AN OSTRACON FROM HESHBON

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A small ostracon in Aramaic script was found in the first season of excavations at Heshbon (modern *Ḥesbân*) in the summer of 1968.[1] The sherd, Registry No. 309, came from Area B, Square 1, Locus 52, the lowest level reached in the 1968 campaign, associated with pottery dating in large part from Persian times, in small part from earlier periods.

The sherd as presently preserved measures 5.4 × 5.3 cm. at its largest dimensions. Unhappily it has been broken on three sides as we can judge from its incomplete text, that is, on the top, bottom and left; the right side is evidently intact in view of the calcium deposits on its edge and its parallelism with the right margin of the lines of script. The break on the left, at least, appears to be recent, and there may be some hope of recovering more of the ostracon. The surface of the ostracon is marred by three gouges, no doubt from the blows of the workman's pick. These appear black on photographs, but can be distinguished clearly from ink marks with the naked eye.[2]

The text of the ostracon (Pl. XXV: B; Fig. 13) reads as follows:

]°ל בן 1.	Bin l°[
ל[אׄיזע 2.	'Uzzi' [el

[2] In Figure 13, the gouges are marked, two on line 3, one on line 4, with dotted lines. Shaded areas within or adjacent to the dotted lines are remnants of ink. It should be said that unusual efforts have been made at Heshbon to protect ostraca or graffiti. Iron Age potsherds were brushed with a dry brush before being subjected to water. A technique of dipping potsherds in water and examining them before cleaning, developed first, I believe, by Professor Yohanan Aharoni, at ʿArad, has been followed in part at Heshbon.

]ᵓⁱᵖᵓᵓᵓˡ בן	3.	Bin Rapaʾ [
]פסמי בן	4.	Bin Psammī [
‖ נידן	5.	Nanāyiddin ı

Figure 13. A tracing of the Hesh-
bon Ostracon and significant
letters of its script

Line 1. The *bêṭ* of *bin* is marred at the top by a deep chip in the potsherd which obliterates the right shoulder of the letter. Following *lameḏ* are remnants of a second letter, very faint and indeterminate; a *ḥêṭ* is possible: *lʿḥ̓* [*y*] ? [3]

Line 2. The broken *ʾaleṗ* at the end of the line appears to me to be certain. In this case the reading *ʿuzzīʾē*[*l*] imposes itself. Cf. the common biblical name *ʿUzzīʾēl*.

[3] On the name *lḥy*, see now J. Naveh, "The Scripts of Two Ostraca from Elath," *BASOR*, No. 183 (1966), pp. 27 f., and n. 9; G. Ryck-mans, *Les noms propres Sud-Sémitiques*, I (Louvain, 1934), 120.

Line 3. Following *bn* is a long gouge in the sherd. Ink remnants preserved at the top of the gouge appear to be *rêš* or *daleṭ*. Following is the letter *pē'*, faintly preserved but certain. On the left edge of the line is a stroke which conforms best to *'aleṗ*, but is quite uncertain. *Rāpā'* or *Rĕpā'ēl* are possible reconstructions.

Line 4. The reading *bn psmy* is clear despite the gouge which largely obliterates the *samek*. On the left top of the indentation is ink following the curve of *samek*; almost all of the lower, rounded sweep of *samek* is visible. The name *psmy*, Psammī, is well known from Egyptian Aramaic texts.[4] It appears to be a hypocoristicon of Egyptian *psmtk*, in Aramaic script *psmšk*.[5]

The Psammī of the Hermopolis papyri is the son of Nabūnatan (nbwntn; the name is Aramaean), the father of Makkibānīt (< Mankibānīt) and Waḥpere' (Egyptian Hophra-Apries).[6] The Psammī of the Brooklyn papyrus is the father of 'Attarmalkī. We shall return to this curious mixture of Babylonian, Egyptian, and Aramaean names found in Egyptian Aramaic texts and, as we shall see, in our Heshbon ostracon.

