

AN EDMITE MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD NORTH OF PETRA (BA'JA III)

by
Manfred Lindner and Suleiman Farajat

A cone-shaped mountain roughly in the middle between Siq Umm el-Hiran and Siq Umm el-'Alda north of Petra marks an archaeologically very important site which is called Ba'ja by the local Bedouins¹. SE of the cone shaped mountain which, beside ancient terrace walls, does not show any archaeological traces, a steep mountain (Jabal Ba'ja) of dark-red sandstone rises to a multitude of dome-shaped rocks (35° 27' 25" East/30° 24' 54.5" North; ca. 1,200m). At its foot, about 50 ruins of houses (Ba'ja I) indicate a once prosperous village near the ancient route between Feinan and Petra across Naqab Nemala. The dating of the village has not been possible so far, but the presence of an ingenious channelling system, diagonally tooled ashlar stones, Nabataean pottery and Nabataean inscriptions leave no doubt that the site was at least used during the Nabataean period.²

Former Explorations in 1983 and 1984

In 1984 a group from the Naturhistorische Gesellschaft Nürnberg (NHG) who had already explored the region in 1983 made two startling discoveries. First, ascending through a Siq-like gorge behind the village, a PPNB-settlement "el-Hamda" (Ba'ja II) was found, and later verified by H.G. Gebel³. Second, by a steep and dangerous ascent, with the help of two local 'Amarin Bedouins, on top of Jabal Ba'ja an archaeological site of a very special kind was discovered (Pl. XIII,1,2). On some of the dome-shaped rocks, foundations of houses, walls and cisterns fur-

nished proof of the existence of an ancient mountain stronghold which could not have existed for a short duration only. Grinding slabs and pottery seemed to indicate use during different periods over a long time. But there were doubts, and a thorough examination seemed necessary (Pls. XIV, XV).

The Expedition of 1986

In 1986, during a new series of archaeological explorations, Ba'ja was revisited by a group from the NHG Nürnberg under the direction of M. Lindner. This time the group was accompanied by Suleiman Farajat from the Department of Antiquities. The 'Amarin Bedouins refused to join the group at the last moment when they realized that an official of the Department would take part in the ascent. Later it became apparent why they went on strike.

As it was known that the ascent was difficult, in 1986 other possible ways to the summit were explored. From a valley behind the mountain a path seemed to lead to the summit (Pl. XVI,1). Pottery sherds washed down from above gave hope. But in spite of daring climbing, no way to the top was found. Either there was a wooden ladder or a rope-ladder used in antiquity or a considerable junk of rock had fallen down in the meantime.

The Ascent

Without the local Bedouins the ascent was more difficult and dangerous than at

1. *Lisan Al Arab* Vol. 2, p. 214-215; "Ba'aja" in *Lisan Al-Arab Dictionary*; Ba'aj: Stabbed (He used a sharp tool to penetrate his stomach.) Al-Inbi'aj: Cracking (He made a crack in the wall or in the ground.) Ba'aijat Al Wadi: A valley getting larger or wider. Al Ba'ija: Plain land. Ba'ijat Al Gordan: Name of a site. Banu Ba'aja: Name of a tribe. Ba'ija: Name of a site.

2. M. Lindner, *Petra - Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (1986), p. 112-121.

3. H.G. Gebel, 'Die Jungsteinzeit im Petra-Gebiet'. In: M. Lindner (ed.), *Petra - Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (1986), p. 273-309. Gebel calls the site Baga 1.

4. *Loc. cit.*, p. 127-130, Fig. 19-26.

the first time. But the assistance of two young Austrians with mountaineering experience made it possible. The ascent (Fig. 1) begins left (north) of the Siq-like gorge leading up to the PPNB site of el-Ḥamda. There are three difficult and dangerous parts, first a rounded rock (+15.0), then a very narrow almost perpendicular cleft (+25.0 - +60.0), and eventually an oblique passage (+100.0). At the end of the ascent proper, it is not easy but less dangerous to find the way to the summit area. At any rate, the ascent should not be undertaken without mountaineering experience and equipment.

The Summit

The summit of Ba'ja (Ba'ja III) and the third part of the ascent (Pl. XVI,2) can be seen from the stone house built by Bedouins out of stone material from the ruined village at its foot (Ba'ja I) some twenty years ago. The summit is so fissured that a description is as difficult as the description of the ascent. As it was impossible to draw a proper map the present sketch has to suffice (Fig. 2). The dome-like rocks of different heights may be compared to the towers of a medieval fortress. There are steps between them, and there is a wall which was built to close a possible entrance from the SE. The view from the summit domes extends to the Sharah Mountains, to el-Ḥamda (Ba'ja II), down to the Siq-like gorge and across the plain in front of Wadi 'Arabah from Jabal Qārūn to Naqab Nemala. The sketch shows walls, relics of walls and supposed foundations, all drawn in a far better preserved state than they actually are. Nothing can be said about the purpose of the different ruins (Pl. XVII,1). They may have been houses, reservoirs, or animal pens. Jungle-like bushes made the survey difficult.

