

TELL QARAMEL

EXCAVATIONS, 2001

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The Syrian-Polish Archaeological Mission to Tell Qaramel carried out the third season of excavations at the site.¹⁾ Fieldwork continued in trenches located in the lowest part of the southern slope of the tell (squares J-7 b,d; K-6 a,c; K-5 b,d). A new trench (L-4 a,c, 5 by 10 m) was opened to the southeast of square K-5. Together with previously excavated trenches J-12, J-11, J-10 and J-9, they form an 80 m long step-trench. The surface of the area explored on the southern slope in 2001 totals 200 sq. m. It was expected after examination of last year's stratigraphical evidence that Pre-Pottery Neolithic layers would be reached forthwith.

1) Research is the result of scientific and financial cooperation between the Polish Centre of Archaeology, Warsaw University and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, Damascus. This project is also sponsored by the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University.

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Abdel Razzaq Moaz, the Director General of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus for his constant help and kindness. We are deeply indebted to the staff of the Regional Directorate of Antiquities in Aleppo, especially to the Director, Dr. Wahid Khayyata, for help in arranging the fieldwork and for the warm welcome. The staff of the expedition on the Polish side included: Prof. Dr. Ryszard F. Mazurowski, Co-Director; Dr. Dorota Ławecka, Ms Joanna Gawrońska, Ms Katarzyna Januszek, Mr. Piotr Karczmarek, Ms Renata Maskowicz, archaeologists; and students from the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University: Mr. Marcin Białowarczuk, Ms Małgorzata Chacińska and Mr. Artur Grabarek. Dr. Karol Piasecki, anthropologist from the Institute of Archaeology, Warsaw University, joined the team on May 7-13 to study human remains discovered during the previous three field seasons. The Syrian side was represented by Mr. Thaer Yartah, Co-Director; Mr. Qasem al-Mohammad, archaeologist, and Ms Alisar al-Sheikh, student from Damascus University.

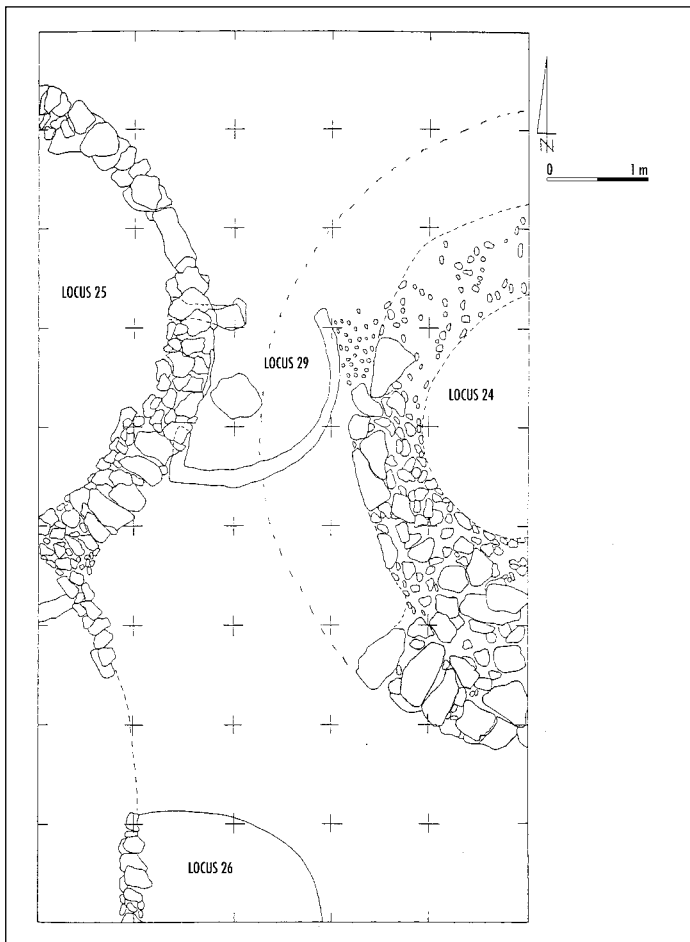


Fig. 1. Square J-7. Stratum XIXI
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

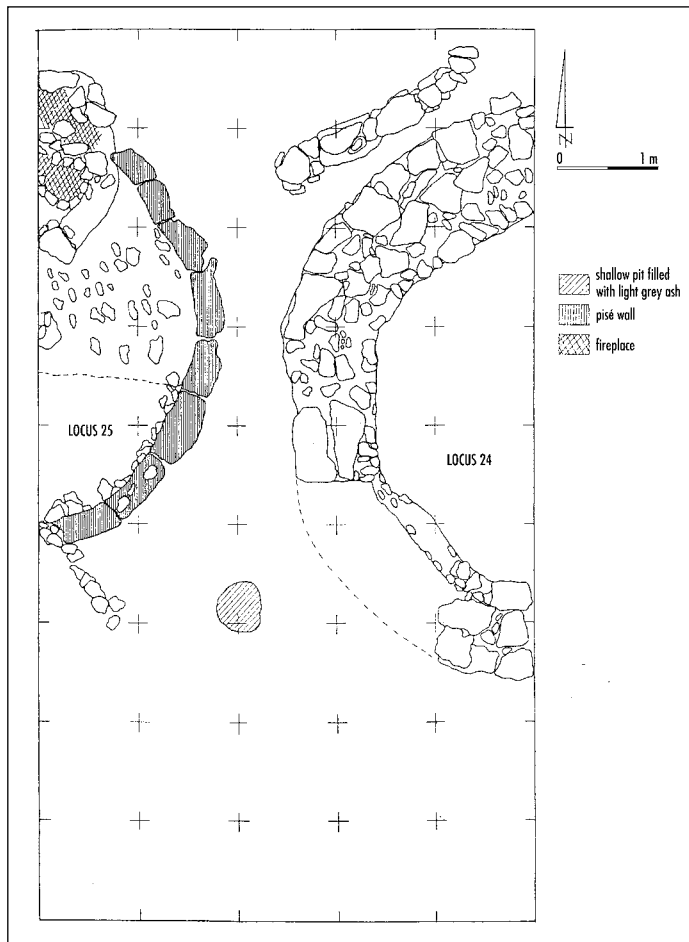


Fig. 2. Square J-7. Stratum X (phase Z)
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

SQUARE J-7

Pre-pottery Neolithic levels were finally reached this year with only small intrusions of EB IV layers in the upper parts of the filling of earlier structures. The Pre-pottery Neolithic settlement sequence discovered to date in trench J-7 consists of three occupational phases. Virgin soil has yet to be reached.

