent funerary offerings, but no complete vessels were recovered. The two flint objects were flat fan-scrapers, with two edges and the cortex visible on one side (**Fig. 8**). The first (object 69) had an elongated shape and curved profile, with traces of red being visible to the naked eye on both its jagged edges. Micro-analysis of a similar flint blade from the EB II - III temple at Bab adh-Dhra determined that the traces of red might be animal blood, which stimulated a debate on the possible ritual function of these objects (see Rosen 1997: 74-75; Rosen 2011: 252). Future studies on the blade from dolmen 317 at Jabal al-Mutawwaq using laser analysis are planned to investigate whether or not this blade had also been used for the slaughter and butchery of animals. The second fan-scrapers (object 70) had an oval shape and was very thin and flat, being typical for the Early Bronze Age but larger and more refined.

Objects very similar to these two finds have been found as funerary offerings in cave tombs in the west of the southern Levant, for example at Neshet-Ramla Quarry (Cave F-55 [Avrutis 2012: 215, fig. 7.3/C] and Cave F-257 [Avrutis 2012: 214, fig. 7.2/B]). A couple of similar flint tools were also recovered from house 75 at the EB I Temple of the Snakes at Mutawwaq<sup>6</sup>. This suggests that these objects may have been used

4. The previous Spanish excavations of Juan Antonio Fernandez-Tresguerres at other dolmens on Jebel al-Mutawwaq discovered at least two phases of use for some megalithic tombs in different areas of the necropolis during the Early Bronze Age (see Fernandez-Tresguerres Velasco 2004).

5. This was also proposed during the 2012 excavation season (see Alvarez, Muniz and Polcaro in press a; Muniz, Polcaro and Alvarez in press b).

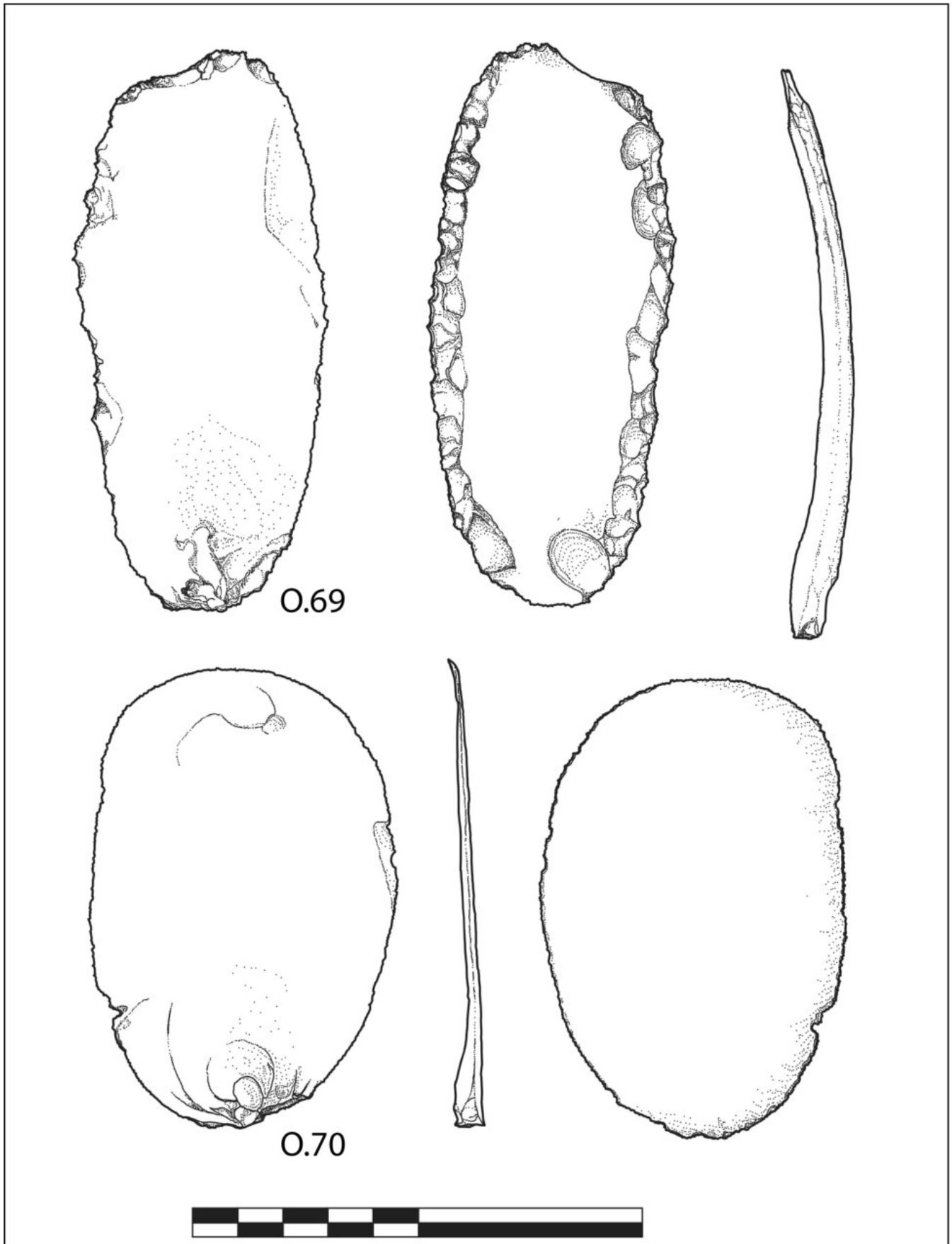
6. The only 'tower' identified to date by the earlier archaeological investigations of Oviedo University on Jabal al-Mutawwaq is located in the western part of the village, directly against the western slope of the mountain overlooking the confluence of Wadi Zarqa and the Qunayah spring (see Muniz, Polcaro and Alvarez 2013). A conclusive interpretation of this structure as defensive, ritual or a vantage point has not yet been achieved.