Line 5. This line with its name and number is apparently the only complete line in the ostracon. It makes clear that the original ostracon consisted of names and numbers, evidently a record of payment or rations, or a record of goods shipped

[4] Cf. E. G. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramic Papyri* (New Haven, 1953), Pap. I, 13; and especially E. Bresciani and M. Kamil, *Le lettere aramaiche di Hermopoli, Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei*, "Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche," Serie VIII, Volume XII, 5 (Rome, 1966), *passim*, esp. p. 381. Cf. N. Aimé-Giron, *Textes araméens d'Égypte* (Cairo, 1931), 2. 1 and 34.4; and G. R. Driver, *Aramaic Documents of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1957), II, 4 (p. 43), and III, 3 (p. 45).

[5] For the Neobabylonian transcriptions, see K. Tallqvist, *Assyrian Personal Names* (Hildesheim, 1966 [reprint]), pp. 181 f.

[6] See J. T. Milik, "Les papyrus araméens d'Hermoupolis et les cultes syro-phéniciens en Égypte perse," *Biblica*, XLVIII (1967), 546-622, esp. 547 ff.

or received. The name Nanāyiddin is a fairly common name in
Babylonia in the 6th century B.C.[7] It is a transparent formation
composed of two familiar elements, the name of the goddess
Nanāy,[8] popular in Neobabylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic
times as Nabū's consort, both in Babylonia and among the
Aramaeans, and the familiar onomastic element *iddin*, "has
given." One may compare such names as *nnyḥm*[9] and *br-Nny*.[10]

The script of the Heshbon ostracon is to be compared
palaeographically with the scripts of the Hermopolis papyri
(last quarter of the 6th century B.C.), the Meissner Papyrus
(515 B.C.),[11] Elephantine Papyri, Cowley 52 (late 6th century
B.C.)[12] and Cowley 1 (495 B.C.),[13] and the inscriptions of
Sheikh Faḍl (early 5th century B.C.).[14]

'*Alep* in line 2 is broken. However, it is clear that the form
is that of the 6th-century Aramaic cursive. This form with
its right stroke in the form of a horizontal "V" persisted in the
chancellery script[15] of the 5th century, but was replaced in

[7] Cf. K. Tallqvist, *Neubabylonisches Namenbuch* (Helsingfors, 1905),
p. 159. The name is written Na-na-a-iddin.

[8] See D. O. Edzard, *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, ed. H. W. Haussig
(Stuttgart, n.d.), I, Mesopotamien, p. 108, and references. Note also
Ναναία of 2 Macabees 1:13, 15. Tallqvist lists some forty names
formed with *Nanāy* (see n. 7).

[9] Cf. *nnyḥm* in the Hermopolis Papyri (cited above in n. 4).

[10] Cf. Hatraic *nny* and *brnny*, H. Donner and W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische
und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1964), II, 294 f., and references.

[11] H. Bauer and B. Meissner, "Ein aramäischer Pachtvertrag aus
dem 7. Jahre Darius' I.," *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie
der Wissenschaft*, Phil.-Hist. Klasse (Berlin, 1936), pp. 414-424; esp.
Taf. I and II.

[12] A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century* (Oxford, 1923),
pp. 1 ff.; E. Sachau, *Aramäische Papyrus und Ostraka*, II (Leipzig,
1911), Papyrus 22, Pl. 24.

[13] Sachau, *op. cit.*, Pap. 30, Pl. 30.

[14] N. [Aimé] Giron, *Ancient Egypt*, XIII (1923), pp. 38-43. I am indebted
to Dr. Joseph Naveh for new photographs of these inscriptions. Cf.
his dissertation, shortly to be published: *The Development of the
Aramaic Script* (The Hebrew University, 1966), pp. 57 f. [Hebrew].

