

# PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT TELL IKTANU, JORDAN, 1989

by  
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Work at Tell Iktanu in the south Jordan Valley in 1989 lasted for seven weeks in the field, from 11th January - 28th February.<sup>1</sup> This year excavation was dispersed very widely over the site (Fig. 1), partly problem-oriented, but also in response to rescue work related to the current project to widen the Dead Sea Highway, which cuts through the site immediately west of the Wadi Hisban bridge. The highway has been upgraded to a dual carriageway, and the new south lane has been cut through the shallow archaeological remains on the southern hill at Iktanu (Katf al-Huṣan).

## Area A

This is the primary area for investigation of the domestic occupation of the large village of the Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age period (EB-MB); three seasons of work (1966, 1987, 1989) have now been completed with 408 sq.m. exposed. Again the results provided fresh insights while continuing to confirm the stratigraphic patterns previously encountered.

## Square 12

The excavation of a Phase 1 pit (IK.404.34) discovered in the 1987 season was completed. The pit, which is cylindrical, ca. 1.22 m. in diameter and 1 m. deep, was filled with layers of ashy and brickly debris.<sup>2</sup> It was cut through the natural gravel, and the flat base showed traces of burning. It was probably a store pit, possibly for grain-storage like the bell-silo just to the south-west in the same room. The excavation area was extended beyond a doorway to the west, where another room was uncovered. It was almost square, ca. 4.75 × 5.25 m., and well preserved. It contained a central stone, which must have served as the base of a ?wooden roof support. In a secondary stage part of the room was partitioned by a line of bricks forming a corridor with doorways at the east and west ends. These are the first *in situ* bricks to be encountered during the excavation of the village. The room contained a dense sherd scatter, study of which is in the initial stages. The material is of Phase 2 date. Among other objects recovered were a small copper/bronze point,

1. The permission of the Department of Antiquities, its Director Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, and the assistance of the Representative of the Department, Dr. Khairieh 'Amr, are gratefully acknowledged. The excavation was sponsored by the British Institute at Amman for Archaeology and History, and the continued support of the Director and Assistant Director is greatly appreciated. Ms. Alison McQuitty's help throughout the season is recorded with gratitude. The members of the excavation are thanked for their many contributions. Surveyor and supervisor: Michael Rawlings; supervisors: Dr. Khairieh 'Amr, Sarah Collins, Jennifer Kiely, Anthony Lowe, Catherine MacLaughlin, Dianne Rowan; geomorphologist: Dr. Philip Macumber; camp management and ceramics: Dr. G.W.A. Newton and Mrs. E. Newton. The Jordan Valley Authority, and its

area manager, Mr. Husein al-'Abini, are thanked for their ready co-operation, which greatly facilitated our flotation project. Financial support was received from the British Institute at Amman, the British Academy, the British School in Jerusalem, the Palestine Exploration Fund, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Wainwright Trust, the Ashmolean Museum, Birmingham Museum, Bolton Museum, The British Museum, Liverpool Museum and The Manchester Museum, with kind assistance from the Embassy in London of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the Midland Bank, University Branch, Manchester.

2. K. Prag, 'Preliminary Report on the Excavations at Tell Iktanu, Jordan, 1987', *Levant* XXI (1989), p. 36-37, Fig.2.

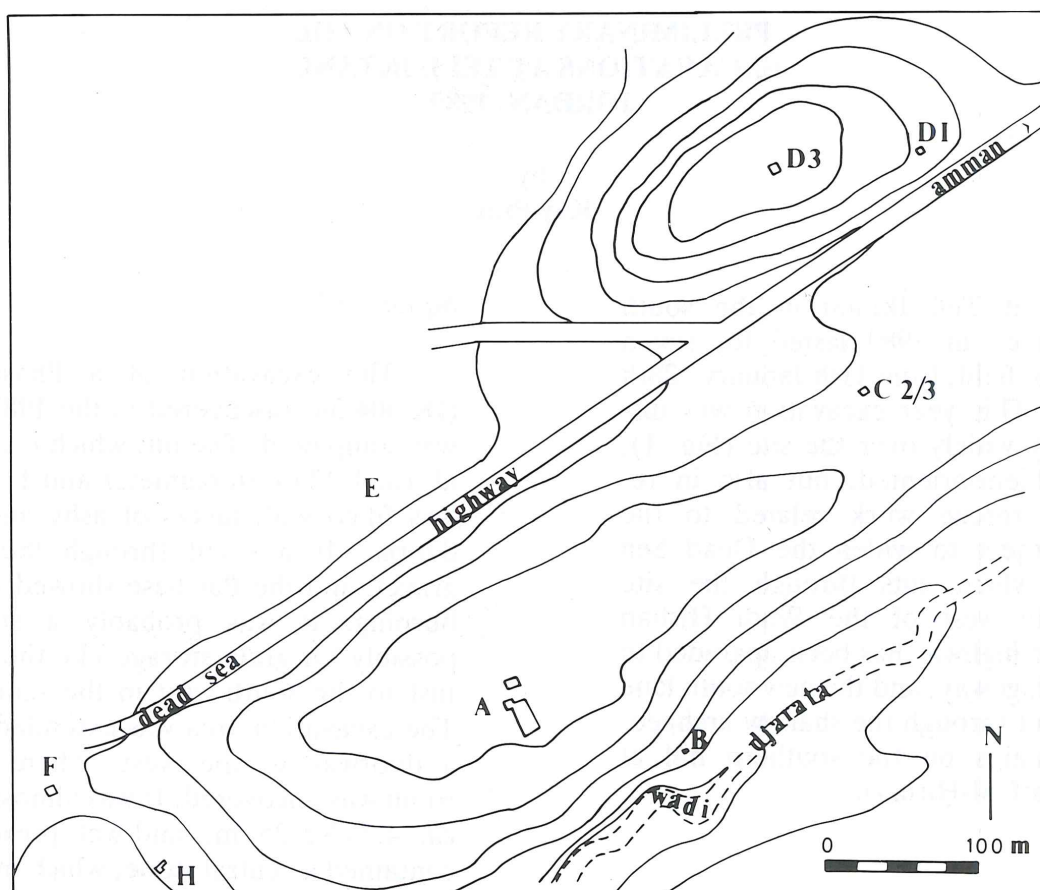


Fig. 1. Contour plan of Tell Iktanu, with excavated areas.

