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Tell Qaramel: Excavations 2004

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TELL QARAMEL

EXCAVATIONS 2004

Ryszard F. Mazurowski

During the sixth season of excavations at Tell Qaramel, which took place between September 2 and October 21, 2004,¹ the exploration of the Early Aceramic settlement was continued. In traditional terminology, this represents the so-called Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) horizon (non-calibrated C14 dates 8650-7700 BC). Field activities were concentrated on the lower part of the southern slope of the tell (for a contour map of the site, see PAM XV, Reports 2003 (2004), 356). Square K-7 (trench supervisors M. Białowarczuk and K. Januszek) is the location of the site's most important structures, the two towers, the older one of which has been dated to about 8350 BP (non-calibrated). The other excavated area was in squares K-3 b, K-4 b,d, L-3 a, L-4 a,c, situated in the lowest southern part of the tell, south and southeast of K-5 b,d (supervisors J. Gawrońska and A. Grabarek).

In an effort to determine the position of the aceramic settlement and the mound with regard to the river terraces and bed, a geomorphologic cross-section of the Qoueiq valley was carried out (M. Chacińska and M. Przeździecki).

Paleobotanists Dr. George Willcox and Mrs. Sandra Fornite from Archéorient, Maison de l'Orient Méditerranéen, CNRS UMR 5133, Lyon, kindly joined the team for two weeks in order to examine by flotation (with the assistance of P. Karczmarek) soil samples taken from the site.

1 The Syrian-Polish Archaeological Mission continues to be run jointly by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria, with partial funding from the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Tammam Fakouch, then Director General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria, and Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi, Director of Excavations, Damascus, for their continuous help and kindness. Special words of thanks to the staff of the Regional Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Aleppo and its Director, Dr. Nadim Fakesh.

Prof. Dr. Ryszard F. Mazurowski (stone objects analysis and stratigraphy) and Dr. Joussef Kanjou (human bones examination) co-directed a team composed of, on the Polish side, Mr. Marcin Białowarczuk (trench supervisor, special finds register), Ms Małgorzata Chacińska (faunal material), Mrs. Joanna Gawrońska (trench supervisor, general finds register), Mr. Artur Grabarek (trench supervisor), Mrs. Ewa Hander, Ms Katarzyna Januszek (field documentation register), Mr. Piotr Karczmarek (flint object processing), Mr. Michał Przeździecki (flint object processing) and Mrs. Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, archaeology students from Warsaw University's Institute of Archaeology.

SQUARE K-7

All the levels excavated this season belonged to Stratum V connected with PPNA occupation.² They had all been heavily disturbed by the cutting of three deep Early Bronze Age pits (loci 31, 32, 39) in the central part of the square.

LEVEL 6

Continued excavation of the younger tower, the only structure in this level, revealed it

to be round, c. 7 m in diameter, located in the western part of the square (joining the other half of the tower excavated in 2001 in square J 7.³ Two rows of flat medium-sized pebbles and a core filling of small stones and soil formed the substructure of this wall, the overall thickness approaching 1.50 m. The superstructure was made of compacted red mud, which must have been excavated somewhere near the village

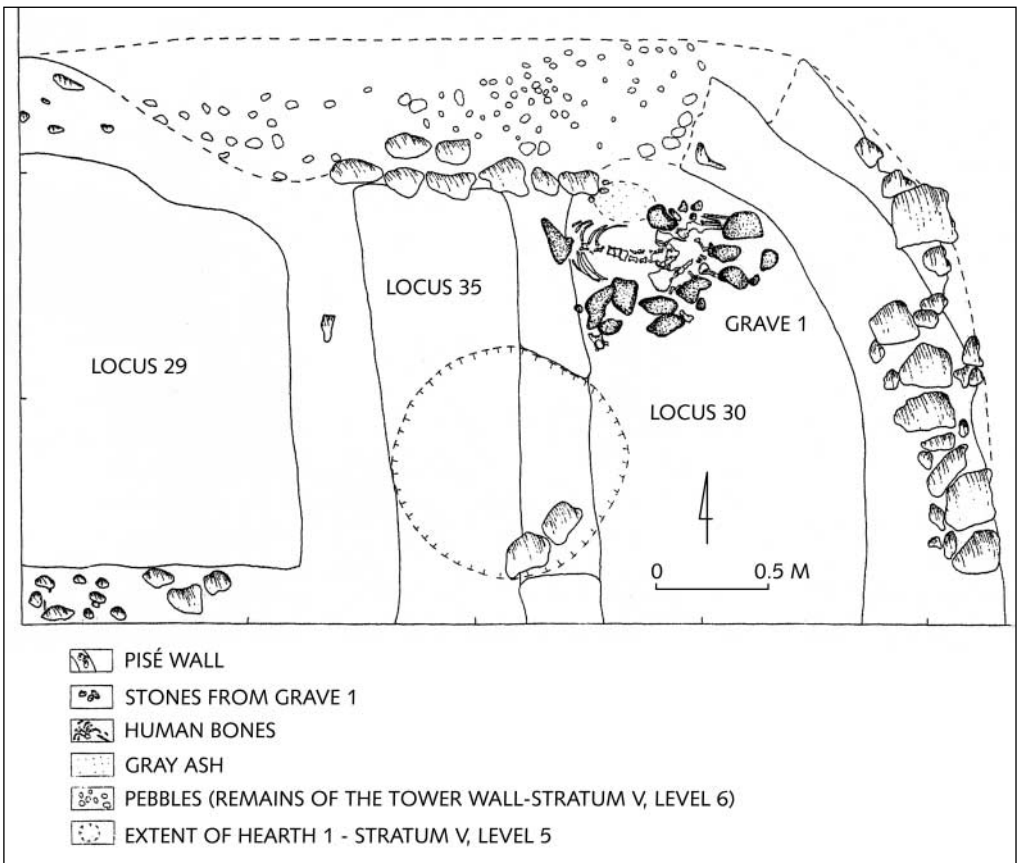


Fig. 1. Square K-7 c. Stratum V, level 7
(Drawing M. Białowarczuk, K. Januszek)

2 Cf. previous report in *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 360-361.

3 Cf. *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 297.

to judge by the large content of flint, bones and other organic material. The fill of the tower was left for exploration in the coming season.

