

## THE DISCOVERY OF AN EARLY BRONZE IV TOMB AT SARAQIB (NORTHERN SYRIA)

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In November 1983 Abdo Asfary, at that time Assistant-Director in the Department of Antiquities of Idlib, was informed of the chance discovery of a tomb at Saraqib - a town a few kilometers North of Ebla-Tell Mardikh, along the Aleppo-Damascus motorway - and decided to take the necessary measures in order to prevent the dispersion of its furniture. The tomb was brought to light during the excavation of some sewage canalization, and it was not possible to draw its complete map. However, it was possible to ascertain that it belonged to the typology of the tombs excavated in the rock, without the entrance shaft.

The funerary chamber had an oval shape, it was 1,5 m high, 2,5 m long, 2,0 m large, and its entrance was to the East. From the architectural point of view it is similar to the tombs of the cemetery at Ansary, in the town of Aleppo (Fig. III), while it is different from the Palestinian and Syrian shaft tombs (s. Qatna-Mishrife), for the absence of the vertical entrance shaft.

It was not possible to have any indication of the original placement of the furniture and of the human and animal bones. In the West part of the chamber, two bronze objects, a bracelet and a spear head, were found together with a clay figurine, but the greatest part of the funerary furniture was made of vases of different typologies. We will give now the catalogue of the whole furniture (Pl. I, 1).

We have catalogued the pottery according to both its morphology and its typology, namely to the types of the paste and the decorations, in order to develop some organic comparisons with the typologies we know from Ansary, Ebla-Tell Mardikh, the sites in the middle Orontes, in the 'Amuq and the Nahr Quweyq valleys.

Painted Goblets (Fig. I, 1-3): they have a conic shape and a slightly convex base; the paste is usually yellow-white or pinkish. They are decorated in the upper part of their bodies with brown, red, or black horizontal bands, which are deeply incised or combed in order to reveal the paste underneath. We know quite well the distribution of this kind of goblet from central to northern Syria<sup>1</sup>.

Bowls (Fig. I, 4-16): the distribution of this shape in northern Syria, from the sites in the 'Amuq valley (Tell Taynat)<sup>2</sup> to Ansary (Fig. III), is also well known. It is divided into two classes, namely a type of common clay, and a type of painted clay. Anyhow, the base is always flat or slightly concave. Lastly, we recognize the following variants in the two types of common and painted clay:

- 1) Bowls with grooved rims (Fig. I, 4-5, 13): usually this shape has an open mouth, slightly everted rim, grooved from two up to four times on the outside; the paste is whitish or pinkish; the diameter of the mouth is between 11,0 and 18,5 cm long<sup>3</sup>.
- 2) Bowls with folded-over rims (Fig. I, 6-7): the paste of common clay is always white-yellow in colour, and the diameter of the mouth is between 12,0 and 16,0 cm long<sup>4</sup>.
- 3) Everted-rim bowls (Fig. I, 8): also in this case we have

<sup>1</sup> H. Ingholt, *Rapport préliminaire sur sept campagnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie (1932-38)*, København 1940, pp. 34-36, pl. XI: 1-2; E. Fugmann, *Hama. Fouilles et recherches de la fondation Carlsberg, 1931-1938*, København 1958, figs. 74-75, 85, 93, 98, 103, J5-1. P. Matthiae, *Ebla. Un impero ritrovato*, Torino 1977, fig. 21; pp. 110-12. R. Braidwood-L. Braidwood, *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch. I. The Earlier Assemblages. Phases A-I (= OIP 61)*, Chicago 1960, fig. 344, n. 9-16, 'Amuq J. J. Matthers, *Tell Rifa'at 1977: Preliminary Report of an Archaeological Survey: "Iraq"*, 40 (1978), nn. 26, 31, fig. 9. R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Le site archéologique de Mishrifé-Qatna*, Paris 1935, pl. L, Tell Masin; Id.: "Syria", 11 (1930), pl. XXXIII, col. 2. A. Souleiman, *Excavations of Early and Middle Bronze Age Sites in Aleppo, Syria: "Sovietskaia Archeologia"*, 4 (1983), fig. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Braidwood, *Excavations*, fig. 342: 4-7, 'Amuq J.

<sup>3</sup> We find the same bowl at Hama and Ebla: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 103, 3C85, 3B847, from J1; fig. 109, 3B964, 3C710, from H5; Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 21: 1-2. But they are also present at Halawa: W. Orthmann, *Halawa 1977-1979 (= SBA 31)*, Bonn 1981, pl. 55: 3; at Hadidi: R.H. Dornemann, *Tell Hadidi. A Millennium of Bronze Age City Occupation: AASOR, 44 (1979)*, fig. 15: 29-30; at Til Barsip: F. Thureau-Dangin, M. Du nand, *Til Barsip (= BAH 23)*, Paris 1936, fig. 31.