In 1984 two cisterns had been found, one (I) cut into the rock with a square opening (Pl. XVII,2), another (II) hidden in a small cleft with a round opening from which it was filled. Both are slightly

piriform and show an inner coating of a mortar-like plaster. As cistern I was easier to descend into, it was chosen for excavation. At the same time more correct measurements were taken.

Cistern I is 5.35m deep, 2.40m wide with a curvature of 1.20m in the upper part. The opening is roughly a square of 1 x 1m. There are remains of plaster only in its upper part. Its bottom was covered by a layer of sand which was 0.75m deep. Relatively little pottery was retrieved in three strata. The second cistern (II) is almost completely plastered, and more bellied. Being easier to descend into, it had been looted by Bedouins. A third cistern (III) was discovered in the north of the summit. Three more cisterns (IV, V, VI) of the same kind are located down a narrow valley in the NE of the summit (Pl. XVIII,1,2). This valley, closed by a wall, seduced some members of the group to look for an easier descent (Pl. XIX,1). It is relatively narrow at first, but at its end (40m below the summit) it is ca. 100 x 70m wide. The flora of the "gardens" is exuberant. Besides, copper-colored snakes, 20 cm in length, and beige-colored ones of 1m length, were encountered, and a pair of Jericho birds were seen. There were no traces of a recent pastoral or agricultural use. From a ledge where it was impossible to continue the descent, Bedouin tents could be seen east of the summit. It was the place from where the unsuccessful ascent had been tried (Fig. 3).

Other Observations

Grinding slabs, roughly rectangular in shape, were found on the ground (cf. Pl. VII,1). A trap made of stone slabs is reminiscent of a similar one found on the way around Jabal ed-Deir in 1984⁵. The purpose of two round holes of less than 10 cm Ø and hardly deeper than that can only be speculated (Pl. XIX,2). As there are very fine grooves leading to them it can be surmised that rain water, blood or some other sacrificial liquid was to fill the holes. Nearby, in a patinated rock slab, a circle of