the only piece of metal discovered in the EB-MB levels at Iktanu,<sup>3</sup> a number of smooth white limestone pendants, both large pebbles with tiny suspension holes and small carved pieces with square section, and a set of Canaanian sickle blades like those found in the 1966 season. The whole assemblage was covered by collapsed brick debris.

### Square 13

A similar situation was encountered in a new area (9 × 7.50 m.) opened to the north-east. Despite the usual shallow stratigraphy at Iktanu, a remarkably well-preserved set of three interconnected rooms was excavated (Fig. 2). On the north side a large broad room (7.80 × 4.20 m.) was entered by a doorway placed asymmetrically in the long north wall. The doorway was 1.60 m. wide, and had a

socket stone on the inner east side. The room contained *inter alia* two stone roof-post bases on the long axis, a small curved partition wall against the central north wall, and a mortar set into the natural gravels near the central south wall. There were several dense scatters of sherds. In the south long wall two narrower doorways with thresholds each 60-70 cm. in width led into small broad rooms; that on the south-west (3.80 × 1.70 m.) was virtually empty; that on the south-east (3.40 × 1.70 m.) was almost full of broken pottery, and a collapsed stone and clay bench. The preliminary analysis of the material from the small south-east room has proved most rewarding. There was very little surface disturbance of the area, with only eight chips of modern pottery recorded in the topsoil. In the bricky collapse debris beneath the topsoil material, 1207 EB-MB sherds were recovered. Only one sherd had red slip

3. Cf. spikes, pins, awls in K.M. Kenyon, *Jericho II*, London, 1964, Fig. 45:8, 19; p. 91, 106, 109.





Fig. 2. Tell Iktanu, Area A, Square 13.

(probably a Phase 1 residual). There were 513 cooking-pot ware sherds, and 693 plain ware sherds. Because cooking-pot ware often crumbles into small chips the actual bulk ratio of cooking pots to plain wares is smaller, about 1:4. The actual number of cooking pots represented has not yet been studied. The plain wares reveal a high concentration of storage vessels, some of which are restorable. Large parts of up to eight large jars, two large jugs, two medium-sized jugs, one large storage or mixing bowl, one medium bowl, two medium bottles, and a large 'teapot' have been identified, with very few stray sherds. Some fragments of these vessels were also found in the main room. In the main room a number of smaller vessels have been identified, including fragments of a four-spouted, round-based lamp, and small or medium-sized bowls and bottles.

It seems likely that the small south-east room was the pantry or store, and the large room the living room with small

vessels for serving and daily use. A remarkable amount of detail should be retrievable from this material, such as the use and break patterns of ceramics, and patterns of daily life, when the material is related to the environmental, plant and animal bone studies in progress. The finds from this complex of three rooms also date to Phase 2 of the EB-MB period and to the final occupation of the site. It is likely that most of the material was abandoned *in situ*, and not long afterwards disturbed, smashed, and sealed by the collapse of the mud walls. That parts of vessels are missing or spread across two rooms indicates that the disturbance was human rather than due to a natural catastrophe, such as an earthquake.

#### Area B

This check trench was excavated in 1966 only.

### Area C

Two 20×20 m. grids were laid out on either side of the Phase 1 EB-MB kilns discovered in 1987<sup>4</sup> and a gradiometer survey was made during the first week of the excavation. This survey located several possible kiln sites and two areas measuring respectively 8×4.5 and 4×2 m. were laid out. All 'hot-spots' proved to be concentrations of sherds or iron-rich stones with high magnetic fields. Some further pits, a small amount of kiln material and a potter's basalt pivot stone were uncovered, but no more kilns. Beneath these a series of denuded and destroyed fragments of straight and curved walls of EB 1 and 2 date were discovered, but the remains are poorly preserved due to erosion and rodent activity.

### Area D1

The small test pit (3×2 m.) in this area was completed at a depth of 3.27 m. and backfilled.<sup>5</sup> The sequence of mudbrick EB 1 walls on stone foundations continued downwards on the same alignment for nearly three metres; the final one encountered just above the natural soil proved to be the most substantial. It was associated with a carbonized grain spread overlying the natural soil. A small sample of Early Bronze 1 material was added to that recovered in 1987.

### Area D3

This small trench was extended and again produced a sequence of material mainly dating from the Persian and Iron Age II periods.<sup>6</sup>

1. The surface levels contained a dense complex of Ottoman - Mandate period burials.
2. Crumbly secondary deposits of eroded mudbrick overlying poor stone founda-

tions and horizontal surfaces, probably associated with a Persian phase of use of the fort walls, which are clearly visible on the surface of the tell. These horizontal surfaces were supported by the fort podium.

3. A series of pits, burnt brick material, mortars and horizontal working surfaces, some showing considerable burning, which are probably also associated with the fort podium, but which suggest semi-industrial use of the site: the finds include a potter's rib.
4. Two stone-lined silos and a cylindrical pit of Iron Age II date.
5. Steeply sloping, compacted silt levels which possibly pre-date the fort podium. These overlie
6. A substantial stone foundation of undressed stones on a different alignment to the visible fort walls.