<sup>4</sup> For a comparison see Ebla and Hamah: Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 16: 10; Mar-

a shape made of brown-pinkish common clay; the mouth is between 15,0 and 19,0 cm large<sup>5</sup>.

- 4) Bowls with folded-over and carinated rims (Fig. I, 9-10): the shape is made of brown or white-grey common clay; the mouth is 14,0-26,0 cm large<sup>6</sup>.
- 5) Bowls with vertical rims (Fig. I, 11-12): as in the previous cases the clay is of the common type; the diameter of the mouth is 13,0-18,0 cm long<sup>7</sup>.
- 6) Painted bowls (Fig. I, 14-16): usually they have folded-over rims, but sometimes also natural rims are present; the painting is in red or black bands, which have one or two deep grooves, in order to show the clay underneath, with the same technique as the goblets; the clay is greyish, or whitish, or light pink; the mouth is between 12,0 and 21,0 cm large<sup>8</sup>.

Spouted jars: we have two specimens with bell-shaped bases, spout on the shoulder, and everted, carinated rim; the clay is light grey and whitish in colour, like the goblets; on the body there are some bands of painting, with one or two wavy grooves, which reach the original surface (Fig. I, 17)<sup>9</sup>. A third specimen (Fig. I, 18), has the same shape with a large neck, slightly convex base, and everted, swollen rim; the clay is whitish with a brown core<sup>10</sup>.

dikh IIB1; Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 74: 3K206, 3K203, from J5.

<sup>5</sup> They can be compared with Ebla, Hamah, and Tell Hadidi: Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 21: 3, fig. 16: 6-7, Mardikh IIB2; Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 103: 3C77, 3C109, from J1; Dornemann: AASOR, 44 (1979), fig. 18: 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> We find some comparisons only at Hamah: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 98: 3E7; fig. 85: 3F806, J1 and 4.

<sup>7</sup> Compare them with Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 16: 4; Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 85: 3G65, J5; Orthmann, *Halawa*, Pl. 54: 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> They are to be found from Hamah to the 'Amuq: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 64: 3G905, from J6; fig. 74: 3G289, from J5; Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 21: 3-4, 8; Braidwood, *Excavations*, fig. 343: 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> They are known particularly at Hamah: Fugmann, *Hama*, figs. 64, 74, 85, 93, 98, 103, from J6 to J1.

<sup>10</sup> They are spread over from central to northern Syria: Fugmann, *Hama*,

Trifoil-mouth pitchers (Fig. II, 13): this is a single-handled shape of brown-pink or white-yellow clay. It is made either of simple ware or of painted ware, or also with a decoration of very thin horizontal bands of wash on the upper part of the body<sup>11</sup>.

Pointed-base jars (Fig. I, 20-21): these are egg-shaped jars, whose bodies are partly altered due to their placement in the furniture; the rim is everted and swollen, and the clay is white-greenish<sup>12</sup>.

Spherical pots (Fig. II, 10): there is only one specimen of this type, with globular body, short neck, and natural, slightly swollen rim; two holes are made below the rim, in a diametrically opposed position; the clay is grey.

Two-handled storage jars (Fig. II, 14): these specimens have always a simple body, with flat or slightly concave base; the clay is white-yellow and is of the same workshop as the goblets, or of a very similar one; this is true of the decoration, too, which is made of black bands on the neck<sup>13</sup>.

Spherical jar with carinated rims (Figs. I, 19; III): only one specimen made of simple ware, with a white-yellow or greyish clay; it is between 20,0 and 22,0 cm. high<sup>14</sup>.

Vertical plain-rim storage jar (Fig. I, 22): this kind of jar is made of pinkish clay, with a white slip; it may be compared with the types of the 'Amuq and of Ebla<sup>15</sup>.

fig. 103: 3B835, J1; Braidwood, *Excavations*, fig. 337: 9; Orthmann, *Halawa*, pl. 59:21.

<sup>11</sup> They are known between Qatna and the 'Amuq: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 98: 3F909; R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Compte rendu de la quatrième campagne de fouilles à Mishrifé-Qatna*: "Syria", 11 (1930), Dnebi, pl. 3; Braidwood, *Excavations*, fig. 335:3; fig. 337: 14.

<sup>12</sup> It is prevalently diffused in northern Syria, but also in central Syria: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 93: 3F7, J3; J. Matthers, *The River Qoueiq, Northern Syria, and Its Catchment* (= BAR 98), Oxford 1981, fig. 205: 32; M.E.L. Mallowan, *Excavations in the Balih Valley, 1938*: "Iraq", 8 (1946), figs. 9: 12, 10: 14, from Tell Jidle.

<sup>13</sup> We find the same unpainted shape at Hamah and at Til Barsip: Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 106: 5B94, from J1; Thureau-Dangin, *Til Barsib*, fig. 32, pl. XXVI: 1.

<sup>14</sup> It is prevalently known in northern Syria: Dornemann: AASOR, 44 (1979), fig. 15: 33; Thureau-Dangin, *Til Barsib*, fig. 32: 16; Matthers, *River Qoueiq*, fig. 211, col. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Braidwood, *Excavations*, fig. 314: 10; Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 17: 6, Mardikh IIB1.