5. M. Lindner (ed.), *Petra - Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen* (1986), p. 98.

THE WAY FROM
BA'JA I (VILLAGE)
To BA'JA III

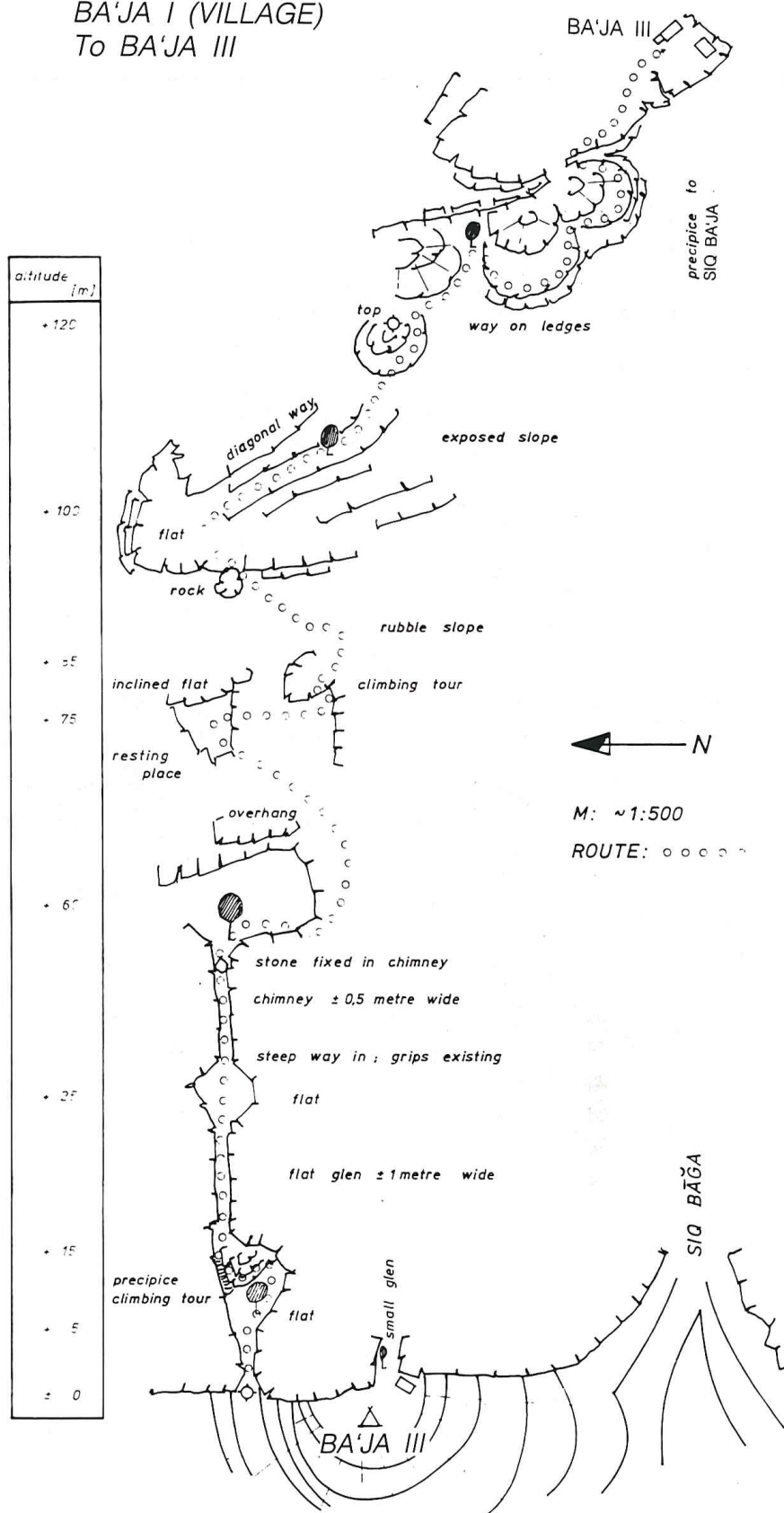
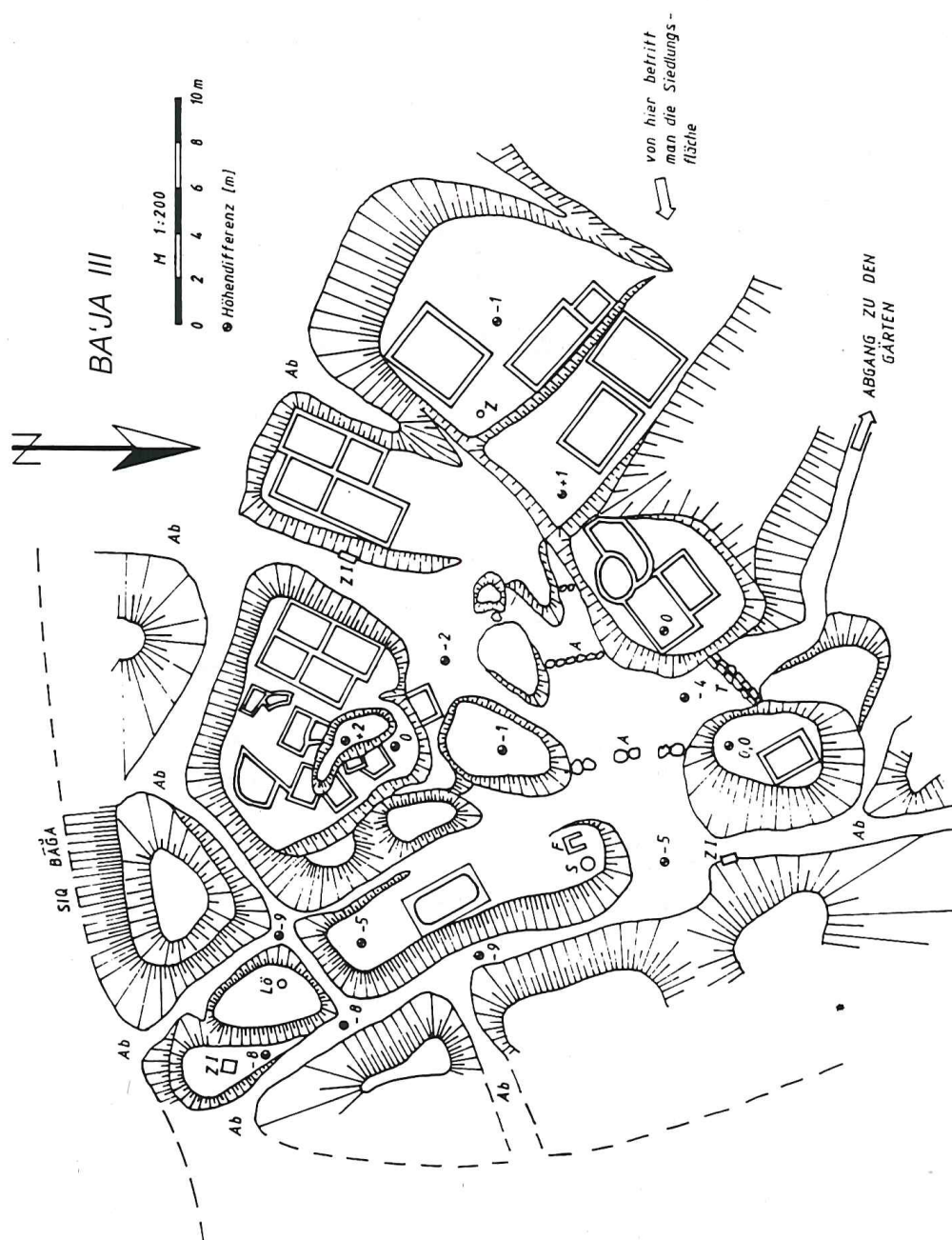


Fig. 1: Sketch map of the ascent to Ba'ja III.



gez. H. HÜBL

Fig. 2: Sketch map of the summit of Ba'ja III.

