

TELL EL-HAMMEH

PLATES XXXVII-XXXVIII

ON November 22, 1932, soundings were made at Tell el-Ḥammeḥ on behalf of the American School of Oriental Research, Jerusalem, by Professor Clarence S. Fisher and the writer, with the assistance of Mr. A. Henry Detweiler, who has drawn the plans and the sherds. El-Ḥammeḥ is situated on the north bank of the Yarmûk River,¹ at the point where the frontiers of Palestine, Syria and Transjordan converge.² At el-Ḥammeḥ was located the Roman town of Ḥammât Gader, the Hot Springs of Gadara (Umm Qeis).³ Roman, Byzantine and early Arab sherds were found on all the slopes and the top surface of the mound, and a large number of Early Bronze sherds were found on its northeastern slope, most of them in a definitely restricted area.

Five pits were sunk down to the natural soil of the mound in what seemed to be the most promising places for trial excavations. In a large pit dug previously by someone down to the natural soil, less than half a metre below the surface on the western edge of the top of the mound, there were a number of Byzantine sherds. The first sounding⁴ was made a few metres from the ancient synagogue, which had been exposed a few weeks before by E. L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University.⁵ Along the northern side of the pit there was exposed the inner face of a long wall. It was well built of large uncut boulders, which had probably been taken from the Yarmûk river-bed at the foot of the southern side of the mound. The wall extended downward .75 metre, and rested on a layer of gray earth mixed with ash, which seems to have been used as a fill. There was otherwise no trace of a general burning. A reused door-jamb was found beneath the surface of the ground, which was unrelated to anything else in area I.⁶ It was similar to a door-jamb in place at the southeast door of the synagogue. At right angles to this north wall and bonded into it, was a well-built wall of large boulders, which extended across the pit, and rested on a foundation of three rows of smaller stones.⁷ This foundation jugged out slightly on the eastern side, and probably marked where the floor level had been. Next to the wall foundation was a pebble fill, indicating where space had been left when the original trench for the foundation of the wall had been dug to enable the laying of the foundation. The foundation stones rested on earth, and .125 metre lower down there was a plastered floor laid on small stones. Below this floor level a piece of a Byzantine marble altar-screen was found, as well as several small worn sherds. All the sherds in the pit were Byzantine or early mediaeval Arabic. Further excavation in the pit revealed a thick, undisturbed, natural layer of large and small pebbles, deposited in earliest times when swirling waters had receded and left them there. Examination of the hills on the other side of the Yarmûk revealed, at approximately

¹ Fig. 1.

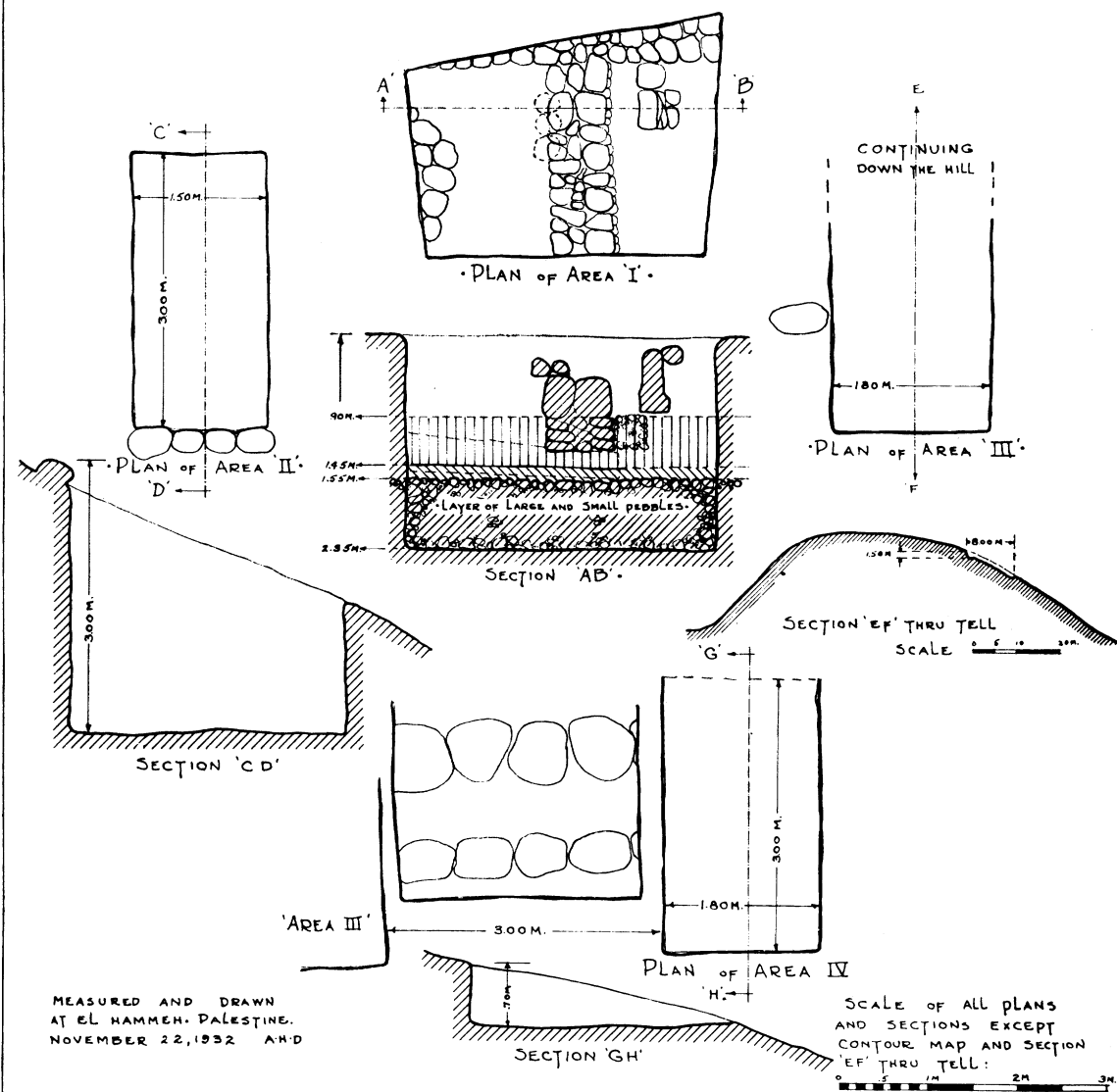
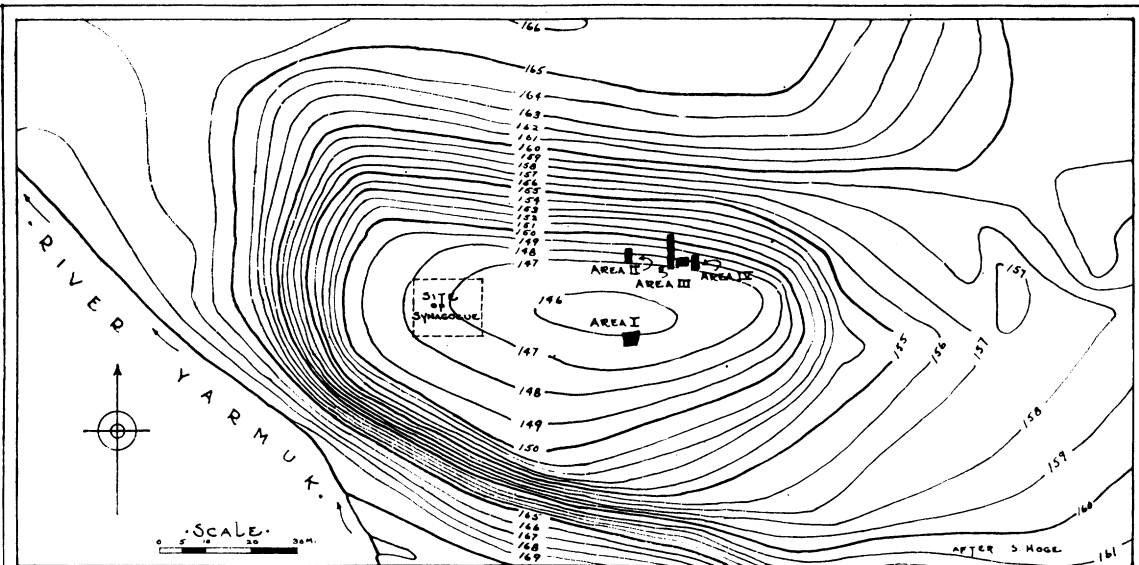
² *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 49, p. 22; *QD.AP.* III, 4, pp. 173-4.