LEVEL 7

The subrectangular house in this level was located in the southwestern corner of the square and extended into adjoining squares J-7, J-6 and K-6 [Fig. 1]. However, since its remains in K-6 were completely destroyed and square J-6 has yet to be excavated, it was impossible to estimate its overall dimensions. The part uncovered so far (c. 4.50 by 2.50 m) consisted of three rooms (loci 29, 30 and 35). The walls, c. 0.30-0.60 m wide, were made of blocks of mud with stones inside. Some parts were shaped in soft mud. Loc. 35 may have been used as storage space, while the other two could have been living rooms.

In the northern part of loc. 30, a grave was found under the floor. The body had been laid out on its back with legs pulled up. The skull was missing and must have been removed intentionally. Surrounding the oval burial pit, c. 0.40 by 0.80 m, was a row of pebbles. There was no evidence of any grave goods.

LEVEL 8

The level, much destroyed, contained one building and two pits. An oval triple-room structure (loci 33, 34, 38) was located in the central part of the square [Fig. 2]. It was c. 2.60 m wide, but the length could only be estimated, the ends of the building having been destroyed by two Bronze Age pits. The walls were made of double rows of stones covered with a hard lime mass with limestone chips and soil mixed in. The same mass was used for the floors,

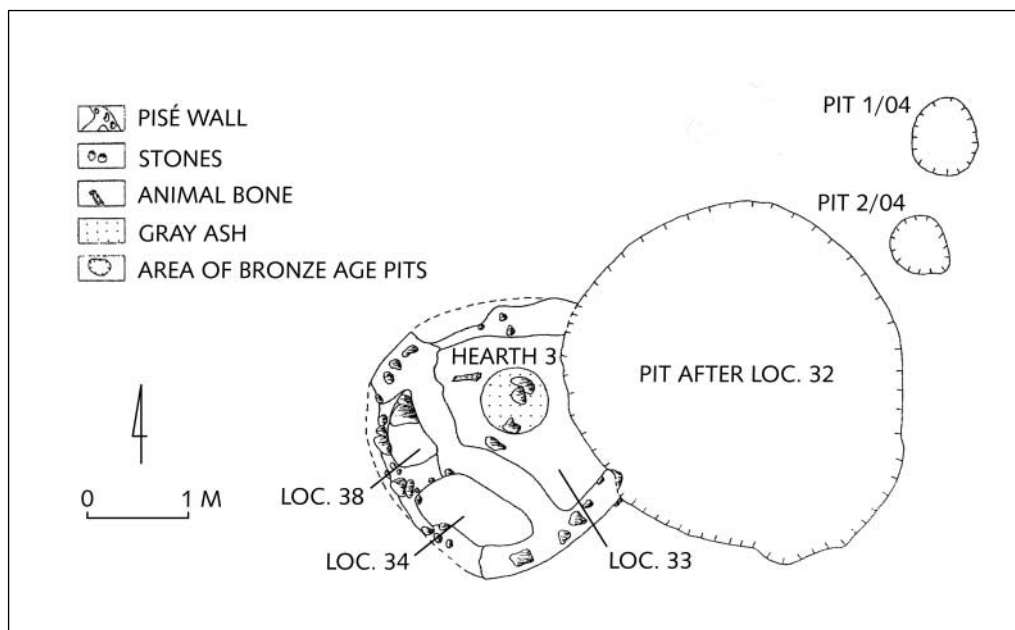


Fig. 2. Square K-7. Stratum V, level 8
(Drawing M. Białowarczuk, K. Januszek)

which were 2-3 cm thick. There was a hearth directly on the floor. The small dimensions and the finds, which consisted of some animal bones and flints, suggested that the building was more likely a store of some kind or a place where everyday activities took place.

LEVEL 9

The house discovered in this level (loc. 36) was located in the northeastern corner of the

square. It was a round structure, c. 4.50 m in diameter, with a pebble floor covered with a layer of mud sunk into the ground [Fig. 3]. Walls, built on ground level, were shaped in soft mud with small pebbles and an occasional *pisé* block inserted in it. The internal division of the house proved to be highly interesting. Two low curved walls made of pebbles started from a big limestone slab set right in the center of the house. A deposit of four auroch skulls was