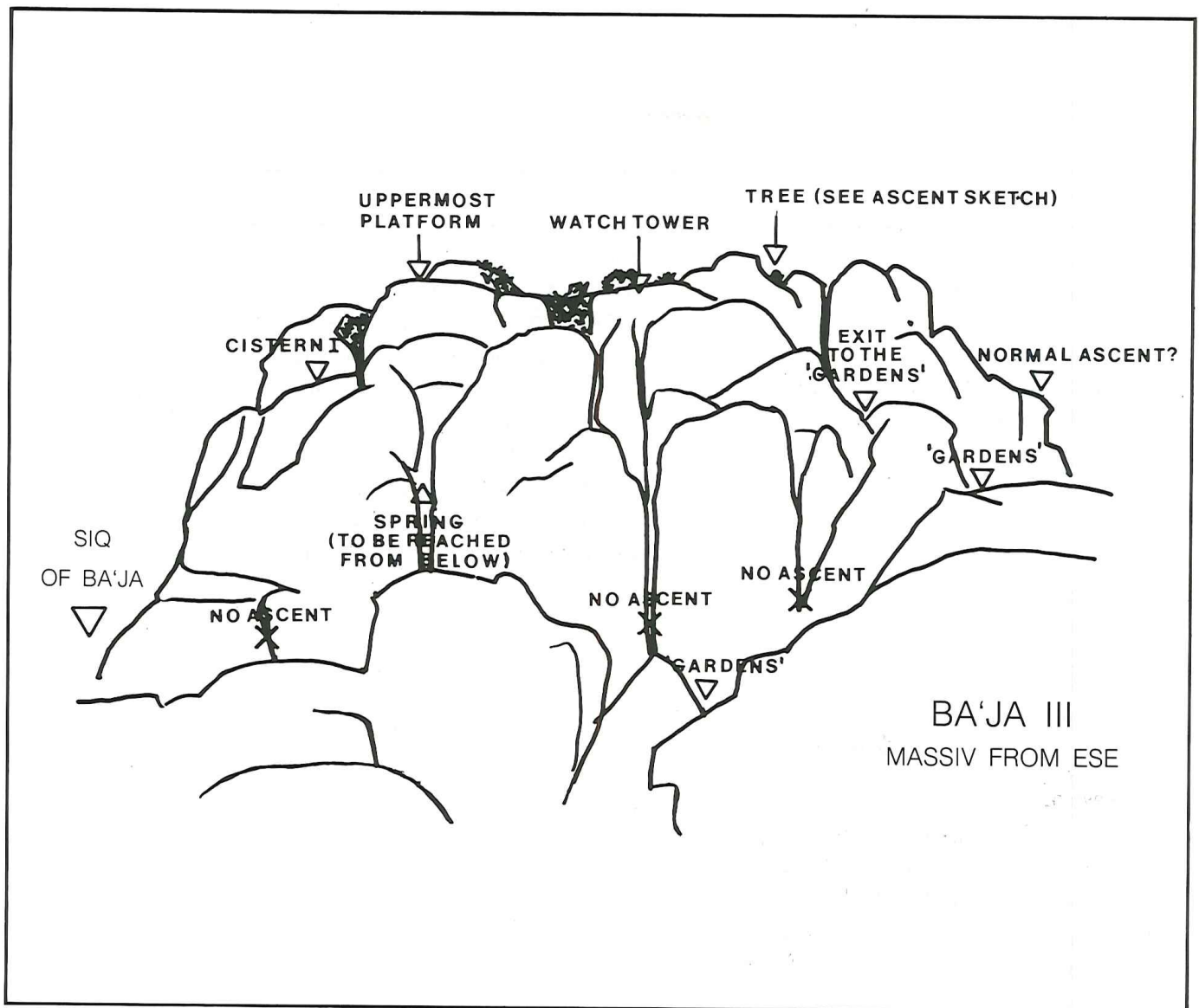


Fig. 3: Sketch map: Ba'ja III massif from ESE.

ca. 10cm inner diameter is pecked with an arrow (?) piercing it from outside (Pl. XX,1). Another observation was discouraging. There was much more evidence now of illegal digging than there had been in 1984. In one place even single sherds were laid out on a ledge above the excavated pit, and the digging of Cistern II still showed sharp outlines. There was the explanation of the unwillingness of the Bedouins. They had been excavating on the mountain top since 1984 and were afraid to be confronted with the facts.

The Flora of Ba'ja III

The summit and the valley of Jabal Ba'ja are a kind of preserved park where goats, sheep or other animals were not able

to graze for a long time. Beside the usual *Juniperus phoenicea* L. there are *Phlomis fruitcosa* L., *Quercus ilex* L., *Bryonia cretica*, *Ferula communis* L., *Asparagus acutifolius* L., *Ficuls carica* L., *Anthemis chia* L., *Papaver rhoeas* L., and *Smilax aspera* L.

The Descent

As in 1984 and 1986 no other descent from Ba'ja III was found, it was necessary to take the route of the ascent. One should not think the descent easier. It is in fact more dangerous, and demands more attention and mutual assistance than the ascent, especially when the mountaineers are tired and the sun is setting.