³ *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, VI, p. 42. ⁴ Fig. 1, section AB.

⁵ *QD.AP.* III, 4, p. 175.

⁶ Fig. 1, section AB.

⁷ Fig. 1, section AB.



the same height, the same layer of large and small pebbles. Area I was approximately half way between the synagogue and the eastern edge of the mound, and should have given evidence of occupation levels beneath those of the Byzantine period, had there been any. Tell el-Ḥammeh, as revealed by the various soundings, is for the most part an entirely natural mound, being an outspur of the hills on the western side of the river. It is isolated from them by a valley dug out by the rushing waters of the Yarmûk, whose volume is increased by the strong outflow of the hot springs at el-Ḥammeh. It is most probable that the smaller mound back of the theatre to the east is also a natural hillock, with a covering of Roman ruins ¹ (fig. 2).

A second pit was dug on the northern side of the mound, approximately opposite



FIG. 2.—EL-ḤAMMEH

the first, and about fifteen metres removed from it.² A quantity of Byzantine sherds was recovered, and at a depth of 2.40 metres, one late Iron III sherd was found. Otherwise the sounding revealed nothing except some loose stones which had become buried in the débris. There were no traces of walls or occupation levels.

A trench, about eight metres long, was then dug up the northeastern slope of the mound.³ At first only a few Byzantine sherds were discovered embedded but a slight distance beneath the surface in the natural chalky soil. Near the top of the mound, however, a large pocket of exceedingly interesting Early Bronze sherds was found at a depth of about 1.25 metres beneath the surface. There were no traces of walls. This sounding was immediately above the area on the northeastern slope of the mound, where a number of Early Bronze sherds had previously been picked up on the surface of the ground. Another trench, designated area IV,⁴ was dug on the northeastern top and slope of the mound, virgin soil being reached at a depth of .70 metre. It yielded Byzantine sherds. Between areas III and IV a rectangular pit was dug down to virgin soil between two rows of basalt stones, which, it was thought,

¹ *Annual*, VI, p. 42.

³ Fig. 1, area III, section EF.

² Fig. 1, area II, section CD.

⁴ Fig 1, section GH.

might have been the top stones of a wall, but proved to be only one course deep.¹ The pit yielded a few Early Bronze sherds, a small Roman bowl (fig. 3), and a quantity of Byzantine sherds. The Roman pottery was undoubtedly brought up from the extensive Roman bathing establishment below the mound.



FIG. 3.—A SMALL ROMAN BOWL FROM
TELL EL-HAMMEH

It is seen that at Tell el-Hammeh there are no traces of house or city-walls belonging to the Early Bronze Age, to which period almost all of the early sherds can be ascribed. The entire Early Bronze Age level had either been completely destroyed and dumped in the Yarmūk below the southern side of the mound, with some sherds thrown over

the northeastern side, or the entire settlement then may have been limited to a small guard post on the northeastern side of the mound. Clearances may have been undertaken in the Byzantine period. A police-post was probably established and maintained in the Early Bronze Age for the protection of visitors to the hot springs, who perhaps came largely from Beth-Yerah on the Sea of Galilee about six miles away in a straight line.² The only settlement which covers the top of the mound is a Byzantine one. There is also no trace of a Roman settlement on the mound, although there are very extensive Roman ruins adjacent to the hot springs in the valley below, belonging to Hammam Gader, by which name the Byzantine site was also known. It is possible that under the synagogue floor, traces of an Early Bronze Age level may be found; it is to be doubted, however, because soundings a few metres removed from it revealed only Byzantine remains.