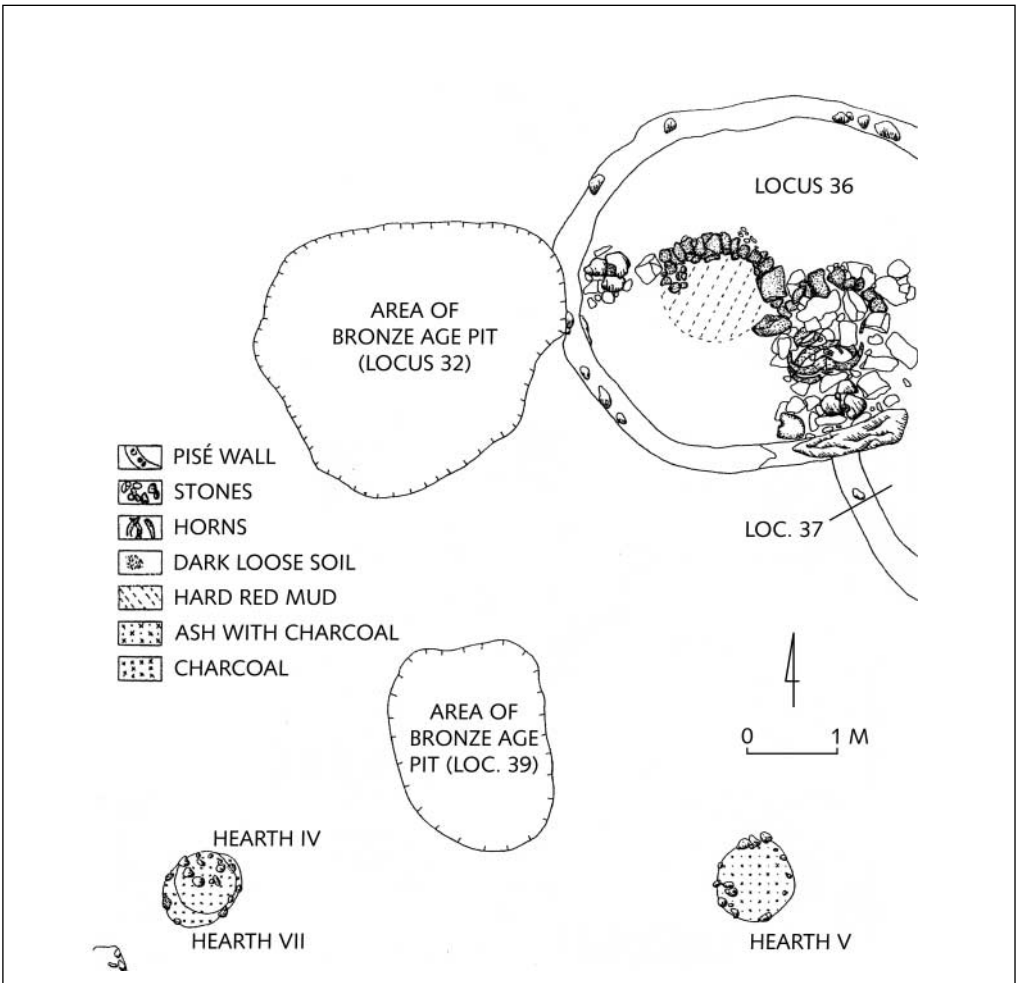


Fig. 3. Square K-7. Stratum V, level 9
(Drawing M. Białowarczuk, K. Januszek)

discovered below the floor, just beside one of these walls. The bucrania were arranged in a way that repeated the outline of the curved walls. Found with them were some bladelets, one segment of a lunar-shaped point and one El-Khiam point. One theory is that the curved internal walls were in fact an imitation bucranium, suggesting a cult function for the structure.

Another locus opened off loc. 36; it remains to be explored, but even now it

may be presumed to be another room of the same building. Two round hearths, contemporary with loci 36 and 37, were also recorded in this level.

LEVEL 10

Three contemporary structures of different type, representing the Early PPNA, were found in level 10. The first of these architectural units (loci 40, 42) lay in the middle of the square [Figs. 4,5]. It was an oval

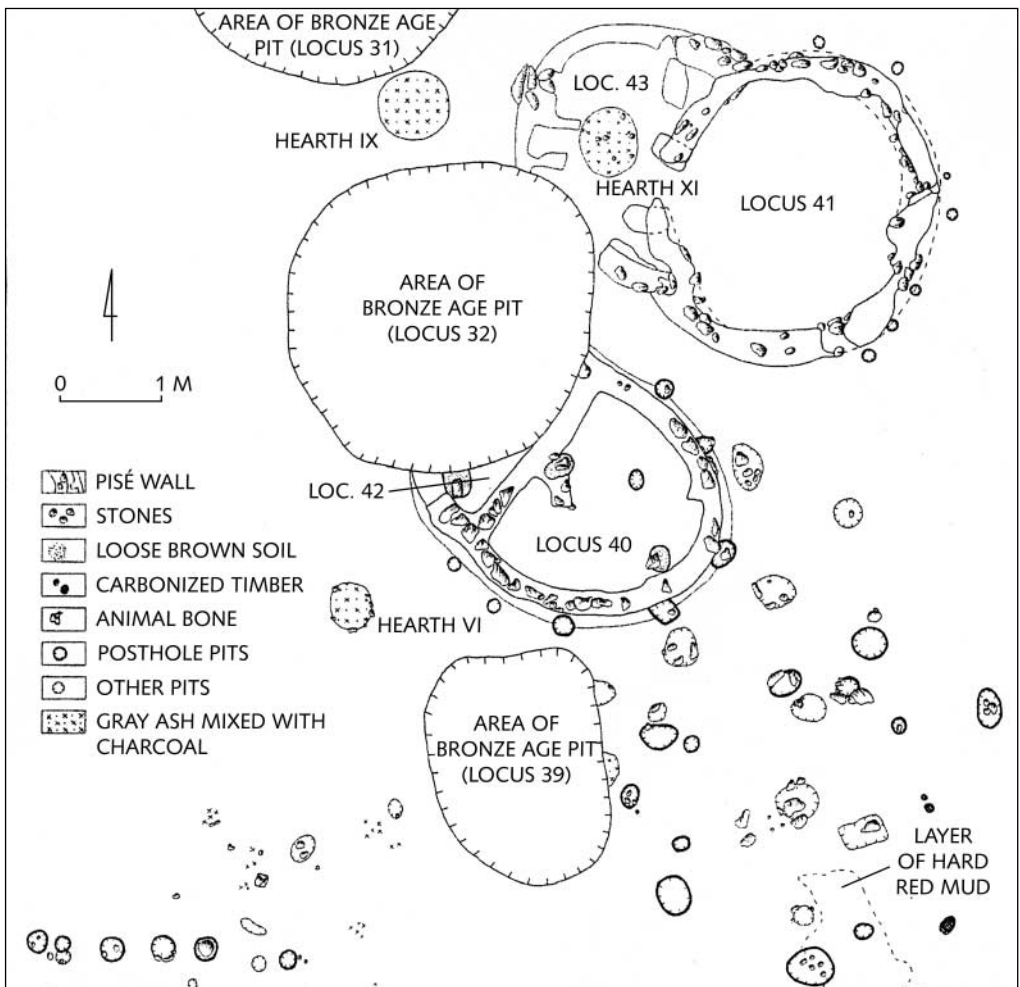


Fig. 4. Square K-7. Stratum V, level 10
(Drawing M. Białowarczuk, K. Januszek)

structure, c. 2.00 by 2.50 m, divided into two rooms, partly destroyed by an EB IV pit. The walls were made of stones and mud in the so-called "skeleton technique". Seven postholes, presumably roof supports, were found just outside the walls. The floors were of red mud (c. 5-7 cm thick) on a layer of pebbles. Small finds, like grinders, mortars and a sizable quantity of animal bones suggested a storage or workshop function.