Bevelled-rim jar (Fig. I, 23): it is a peculiar type, due to its profile; it is made of brown-greyish clay.

Pattern-combed jar (Fig. II, 15): it has a close and smooth mouth, but the presence of the base of the handle, leads us to believe that the handle ended quite high up the neck; thus, we must suppose that the original neck and rim are lost; the surface of the body has the typical patterning of the well known typology, and it is quite regular; the base is flat and it bears the traces of the rope used to detach it. The clay is greyish with sandy black and white grits. The typology is common in Palestine and in Syria.

Painted jars (Fig. II, 1-3): they certainly belong to the class of the painted goblets and bowls; they have a long neck and slightly everted, swollen rim; the painting is made of black or red bands, and is removed by a groove or by a two-waves combing; they can also be decorated with a simple net-like pattern. These shapes with the same decoration are common at Ansary/Aleppo and at 'Ain Assan, and in central Syria (Fig. III)<sup>16</sup>.

Carinated bowls (Fig. II, 7-9): they have a slightly everted or a natural or an outswollen rim; in the last case there are also three or four grooves; the clay of the body has different tones, from light brown to cream-yellow. The type is well known in central Syria<sup>17</sup>.

Painted Syrian bottles (Fig. II, 4-6): they certainly belong to the class of the painted ware, which we have already taken into consideration, concerning the goblets and the bowls; they have some variants in the shapes, with a globular type with leaning swollen rim, and an *alabastron*-like type, or a pear-shaped type with a natural rim, but the base is always flat, or slightly concave; the painting is black in bands on the neck and the shoulder. The typology of this decoration is spread over central Syria, as is well known<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla*, pp. 112-13, Mardikh IIB2; Fugmann, *Hama*, s. J5-1, *passim*; Braidwood, *Excavations*, figs. 342-44; R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Souran at Tell Masin*: "Berytus", 2 (1935), pl. XLIX: 15, from Tell Masin.

<sup>17</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla*, fig. 33: 9-10, Mardikh IIIA; Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 110: 18; Ingholt, *Hama*, pl. X, GI-CX; R. du Mesnil du Buisson, *Les ruines d'el-Mishrifé*: "Syria", 8 (1927), pl. XII: 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla*, from Mardikh IIB2, p. 11012; Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 75:

Metallic Syrian bottles: this is the same typology as the previous one, but it was produced by two different workshops: the first one (Fig. II, 11), is characterized by the use of a very fine black clay, of the metallic type, with corrugation and polishing; also the shape has some basic differences: the rim is vertical outside, and has an indentation inside, as if it had to host a lid, the base is pointed. The other Syrian bottle (Fig. II, 12), has the shape of an *alabastron*, with a double everted rim, it is made of grey clay, polished in horizontal bands outside. As H. Kühne has clearly proved<sup>19</sup>, this type is well spread over northern Syria.

Lastly, the furniture included also some objects; in particular, there were a spear head (Fig. I, 24; Pl. I, 2), of the type with the collar graved with a fish-bone incision, and the blade with an expanded, carinated central ribbing, and a hooked tang, as is found at Ebla, and particularly at Byblos<sup>20</sup>. A bronze bracelet (Fig. I, 25) is of the common spiral-like type. Moreover, with the bronze objects, there was also a naked female figurine, with the hands to her breasts, wearing a necklace of a type wellknown (Pl. I, 3)<sup>21</sup>.

We give here the percentages of the presences of the different pottery types of our classification.

GOBLETS	BOWLS	BOTTLES	VASES	SMALL JARS	JARS	BOWLS	BRONZE OBJECTS	FIGURINES
Fig. I, 1-3	Fig. I, 4-16	Fig. II, 4-6, 11-12	Fig. II, 1-3	Figs. I, 17-20, II, 13-15	Fig. I, 22-23	Fig. II, 7-9	Fig. I, 24-25	Pl. I, 3
with decoration without decoration	with decoration without decoration	black clay grey clay with decoration	with decoration	with decoration spouted jars jars without spout jars with decoration	without decoration	with carination with decoration	spear head bracelet	
54	5	6 48	5 1 21	8 10	3 8 6	7	6 10	1 1 1

3D315, J5; fig. 85: 3B915; fig. 93: 3A673, 3F585, J3; fig. 106: 5A977, 5A976, 5A979, J1; du Mesnil du Buisson: "Berytus", 2 (1935), pl. XLIX: 31.

<sup>19</sup> H. Kühne, *Die Keramik vom Tell Chuēra und ihre Beziehungen zu Funden aus Syrien-Palästina, der Türkei und dem Iraq*, Berlin 1976, pp. 63-67, map 2.

<sup>20</sup> TM.78.Q.477 from Ebla-Tell Mardikh, unpublished; M. Dunand, *Fouilles de Byblos. II. 1933-1938*, Paris 1954, n. 9524, pl. LXV, fig. 320, p. 291.