Among the Early Bronze sherds recovered particularly from area III, a number of ledge handles was found. Two types were represented, the one being roughly rectangular in shape, extending from about four to six centimeters from the side of the vessel, and varying in length from 7.5 to 10 centimeters,³

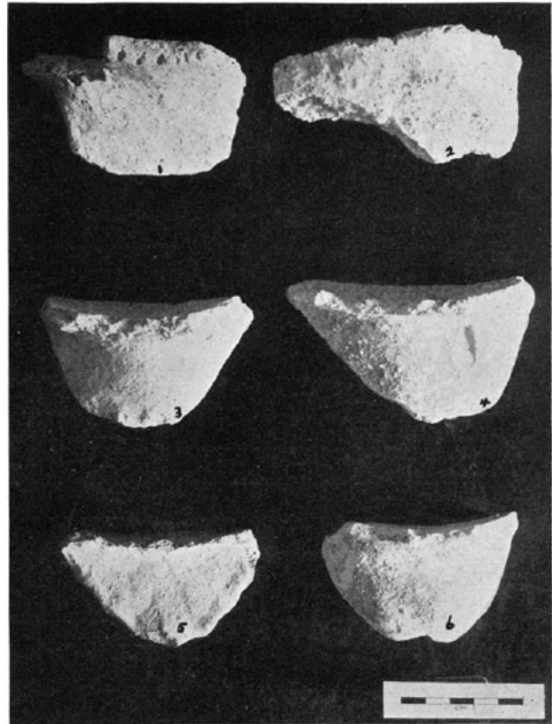


FIG. 4

¹ Fig. 1, section between areas III and IV.

² *Bulletin*, 35, p. 12.

³ Fig. 4, 1, 2.

and the other type being a semi-elliptical projection of approximately the same measurements in its greatest dimensions as the rectangular type, and like it concave above and convex below.¹ One of the rectangular shaped ledge-handles had been attached to the shoulder of a vessel, the rim of which was decorated with a row of oblique notches.² The coarse gray clay of the vessel was filled with large grits. Its entire outer surface had evidently been covered with a coarse haematite slip, parts of which are still visible. The semi-elliptical ledge-handle seems to be the more common type. Those of this type found at Tell el-Ḥammeh,³ and one found at Beth-Yerah⁴ during one of the 1933 seminar trips of the Jerusalem School, reveal slight indentations on their outer edges made by finger impressions. One of these ledge-handles has an incision for the thumb on the lower convex side.⁵ Neither at Tell el-Ḥammeh nor at Beth-Yerah were any wavy ledge-handles found. Albright reports from his finds at Beth-Yerah (Khirbet Kerak) that "ledge-handles were rare, and the typical long, narrow wavy ledge-handles of the Early Bronze in southern Palestine were hardly represented at all. The typical ledge-handle of Khirbet Kerak is short and smooth, but projects from four to six centimeters from the body of the vessel."⁶ Only some degenerate forms of the wavy ledge-handle were found there by him.⁷ There seems to be a general absence of the wavy ledge-handle north of the Valley of Esdraelon. This fact, which had already been established through Albright's researches, is confirmed by the results of the soundings at Tell el-Ḥammeh and the surface finds at Beth-Yerah. The wavy ledge-handle is found frequently in Bronze Age sites south of Galilee in western Palestine, and south of the Ḥaurân in eastern Palestine.⁸ The province of the wavy ledge-handle extends also through Moab and Edom.⁹ The writer hopes to publish his pottery collections from numerous Bronze Age sites in Moab and Edom in the near future in one of the forthcoming numbers of the *Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*. Wavy ledge-handles were found on almost every one of the Bronze Age sites located in these areas. This type of wavy ledge-handle, found also in Egypt,¹⁰ seems to have fallen into disuse everywhere about 1800 B.C. Characteristic at Tell Beit Mirsim of the late Early Bronze J level, circa 23rd–21st centuries B.C.,¹¹ wavy ledge-handles appear in degenerate forms in the I-H levels, circa 21st–19th centuries B.C.,¹² and disappear before level G, circa 19th–18th centuries B.C.¹³

It is impossible to fix an exact date for the types of ledge-handles such as were found at el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah until stratigraphic excavations have been carried out at some site north of the Valley of Esdraelon. Whereas in central and southern Palestine the pushed up and folded ledge-handles can be traced down to about the end of the Early Bronze Age, the failure to find such types north of the

¹ Fig. 4, 3, 4, 6; for examples of the semi-elliptical ledge-handle see Macalister, *Gezer*, III, pl. XXXII, 1; pl. CXLVI, 10; pl. CXLIX, 2; pl. CXLVIII, 11; II, p. 133, 2; Sellin and Watzinger, *Jericho*, pl. 20, A, 3b; Karge, *Rephaim*, p. 230 a, b; *Beth-Pelet*, II, pl. XXXVI; Bliss, *A Mound of Many Cities*, p. 40.

² Fig. 4, 1 = pl. XXXVII A, 1; for examples of the rectangular ledge-handle see Macalister, *Gezer*, I, p. 93; pl. XXII, 14; pl. CXLVIII, 3; pl. CXLVII, 24; pl. CXLIV, 15; Macdonald, *Beth-Pelet*, II, pl. XXXVI; *Revue Biblique*, July, 1934, p. 413, n. 2. ³ Fig. 4, 3, 4, 6. ⁴ Fig. 4, 5. ⁵ Fig. 4, 4.

⁶ *Annual*, VI, p. 28.

⁷ *Bulletin*, 12, pp. 3–4.

⁸ *Annual*, XII, p. 3; XIII, p. 58, n. 4.

⁹ *Bulletin*, 51, pp. 12, 16; 55, pp. 3 ff.

¹⁰ *Annual*, XIII, pp. 58–9.

¹¹ *Annual*, XII, pl. 1, 7, 8; pl. 2, 16c; XIII, pp. 59–60, pl. 1, 3–5; 20, 20–4.