The second of the houses (loci 41, 43) lay just to the northeast of the first. Both loci were round (c. 3.00 m and 1.50 m respectively), built in the same technique as the first of the described buildings. The gap in the wall of loc. 41 presumably gave access to the smaller annex (loc. 43) with markedly

raised mud floor. Loc. 41 could be interpreted as a house with loc. 43 acting as storage.

In the southeastern corner of the square, there was a kind of floor made of mud with twelve postholes arranged in an oval (c. 3.00 by 2.50 m). Fragments of mud plaster with impressions of straw and large quantities of small lumps of charcoal were found inside and around this structure, suggesting a hut-like form with walls made of straw mats tied to posts and plastered thinly with mud. A few storage pits and two hearths were found in the vicinity. Two rows of postholes in the southwestern corner of the square must have belonged to a similar structure.

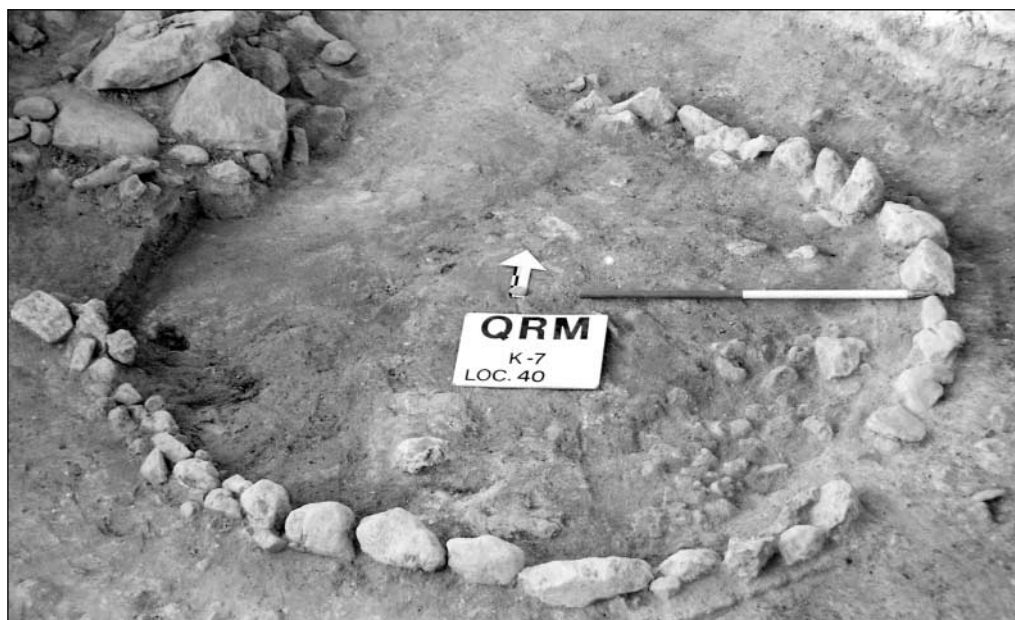


Fig. 5 Square K-7. Stratum V, level 10, Locus 40, seen from the south
(Photo R.F. Mazurowski)

SQUARES K-3 B, K-4 B,D, L-3 A, L-4 A,C

The exploration of Stratum IV was completed,⁴ and work started on Stratum V. Both were of PPNA date.

Further work on the 'grill-house' with its special niche connected with both human and animal (auroch) burials confirmed its apparently public character, perhaps as a meeting place for the local community and the site of religious ceremonies. Favoring this idea are the 14 human graves found around it. Concentrations of flint points, including many categories of El-Khiam points, as well as Helwan points and sometimes Jordan Valley points, were recorded inside the structure. Indeed, knapping appears to have been a major activity here. The special function of the structure is to be admitted also on the grounds of the objects discovered in the stone-and-mud foundation of the 'grill-house': a complete human (female ?) figurine made of soft chalk and a large retouched flint celt of the Jericho type never encountered before on our site.

STRATUM V

Earlier structures unearthed below the remains of the public house (shrine) may have belonged to the older phase of the 'grill-house'. The wall of the structure, preserved to a height of 0.60 m, was made of big stones bonded in mud. A white mud floor proved to be c. 10 cm thick. A partly destroyed oval house (loc. 15) to the south had walls of red mud [Fig. 6]. No hearths or any other sign of everyday activity were unearthed inside the structure, but there were two storage pits, approximately

1.00 m in diameter, to the north of it. The pits were both 1.50 m deep and had been lined with mud and pebbles. The fill contained pebbles and gray ash mixed with animal bones. A hearth found here, some 0.50 m in diameter, had a stone superstructure around it. The filling consisted of charcoal, ash and animal bones.

A shelter excavated in the southeastern part of square L-4 c (loc. 17) was assigned to level 2 in this stratum. Eight small postholes, approximately 0.30-0.40 m in diameter and 0.10-0.50 m deep were found to be associated with this structure. A kind of mud floor, c. 10 cm thick, was observed inside the building. Connected with the structure were five storage pits (nos. 11-15), approximately 1.00-2.00 m in diameter and 0.30-0.50 m deep [Fig. 7]. A round mud-wall superstructure surrounded each of the pits (approximately 0.20 m in diameter). Moreover, the biggest one (no. 14) was covered with mud. The fill of the pits contained gray ash and a quantity of animal bones. More animal bones were found below the pit. The place was probably used as a garbage pit.

An older occupational level, consisting of two buildings: loci 13 and 16, was discovered in the next level, below the remains from level 2 [Fig. 8]. Locus 13 in the northern part of the trench was of oval shape, approximately 4.00 m long. Its wall, c. 1.00 m thick and preserved to a height of 0.50 m, was made of mud and stones. The construction appears very similar to the wall of the younger tower in square K-7. The occupational fill of the structure, containing pebbles, gray ash, burned mud

⁴ For previous work in this area, cf. PAM XIII, op. cit., 301, 303; PAM XIV, *Reports 2002* (2003), 323-325 and Fig. 10; PAM XV, op. cit., 364-366.