<sup>21</sup> See for a comparison Fugmann, *Hama*, fig. 64: 3D483, from J6; du Mesnil

The pottery furniture of the Saraqib tomb belongs to the ceramic horizon of the end of the third millennium B.C., which is called, according to the Italian terminology, Early Bronze IVB<sup>22</sup>. It is characterized by the prevalent presence of the painted goblets, made with the fast wheel. This period is also called, on the base of the pottery, age of the painted caliciform culture, and can be dated after the destruction of the Royal Palace G of Ebla, namely to the last fourth of the third millennium B.C.

In fact, during the preceding phase of Early Bronze IVA, the corrugated goblets are prevalent, at least in central Syria, and are found in the Palace G of Ebla. After the destruction of this Palace, the corrugated type disappeared, and a painted type appeared (Fig. I, 1-3), which is new for the decoration, the clay type, and the working of the ware. This type is spread over along the Orontes valley, up to the 'Amuq, on the coast in the Tartus region, at Tell Simiriyan, in inner Syria up to 'Ain Assan and Ansary/Aleppo. This distribution points to a movement towards the South of this caliciform culture, which is, for its characteristics, a new phenomenon.

From the point of view of chronology, the funerary furniture of Saraqib has apparently to be put within this second phase of the caliciform culture, as is pertinently proved by the specimens of the painted bowls, goblets, and juglets. However, some types in our classification, namely some jars (Fig. I, 19-21), have some more pertinent parallels - as we have pointed out - within the ceramic repertoires of Hamah and Ebla of Middle Bronze; the same types are to be found in the excavations of Ansary/Aleppo (Fig. III, 12-15). Yet, from the point of view of the paste and the clay, these jars apparently belong to the same workshops as the bowls (Fig. I, 4-7), whose more pertinent parallels are found at Hamah J2-1.

This phenomenon could lead us to make a distinction between the different shapes of painted pottery, goblets, bowls, jars (Figs. I, 1-3, 14-17; II, 1-6, 14) - which are clearly inserted in the horizon of Early Bronze IVB - and some shapes of the common pottery, like the above-mentioned jars, and the carinated bowls, which have

du Buisson: "Berytus", 2 (1935), pl. L: 81; L. Badre, *Les figurines anthropomorphes en terre cuite à l'âge du Bronze en Syrie*, Paris 1980, tavv. II, IV, LXII.

<sup>22</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla*, p. 45.

more pertinent parallels in the immediately following phase. The contemporary presence of the two pottery shapes in the Saraqib and Ansary furnitures (Fig. III), may be explained either with a possible date from Early Bronze IVB for both, or from an initial and final phase of Early Bronze IVB, or from a period between the two phases, namely Early Bronze IVB and Middle Bronze I.

The second hypothesis would prove that the tombs were multiple burials, and were used for a long period, and not for an individual burial in a definite time. This could be true also for Ansary, 'Ain Assan, some tombs of Dnebi, Hamah, and, lastly, Qatna-Mishrife. However, a difference between the last and the first instances is probably due to the social and economic nature of the burials, and of their furniture. In fact, both at Ansary and at Saraqib, the technique of the excavation of the tomb could point to its belonging to a village, rather than to a town. Thus, we cannot exclude that the collective nature of these two instances might descend from the socio-economic characteristics of the societies, to which they belonged.

We can now end with one last consideration. The clay of the two furnitures is different as regards the paste and the workmanship, and it is possible to trace a sequence between the oldest and the most recent types. It is, however, certain that they are linked by the thread of an internal evolution; in fact, some changes took place as a consequence of the technologic improvements and not of a cultural transformation. In other words, we have here an inner development of the ceramic culture, and not a change of it. This process is not due to an external, violent or pacific, contribution - like the immigration of new peoples -, but it is the result of a progressive development of the same centres, which were responsible for the culture of Early Bronze IVA, a development which probably brought from the formation of the state of Ebla, to the formation of the state of Yamkhad<sup>23</sup>.

In conclusion, the Saraqib furniture is the evidence for a transition phase between Early and Middle Bronze in northern Syria, between 2000 and 1900 B.C. This phase brought to a slow and progressive inner transformation, which ended with the formation of a new local culture, namely the Middle Bronze culture of Syria.

<sup>23</sup> Matthiae, *Ebla*, p. 60, fig. 10; A. Suleiman, *Excavations at Ansary-Aleppo for the Seasons 1973-1980. Early and Middle Bronze Ages: "Akkadica"*, 40 (1984), pp. 1-16.