6. *Street L.21, from north.*



7. *Layer 51 inside the chamber of dolmen 317; (foreground) long bones of burial B.25 and (left) object O.69.*



8. Tabular scrapers from burial B.25.



in ritual contexts, probably for butchery or for processing animal skins.

Preliminary anthropological analysis of the B.25 bones demonstrate that the individual was 30 - 40 years old, had very good health, no disease, enjoyed a balanced diet and displayed no evidence for muscular stress. Gender was not straightforward to determine, owing to poor preservation of the pelvis. The teeth displayed no signs of extra masticatory use, like the teeth of the earlier burials recovered from dolmen 317 and from other dolmens excavated over the past

two seasons. These data allow us to hypothesise that B.25 represents a person from the EB I village at Mutawwaq, perhaps involved in rituals or in activities related to the killing and butchery of animals. The manufacture and deposition of the two large flint tools and, moreover, the clear intention to leave the deceased inside the dolmen might indicate a particular status for this person, at least at the moment of death.

A startling injury was observed on the skull. On the left parietal, in the ectocranial side, there was a triangular-section hole that ended in a



9. pottery sherds from of the EBI Area B.

small hole in the endocranial side of the skull. Owing to the absence of cranial bone growth around it, the injury can be interpreted as either perimortem or postmortem. The absence of stones near the skull (that might have caused the damage) or in the layers covering burial B.25 suggests that this triangular-section hole may represent the cause of death, perhaps by means of a single precise blow, but further analysis will be necessary to confirm this hypothesis.