Because of the modern Islamic graves it is not possible to extend the trench to the north, east or west; and the crumbly brick deposits into which the graves are cut make the upper sides of the trench very unstable. To continue the excavation into the earlier levels is not safe without cutting back a considerable distance into the grave area, and the trench has been backfilled at a depth of four metres. The preservation of the earlier levels appears to be good and the decision is a matter of regret. A useful if small sample of ceramics, bone, stone, plant and small objects (including iron and bronze) has been obtained, which will assist with the dating and interpretation of the regional survey material, which was the primary aim of the excavation. A larger project on the Iron Age remains working at the east end of the fort might well be worth considering at a future date.

### Area E

Area E designates a large triangle of light alluvial soils which have been deep-

4. K. Prag, 'Kilns of the Intermediate Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age at Tell Iktanu, Preliminary Report, 1987 Season', *ADAJ* XXXII (1988), p. 59-73.

5. K. Prag, *Levant* XXI (1989), p. 39-40, Figs. 5-7.

6. K. Prag, *Levant* XXI (1989), p. 40-44, Figs. 6, 8-11.



ploughed in the last few years. The area lacks evidence of house walls and relatively few sherds were found. It is bordered on the south by the steep, mainly natural shoulder of Katf al-Ḥuṣan where traces of house walls are visible. No excavation was undertaken here, but much information was obtained by field walking, recording and sampling, especially along the line of bulldozer cuts in the highway zone. Distinctive EB-MB saddle querns (Fig. 3:1) and mortars (Figs. 2, 3:2, 5) of types stratified with EB-MB occupation in Areas A and H were numerous on the edges of the area; their positions were planned. Those in the path of the new road were removed, though most have been left on the site (P1. I, 1). Their numbers, in an area lacking other remnants of occupation, may suggest a food processing zone. A few fine flint sickle blades of the EB-MB period were recovered from the central areas of alluvial soil in Area E where there was very little pottery; they may therefore indicate areas of cereal harvest. A sample of 1400 fragments from a dense sherd scatter found just below the shoulder of Katf al-Ḥuṣan was analysed and indicated purely Phase 2 EB-MB wares and types. The bulldozers, cutting into the dry steep shoulder of Katf al-Ḥuṣan, revealed a concentration of bell-silos and pits associated with shallow EB-MB occupation areas of both Phase 1 and 2 date. These were recorded, sections drawn (Fig. 4), and their fills sampled for sherds and flotation. A classic bell-silo (IK.752.1) which had a depth of 1.80 m. and a maximum diameter of 1.90 m., contained a small clay bin, which had been thrown in with the fill and which may also have served for food storage (Fig. 3:3). Area E has thus provided some very useful information on the extent of the Phase 2 occupation and on a probable area of cereal cultivation, processing and storage, which can be correlated quite satisfactorily with information from

the excavation on the tell.

#### Area F

A partly-destroyed stone structure just off the north-western perimeter of the EB-MB village, first recorded by Mallon,<sup>7</sup> was threatened by the nearby road works. Perhaps originally at least 9.50×5.20 m., only the south end is preserved. Large purple limestone monoliths extracted from the adjacent outcrop were set up to form a sub-rectangular enclosure on flat land 15 m. west of a line of similar stones which define the limits of the EB-MB houses. A section (5.30×2 m.) was excavated across the south end. It appears to have been a rectangular structure, built of large blocks of limestone which were set rather shallowly into alluvial deposits and chocked upright with small stones. The weathering of the exposed surfaces indicates that the stones have stood in this position for a very long time. Mallon's photograph indicates that the north end had disappeared before the building of the 1960s highway which runs immediately to the north. The structure was probably originally paved with large wadi cobbles. Into it was cut a relatively recent (?Ottoman period) child burial, and a more recent pit. The contemporary sherds date the structure to the EB-MB period, and there was no indication that it served as a tomb in antiquity. No evidence of its purpose was preserved.

#### Area G

A trench cut by the army in the 1970s ca. 150 m. north-east of Iktanu on the banks of Wadi Ḥisban revealed dark humus deposits containing EB-MB sherds buried under 1.60 m. of later alluvium. The site (Wadi Ḥisban 3) was noted by J. Mabry in 1987. A flotation and sherd sample was obtained just before the site was accidentally flooded and reburied by adjacent agricultural activity.

