Excavations and Survey at Boztepe and Intensive Survey at Talavash Tepe, 1999: A Preliminary Report

By
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Introduction

The site of Boztepe is located some eight kilometers east of the modern town of Bismil in Diyarbakir Province, southeastern Turkey [figure 1]. Boztepe is today a small, relatively low mound. In spite of the fact that in some areas cultural debris measures more than four meters in depth, its facade against the rolling terrain and neighboring hills make it almost indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape.

Archaeological investigation at Boztepe began in earnest in early July 1999 at which time we opened four five by five meter trenches in two separate areas of the site.[1] By the end of the season, we had expanded this number to eleven trenches and two soundings [figure 2]. At the same time work also began on intensive surveys of both Boztepe and the neighboring site of Talavash Tepe (see below). What follows is a preliminary report outlining the results of this research.

Excavations at Boztepe

Because many parts of Boztepe are covered by the remains of a modern village we focused our initial trenches in two areas. Area A trenches were placed in the courtyards of two ruined houses at the center of the mound, and area B trenches were placed in what seemed to be an undisturbed area around a road on the southeast side of the mound [figure 2].

Area A

We began by opening two trenches in area A. Because of the depth of the modern overburden, trench A1 was initially a disappointment. However, at a depth of 2.6 meters below the surface, we reached a Halaf period cemetery. The significance of the burial goods contained in the first two graves (see below) in addition to the discovery of another burial protruding from the west section of the trench was persuasive enough to warrant

[1] Archaeological research is always a collaborative effort. We owe a great debt of gratitude to many people and institutions for helping us make the Upper Tigris Archaeological Research Project a reality. The 1999 field season was funded by generous grants from the National Geographic Society, the American Philosophical Society and the American Research Institute in Turkey. Our team was made up of the authors plus Marco Baldi, Bonnie Bass, Elvan Basht^{a}rk, Debbie Dilley, Mark Sharp, Jennifer Theiss Sharp, Huseyin C^{a}se and Shehmuz Aslan. We are especially indebted to Numan Tuna, Jale Velibeyulu, Necdet nal and Yashar Yilmaz for their assistance to us in Turkey. Debbie Dilley and Susannah Topham aided us the production of this article. This project has received much support from the faculty and staff in the Department of History at the University of Utah. Among them we owe special thanks to L. Ray Gunn and Lindsay Adams.

expansion of the original exposure to this level. The final result was a twelve square meter exposure of the Halaf cemetery which contained three complete burials and one fragmentary burial. All the bodies were interred in a flexed position on an east-west axis with the head facing east. Grave goods were found in all four burials. The Halaf ceramic assemblage from Boztepe consists of shallow and flaring straight-sided bowls, globular hole-mouthed and necked jars and several miniature vessels. These ceramics have a variety of typical Halaf motifs [figure 3] including red scalloped designs, which occur exclusively on the inside of vessel rims (Watson and LeBlanc 1990 fig 4.7 nos. 1 and 3), black crosshatching on a cream slip (Wilkinson and Tucker 1995 fig. 63 no. 12) and red diamonds also on a cream slip (Watson and LeBlanc 1990 fig 4.16 no. 1; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995 fig. 63 no. 7. Also see and Hijara 1980). One particularly interesting complete vessel is decorated with a procession of long-necked animals (see below and figure 4). Also included among this assemblage are a number of typical Halaf rough undecorated wares similar to those described in Watson and LeBlanc 1990 pgs. 68-80.

Burial 1 (A1 L1009)

Burial 1 contained the skeleton of an adult female between the ages of 18 and 35, buried on her right side so that the orbitals of the skull were facing north. The legs were tightly flexed and brought up to the body, while the arms were bent at the elbows placing the hands under the mandible. A squat jar beautifully decorated with black polka dots on a reddish wash was placed behind the skull [figure 5].

Burial 2 (A1 L1009)

A second burial was found directly below the first burial described above. However, in this case the deceased was an adult male between the ages of 18 and 35, buried on his right side in the same orientation as Burial 1. The legs were tightly flexed and brought up to the chest while the arms were slightly outstretched toward the north. A small collared jar was placed behind the ribs, and a stamp seal was found near the joint of the right humerus and clavicle.

Burial 3 (A1 L1014)

Burial 3 contained an adult individual, buried in an east-west orientation. Some settling of the skeleton must have occurred after inhumation as the torso and skull were lying on their right side, while the legs and feet were lying on their left side. Due to its poor preservation, no sex could be determined on-site. This individual's body was tightly flexed, the legs bent up to the chest area and the arms bent so that the hands were placed under the skull. Three small jars (two collar-rimmed jars and a pierced-lug jar) were placed five centimeters east of the top of the skull and a larger hole-mouthed jar painted with reddish-brown decorations which include a procession of animals was placed behind the skull [figure 4].

Burial 4 (A1 L1015)

This incomplete burial contained fragments of a skull, a left scapula and a left humerus. An undecorated flaring-neck jar was placed on the north side of the burial nearest the skull fragments.