[15] Naveh, in the study cited in n. 14, has distinguished systematically
a "conservative" and a "vulgar" cursive style in fifth-century scripts.
His analysis is no doubt correct. Our "chancellery cursive" corresponds
to this "conservative cursive."

the ordinary cursive by a form with a more or less vertical right arm.

Bêt is still quite elongated as in late 6th-century and early 5th-century styles. The top preserves a narrow form with sharp, upward ticks on either side.

Two features of *dalet* are to be noted, the bold slant of its right leg from left down to the right, a trait of 7th- and 8th-century styles, and the stubbiness of the form, again an early (pre-5th century) character. The closest parallels are in the P. Cowley 52, in the Hermopolis papyri, and in the Meissner papyrus, as well as earlier documents.

The *zayin* in line 2 is broad at the top and angled left to right. This is a very archaic form, much like that of P. Cowley 52 and earlier hands.

Yod in the Heshbon ostracon is very large, composed of two separate strokes, the left stroke having been drawn from right to left. By the beginning of the fifth century there is a strong tendency to draw the letter without lifting the pen in the ordinary cursive, and the letter grows progressively smaller. There is also a tendency for the left stroke to move upward from right to left which appears in the Meissner Papyrus of 515 B.C. The *yod* in l. 2 shows a slight move in this direction. Closest to the Heshbon hand is once again P. Cowley 52 (as well as much earlier hands).

The stance of *lamed* shifts from a slant down right to left (before the broad loop) in the 6th-century, to a stance close to the vertical in 5th-century hands. The Heshbon form is of the earlier type. Compare especially the Hermopolis forms.

Mem is one of the best letters for dating, having a complex evolution in the 7th to 5th centuries. 7th- and 6th-century forms are characterized by the right down-stroke moving straight, uncurved from a squarish shoulder downward. The left down-stroke is relatively short, beginning well above the horizontal. The Heshbon form finds close parallels as

early as the Saqqārah Papyrus (601 B.C.),[16] as late as P. Cowley 1.

Nūn is not especially useful in this period. In the chancellery hand it evolves little in the 7th-5th centuries.

The *'ayin* of the Heshbon script is characterized by its near circular form and small opening to the top. Its traits are relatively early typologically, though such forms may appear sporadically well into the 5th century.

The Heshbon *pē'* in each example exhibits a rounded head and slightly curved downstroke. One may compare the form of Hermopolis Papyrus I, 5 which is identical. The lower curve develops late in the 6th century and continues through the 5th century.

Unhappily, the form of *samek* in line 4 of the ostracon is too uncertain to be analyzed palaeographically. Its traces may be made to conform with either 6th- or 5th-century styles.

Our palaeographical analysis has revealed that most of the letter forms of the Heshbon ostracon can be fitted to a date shortly before or shortly after 500 B.C.: *'alep̱, ḥêṯ, mêm, nūn* and *pē'*. The remaining letters are typologically earlier, especially *zayin, lameḏ,* and *daleṯ*. We prefer a date in the last quarter of the 6th century, 500 B.C. in round numbers.

The most striking feature of the Heshbon Ostracon is its mixture of names, two West Semitic, one Egyptian, and one Babylonian. As we noted above, a similar mixture of names obtains in the Aramaean and Jewish population of Egypt in the Persian Age. One suspects that Psammī was not a native Egyptian, nor Nanāyiddin Babylonian, but Aramaeans or Aramaized Arabs who moved over the caravan routes which crossed in Heshbon, the King's Highway connecting with North Arabia and the Gulf of Aqabah in the south to Rabbat Ammon and Damascus in the north, and the westerly road to Jericho, Jerusalem, and Joppa.

Another significant feature of the Ostracon is its use of the

[16] A photograph may be conveniently found in Donner and Röllig, *op. cit.,* III, Taf. XXXIII.