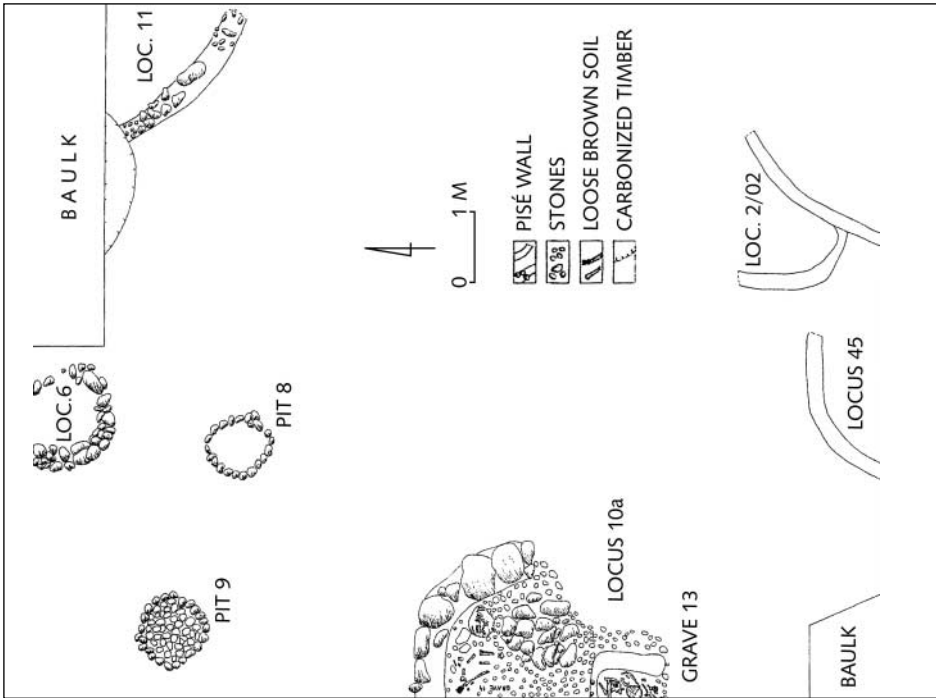


Fig. 6. Square K-4 b,d, K-3 b, L-4 a,c, L-3 a. Stratum V, level 1
(Drawing J. Gawronńska, K. Januszek)

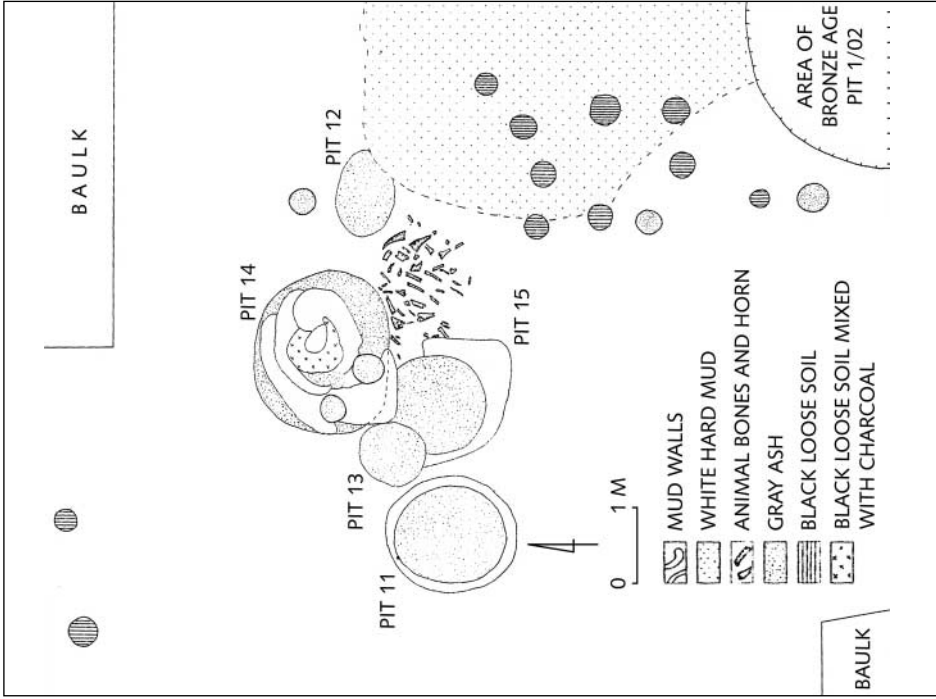


Fig. 7. Square K-4 b,d, K-3 b, L-4 a,c, L-3 a. Stratum V, level 2
(Drawing J. Gawronńska, K. Januszek)

and charcoal, was deposited on a floor of red mud. Locus 16 located further to the south was only partly excavated; its eastern part was destroyed by an Early Bronze Age pit, while the rest of the structure disappeared into the southern wall of the trench. It was constructed of mud and mud blocks (*pisé*). A hearth surrounded by a superstructure of stones was found inside it. The fill

consisted of charcoal, ash and animal bones. Moreover, two yokes – remains of some kind of post supporting the roof (c. 0.30-0.40 m) – were discovered. The floor of the building (c. 8 cm thick) was covered with mud laid on pebbles. Underlying it was an older floor. The evidence here included two yokes, hearth querns and mortars, all probably used in everyday activities.