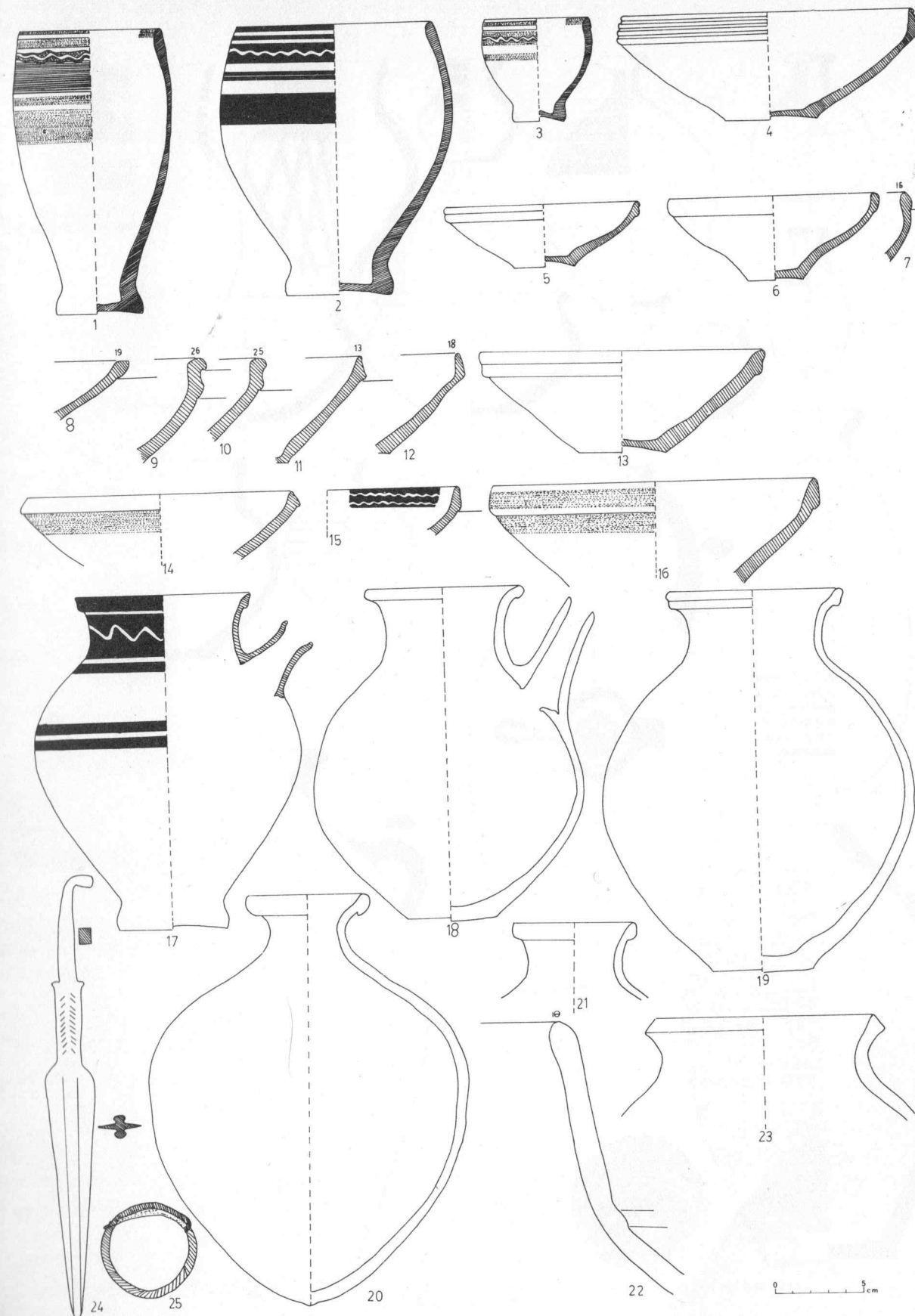


Fig. 1