¹² *Annual*, XII, pl. 3, 38–40; pl. 4, 35.

¹³ *Annual*, XII, p. 12.

Valley of Esdraelon may simply indicate that the smooth ledge-handle of the el-Ḥammeh type was used to the exclusion of other types of ledge-handles down to the end of the Early Bronze Age. Numerous examples of the smooth ledge-handles found at Tell el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah have been found on various sites in Palestine in deposits which belong to the latter part of the Early Bronze Age.¹ The semi-elliptical smooth ledge-handles found at el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah may be compared to the small smooth ledge-handles found at Megiddo, which make their appearance there in stage V, predominate in stage IV, and extend down into stage III.² It is hardly possible, however, that these ledge-handles can be contemporaneous, because neither at Tell el-Ḥammeh nor at Beth-Yerah was there found any of the gray

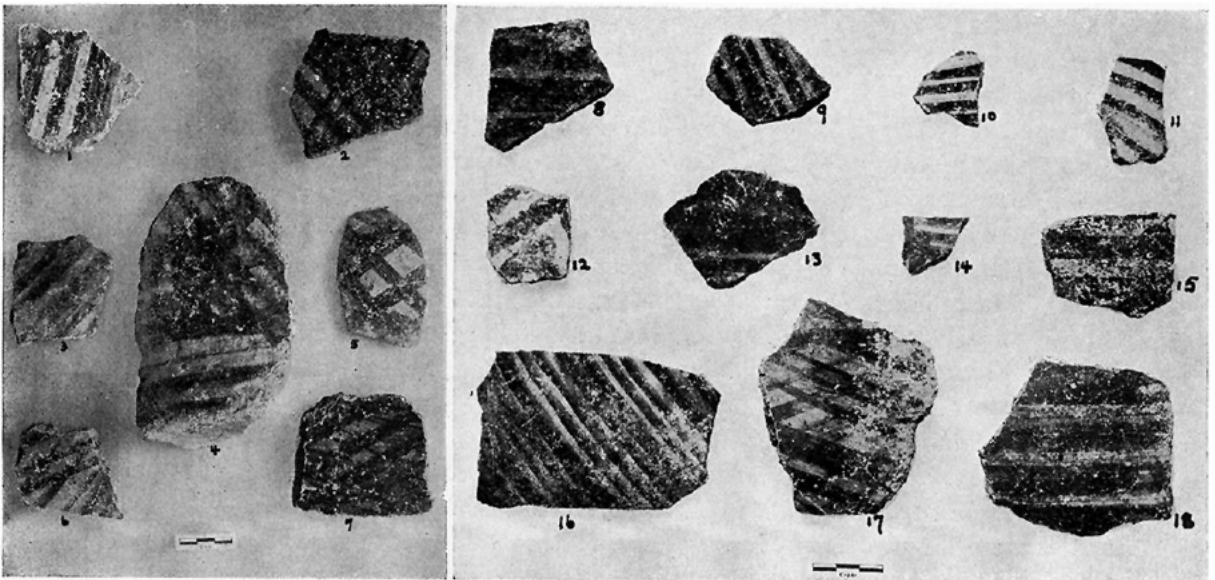


FIG. 5

burnished ware which at Megiddo extends from stage VII through stage IV, and to which Engberg and Shipton assign a fourth millennium date.³

Many of the sherds of the Early Bronze Age from el-Ḥammeh belonged to large, flat-bottomed⁴ store jars, made for the most part of coarse "porridge ware," and decorated with a band-slip. The band-slip consists of parallel, vertical, diagonal, and latticed bands of brown, red, orange, or cream slip, sometimes put directly on the surface of the vessel, but more frequently superimposed on a slip of a single color. Fig. 5, 4 = Pl. XXXVII A, 13 shows a sherd of a large, flat-bottomed pithos, covered on the outside with a cream slip over which latticed bands of dark brown paint were placed. The lower part of the jar was decorated with fairly evenly spaced parallel bands of dark brown paint over the underlying cream slip, which also covers the flat base.

¹ See above, p. 325, notes 1 and 2.

² Engberg and Shipton, *Notes on the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Pottery of Megiddo*, chart, col. 14 c, d; *Revue Biblique*, July, 1934, p. 412.

³ Engberg and Shipton, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁴ See Fig. 5, 4; Pl. XXXVII A, 13, 14; XXXVIII, 11-13; for similar types of bases from Beth-Yerah, see Fig. 6, 12-20.