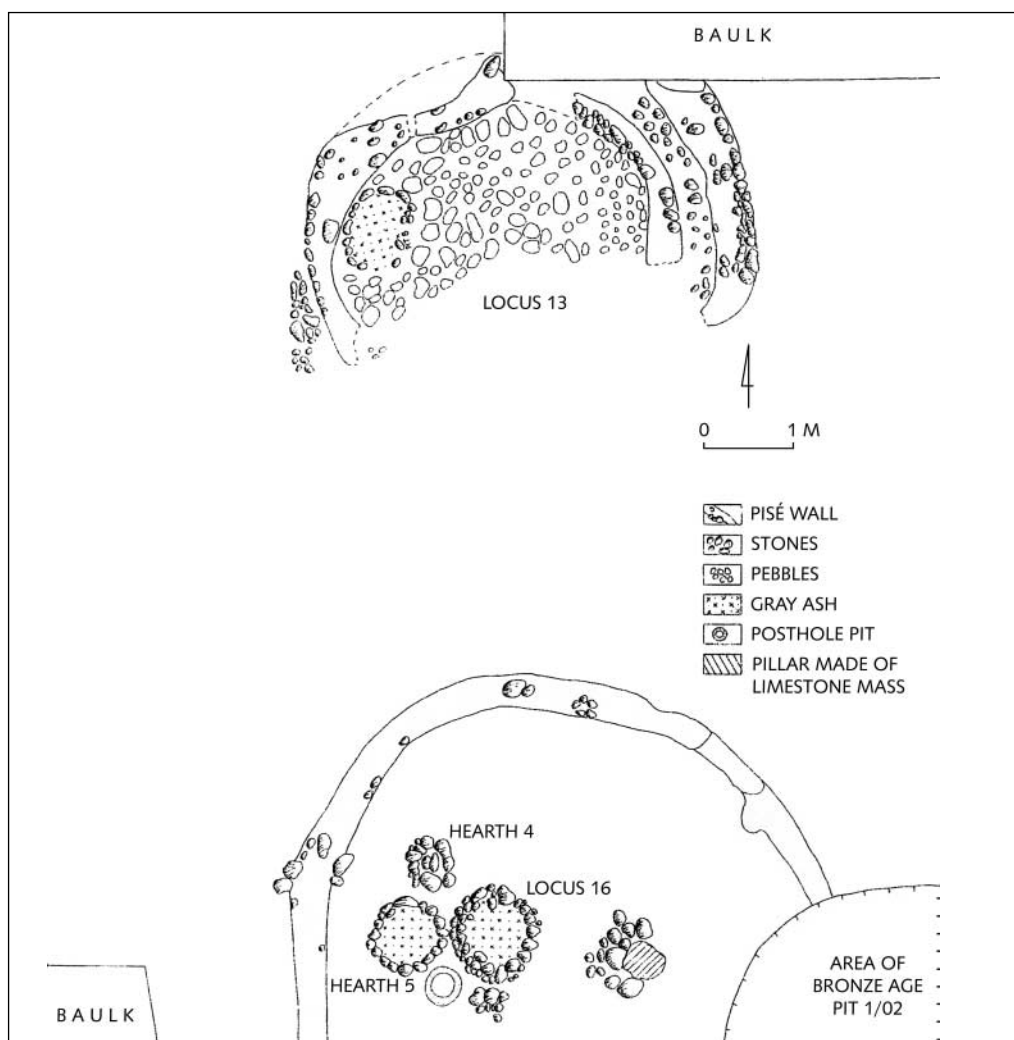


Fig. 8. Square K-4 b,d, K-3 b, L-4 a,c, L-3 a. Stratum V, level 3
(Drawing J. Gawrońska, K. Januszek)

CHIPPED STONE (FLINT) INDUSTRY

A local brown ('chocolate') flint continued to be the chief raw material identified in the flint industry at the site (95%). No obsidian was found.

Three kinds of cores, all for blade production, were identified: opposite bipolar with one striking platform, single-polar irregular with one striking platform, and multi-polar all-direction exploitation cores, the latter two types in small numbers. The number of single-polar cores increased in the lower levels, but all the mentioned types frequently coexisted in the same stratum. Virtually all the cores were extremely exploited by hard hammering technique in the last phases of exploitation. Pressing, indirection and very seldom a soft hammer technique were also observed.

The majority of the tools were made on rather small blades [Fig. 9]. The longest specimens were not longer than 6-7 cm, the average being 3-6 cm in length and 0.9-1.4 cm in width. The most numerous groups of tools were points and sickle-blades (more than 50% of the assemblage).

El-Khiam points in several varieties prevailed. Points with straight or lightly

concave base and proximal recesses were the most numerous. Some specimens had additional pairs of recesses near the top and retouched on the bottom side of the tool. The El-Khiam type points were 2-3.5 cm long as a rule and about 1 cm wide. Longer fragments (over 3.5 cm) were recorded, but not one completely preserved specimen was discovered. There was also a small number of points with handle, about 2.5 cm in length and not standardized in shape.

Retouched blades and burins (corner and wedge types), perforators or borers were also frequent among the finds. Except for a few burins, all of the above were made on blades. The same referred to scrapers and end-scrapers. Only a few specimens were executed on flakes and flakes with cortex. Among the perforators and borers, furnished usually with a long piercing sting, the specimens meriting attention were the ones shaped like a shovel, sometimes with a sting 4-5 cm in length.

The nearest parallels to this assemblage can be found in the late Natufian and Early Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlement.

GROUND AND PECKED STONE INDUSTRY

The current assemblage of 202 artifacts representing the ground and pecked stone industry from aceramic (PPNA) layers [Fig. 10]. has again been classified following R.F. Mazurowski's system.⁵ It includes two spherical bolas balls (IA1) made of brown flint; fragments of flat circular quern-like objects (IIA1) made of white limestone and much more common oval querns (IIB1a), nearly all made of basalt; 52 single-pole or double-pole pestles (IIIA1 or IIIA2) most

often made of chlorite, nine of these featuring grooves or lines made with a very sharp flint tool; 20 circular or oval grinders, unilateral (IIID1a/IIIE1b) or bilateral (IIID2a, IIIE2b, IIIE2c), made of basalt; three limestone mortars (2-IVA1, 1-IVA2); fragments of mortar pounders (VC1\2, VD1\2); 15 trapezoidal (VIIA, VIIA1) or triangular (VIIA2) celts made of chlorite or greenstone (diabase), four of them decorated on one or two edges with elongated or lateral

5 R.F. Mazurowski, *Ground and Pecked Stone Industry in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of Northern Iraq* (Warsaw 1997).