From the earliest phase is a fragment of a round house, Loc. 26 (*Fig. 1*) discovered in the southwestern corner of the square. It has a tamped floor made of hard clay and probably a low bench, of which a big flat stone is all that remains. Walls, which are c. 0.2 m thick, were built of large upended stone slabs, leaning outward slightly and supplemented in the upper part by smaller stones. This structure has a close parallel in the partly preserved Loc. 17 discovered in the lowest level of trench K-5. Also belonging to the oldest phase is a pit, situated close to the southern trench wall, filled with ashes and bones, possibly with a fireplace in the upper part.

The most important structure existing in phase 2 was a round building – Loc. 24 – of which nearly half was unearthed within the limits of the trench (*Fig. 2*). Since the foundation level has not been reached yet, it is possible that this building was erected in an earlier phase of occupation, perhaps on virgin soil. In the lower part it probably had an outer diameter of c. 7.5 m. Only the southern part of the wall is preserved; the building was partially destroyed in this phase and Loc. 29, described below, was built in its place. The wall of Loc. 24 in its preserved part is 2.25 m wide and is constructed of large unshaped stones up to 0.8 m in length on both (external and internal) faces. The space inside the wall is filled with smaller stones set in red clay. The filling of this structure consisted of

large and small stones in brown, loose earth with EB IV sherds. This substantial building could be interpreted as a tower constituting part of the settlement defense system. It remains to be fully explored and its role in the presumed line of fortifications to be examined.

Loc. 29, which is poorly preserved, is a small structure replacing part of the destroyed wall of Loc. 24 and is surrounded by a narrow (c. 0.2 m) wall of yellow clay. It was built against the wall of another round house (Loc. 25), situated in the western part of the trench and only partly within its limits. The upper part of a Loc. 25 wall was constructed of blocks of tamped yellow clay (*pisø*), c. 0.3 m wide and 0.7 m long, laid on a stone wall, which rested on layers of small stones. The space inside this wall was reused later as a place where a double-chamber fireplace surrounded by stones or a small oven was built.

Immediately south of Loc. 24 a shallow depression, c. 2 m in diameter, filled with a large quantity of animal bones was discovered.

In phase 3, Loc. 24 (tower) was reconstructed on a slightly different plan. Above the layers of small pebbles set in red clay, a stone wall c. 1.2 m wide was raised. The building had an outer diameter of c. 6.5 m. Also belonging in this latest Pre-pottery Neolithic phase is the previously uncovered round structure in the southeastern corner of the trench (Loc. 17).

An open space or courtyard appears to have surrounded the loci in all of the discerned phases. Successive layers consist of dark and light gray ashes, concentrations of pebbles, layers of reddish clay, greenish soft earth with decayed organic matter, and also flint artifacts and amazing quantities of animal bones.

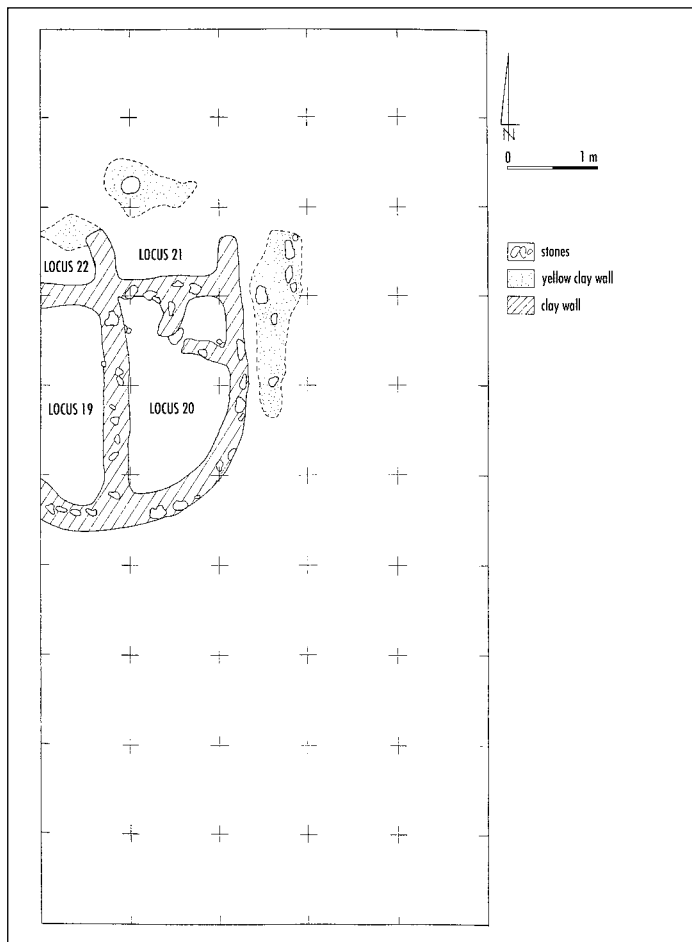


Fig. 3. Square K-6 a.c. Top of layer XI (stratum IX)
(Drawing K. Januszek)