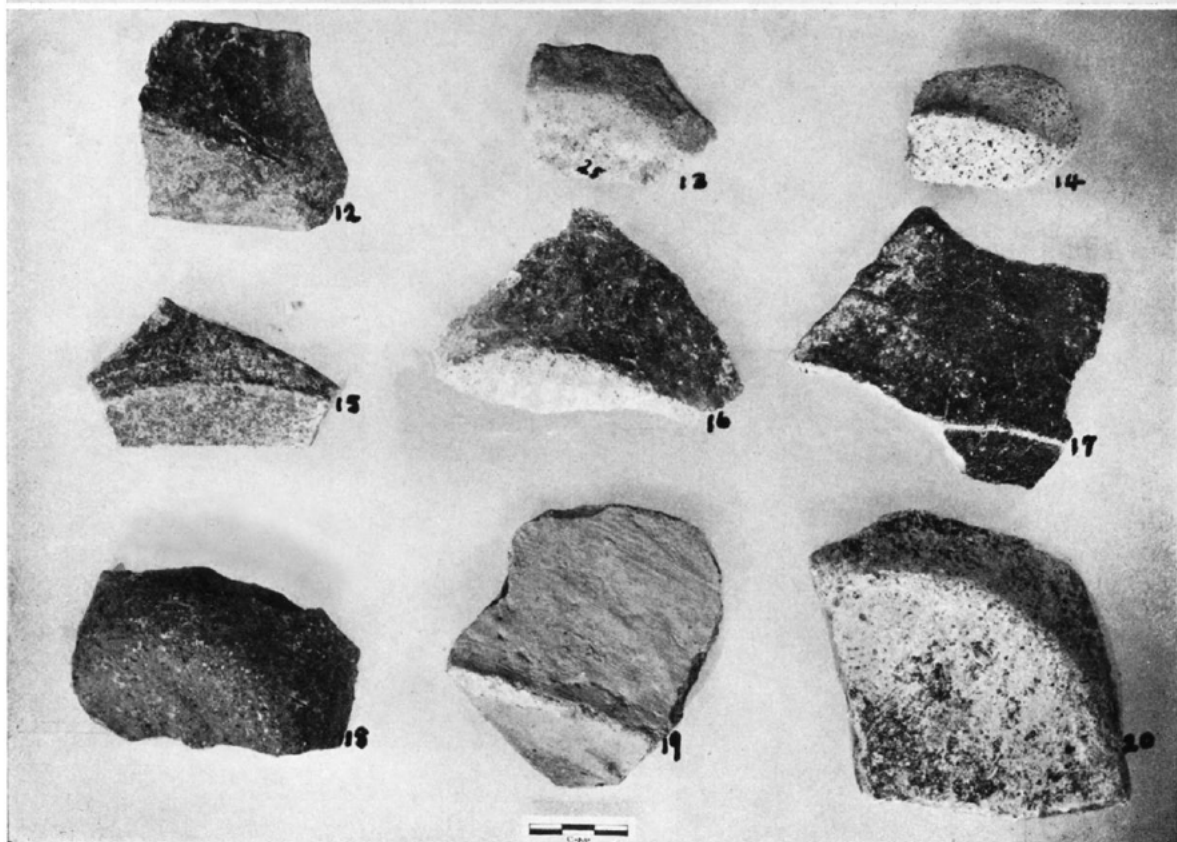
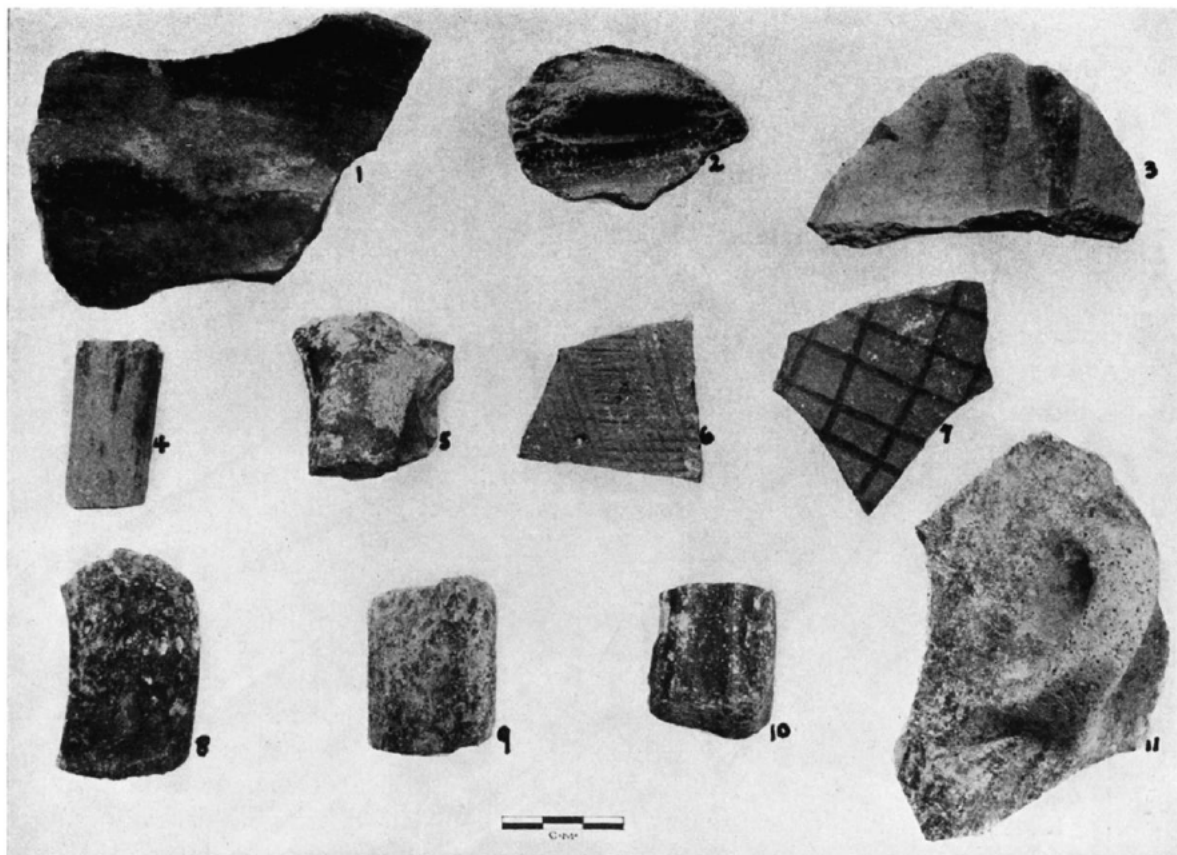


FIG. 6

Fig. 5, 1-3, 5-7 illustrates other sherds from Tell el-Ḥammeh with various types of the band slip. Large numbers of similarly decorated sherds are to be found at Beth-Yerah;¹ specimens from Beth-Yerah are illustrated on Fig. 5, 8-18. Similarly decorated sherds have been found, for instance, at Tell Beit Mirsim in the J level.² These decorated sherds with the band slip from el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah are strikingly similar to the painted sherds discovered at Megiddo. Most of the painted sherds at Megiddo were found in stages VII-III, with some occurring in stages II-I.³ The band slip on Fig. 5, 4, from el-Ḥammeh, is much like that on the "grain-washed" sherd with a loop handle decorated with several rows of oblique notches, found in stage V at Megiddo.⁴ It is interesting to note that at Beth-Yerah fragments of two loop-handles similarly decorated with rows of slightly oblique notches were found. The handles were covered with a red wash, and evidently belonged to vessels decorated with the band-slip, Fig. 6, 8.9. Although the painted pottery of Tell el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah cannot be contemporaneous with similar pottery found in stage V at Megiddo, because of the above mentioned lack of gray burnished ware, one can safely assume that it may be dated to the period extending from at least the middle to near the end of the third millennium B.C.⁵