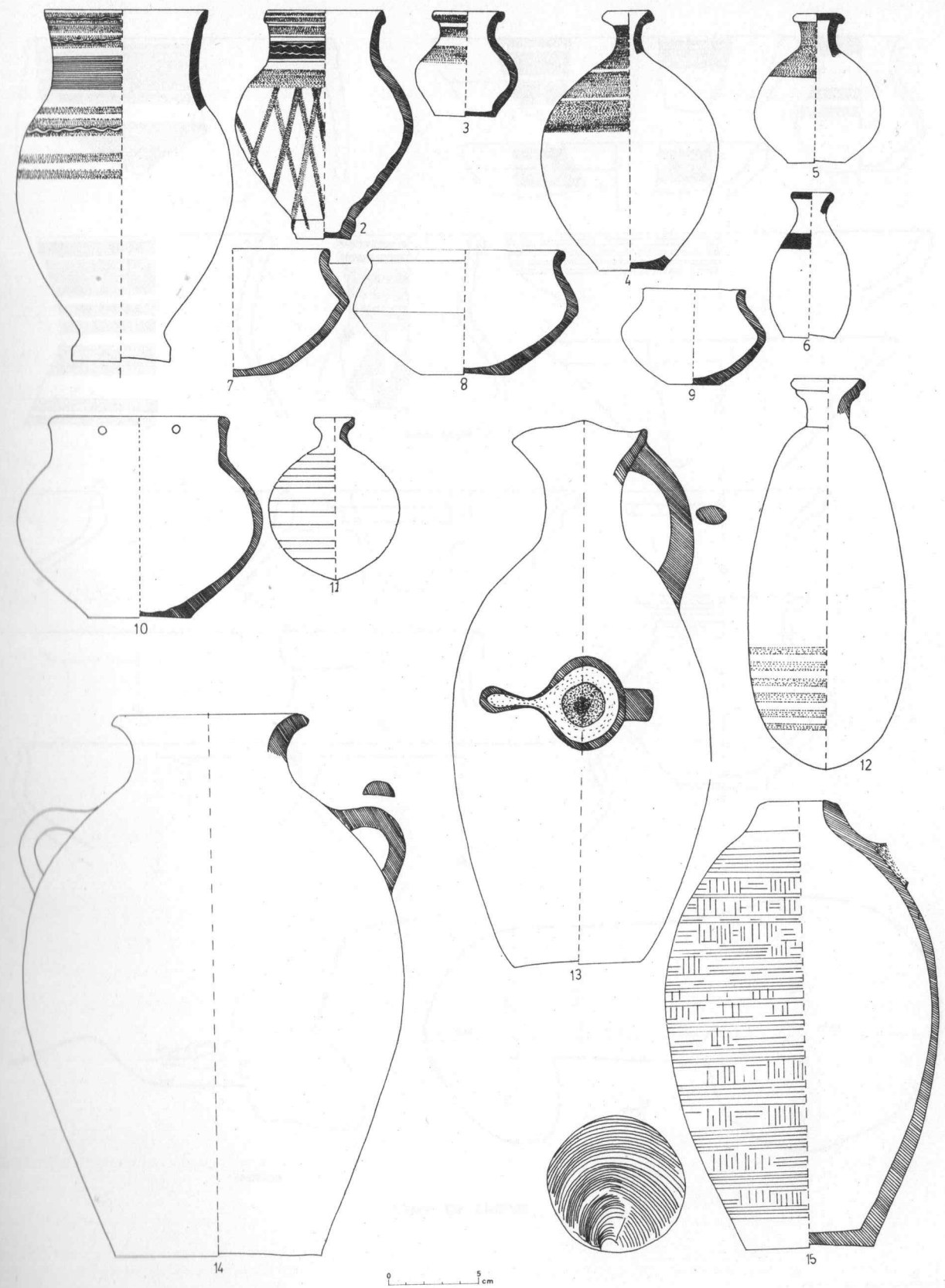
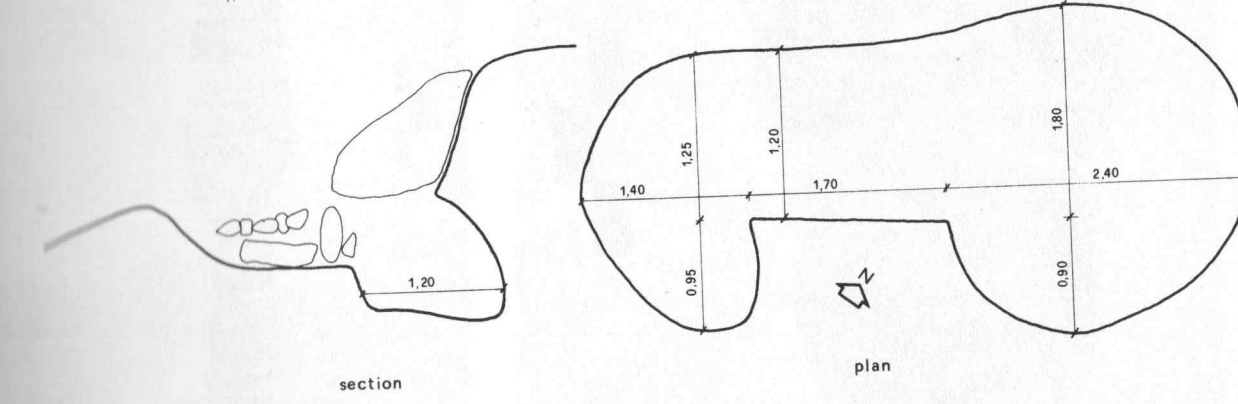