Canaanite (Hebrew or Ammonite) element *bn* plus Canaanite
or Egyptian patronymics. The scribe, while using an elegant
Aramaic cursive script, was writing in his native dialect. One
may compare the similar use of the Aramaic script for writing
Hebrew in Judah in the era of the Restoration.[17]

[17] See the writer's paper "Judaean Stamps" *Eretz Israel* IX (1969)
[the Albright Volume], 26, 27, Pl. V: 3, 4.

PLATE X

A. *Tell Ḥesbân* from the northeast. The acropolis and the shelf between the acropolis and the lower slopes of the mound are clearly noticeable

B. The staff of the 1968 Heshbon expedition

Plate XI

A. Area B: the lime kiln protruding from the north balk, and cutting through
several occupational strata to a depth of three meters

B. Area B: north face of Wall 17B of the Persian period. The foundation, lying
deeper than what is visible in the picture, was not reached in the 1968 season

A. Area B: view from the top on Wall 17B (running from top to bottom). To the left are cross Walls 27, 21, 28 and 25B, lying south of Wall 17B. The structure at the right of Wall 17B is an auxiliary balk

B. Area B: the narrow foundation trench on the north side of Wall 17B, visible in the auxiliary balk between the meter stick and the wall to the left

PLATE XII

PLATE XIII

A. Area C: aerial view of the L-shaped enclosure wall (C 1:2-3 and C. 2:5)

B. Area C: Structure C. 4:10-8 in the northwest corner of Square 4

PLATE XIV
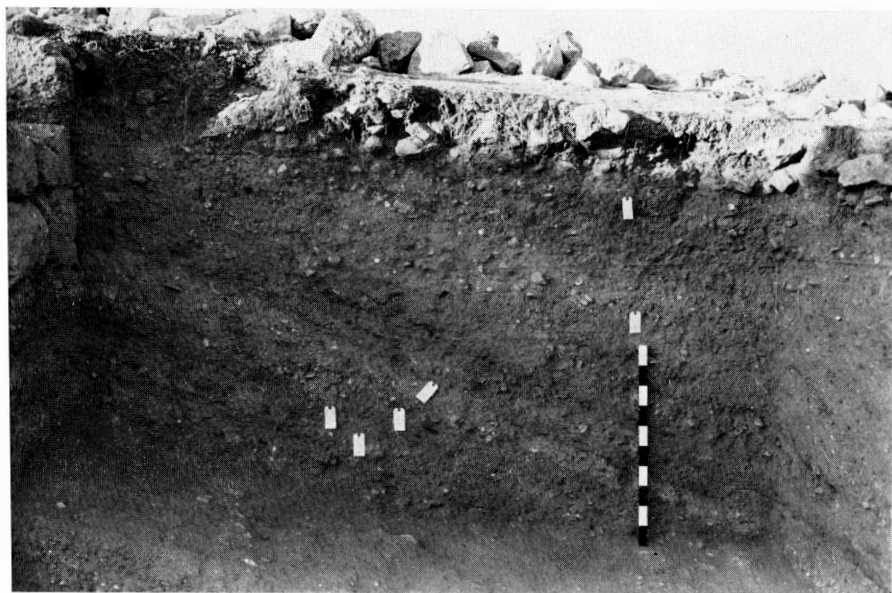
A. Area C: south balk of Square 2 showing the tip lines of the layers of wash, and Wall C. 2:10 to the left
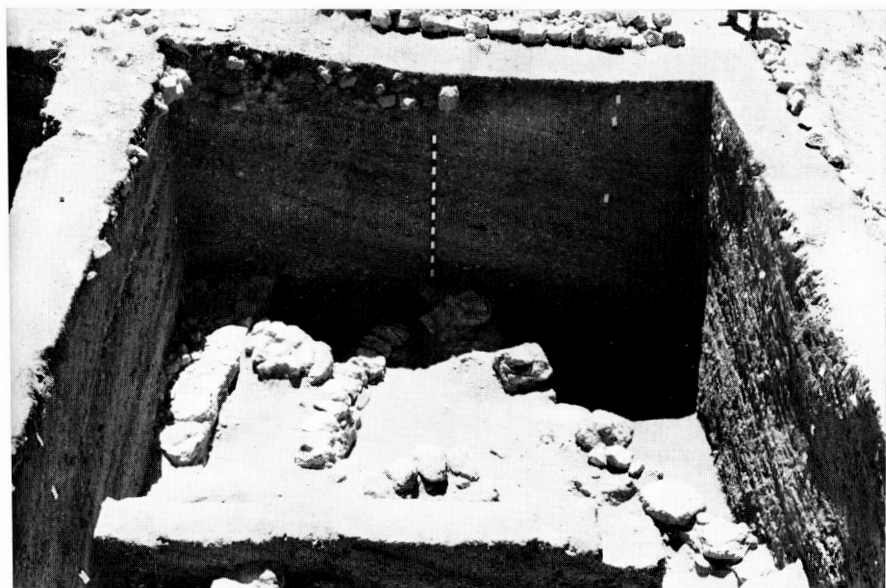
B. Area C: Square 1 at the end of the first season's work, with the first encountered architectural remains visible, probably of Roman origin