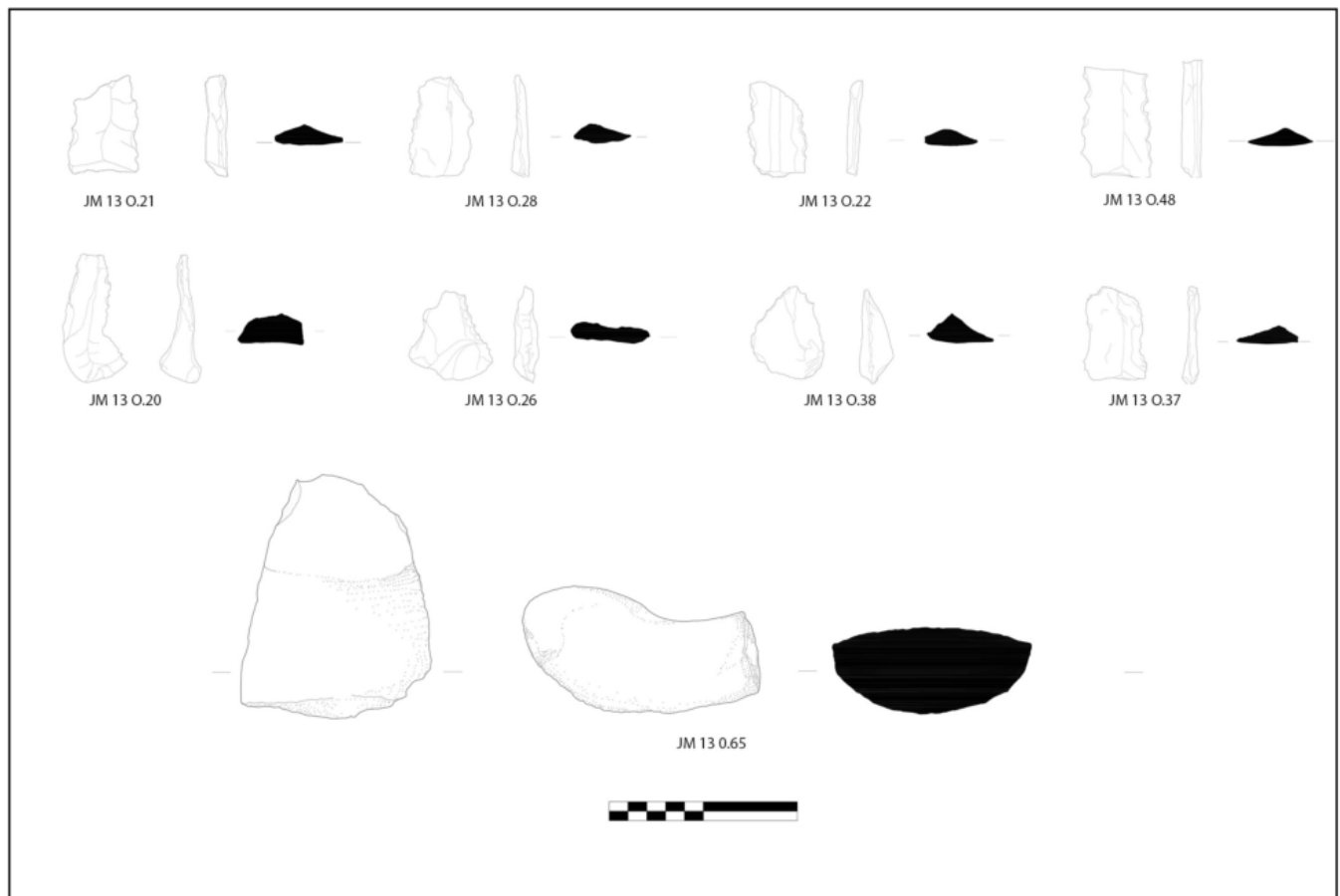
Regarding the pottery recovered from all three dolmens excavated in 2013, the sherds from the fill layers inside the burial chamber, those recovered from the bedrock around the tombs and those from the stone layers of the tumuli all date to EB I and have good parallels with pottery from the settlement. No intact vessels were recovered from the three dolmens excavated. The pottery was all hand-made, with a red-orange paste and many limestone inclusions. From the sherds it was possible to identify the original shapes of

the vessels, mainly hemispherical bowls (the most common form), small cups with everted pointed rims and large storage jars with simple, plain ledge-handles (typical of EB I) and simple everted or ribbed everted rims (**Fig. 9**).

Small flint tools were found in the layers that sealed the dolmens' burial chambers and in the deposits around the structures. In particular, many basalt grinding stone fragments (only one well-preserved) and flint tools, mostly scrapers and small blades, were identified between dolmens 317 and 321 in the layers over the bedrock in front of the tombs and over streets L.21 and L. 22 (**Fig. 10**).