7. A. Mallon, R. Koeppl and R. Neuville, *Teleilat Ghassul I*, Rome, 1934, P1. 5:1-2.

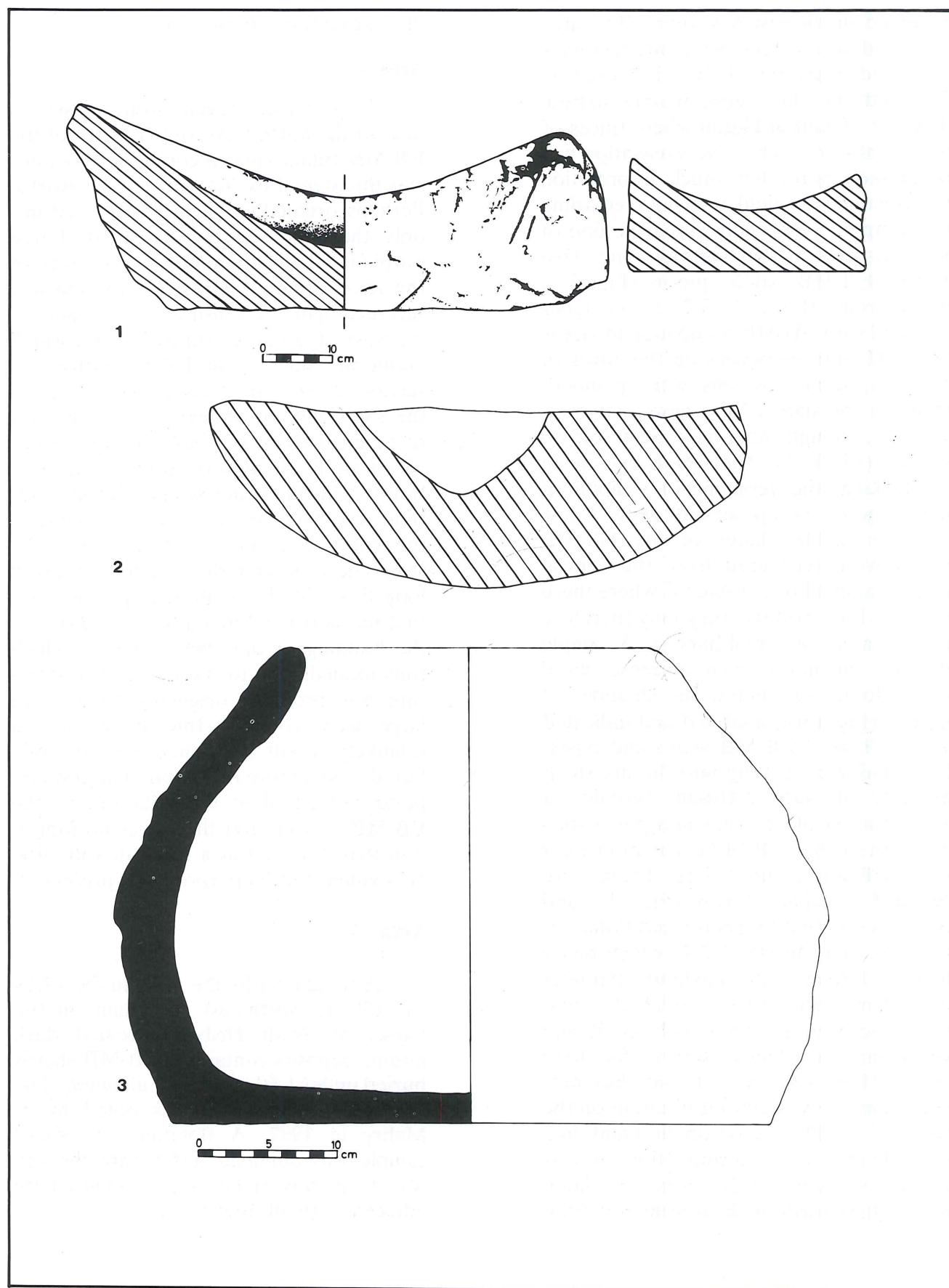


Fig. 3. 1. Saddle quern from Area E; 2. mortar from Area H; 3. clay bin from silo 752.1, Area E; all EB-MB, Tell Iktanu.



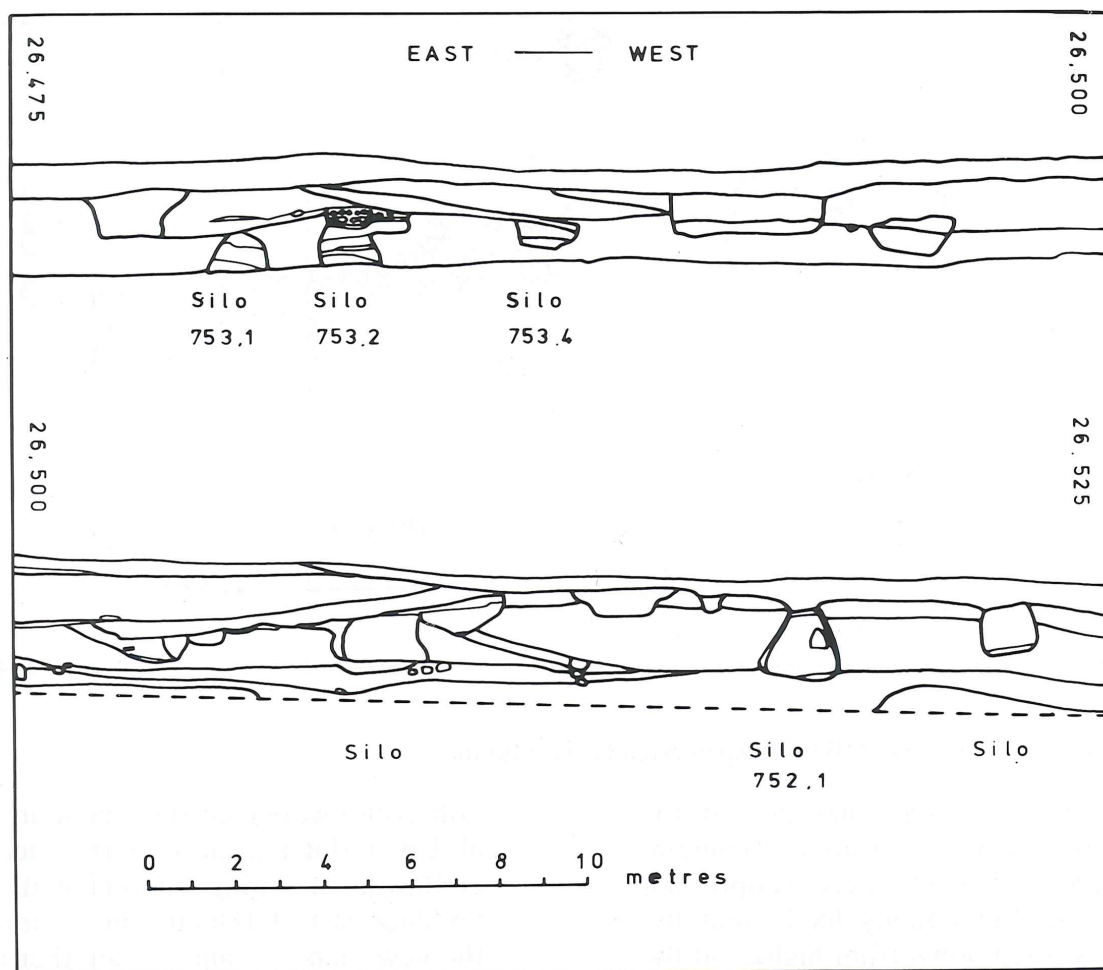


Fig. 4. Sections bulldozed through EB-MB silos in Area E on the north shoulder of Katf al-Ḥuṣan (Iktanu).