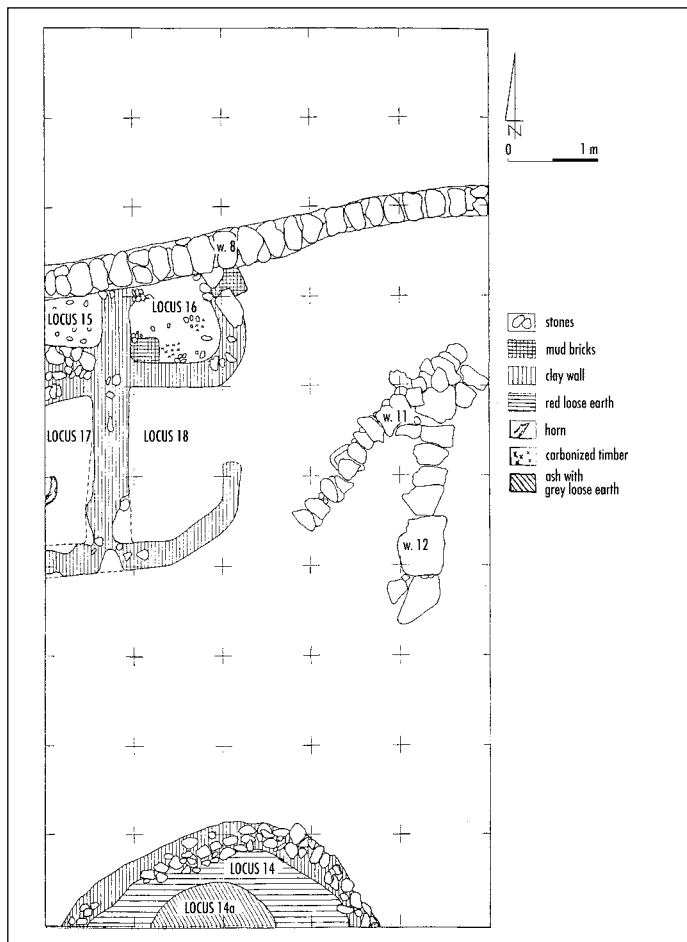


Fig. 4. Square K-6 a.c. Top of layer X (stratum VIII)
(Drawing K. Januszek)

SQUARE K-6

Three successive settlement layers (strata VII-IX) representing the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A period were distinguished. These strata include consecutive phases of rebuilding of houses uncovered in the western part of the trench, which are contemporary with the youngest layers in squares J-7 b,d (Loc. 17, in square K-6 totally destroyed by later building activities) and K-5 (Loc. 14 and 15).

The oldest structure excavated to date in this square (only partly within the trench) was found on top of the lowermost layer (stratum IX). It is a house, oval in the southern end, 9 sq. m in area (*Fig. 3*). Inside, in the southern part, three rooms were discovered: two bigger and oval (Loc. 19 and 20) and one smaller and rectangular (Loc. 20a). In the northern part, there were two only partly preserved rectangular rooms (Loc. 21 and 22). The enclosure wall and the partition walls c. 0.3 m thick were built of tamped mud mixed with broken mud bricks, pebbles and animal bones set on a layer of small pebbles. The filling of these loci (probably collapsed house walls) consisted of mud and a large quantity of pebbles, as well as numerous animal bones and fragments of pestles and whetstones. Remains belonging to stratum IX were only partially uncovered and excavations will be continued.

Successive rebuilding phases of this house were found in a higher layer, stratum VIII (*Figs. 4, 5*). It has the same wall structure, but occupies a slightly larger surface, c. 10 sq. m. The interior of this oval house, built on the ruins of the previous one, is divided into a couple of compartments of various size (Loc. 15-18). Floors made of mud were in some places

paved with small pebbles, with fragments of animal bones and flint artifacts inserted between them. South of the house and contemporary with it was an oval, paved fireplace with animal bones inside. The northern part of the house cannot be reconstructed because of destruction caused by an EB stone wall (w8) built in this place. From this later period come fragments of similarly constructed walls w11-13, found in the eastern part of the trench.

Close to the southern trench wall another oval house was uncovered (Loc. 14: 3.5 m in diameter). This stratum-VIII house resembles Loc. 15-18, with which it is contemporary, in wall structure and compartmentalized arrangement of the inside space. Dug into the red loose-earth filling was an oval pit (Loc. 14a) filled with ash, animal bones and fragments of flint tools.

The last phase of rebuilding was uncovered in stratum VII (*Fig. 6*). The new building, of oval shape presumably and similar to the earlier ones in wall structure, covered an area of c. 7 sq. m. Inside this house there were small rooms (Loc. 10-13), filled with small pebbles, gray loose earth and charcoal, as well as animal bones, flint tools and stone artifacts, including grinders, a celt, bead and stone with incised image of a fish.

All the small finds discovered in the houses from the western part of the trench can be dated to a late phase of PPNA. In the remaining part of the square, finds belonging to PPNA were mixed together with flint tools and sherds characteristic of the Early Bronze Age, coming from the upper settlement level.