PLATE XV
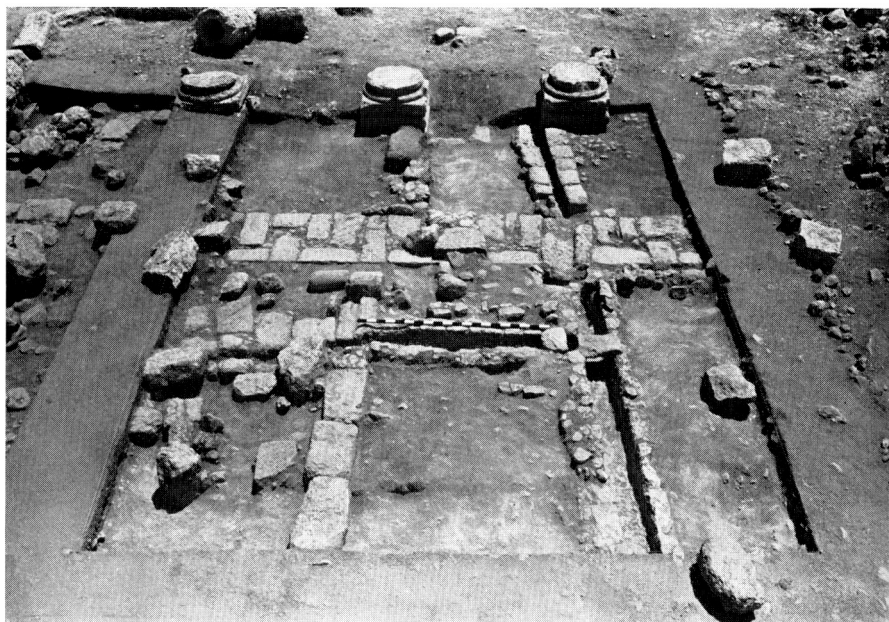
A. Area A: Square 2, looking toward the south, showing the Arab water channels running from north to south (cutting through Wall A. 2:8) and from east to west