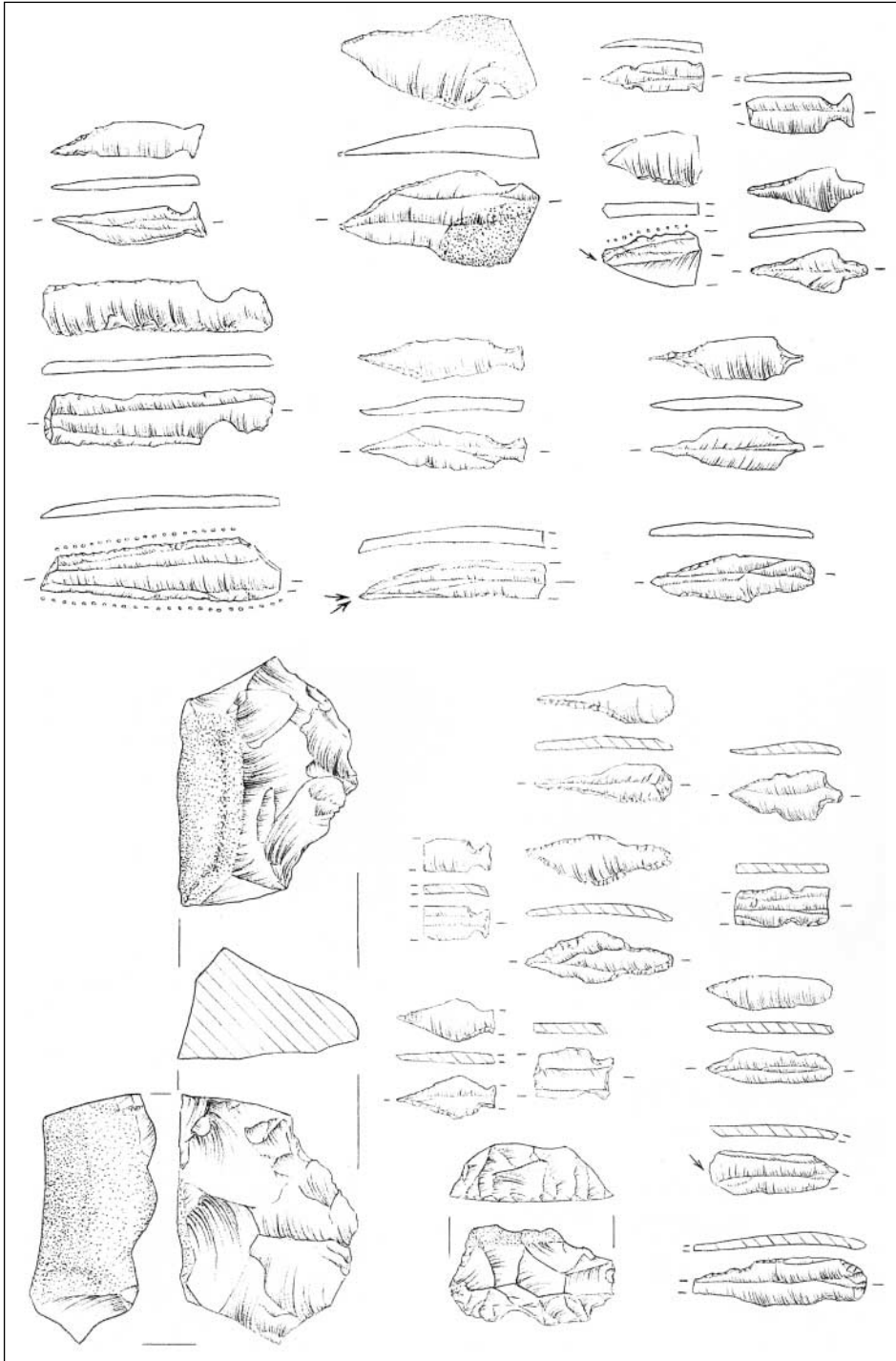


Fig. 9. Flint objects
(Drawing E. Handor)