The Pottery of Ba'ja III

Fig. 4:
a) Surface

No.	Description	Parallels
1.	Rim fragment. Grey ware with small grits.	Crystal M. Bennett, 'Fouilles d'Umm el Biyara'. <i>RB</i> (1966), p. 389, Fig. 3 No. 12.
2.	Rim fragment. Pink ware with small white grits, smooth inside.	1) Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 387, Fig. 2, No. 10. 2) Khaled Abu Ghanimeh, 'Abu Nseir Excavation 1981'. <i>ADAJ</i> XXVIII (1984), p. 305-310, Pl. LXII, 1 No. 47. 3) M.F. Oakeshott, <i>The Edomite Pottery: Midian, Edom and Moab</i> , (1983), p. 58, Fig. 3 No. 10. 4) Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 3.
3.	Collared rim. Fired buff ware with buff slip outside. Grey ware with large white grits inside.	
4.	Pottery sherd. Pink ware with small white grits. Coarse.	
5.	Base of a bowl. Red orange ware with smal. white grits, grey core, whitish deposit outside, smooth inside.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 11.
6.	Lamp fragment. Gritty, medium fabric, wide flanged rim, grey ware.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 387, Fig 2, No. 13.
7.	Flask neck. Fired grey ware, small white grits, whitish deposit upon the neck inside.	Steven Hart, <i>Charareh</i> , 1986. Finds to the Department of Antiquities No. 10 R. 179.
8.	Knob handle. Light buff ware, black core, hand- made with small white grits.	Oakeshott, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 56, Fig. 2 No. 7.
9.	Jar rim. With three rills, fired pink ware, very hard with white large grits, whitish deposits over surface, coarse.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 5.
10.	Part of a cooking pot. Ribbed rim, coarse ware, pink clay with many grits.	Crystal M. Bennett, <i>Excavations at Tawilan</i> . Register of small finds from the 1982 Season No. 763.