B. Area A: storage area in Square 1 with remains of huge storage jars excavated

PLATE XVI
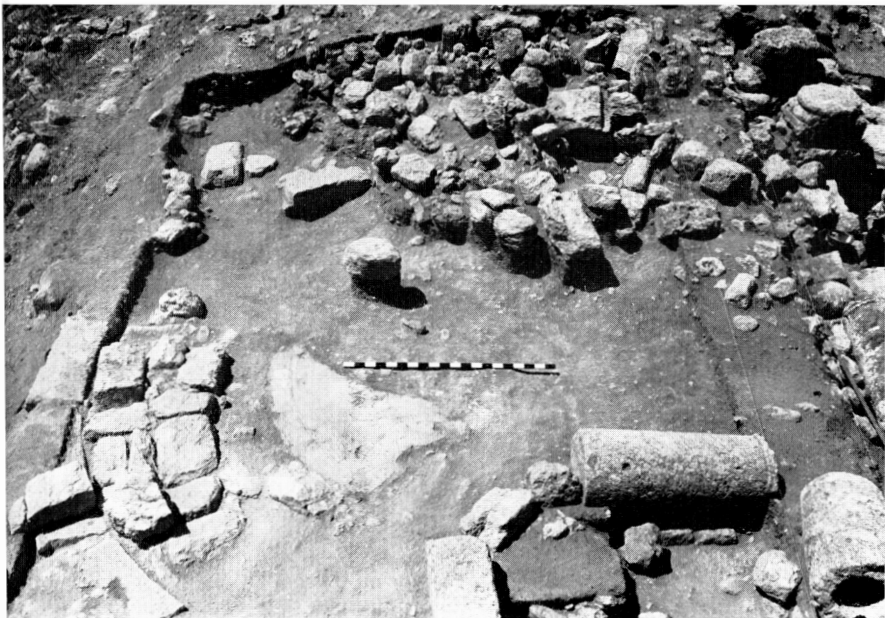
A. Area A: Appearance of the mosaic floor fragment (A. 3:3), covered with plaster (below the meter stick), and of the arc-shaped apsidal stones (A. 3:5) in Square 3. The crude filler Wall A. 3:4 is between the mosaic and Wall A. 3:5

B. Area A: cement bed of the apse mosaic after its removal. Filler Wall A. 3:4 is visible behind it

PLATE XVII

A. Area A: looking north over all four Squares. In the right foreground is the apse of the church with its intrusive Arab cistern (A. 3:8). In the center, running from left to right, are three column bases of the church, and behind them the church's north wall (A. 2:8)

B. Area A: mosaic floor fragment (A. 4:8) shown as found in relationship to architectural features surrounding it

PLATE XVIII

A. Area A: the apsidal mosaic fragment (A. 3:3) from the 6th-century church

Area A: the fragment of a mosaic floor (A. 4:8) from the central aisle of the church

PLATE XIX

A. Area A: the end of the northern leg of the apse wall (after removal of the balk between Squares 1 and 3) and junction with Wall A. 1:9. The left stone on which the meter stick rests is reused and bears a Corinthian capital leaf pattern carved on its north face and its bottom face