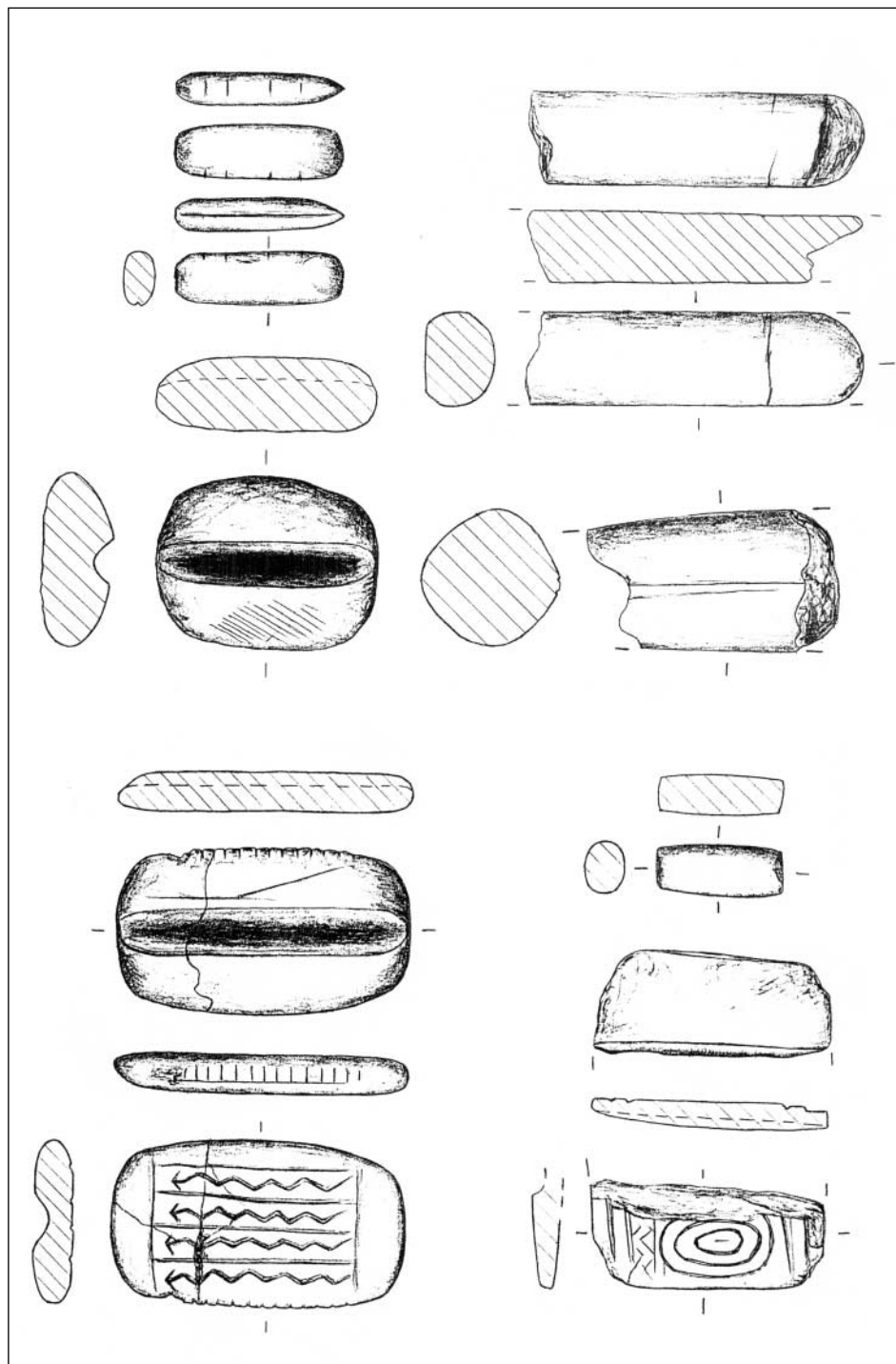


Fig. 10. Stone objects
(Drawing E. Handor)

short grooves; two large elongated polishing stones (IXA); five grinding, polishing and 'kitchen' plates (2-IXB1, 3-IXB2); four ovoid maceheads (XC1); three slender pebbles with one pointed end and the other broad end used as grinder (XIB); four awls (XIC2) including one decorated form; two decorated miniature chisels (XID) made of chlorite; an elongated pebble with negatives of blows at the ends (XIIA1); two natural pebbles with lateral surfaces covered with scars (XIIF); six bowls, three conical (XIVA1) and three hemispherical (XIVA2) including a fragment decorated in Jerf el-Ahmar style; 12 oval (XVA) or rectangular (XVC) shaft straighteners made of chlorite, ten of them magnificently decorated with geometrical or zoomorphic motifs; various tubular beads (XVIA1a, XVIA2a); barrel-shaped bead; five pendants made of natural pebbles (XVIB1); two rings (XVID1);

circular disc with three holes (XVIE3); three ornamented plaquettes (XVIK); rectangular bead separator (XVII1); decorated lunar-shaped bead joiner (XVIM); limestone stele with four symmetrically arranged depressions (from the 'grill-house' niche).

A small lump of copper was discovered in the fill of loc. 30 in square K-7.

Basalt remained the predominant raw material for the production of heavy duty tools, followed by limestone and sporadically calcareous mudstone. Such forms as pestles, celts, shaft straighteners and some categories of the more common ornaments were made of chlorite pebbles and sporadically 'greenstone' (diabase).

Most of these artifacts were found reused in walls and floors or in the fill of the buildings. Only a few could be connected with habitation floors inside the houses or were discovered *in situ* in the courtyards.

BONE MATERIAL

The animal bone assemblage from this season, noticeably smaller than in previous years, represented virtually only PPNA layers. The material testified to the presence in the settlement of cattle, sheep/goats, horses, donkeys, dogs, cats, gazelle, wild pigs and birds. The most interesting discovery was a deposit of auroch skulls inside loc. 36 in square K-7. A small number of shells was also discovered.

The bone material included a few tools, mostly of careless execution, the most characteristic ones being borers, awls, needles, beads and whistles. Some of them bore traces of polishing and/or ornaments. There was also one small fragment of a miniature vessel [Fig. 11] and two points.

As regards human bones, a deposit of three human skulls was found in the wall of

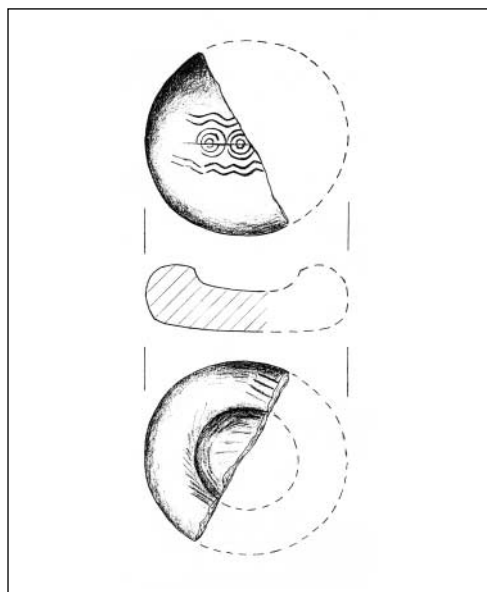


Fig. 11. Miniature stone vessel
(Drawing E. Hander)

the younger tower in square K-7. Another discovery was the headless human burial in loc. 30. Three other incomplete human

skeletons were found in square K-4 (graves 13, 14 and 15). Anthropological examination is scheduled for the coming season.

CONCLUSIONS

The remains excavated this year in both trenches were attributed to the early horizon of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A. The similarities with the architecture and flint industry of the lowest structures in squares K-6 a,c and K-5 b,d explored last year suggest that the horizon now reached in trenches K-7 and L-4/K-4 is what we have provisionally designated as 'Proto-Qaramelian'. Non-calibrated C14 chronology for this horizon places it in the end of the first half and the beginning of the second half of the

9th millennium BC. The architecture and the ground and pecked stone industry belonging to the 'Proto-Qaramelian' displays many similarities with Natufian culture, but the flint industry is different not only from the Natufian tradition, but also from the El-Khiam horizon in the southern and central Levant; for example, Qaramelian points have been noted among the prevalent El-Khiam points, at the same time that there is a total lack of microliths, which are so typical of the Khiamian.