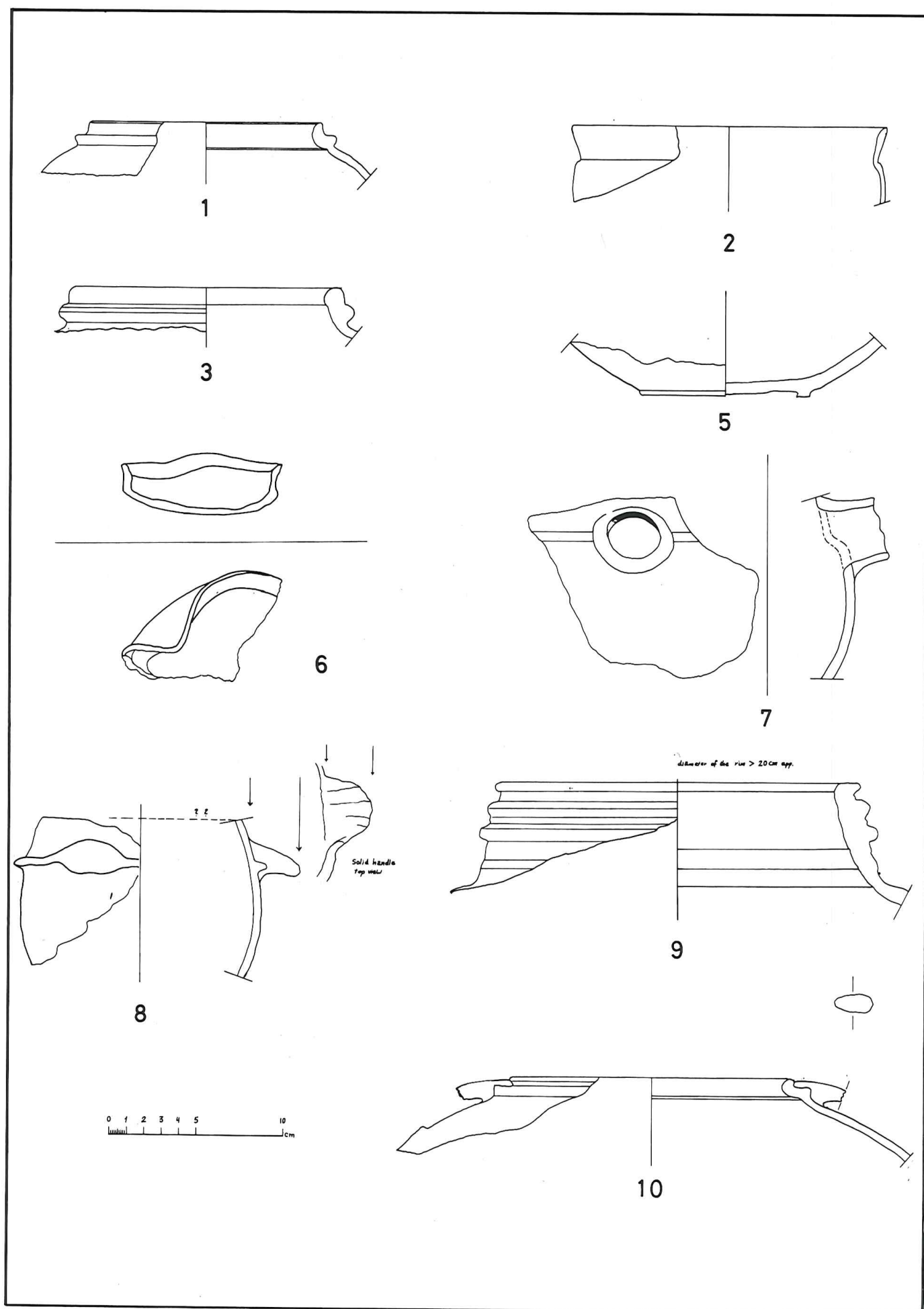


Fig. 4: Pottery from Ba'ja III, Surface.

Fig. 5:

No.	Description	Parallels
11.	Rim fragments of storage jar. Fired pink ware, grey core, small white and black grits, whitish deposits over surface, coarse ware.	1) N. Glueck, 'Some Edomite Pottery from Tall El Khalifeh', <i>BASOR</i> (1967), p. 17, Fig. 5 No. 5. 2) Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 387, Fig. 2 No. 2.
12.	Fragment of a broken handle. Pink ware, hard with white small and large grits. Grey core, whitish deposits inside.	
13.	Fragment of a collared jar. Pink ware with white grits, grey core, whitish deposits inside.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 387, Fig. 2 No. 11.
14.	Water jug incomplete. Buff ware, with small white and grey grits, whitish deposits inside.	1) Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , Pl. XXI 2) Oakeshott, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 58, Fig. 3 No. 3. 3) Steven Hart, <i>loc. cit.</i> , No. 8, Reg. 079. 4) Crystal M. Bennett, 'Bouseirah, Southern Jordan 1973, Third Preliminary Report', <i>Levant</i> 7 (1975) p. 10, Fig. 6 No. 7. 5) Khaled Abu Ghanimeh, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 485, Pl. LX, 2 No. 19. 6) Crystal M. Bennett, <i>Excavation at Tawilan</i> . Copy of the register of small finds from the 1982 season, No. 795.
15.	Fragment of a rim. Buff ware, fired inside, small white and black fired grits, white deposit inside and outside, coarse ware.	Crystal M. Bennett, 'Fouilles d'Umm el Biyara', <i>RB</i> (1966), p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 5.
16.	Rim fragment of a storage jar. Fired pink ware, pinkish grey core, small white, brown grits, whitish deposits over surface, cream deposits inside, coarse ware.	1) Glueck, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 19, Fig. 5 No. 5 2) Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 387, Fig. 2 No. 2
17.	Handle of a storage jar. Pink grey brick ware, different types of grits, very coarse ware.	Crystal M. Bennett, <i>Excavations at Tawilan</i> . Register of small finds from the 1982 season. Reg. No. 851.