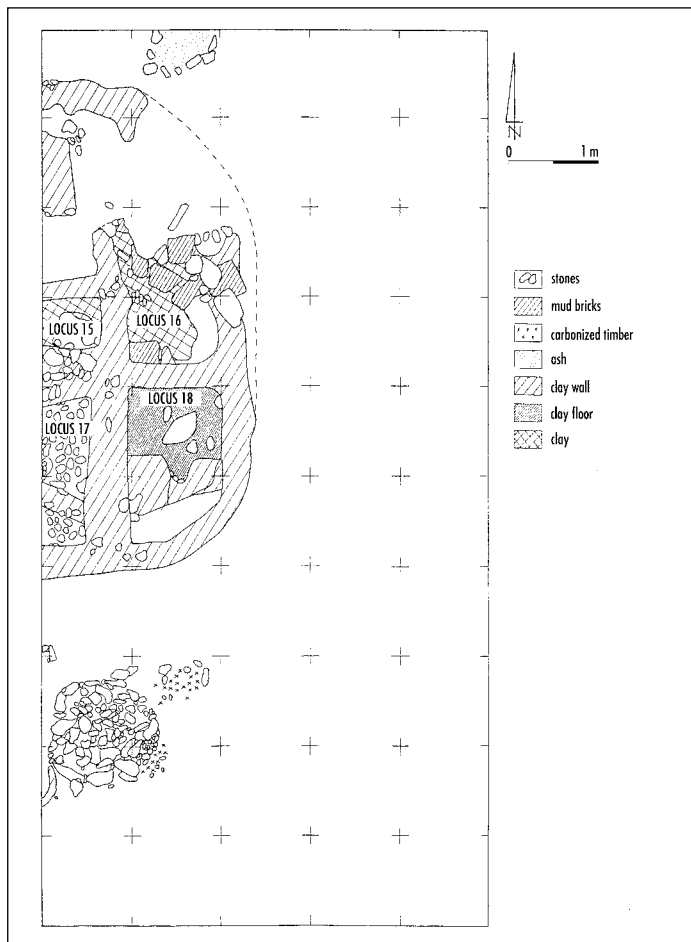


Fig. 5. Square K-6 a.c. Bottom of layer X (stratum VIII)
(Drawing K. Januszek)

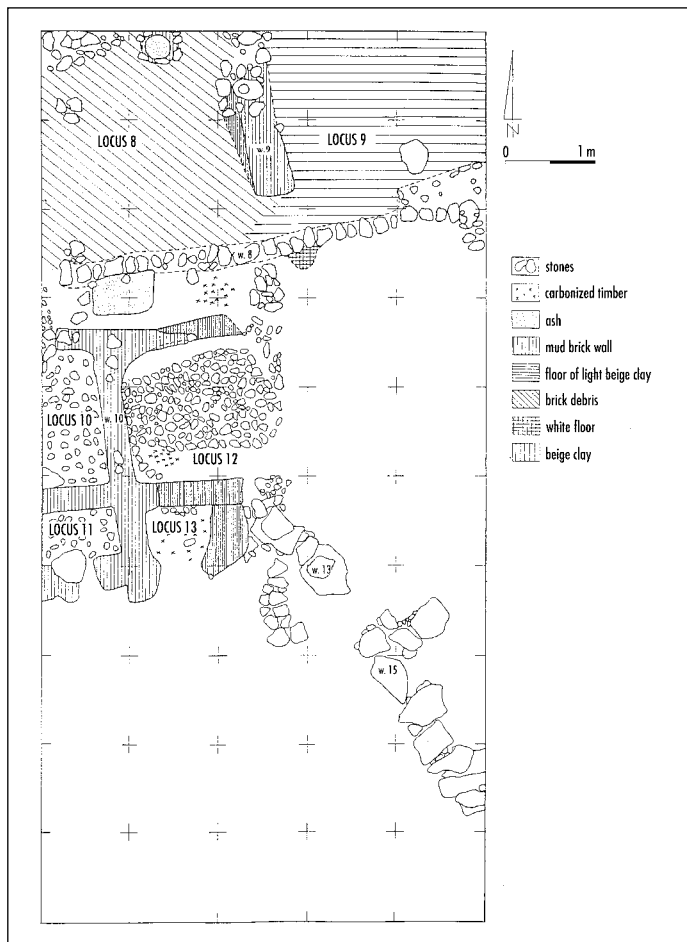


Fig. 6. Square K-6 a.c. Layer IX (stratum VII)
(Drawing K. Januszek)

SQUARE K-5

Virgin soil has been reached in some places in square K-5 b,d, leaving us to conclude that the oldest settlement layers in this area probably date to the middle phase of Pre-Pottery Neolithic A. Belonging to this oldest phase is a fragment of a building (Loc. 17), which was severely damaged by two later EB IV pits, visible in the eastern trench wall (*Fig. 7*). A partly preserved wall made of shaped, upended pebbles was set on virgin soil. Although only c. 1.5 m of the length of this wall survives, its slightly curved shape is suggestive of an oval plan. The house was damaged at least twice: for the first time at the end of PPNA when Loc. 14 and 15 were built, and for the second time in EB IV by the construction of Loc. 6 and 12.

An oval house close to the western trench wall, most of which was destroyed when Loc. 6 was made, belongs to the late PPNA phase. It is c. 3.2 m wide and was divided into two compartments, each about a meter wide and with no floor layer. Walls made of tamped mud were 0.3-0.4 m thick (surviving to a height of 0.2-0.25 m). This structure belongs to the same phase as similar constructions found in trench K-6 a,c (Loc. 10-13, 15-18, 19-22). In both PPNA houses, a large quantity of animal bones was found mixed with a small number of flint artifacts.

The youngest settlement layers excavated this year belong to the EB IV period (*Fig. 8*). Remains of two structures have been discovered (Loc. 6 and 12). Loc.

6 is an oval structure, half of which remains outside the trench. In the eastern part the wall, about 1 m high at present, is 0.3-0.4 m wide. The western part features a different structure and was built of small pebbles and mud; therefore, it is preserved to only about 0.5 m. A conically-shaped floor made of white gypsum or chalk is sunk slightly into virgin soil. The height of the structure from the bottom to the preserved top level of the wall amounts to 1.6 m. An entrance some 0.6 m wide led from the south. Outside the entrance a sort of "corridor" was formed, the space paved with small pebbles and limited by stone walls (c. 0.2-0.4 m wide, currently c. 0.25-0.35 m high) set on a NE-SW axis. The filling consisting of layers of gray, ashy earth yielded numerous artifacts, mainly potsherds and also charred grain seeds, suggesting a possible function as a store-room for cereals, to which possibility the specific shape would also testify.