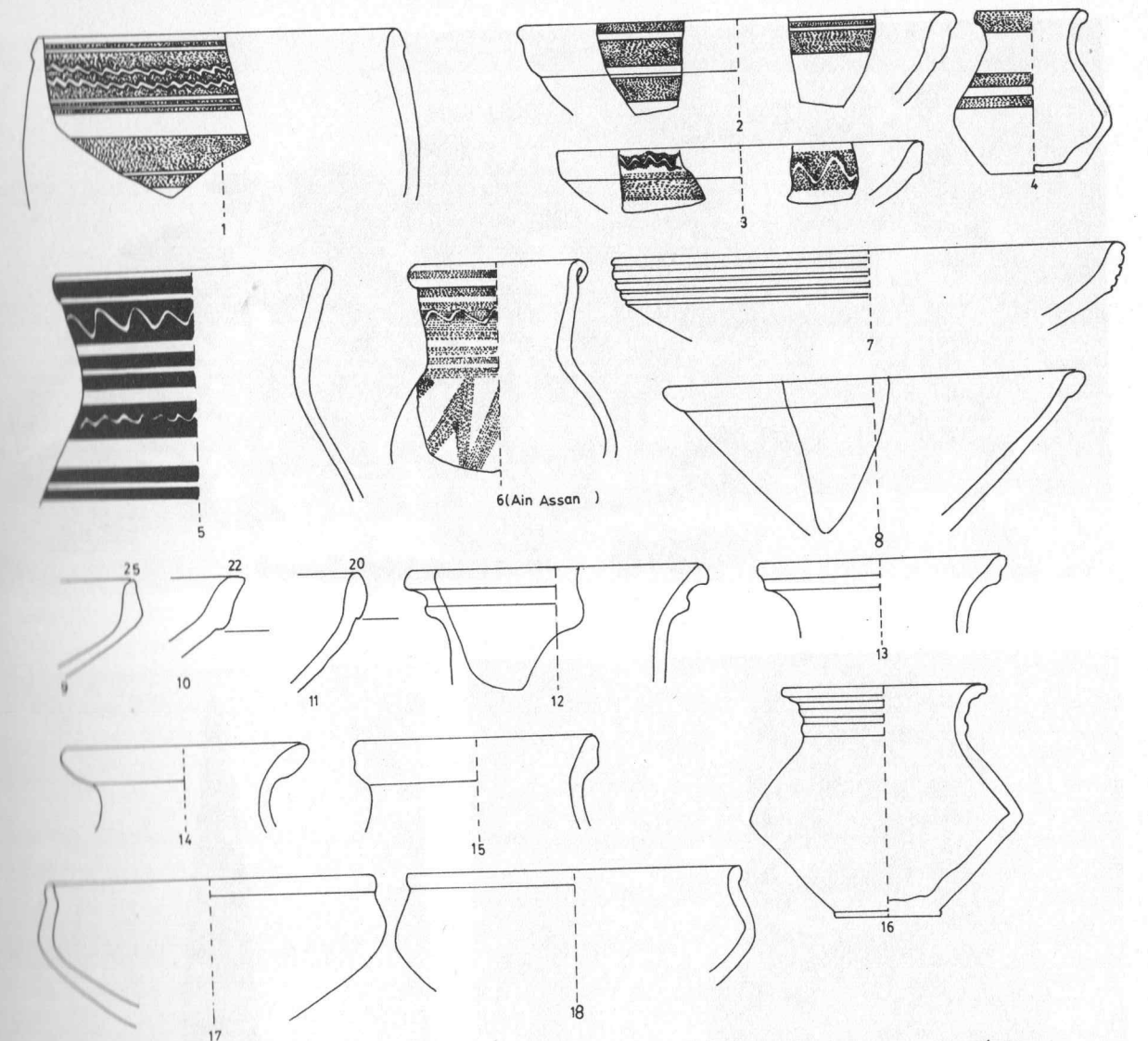