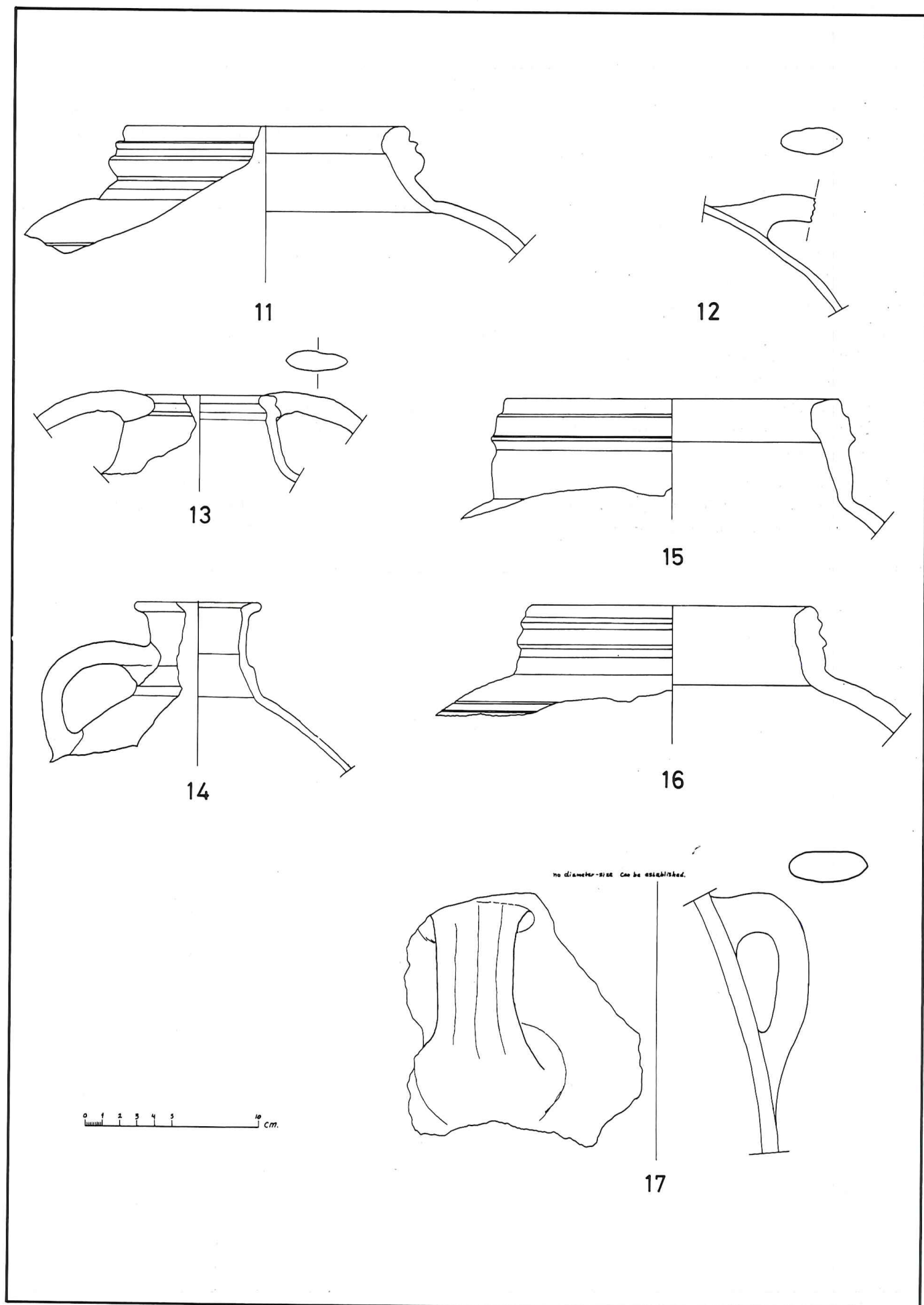


Fig. 5: Pottery from Ba'ja III, Surface.

Fig. 6:
b) Cistern I

No.	Description	Parallels
1.	Fragment of a storage jar rim. Fired pink ware, very hard coarse ware with black and white small grits.	Crystal M. Bennett, 'Fouilles d'Umm el Biyara', <i>RB</i> (1966), p. 387, Fig. 2 No. 2.
2.	Rim of a jar. Pink ware, very well fired with small, white grits.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 7.
3.	Small fragment of a jar neck. Pink ware, very well fired with small grits.	
4.	Collared rim. Pink ware, very well fired with small white grits, hard.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 3.
5.	Collared rim jar. Pink ware, very well fired with small white grits.	Bennett, <i>loc. cit.</i> , p. 391, Fig. 4 No. 3.
6.	Handle of a jar. Buff ware, very well fired from inside with small and large white lime grits.	Crystal M. Bennett, 'Excavation at Buseirah, Southern Jordan, 1973, Third Preliminary Report'. <i>Levant</i> 7 (1975), p. 14, Fig. 8 No. 5.