**Area A: The EB I Settlement Wall**

An important aim of the 2013 season was to clarify the connection between the southern area of the Jabal al-Mutawwaq necropolis and the EB I settlement. A 10 x 5 meter trench was therefore opened along the south-east corner



10. Flint and stone tools from Area B.



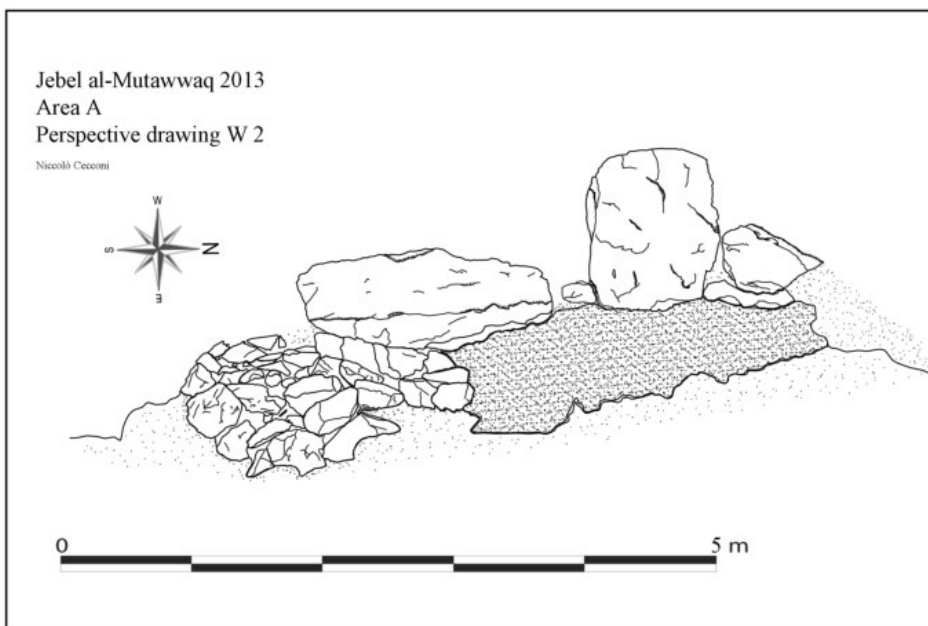
of the settlement wall that enclosed the entire EB I village, previously identified by Hanbury-Tenison's (1986; 1989) first survey and partially excavated in its northern and southern areas by Fernandez-Tresguerres Velasco (1999; 2006). A 5-meter north - south length (W.2) of the settlement wall, and another length measuring 5.5 meters east - west (W.4), were excavated (**Fig. 11**). In preparation for construction of the wall, the natural slope of the bedrock was leveled with a layer of medium-sized stones and

another layer of larger stones. Huge flat rocks were then placed vertically one against the other without any kind of mud-brick superstructure (**Fig. 12**). The height of the wall probably never reached more than 1.6 meters and in the south-eastern corner of the enclosure there are no signs of towers or defensive features<sup>7</sup>.

The absence of defensive structures along the wall, coupled with its low height, suggests that it had no military function but may instead have had ideological significance in separating the



*11. South-eastern part of the settlement wall (W.2 and W.4) excavated in Area A, from south.*



*12. Northern part of the settlement wall excavated in Area A.3*

7. The doors of the houses are usually 75 - 85 cm wide (see

Muniz, Polcaro and Alvarez 2013).

land of the living from that of the dead.

Along the east - west part of the wall, two vertical stone slabs were identified as a possible gate (L.8). This gate is one meter wide, similar to the doorways of houses identified in the village<sup>8</sup> and clearly narrower than the gate to the inner settlement identified by Hanbury-Tenison (1989) to the west of Area A (ca 1.8 meters wide). Despite its small size, the gate is clearly associated with the settlement wall and gave access to two large, circular houses to the north and south. Moreover, another street (L.5) was identified along the settlement wall, starting from the south-east gate. This street is not well-preserved, but seems very similar to the one discovered in Area A (L.21) and follows the line of the dip in the bedrock, likewise filled in this area with small stones to level the ground during construction of the street. It is clear that street L.5 is a continuation of L.21, connecting the nearby dolmen area with the eastern part of the EB I village. The part of street L.5 adjacent to the south-east gate of the settlement consists of a number of steps made of large, flat stones, placed directly on the bedrock. However, the overlying huge collapsed stones from the southern part of the settlement wall at this point make it almost impossible to investigate the nature of the street close to the gate.