The second structure (Loc. 12) is situated in the southern part of the trench. It is a big, very regular round pit, 2.56 m in diameter, sunk c. 2.4 m into virgin soil. The bottom is flat, and the walls carefully cut. From the filling, which consisted of alternating layers of gray earth, red mud and black ash, came a large assemblage of pottery characteristic of EB IV, similar to that from Loc. 6. Its purpose is unclear; most probably it was a cistern, used concurrently with Loc. 6.

SQUARE L-4

Square L-4 a,c is located in the lowest part of the southern slope of the tell, southeast of square K-5 b,d. Two settlement levels (strata I and II) were uncovered this year.

The topsoil (stratum 1) contained grayish-brown earth mixed with a large quantity of stones and artifacts obviously disturbed (e.g. pottery from EB IV to Hellenistic

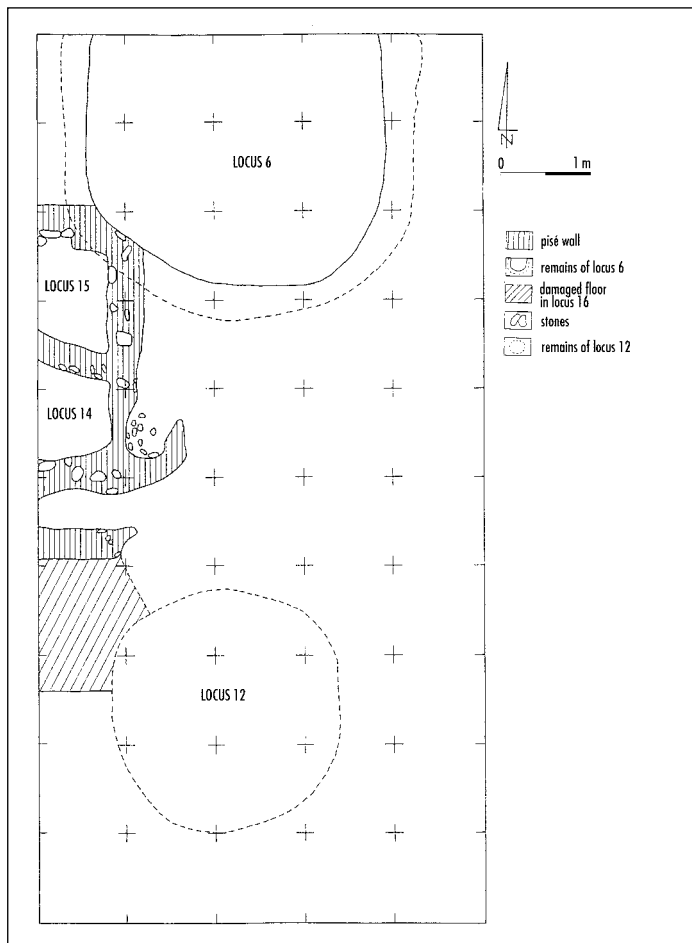


Fig. 7. Square K-5 b.d. Plan of stratum IV
(Drawing M. Chacińska)