#### Area H

A trench 4×5 m., later extended by 3×4.5 m., was laid out across what appeared to be a house/site boundary wall on the western perimeter of the site. This western wall is located near the foot of a gentle slope which is covered by the remains of EB-MB walls and pottery. To the west the ground continues almost level to the bank of Wadi Jarafa and sherds and archaeological traces are sparse. The western wall in this area was built of the same purple limestone as was used in Area F. The excavation (Fig. 5 and Pl. I, 2) showed a doorway, with socket stone on the inner south side, leading into a series of rooms. Two parallel east-west main walls partitioned the area. On the north side was a large area, probably roofed, containing a mortar (Fig. 3:2), and smashed but largely complete vessels discovered *in situ*. These

consisted of a round-based, four-spouted lamp, a storage jar, a bottle and a large fragment of a “wok” (Fig. 6:4). The latter is an unusual vessel for the site. It is made of cooking-pot ware, and like cooking pots has a round base. However the EB-MB cooking pots are very consistently hole-mouth jars in the old Early Bronze Age tradition. That this vessel was also used for cooking is quite clear. The upper exterior walls are sooty, the lower exterior walls burnt pale where they were set into hot ash. The vessel had a pair of envelope ledge handles at the rim. The surviving one has crumbled, undoubtedly from exposure to the heat rising from the fire during cooking. The similarity to a “wok” or deep frying pan is unmistakable. The other vessels are very similar to those uncovered in Square 13, and the whole assemblage is of Phase 2 EB-MB date. Beneath the building was a dark wash level with Phase 1

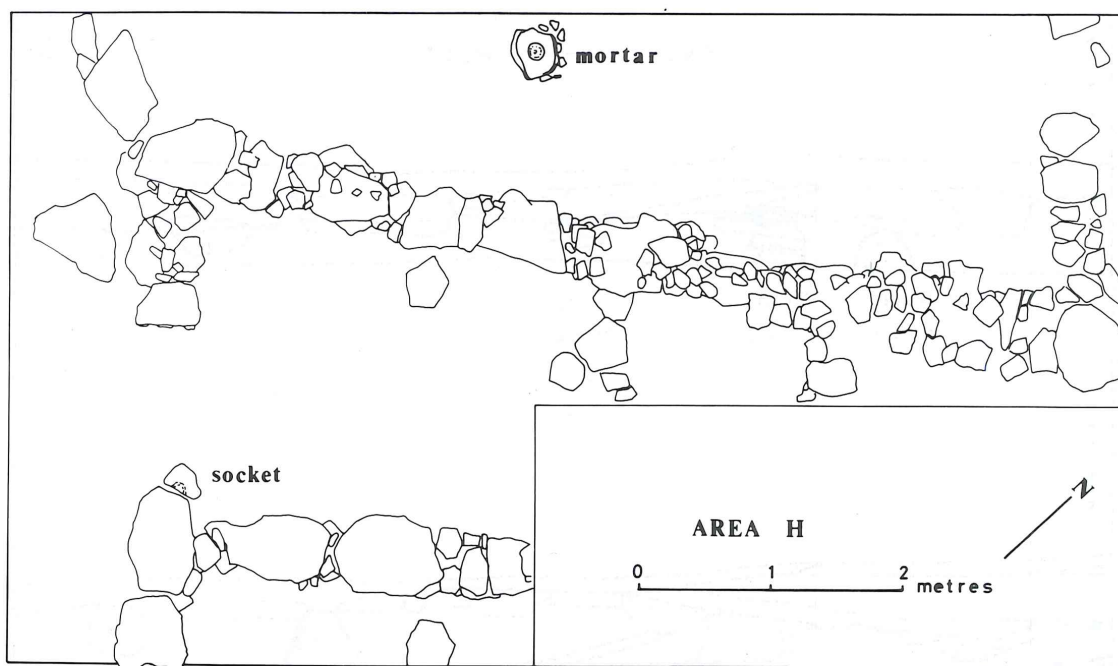


Fig. 5. Plan of Phase 2, EB-MB building in Area H, Tell Iktanu.

material. It is possible that due to the limited area excavated, traces of contemporary Phase 1 walls were simply not encountered, but equally likely that the material washed down from higher up the adjacent slope. The evidence appears to indicate here as in Area E that Phase 2 occupation was spread over a larger area than in the Phase 1 period.

### Survey

Work in the vicinity of the site included the discovery of the first Epi-Palaeolithic site in the region (Wadi Hisban Site 2) by Dr. Philip Macumber.<sup>8</sup> This site will also be invaluable for the process of dating the geomorphological history of the area. Useful deposits of *Melanopsis* shells were discovered at Wadi Hisban Site 1 and collected for dating purposes.