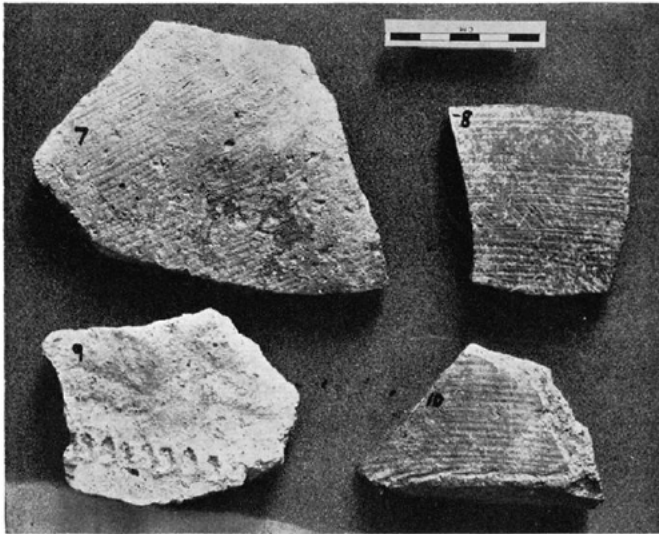


FIG. 7

A number of sherds were found at Tell el-Ḥammeh which were comb-faced with more or less parallel, horizontal lines, Fig. 7, 7, 10 = Pl. XXXVIII, 11; there was also one pattern combed sherd, Fig. 7, 8. Similar comb-faced sherds have been found in the J level at Tell Beit Mirsim⁶ and at Beth-Yerah, Fig. 6, 6, where "comb-facing is generally carried out in horizontal parallel bands and patterned hatching."⁷ Fig. 7, 9 shows a sherd with oblique notches from Tell el-Ḥammeh, similar to several found in the J level at Tell Beit Mirsim.⁸

A number of collared rims of hole-mouth, ovoid-shaped, flat-bottomed jars were found at Tell el-Ḥammeh, decorated with a band-slip ornamentation, or with a plain haematite slip, Pl. XXXVIIA, 10.11; Pl. XXXVIII, 7-10. Some of these rims were scalloped, Pl. XXXVIIB, 5.6. There were numerous plain rims of hole-mouth

¹ *Annual*, VI, p. 29.

² *Annual*, XIII, p. 5, and pl. 1, 9. 17. 30; pl. 2, 3. 6. 7. 11. 16.

³ Engberg and Shipton, *op. cit.*, p. 26, fig. 8.

⁴ Engberg and Shipton, p. 27, fig. 9.

⁵ *Annual*, VI, p. 31; XIII, p. 59.

⁶ *Annual*, XII, p. 5; pl. 1, 5.14.15; pl. 2, 1.2.

⁷ *Annual*, VI, p. 28; Engberg and Shipton, p. 26, fig. 8, A-E.

⁸ *Annual*, XII, p. 6; pl. 1, 26; pl. 2, 8; XIII, pl. 20, 17. 29; Beth-Pelet II, pl. XXXV.

jars, Pl. XXXVIIA, 2-4.6.8.9.¹ Belonging to large ovoid-shaped jars with slightly flaring mouths were various other rims, some of them with scalloped edges, and others plain, Pl. XXXVIIB, 4.7.² There were also a number of fragments of beautiful, large shallow platters and bowls with inverted rims. They were covered with a rich haematite slip continuously burnished, Pl. XXXVIII, 15.16.14.19.³ Pl. XXXVIII, 16 has a continuously burnished haematite slip on both the inside and outside surfaces. At Beth-Yerah we found a sherd with a pattern-burnished design placed over the wet-smoothed, reddish buff, outer surface, Fig. 6, 7.⁴ At Tell el-Ḥammeh there was a fragment of a shallow bowl with inverted rim and pierced ear handle, covered inside and outside with a burnished haematite slip, Pl. XXXVIIB, 9=Fig. 8, 2.⁵ In addition, there were a number of sherds from Tell el-Ḥammeh belonging to medium-sized jars and bowls with out-flaring, plain, and slightly inverted rims, Pl. XXXVIII, 1-4. A short cylindrical spout, Fig. 8, 3, and a diminutive saucer, Fig. 8, 1=Pl. XXXVIIB, 8, found at Tell el-Ḥammeh probably also belong to the end of the third millennium B.C.⁶

One type of pottery not found at Tell el-Ḥammeh, which is probably an accident because it occurs frequently at Beth-Yerah, is that of vases or bowls with a wavy ribbing or fluting on the outside in imitation of metal work in silver. Such vessels have a highly burnished red slip inside, a black slip outside, and a red slip on the rim,⁷ or a highly polished black slip both on the inside and the outside. Fig. 6, 1 from Beth-Yerah has a continuously burnished grayish black slip on the inside and outside surfaces, with the ribbing consisting of a band of small knobs encircling the shoulder of the bowl. Fig. 6, 2 from Beth-Yerah is a fragment of a similar type of ornamentation, the knob being more pronounced. Fig. 6, 17 from Beth-Yerah belongs to a flat-bottomed bowl, completely covered on the inside and outside with a continuously burnished black slip. These vessels are made of a gray, well-levigated clay of slightly porous texture. Fig. 6, 19 has a wet-smoothed, light gray surface on the outside; Nos. 12, 13, 15, 16, 20 have traces of band slip or plain haematite slip decoration on the outside; there are no traces of ornamentation on Nos. 14, 18.