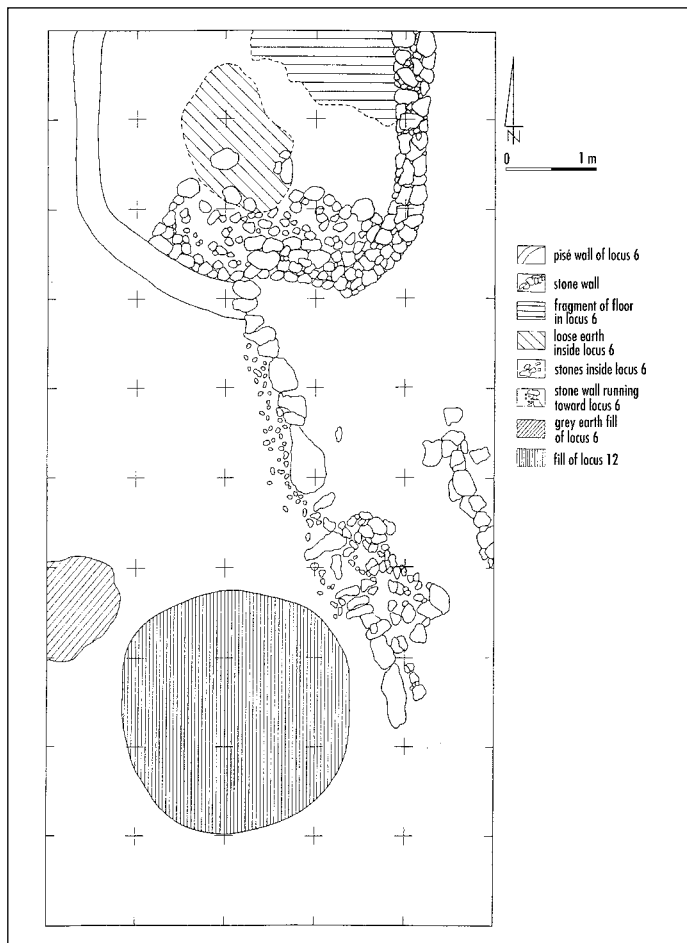
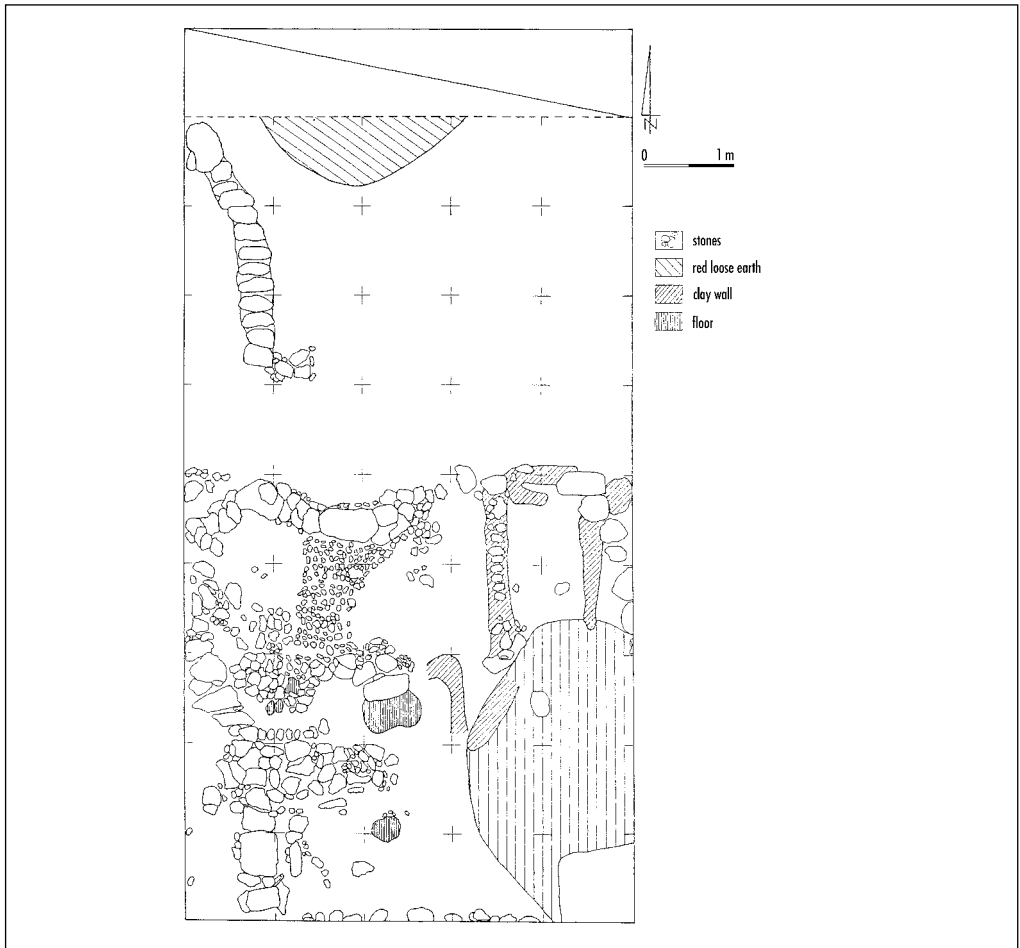


Fig. 8. Square K-5 b.d. Plan of stratum III (layer IV)
(Drawing M. Chacińska)

period, as well as PPNA flint and stone objects). A damaged child burial inside a cooking pot was found in the center western part of the trench. Only the lower part of the vessel of undetermined age was preserved with no grave goods inside. In the western part of the trench, two badly damaged floors were found; similar ones were also discovered in the eastern part of the trench. Stone pestles, flint artifacts and small fragments of malachite jewelry were

found under the upper floor. Below the lower, older floor there were three incomplete and disturbed adult burials. A pit in the northwestern part of the trench contained dark gray earth and, besides it, a terracotta oil lamp dated to the Late Bronze Age.

Remains of a heavily destroyed structure belong to stratum II (*Fig. 9*). This layer is represented by fragments of round houses, one of which features a white



*Fig. 9. Square L-4 a,c. Bottom of layer XII-XIV
 (Drawing J. Gawrońska)*

gypsum floor. Walls were made of limestone, pebbles and mud. Close to the northern trench wall, a round concentration of reddish mud c. 2.5 m in diameter, containing animal bones, pottery and flint

artifacts, was found. Pottery from stratum II is mixed and also in secondary position, but judging by the stratigraphy in other trenches, these structures may be dated to the Middle Bronze Age.

GROUND AND PECKED STONE INDUSTRY

This season 191 objects made of stone were found. Most of them come from cultural contexts belonging to Pre-Pottery Neolithic A layers (occupational floors and fills of houses, cultural layers). Some forms were reused as raw material for wall construction in *pisé (tauf)* technique. Several dozen specimens come also from secondary locations, mainly from Early and Middle Bronze Age layers.

The biggest group consists of grinders (74 specimens). Among them 50 are pestles with a single pole (IIIA1) or double pole (IIIA2); 24 are circular or oval grinders with working traces on one or two flat surfaces and occasionally also on the lateral edge (IIID1,2; IIIE1,2). The next group (21 specimens) covers querns made of basalt (IIB1a; IIE1a) and quern-like circular forms of trough-shaped section, made of beige calcareous mudstone or limestone. Mortars (IVA1 – one specimen) and pounders (VD1/2 – four specimens) are still very rare. Typical among celts (nine specimens) are polished two-sided forms of ovoid (VIIIA3), trapezoidal (VIIA1) or triangular shape (VIIA2), made of pebbles of fine-grained colorful rock. One triangular adze (VIIC) was discovered.

Tools used for processing different raw materials are represented by fragments of polishing plates (IXB1-3) and “kitchen” plates (IXB2-1); ten slender pebbles with one pointed end, the other broad end used as a pestle (XIB); two chisels (XID); two awls (XIC2); eight natural pebbles with scarred lateral surfaces (XIIF). Also two

spherical *bolas* bowls (IA1) made of flint and stone were discovered.

Vessels are represented by fragments of six fine bowls with incised decoration, made of calcareous mudstone, limestone, or fine-grained rock, one ovoid (XIVC2) and one rectangular palette. The most frequent among ornamented artifacts (8) are long cylindrical or short tubular beads (XVIA1, XVIA2). Two decorated discs (XVIE) and one unfinished pendant (XVI B1) were also found.