The material from the street and the excavated part of the village is all a good fit with EB I and seems contemporary with that discovered in Area B of the necropolis (**Fig. 13**). Again, we did not discover any intact vessels but only sherds. From the rims and bases it was possible to identify the principal pottery shapes, mostly hole-mouth jars, small everted rim jars and hemispherical bowls. Simple, plain ledge-handles from large

jars were also common. Fragments of chipped stone tools were also recovered, mostly small blades, points and scrapers (**Fig. 14**). Fragments of two basalt grinding stones were recognized.

### Conclusions

The 2013 excavation achieved two important results. The first concerns the southern part of the megalithic necropolis of Jabal al-Mutawwaq. The finds from inside the burial chamber of dolmen 317 demonstrate that the dolmen was used as a tomb for several burials during Early Bronze Age I and that one interment may relate to an individual from the contemporary village, who was perhaps involved in activities performed in the sacred area of the main temple of the settlement. Moreover, street L.21 (also identified in Area A as L.5) was a path connecting the south-eastern part of the EB I village with the nearby funerary area during the period of use of dolmens 317 and 316. This demonstrates contemporary use of these parts of the village and the dolmen field outside the settlement.

The second main result concerns the nature of the settlement wall. The material recovered alongside the wall and from its foundation layers all relates to EB I, at least in the south-eastern corner. Furthermore, the nature of the settlement wall and its construction technique confirms the hypothesis proposed by J. A. Fernandez-Tresguerres and J. Muniz during previous investigations of the Jabal al-Mutawwaq village (Fernandez-Tresguerres Velasco 2006; Muniz, Polcaro and Alvarez 2013), namely that the settlement wall had no military or defensive purpose but was more probably ideological or practical in nature.