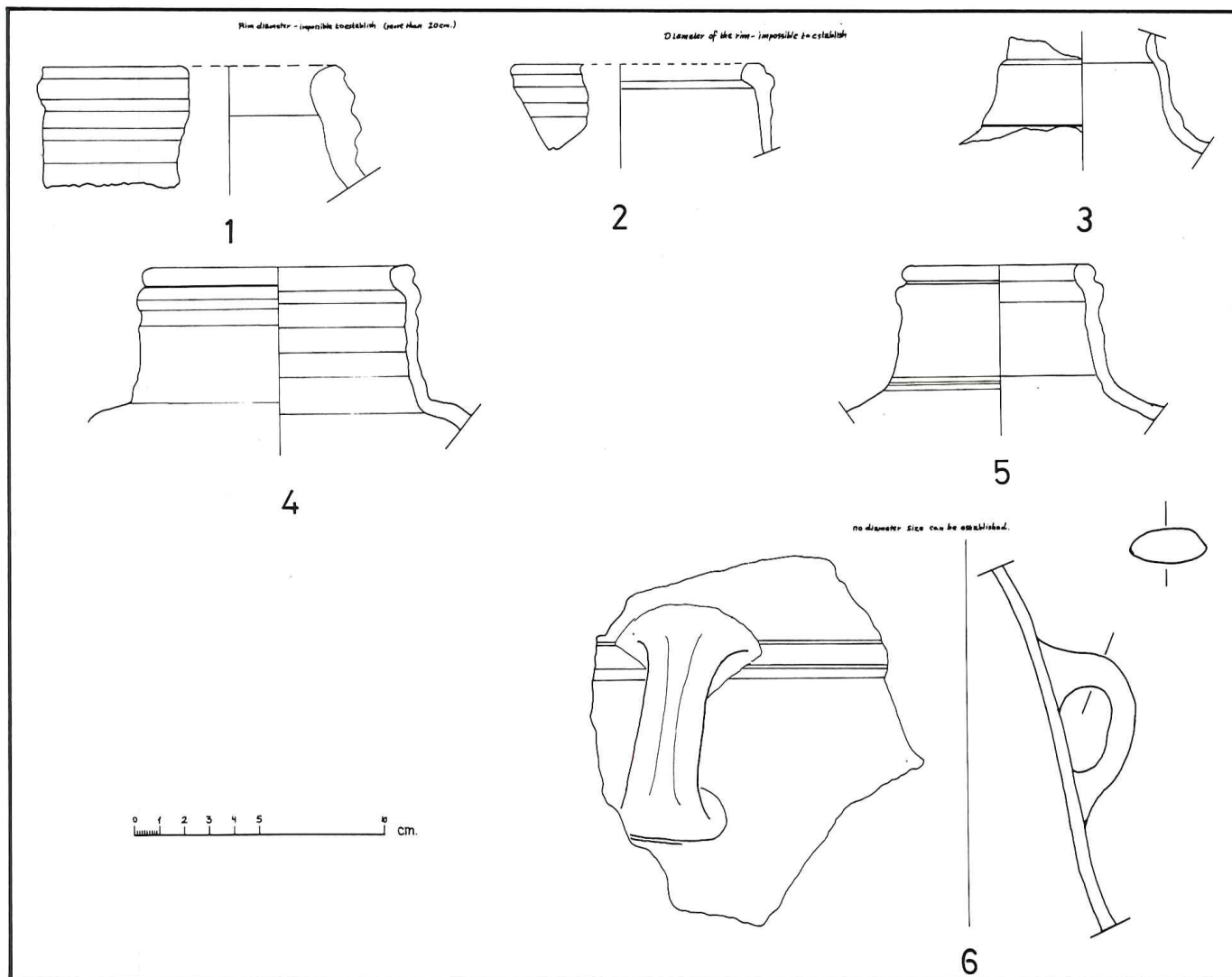


Fig. 6: Pottery from Ba'ja III, Cistern I.

Dating of the Edomite Pottery at Ba'ja III (Pl. XX,2; XXI,1,2; XXII,1,2; Figs.

4-6)

Ba'ja III is one of the Edomite sites which should be dated to the Iron Age II, 8 and 7 Cent. B.C. The site resembles Umm el-Biyara. Both are located on tops of mountains. Umm el-Biyara is situated on the almost inaccessible summit within Petra. Ba'ja lies north of Beida on an also almost inaccessible mountain top. Cisterns are found at both sites. Surface collection of sherds from Ba'ja III revealed its contemporaneity with Umm el-Biyara. Most of the pottery fragments found on the surface and in the cistern can be compared with pottery from Umm el-Biyara. The pottery is characterised by the abundance of vessel types representing cooking pots and storage jars, almost all of them of a hard and coarse ware. The body, particularly in the big cooking pots, is gritty, pink buff and very well fired but poorly levigated and porous.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the authors (M. Lindner) first thought of Ba'ja III as a "place of refuge" without the means of staying over long periods; now another explanation seems possible. With the "gardens" NE of the summit going down half of the height of the mountain, and with the newly found cisterns, it surely was possible to stay in Ba'ja III for longer periods or to have the mountain stronghold as a kind of "acropolis" with the settlement proper down in the plains. Ba'ja I, the ruined village just below Jabal Ba'ja, may have been that settlement, but we only know for sure that the Nabataeans used the site in their time. Another ancient site (Ba'ja IV) has been found ca. 2km SSE of Ba'ja I in 1986, but as in the case of Ba'ja I, up to now the pottery does not fit into the Edomite context of Ba'ja III. Further explorations may unearth the settlement or settlements

of which Ba'ja III was the acropolis, unless it was an isolated refuge site in a hostile environment. Too little is precisely known about the degree of hostility in 8th and 7th Cents. B.C. Transjordan. It seems too early still to draw conclusions out of the location of the hitherto known Edomite sites. As R.H. Dornemann aptly points out^{6/}, the struggles between the Transjordan kingdoms and their neighbours have to be analyzed before the nature of outside (Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian) influence and traderoute involvement can be clearly stated. The fact, however, that there exists more than the Umm el-Biyara and Ba'ja mountain strongholds in southern Edom⁷ may together with pottery documentation show new historical evidence.

Acknowledgments

The authors are indebted to Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director General of the Department of Antiquities, for the permission to explore in the Ba'ja area, to Dr. F. Zayadine for helping with the pottery and the transliteration of the site name, to Major Deifalla Farajat and the officials of the Department in Petra, especially Inspector Inyazi Shab'an, for logistic support. Members of the team beside the authors were Elisabeth Gunsam, Antonie Schmid, Elisabeth Schreyer, Ingo Just, Franz Morgenstern, Hannes Hübl, Bernhard Buttinger. Photographs are by Manfred Lindner, Elisabeth Gunsam and the Department of Antiquities. Sketch maps "Ascent" and "Summit Ba'ja III" by Hannes Hübl. Drawings of pottery by Z.T. Fiema.

Manfred Lindner,
NHG, Nürnberg
West Germany

Suleiman Farajat
Dept. of Antiquities
Petra - Jordan

6. R.H. Dornemann, *The Archaeology of the Transjordan* (1983), p. 182-184.

7. M. Lindner, *Newly Discovered Edomite Mountain Strongholds* (in preparation).