Other sites were recorded, including several EB 1 dolmen sites in the vicinity of er-Rawḍa; a strong but enigmatic stone building east of Iktanu now destroyed by the new highway; and yet another area of EB-MB occupation on a slope 200-300 m. to the west of Katf al-Ḥuṣan. In addition two cemeteries of cist graves ca. 1 km. south-west of Iktanu (of the same type as four destroyed by agricultural development in recent years) were discovered, and one of them was partly recorded (Fig. 7; P1. II, 1). Single, double and 'terraced' rows of cists (P1. II, 2), mostly aligned nearly east-west, a few north-south, and some prominent and larger stone circles are typical of these cemeteries. They appear to be of a type dated by Mallon, Stekelis and others mainly to the Chalcolithic and EB 1 periods.<sup>9</sup>

During work at Area G, an adjacent

8. I am most grateful to Dr. Macumber (Pella Excavations and Department of Water Resources, Victoria, Australia) for his contribution.

9. A. Mallon, R. Koeppel and R. Neuville, *Teleilat Ghassul I*, Rome, 1934, p. 152ff.; A. Mallon, *Biblica* 10 (1929), p. 214, 224ff., Pls. II:4, III:1-2; M. Stekelis, *Les Monuments Mégalithiques de*

*Palestine*, Archives de l'Institut de Paléontologie Humaine, Mémoire 15, Paris, 1935; M. Stekelis, *La necrópolis megalítica di Ala-Safat, Transjordanía*, Diputación Provincial de Barcelona, Instituto di Prehistoria y Arqueología, Monografías I, Barcelona, 1961; see also R. Neuville and M. Stekelis in *Biblica* 11 (1930), p. 249-265 for Bronze Age material.



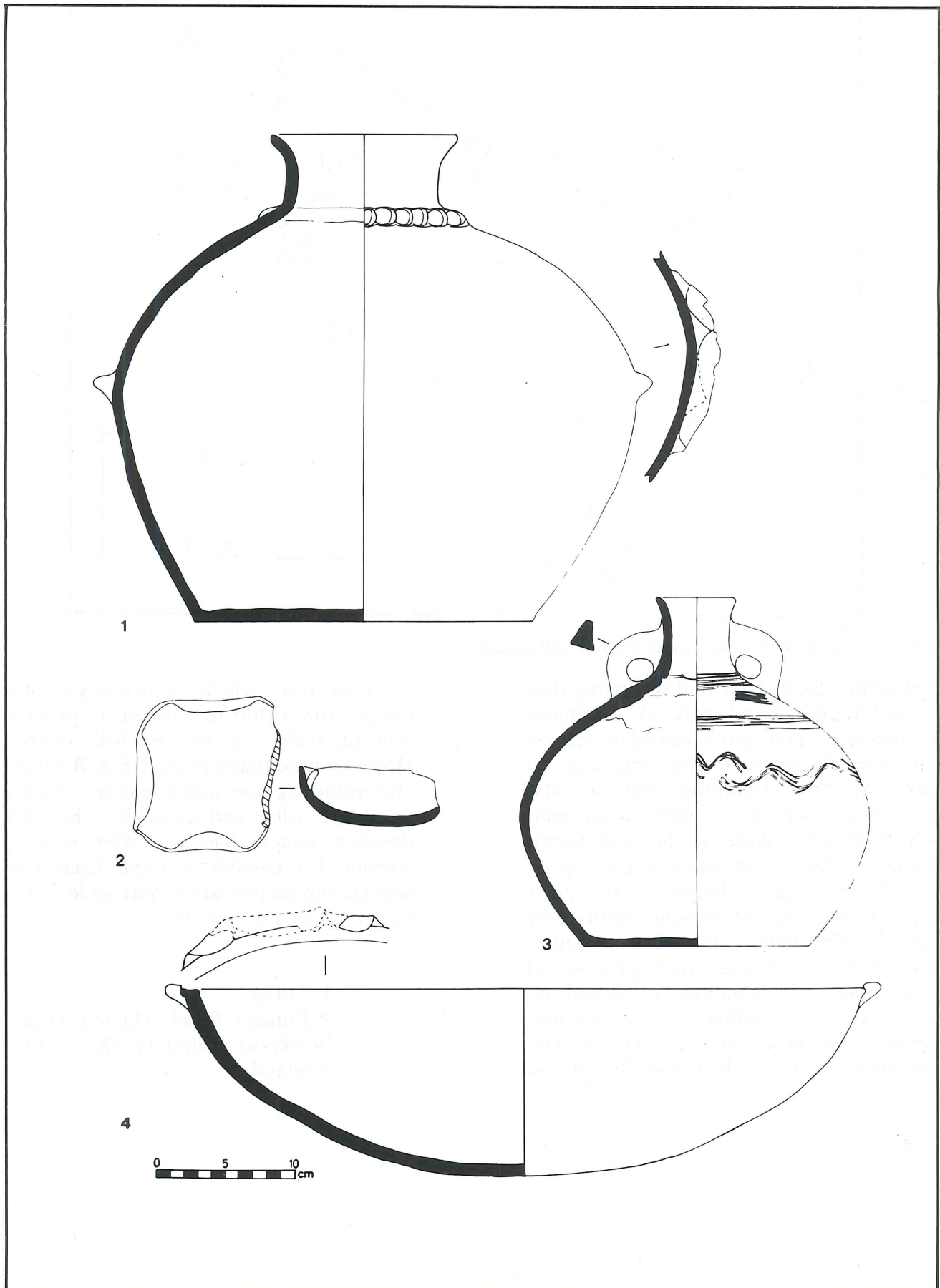


Fig. 6. Phase 2, EB-MB pottery from Area H, Tell Iktanu.