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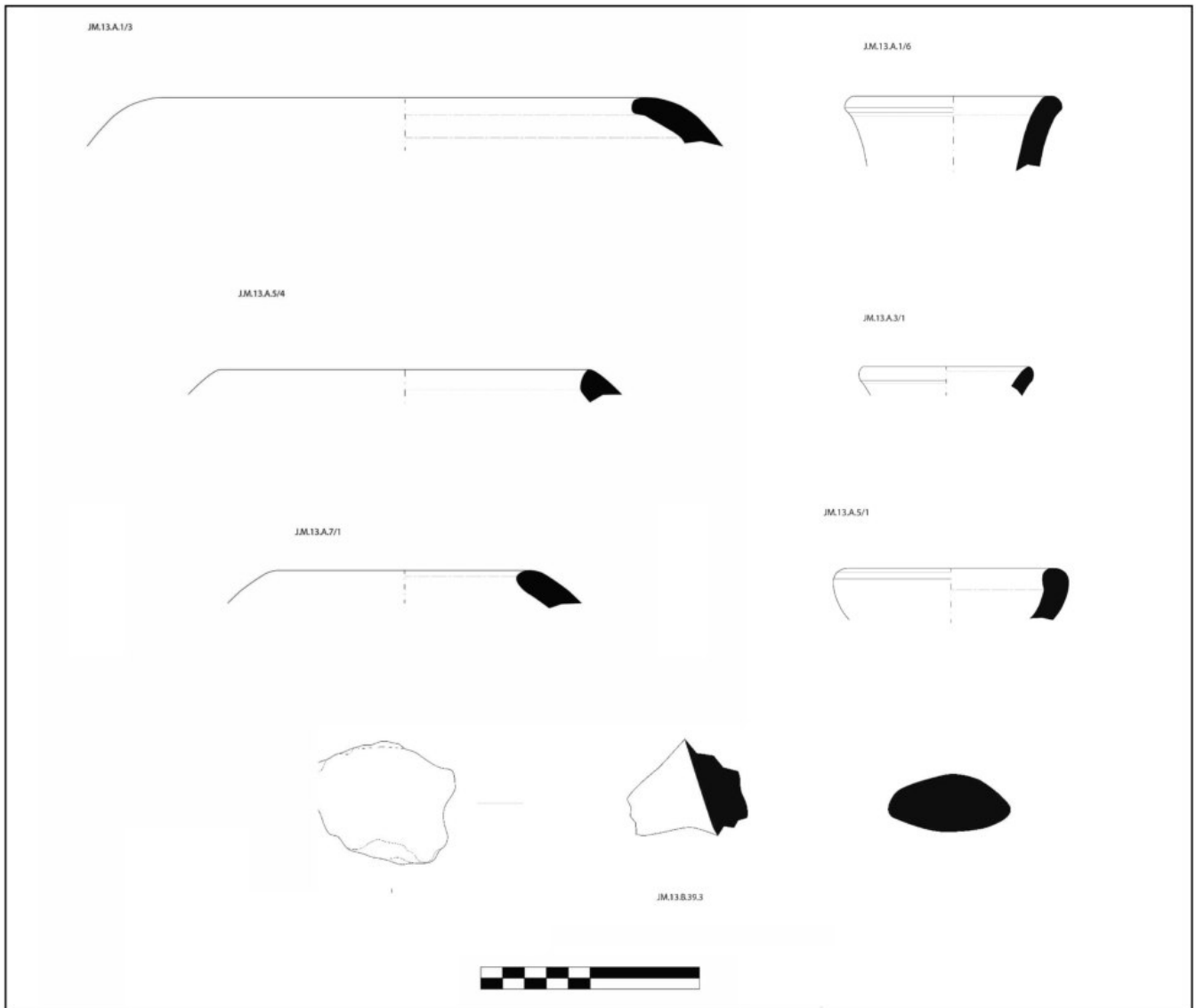
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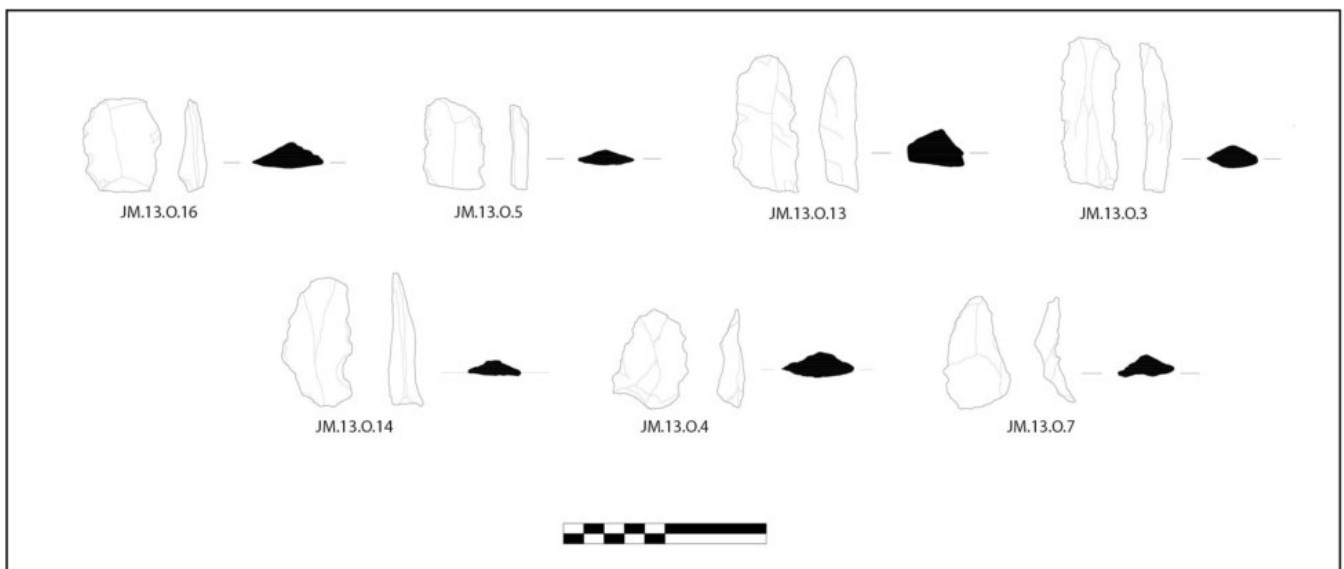
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8 The doors of the houses are usually of 75-85 cm (see

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13. pottery sherds of the EBI from Area A.



14. Flint and stone tools from Area A.

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