Fig. 2



TOMB OF ANSARI

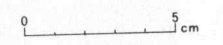
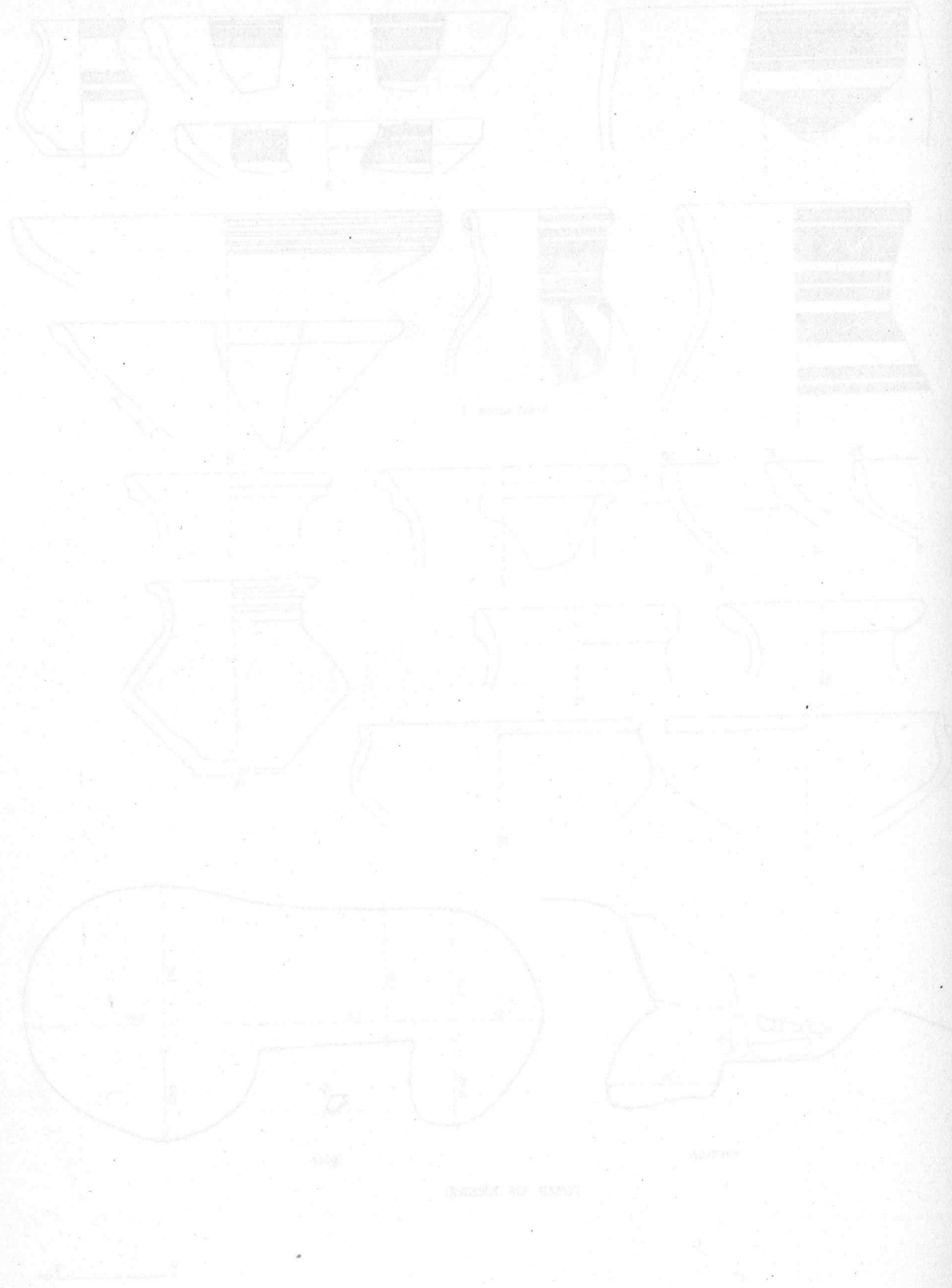


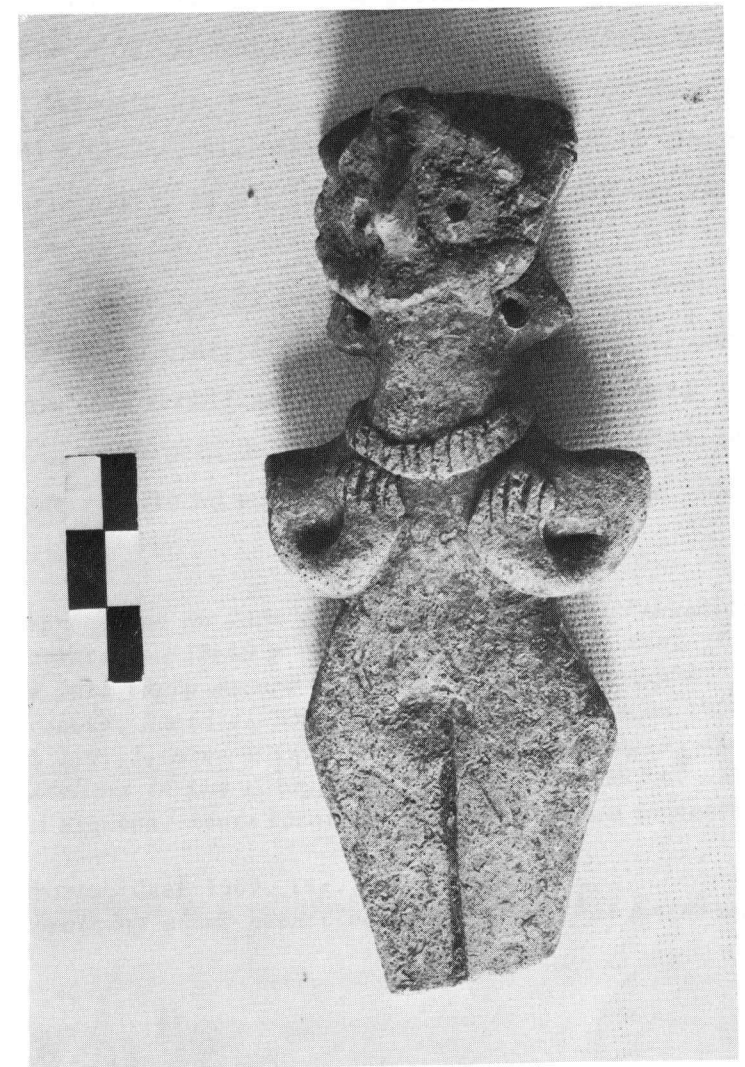
Fig. 3



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