B. Area A: north face of north wall of the church (A. 2:8) in Square 2. The two column bases behind it stand on the balk between Squares 2 and 4
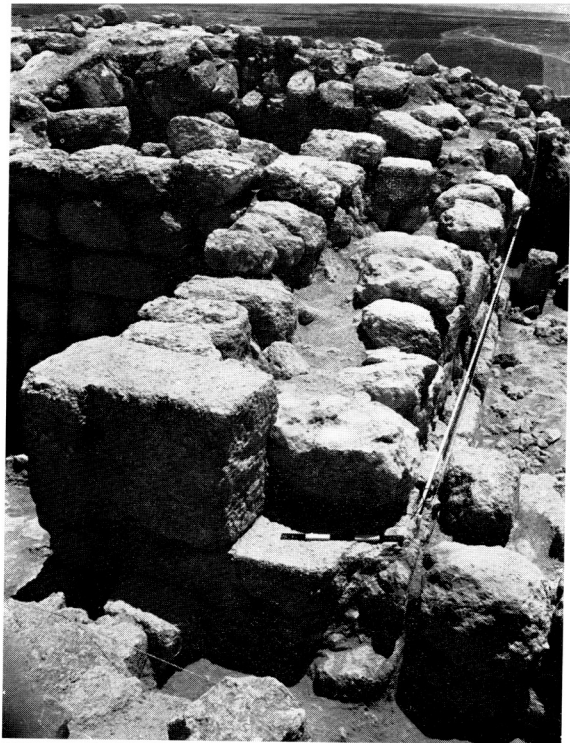
A. Area D: Square 1, looking east. Wall D. 1:4 running from west to east with gateway in the foreground. Wall D. 1:3 is to the left and behind it are the remains of the vaulted room
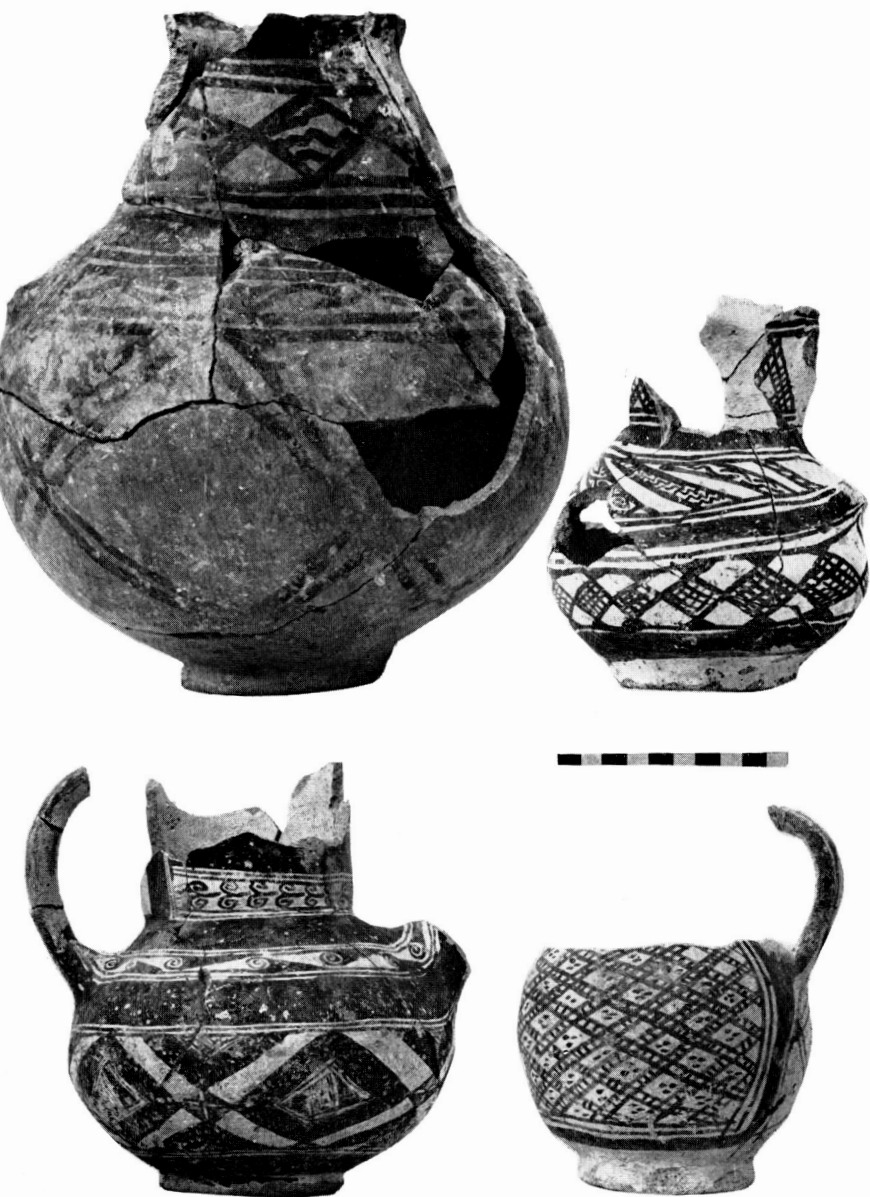
B. Area D: the stairway in Square 2 with Wall D. 2:2 on the right
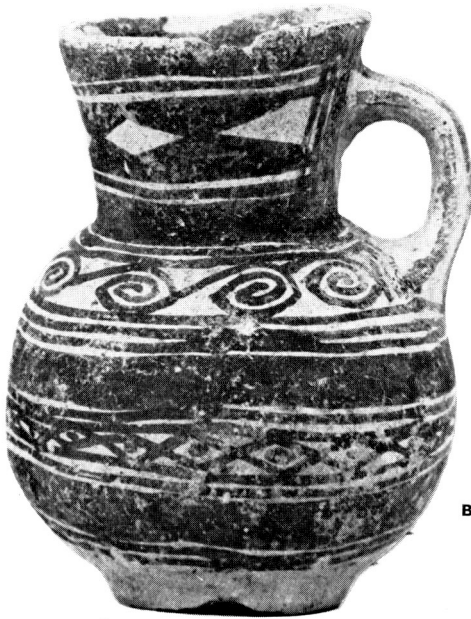
PLATE XX