Two sherds with loop-handles were found at Tell el-Ḥammeh, belonging to jugs with slightly profiled rims, and ornamental grooves on the neck, Pl. XXXVIII, 5. There was also the fragment of another loop-handle with flat oval section, covered with a reddish-brown slip, on the top surface of which were several vertical and criss-cross lines of burnishing. It is similar to the loop-handle found at Beth-Yerah, Fig. 6, 4. Other loop-handles from Beth-Yerah covered with a red wash or slip are shown on Fig. 6, 5.8-11; Nos. 5, 10 like Nos. 8, 9 probably belonged to jars decorated with the band slip; No. 11 is from a jug whose entire outer surface was covered with a red-slip, further decorated with discontinuous vertical and diagonal lines of burnishing.

The Early Bronze Age settlement at Tell el-Ḥammeh flourished in the second and

¹ *Annual*, XII, p. 5, pl. 1, 1-4, 18; Sellin and Watzinger, *Jericho*, pl. 20, A1.

² *Annual*, XII, p. 5, pl. 1, 22; pl. 2, 16a.

³ *Annual*, XIII, pl. 20, 35-40.

⁴ *Annual*, XIII, pp. 61-2, pl. 20, 35, 38-40.

⁵ Macalister, *Gezer*, III, pl. CXLIX, 9, 18; II, fig. 328.

⁶ *Annual*, XII, pp. 6, 7, pl. 2, 14; XIII, pl. 1, 3; pl. 20, 26; pl. 3, 8.

⁷ *Annual*, VI, p. 28.

third quarters of the third millennium B.C. This dating is in general agreement with that established by Albright for Beth-Yerah, the bulk of whose pottery he assigns to Early Bronze II.¹ The pottery of Tell el-Ḥammeh furthermore confirms the opinion of Albright that the identification proposed between Tell el-Ḥammeh and the Egyptian Ḥammat of the thirteenth century B.C. is impossible.² This opinion is further substantiated by the striking similarity between the pottery of Tell el-Ḥammeh and Beth-Yerah, which as we have seen, Albright had already noted.³ The Early Bronze



FIG. 8

Age pottery of Beth-Yerah, which will be treated in full by Professor Albright in a forthcoming publication,⁴ is, on the whole, richer in variety and finer in quality than that found at Tell el-Ḥammeh, as is to be expected. Beth-Yerah was a large, flourishing metropolis, while Tell el-Ḥammeh was at best a small settlement.

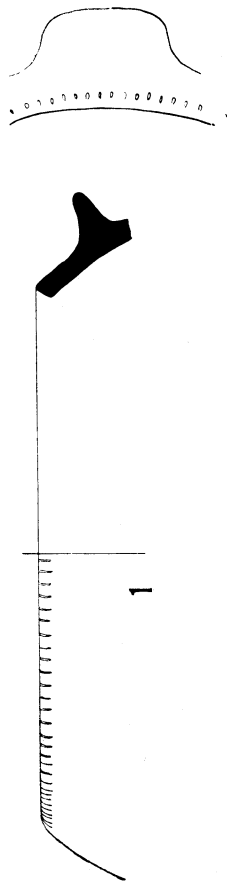
NELSON GLUECK

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE
Cincinnati, Ohio
Nov. 5, 1934.

¹ *Annual*, XIII, p. 59; (see now *Bulletin* 57, pp. 29-30).

² *Annual*, VI, pp. 42-3; *Bulletin*, 35, p. 12; 19, p. 18; 49, p. 23.

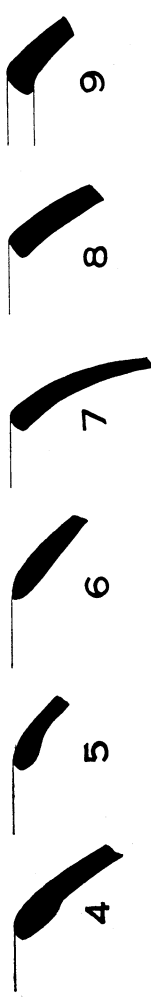
³ *Annual*, VI, p. 28; XII, pp. 3, 4; Saarisalo, *The Boundary Between Issachar and Naphtali*, p. 80; *QDAP*, III, 4, p. 174; Jirku in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlaendischen Gesellschaft*, 11: 3, 4, 1933, pp. 189-190, seems to be unaware of Albright's finds at Beth-Yerah, although they are documented particularly in *Annual*, VI, pp. 27-31. In addition to sherds from Bronze I, he claims to have found sherds from Iron I, which, however, he dates 900-600 B.C., p. 190. I have found neither Iron I nor Iron II sherds at Beth-Yerah, nor apparently have Albright or Saarisalo. Jirku's conclusion that an Israelitic settlement at Beth-Yerah has been proven is incorrect. ⁴ *Annual*, VI, pp. 27, 31.