A highly interesting group of artistically very fine objects is constituted by 14 decorated shaft-straighteners (*Fig. 10*) of oval (XVA), elongated (XVB) or rectangular shape (XVC). One shaft-straightener was made from a fragment of a bowl (XVD). It seems that decorated plaques and bowls are very frequent at Tell Qaramel – about 40 intact and fragmentary pieces have been discovered to date. The technique, motifs and style of ornamentation is similar to finds from Mureybet, Jerf Al-Ahmar, Djade, Cheikh Hassan, Çayonu Tepesi, Çafar Hüyük and Munhata. These parallels testify to a very similar cultural tradition and a dating in the middle and late PPNA and very early PPNB for sites in the Northern Levant and the Taurus region.

Two other objects of art include a phallic representation (XVIIA) with grooved lines and a magnificent representation of what is probably a sheatfish (XVIII B) with realistically rendered anatomic characteristics, made in a brown fine-grained pebble.

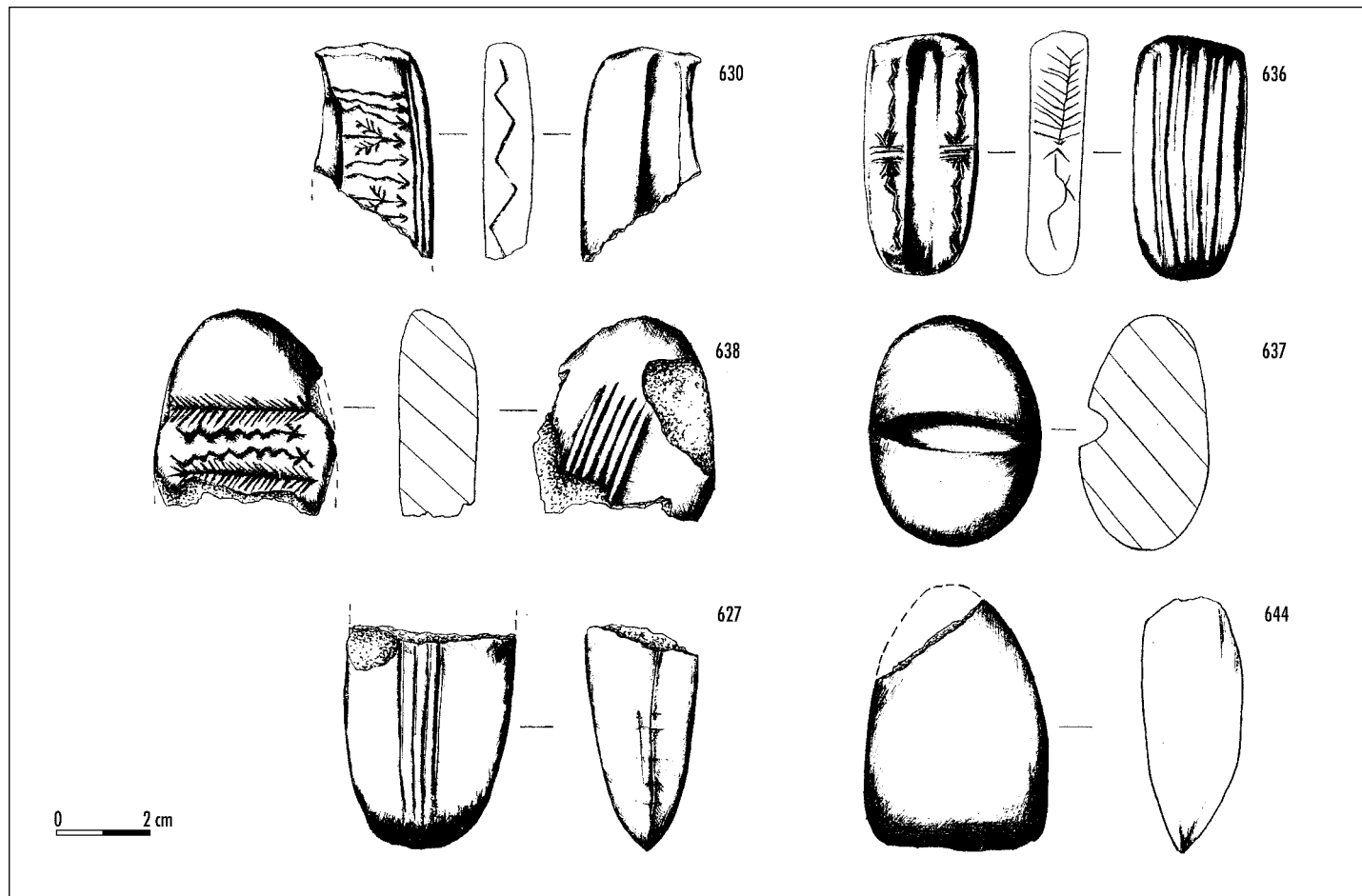


Fig. 10. Shaft-straighteners (nos. 630, 636-638) and adzes made of stone
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