PLATE XXI
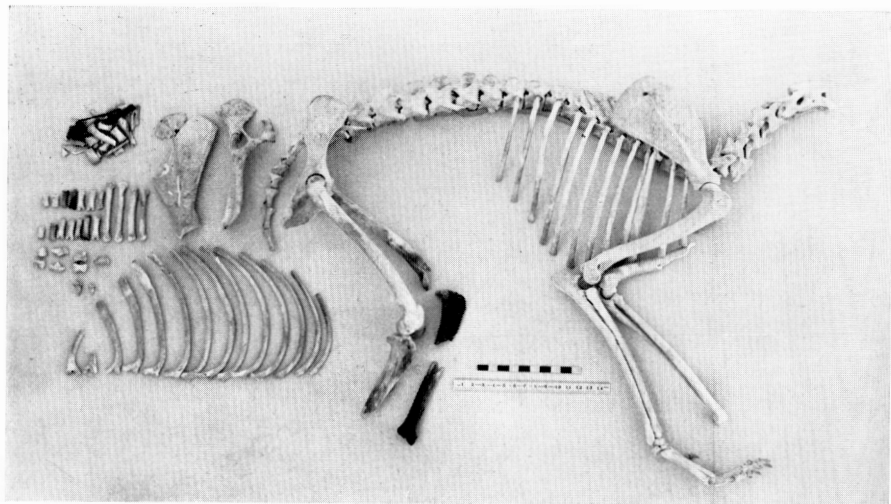
A. Headless skeleton of a large canine found under Locus 24 in Area B. 1

B. A variety of fragments from colored glass vessels and of glass bracelets

PLATE XXII

Painted Arab vessels from the cistern of Area C

PLATE XXIII
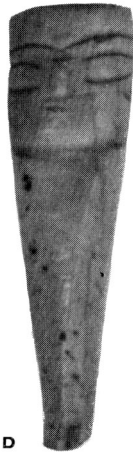

A-B. A painted Arab jug and a lamp from the cistern of Area C

C. A lead pendant (white chalk is put on the background to let the design appear on the photograph; see Figure 5 for an artist's drawing of the design)

D. A bone doll

E. Painted head on plaster from the church (A = half size; B-E = actual size)
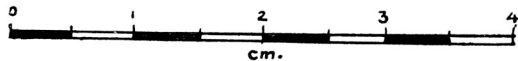
PLATE XXIV

A. Fragment of plaster from the church with the word [Δ]ΑΝΙΗ[Λ] painted on it
(Actual size)

B. Rhodian jar handle with the seal inscription ΕΠΙ ΑΡΑΤΟΦΑΝΕΥΣ and a
helios head

PLATE XXV

A. A pottery handle with a Latin seal inscription (Actual size)

B. The Heshbon ostracon. (About 1½ times enlarged). Photo: John C. Trever