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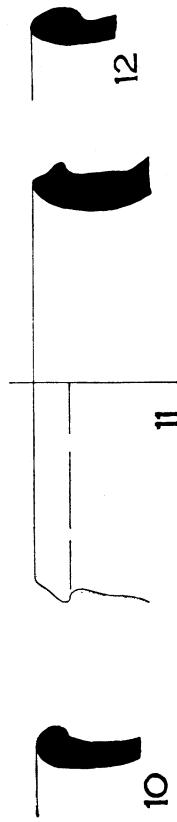
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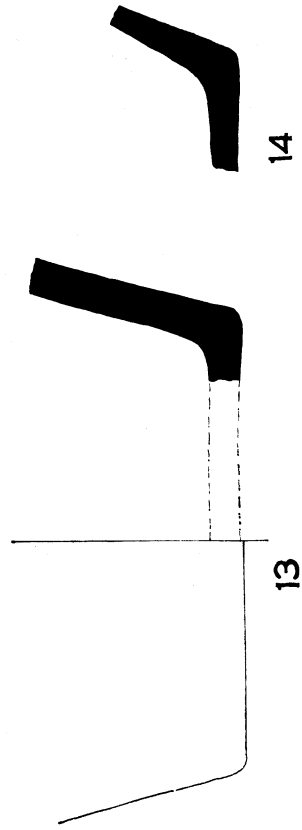
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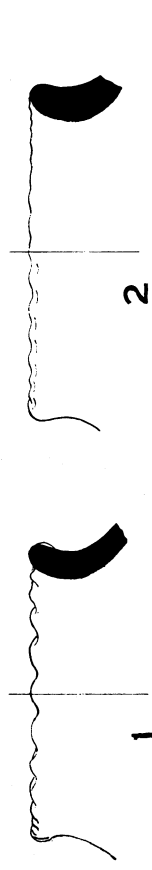
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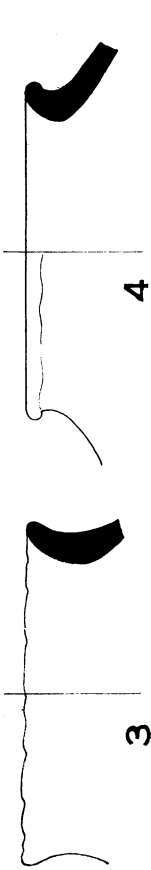
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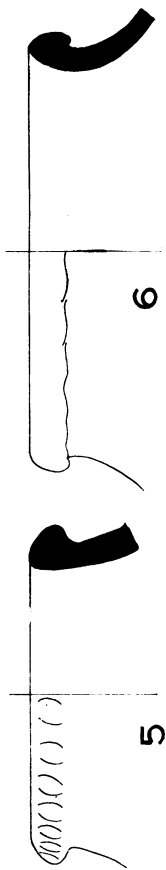
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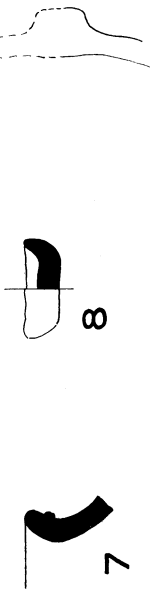
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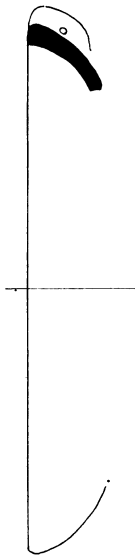
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PLATE XXXVII

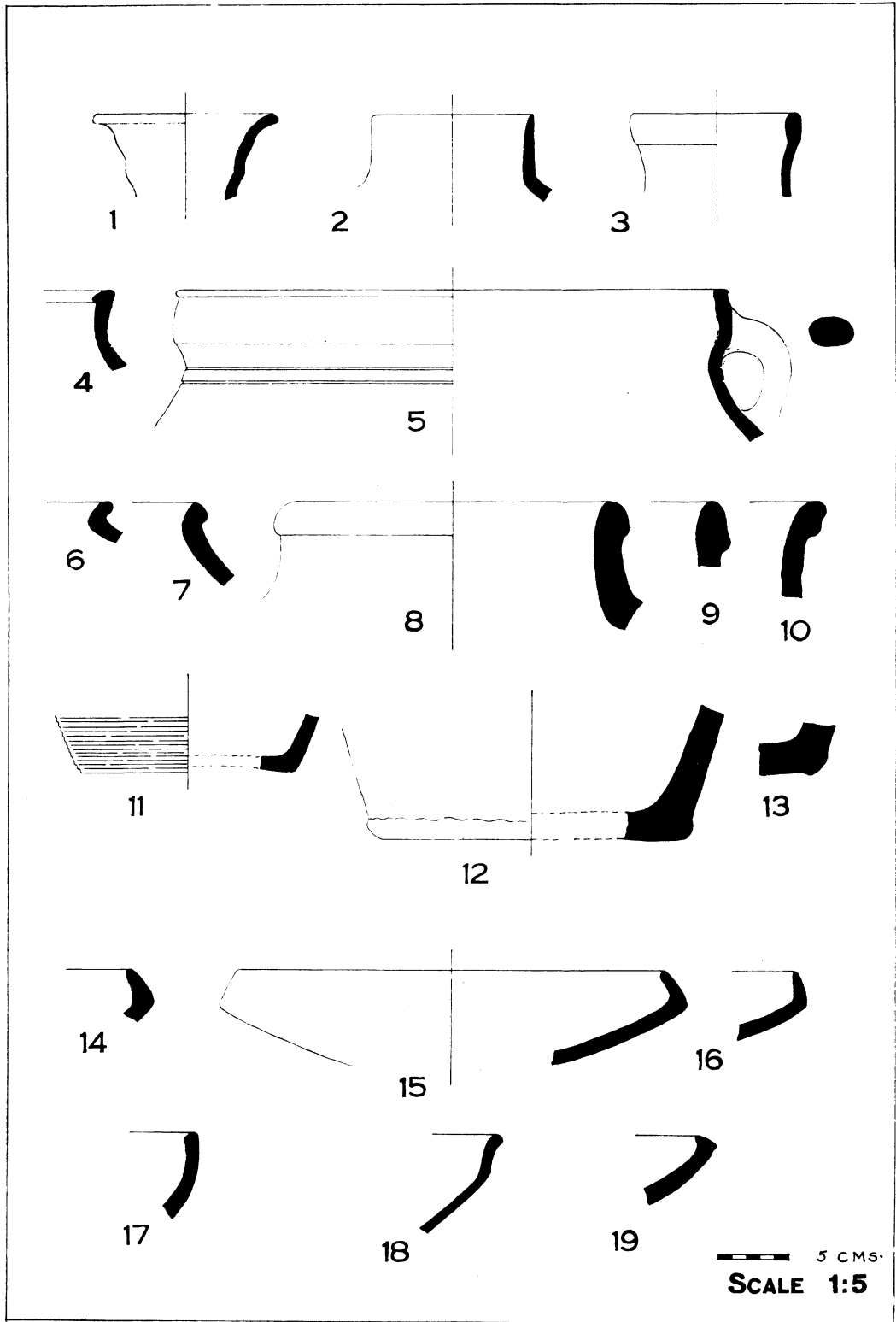


PLATE XXXVIII