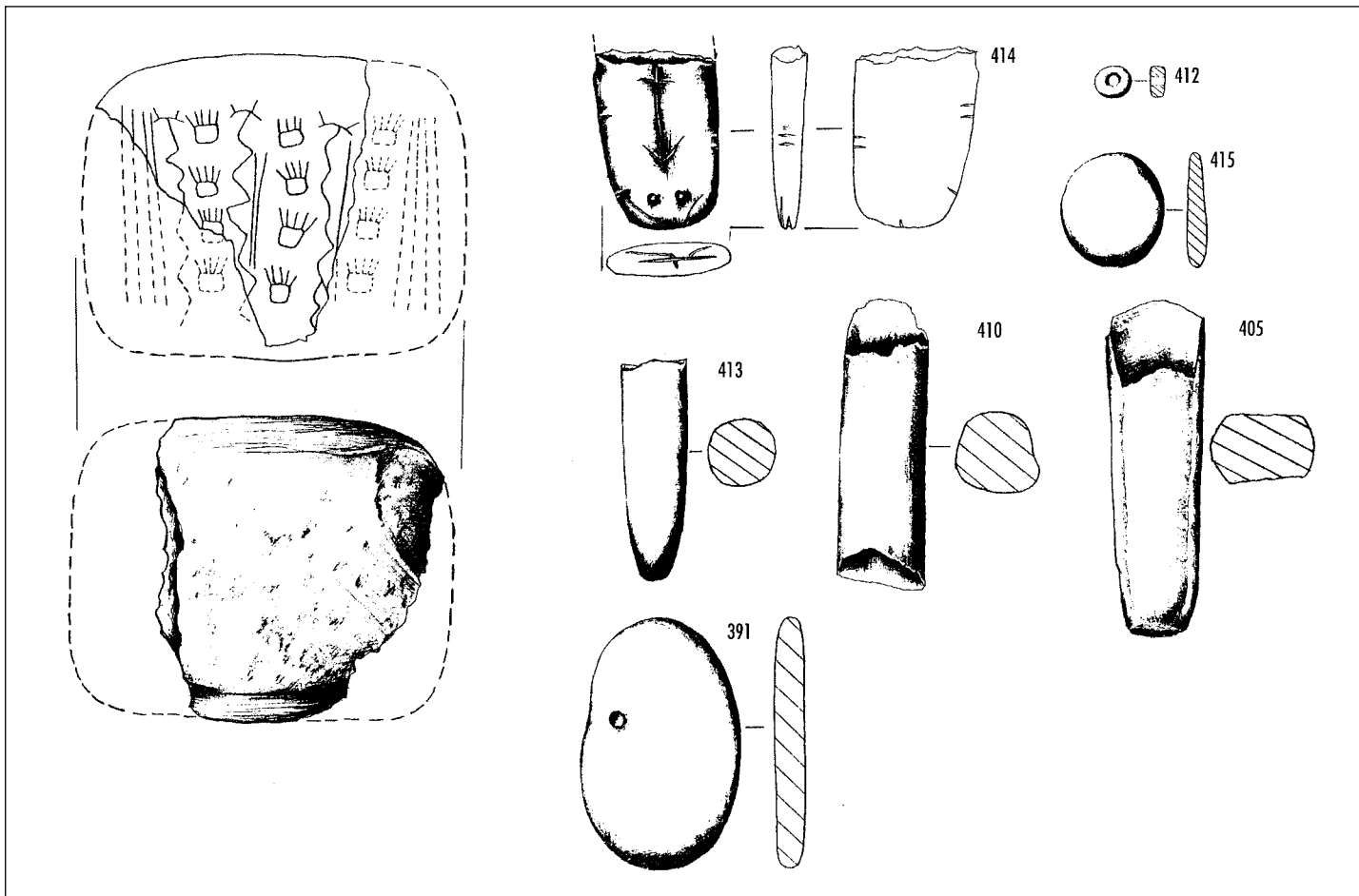


Fig. 11. Stone artifacts from PPNA layers
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

FLINT

Most of the flint artifacts discovered this season were found in secondary position, transferred from older layers to EB layers together with the mud used for wall construction. Flint artifacts were found inside houses, in pits, mud and stone walls, and in the layers outside EB houses. They can be dated on the whole to the middle and late PPNA phase: typical points including El Khiam, end-scrapers, borers, perforators, burins, sickle blades, bi-polar cores for blades as well as retouched flakes and blades (*Fig. 11*). Even so, some of these

artifacts feature a different technology that can be dated to the Early Bronze Age (e.g. switched-orientation cores for flakes and blades, retouched blades and flakes made with a hard stone hammer and splintered pieces). Characteristic of this assemblage is the very small number of obsidian finds and the almost complete lack of heating technique; also erminette tools and classical navy cores so typical of the PPNA are missing. Almost all the tools (over 95%) were made of chocolate flint, and the percentage of obsidian finds is lower still.

POTTERY

Pottery retrieved this season in trenches J-7, K-6 and K-5 can be dated to the Early Bronze Age period. In many places it comes from EB IV pits dug into earlier deposits and from the fill of structures belonging to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period. The most interesting assemblages of EB IV pottery comes from trench K-6, were contemporary structures interpreted as a grain silo (Loc. 6) and a cistern (Loc. 12) were found. The homogenous group from Loc. 12 consists of (among other forms) typical ribbed goblets, small thin

walled ribbed cups, bowls with everted and crescent rims, cooking pots and large kitchen-ware bowls with crescent handles. A few fragmentarily preserved terracotta figurines (one animal and two anthropomorphic) were also found. The pottery bears close analogy to examples from a small collection of earlier (EB II?) sherds. These thick-walled, crude, handmade fragments of pots with vegetal temper resemble very much pottery found last year in trench E-15, in the vicinity of a stone tomb in the western part of the mound.

BONES

Animal bones constitute a large group of finds this season. An enormous quantity (c. 300 kg) comes from PPNA layers, mainly bones of wild cattle (*Bos Taurus*), gazelle, sheep/goat, wild boar, donkey/ horse, small predators, small and big birds, as well as snail shells (*Unio sp.*). Post-consumption traces, i.e., incisions, deliberate crushing and processing in high temperatures, were found on some of the bones.

Bone tools were also discovered, the most frequent forms being a sharp-edged tool made from ribs and whistles made from the second phalange.

Human bones were discovered in two Bronze Age burials (square L-4 a,c), but isolated human bones were found in almost all the layers. This confirms a considerable destruction of Neolithic layers by later building activities.