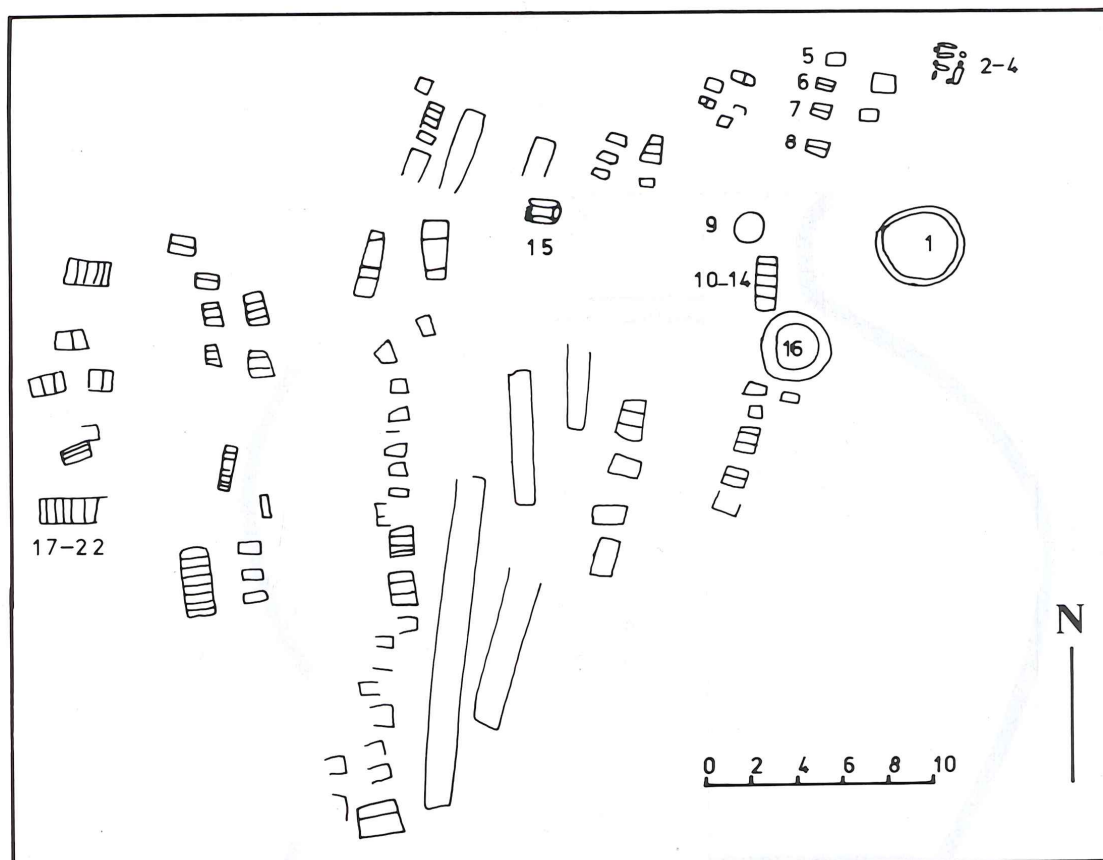


Fig. 7. Plan of Cemetery F, south-west of Tell Iktanu.

Ottoman period water-mill was partly destroyed in agricultural work. A. McQuitty organised an emergency recording session and tried to persuade the landowner to preserve the remaining section. Ms. McQuitty is writing a report on the mill, which probably relates to the more recent history of cereal cultivation in the region.

A preliminary glimpse of the plant remains from the 1987 season identified by Dr. U. Thanheiser, Botanical Institute, University of Vienna, gives promise of much useful information. It should be stressed that the following is a very preliminary note based on a small sample. The staple crops are cereals: in the EB 1 period

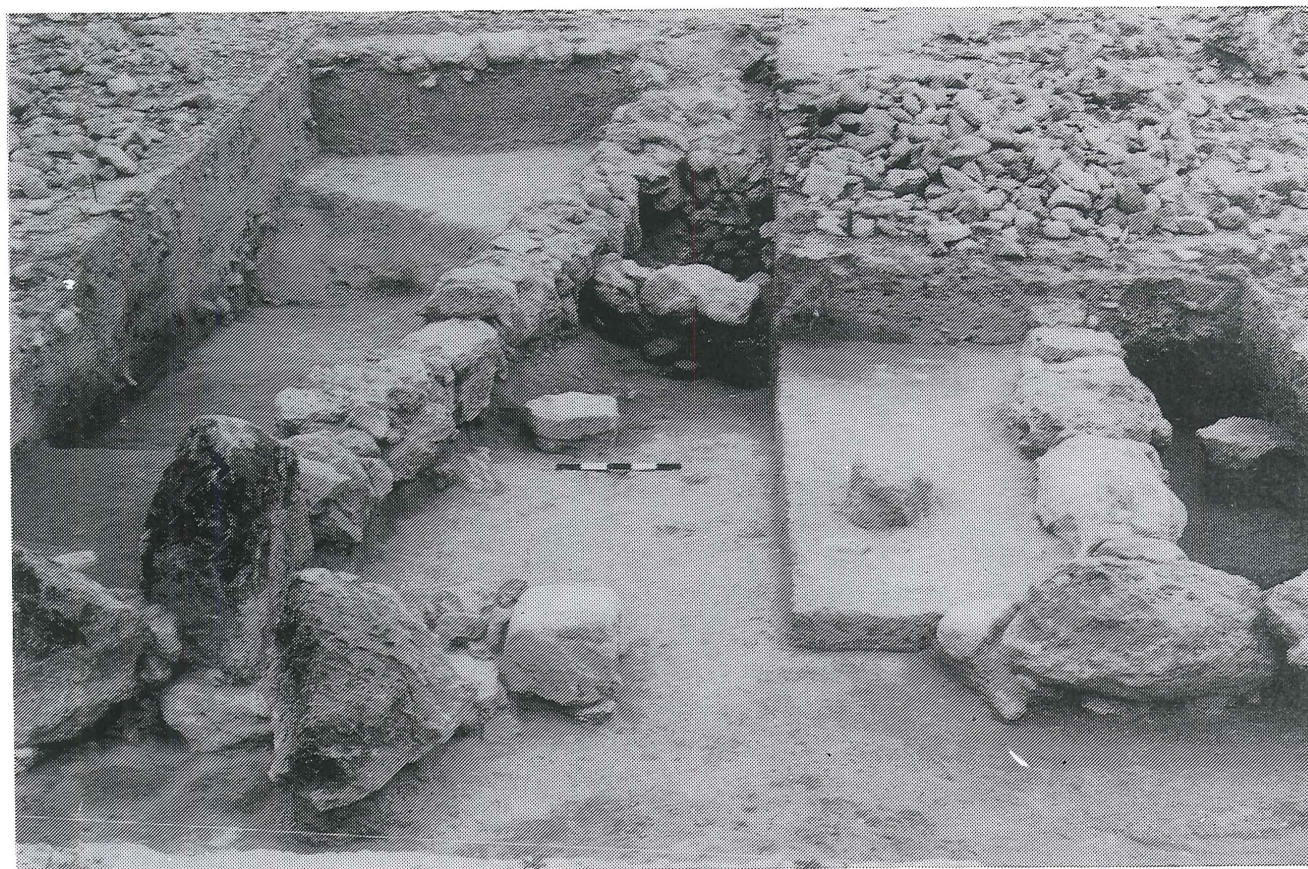
the main crop is wheat, particularly emmer wheat, with a shift to a dominant production of barley in the EB-MB period. However production in the EB-MB period also includes pulses and tree crops, mainly fig, grape, olive and pistachio. The 1989 flotation sample has now been sent to Vienna. The combined sample from both seasons should provide a more solid statistical base in due course.

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1. Mainly EB-MB saddle querns and mortars found in Area E, Tell Iktanu.

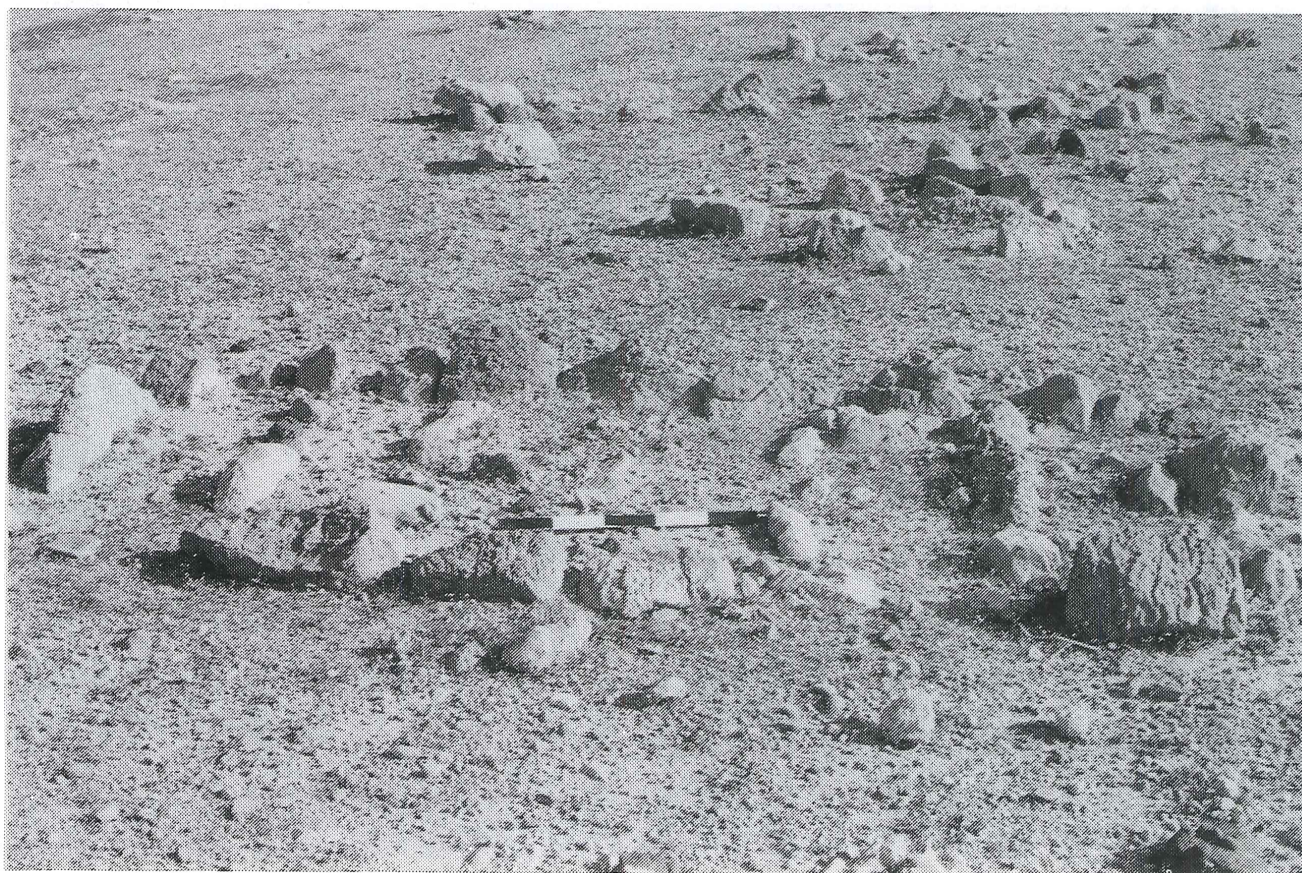


2. Area H, Tell Iktanu; from the west.





1. View of Cemetery F, south-west of Tell Iktanu; from the east.



2. Row of six small cist graves (nos. 17-22 in Fig. 7), from the south. The scale (0.50 m.) is aligned east-west.