Due to the fragile nature of human remains of this age, every effort was made to record these discoveries as they lay *in situ.* The bones were then removed and await analysis in our lab/depot at Dicle University in Diyarbakir.

Although trenches A1 and A2 are relatively close together the results from these two excavation units are very different. In A2 we found several large plaster-lined pits which cut into architecture dating to the Iron Age [figure 6 and 7] directly below the topsoil and a layer of modern debris. This discovery prompted us to open five more trenches adjacent to A2. The Iron Age levels in A2 and its expansions yielded an Iron Age house composed of mud brick walls with associated surfaces, storage pits and several ovens. None of these walls had stone foundations or any stone components whatsoever. The structure witnessed two main building phases, during which the load bearing walls changed orientation slightly, and several sub-phases documented by various partition walls and floor levels. The small finds discovered in these levels, which include loom weights, spindle whorls, and several mortars, indicate that these rooms were utilized for craft production, domestic activities and food processing. The later more substantial Iron Age house was eventually destroyed in a catastrophic fire that brought debris, probably from an upper story, crashing onto living surfaces (in A2) and a kitchen (in A3) on the ground floor [figure 8]. Whether or not the thick layer of ash documenting this disaster is indicative of a larger destruction of the site that took place as a result of hostile intrusion,[2] or even the demise of the Assyrian empire itself, or whether it is a localized conflagration, is unclear at the moment.[3] What is clear is that this destruction level contained the season's most enigmatic artifacts.

Buried within the deposit of ash and collapse in the southwestern corner of A2 were the remains of several very unusual vessels. Sherds from these vessels are handmade of a relatively coarse fabric with burnished surfaces. They consist mainly of pedestals, bowls and clay rods [figure 9]. Once these sherds were cleaned and cataloged it became clear that the pedestals were connected by two rows of clay rods and supported a series of interconnected bowls [figure 10]. The corpus of sherds suggests that there were several such vessels contained in the destruction layer.

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[2] In this context note the many letters in the Neo-Assyrian correspondence that record impending threats to this part of the frontier such as ABL 506 11-22 which was written at Tushan, only a few kilometers south of Boztepe (Parker 1998), in the last decades of the eighth century B.C. This text reads "...three [Urartian governors] are gathered with their pack animals opposite us...all the people are inside the fortified places; the oxen and the sheep are on this side [i.e.; the south side] of the river. We are standing by and keeping watch for [an impending attack]" (Lanfranchi and Parpola 1990: 18).

[3] More precise dating of the Iron Age destruction layer awaits the analysis of several C-14 samples recovered in the destruction layer at Boztepe.

Directly to the west of A2 in trench A4, which was probably just outside the Iron Age house, we unearthed a child burial. The child was buried in an extended position with the head on the south facing east and was adorned with a shell necklace, two bronze bracelets and an iron dagger.

Area B

Area B was established in what appeared to be the least disturbed quarter of the site, on the southeastern portion of the mound. Here, the ground gently slopes down to the east and the surface is flat and even, with no evidence of the modern pits, mounds, and collapsed buildings that characterize area A. Two sets of five by five meter trenches were excavated about ten meters apart in area B: trench B1 adjacent to trench B4, and trench B2 adjacent to trench B3 [figure 2]. None of these trenches contained significant architecture, but a few poorly preserved surfaces and interesting finds were discovered. Notably, this area contained numerous Hellenistic potsherds and some distinctly Hellenistic small finds, described below.

Trenches B3 and B4 were only excavated to a depth of approximately one meter before we closed them in order to concentrate our efforts in area A. These two trenches contained mud brick debris and various finds, but no architecture. In B3 a smashed pot and a possible stone bench or work surface were uncovered resting on an ephemeral earthen surface. In B4 we discovered a 30 centimeter diameter stone with one side hewn flat and a two to three centimeter groove carved into the opposite, naturally curved side. It rested in mud brick debris above and near the opening of an upright whole storage jar. This stone may have served as a drain leading to the jar, reflecting some domestic processing activity although no further evidence of an installation was uncovered. In B2 we encountered the same type of mud brick debris present in the other area B trenches. In addition, we uncovered an ephemeral earthen surface, probably a continuation of the one found in adjacent trench B3. Resting on this surface were a smashed storage jar, a mortar, and a limestone door pivot or wooden pillar base, identified as such by a circular depression in its center. No walls were associated with the surface or door pivot. After removing this surface, we narrowed the excavated area to the southeastern quadrant where we encountered mud brick and ash debris before reaching virgin soil at a depth of 3.11 meters.

The most notable trench in area B was trench B1, where we uncovered a poorly preserved cobblestone surface in the middle of the trench with two smashed pots resting thereon. Several mortars were recovered both on top and within this surface. In addition, another cobblestone surface fragment with a second phase of resurfacing appeared in the northwestern corner of B1. A possible wall stub attached to this surface protruded from the baulk, but no evidence of this wall or the associated surfaces was uncovered in adjacent B4. Beneath the level of the cobblestone surfaces we encountered numerous circular pits filled with ash and mud brick debris cutting several possible earthen surfaces too poorly preserved and lacking associated architecture or artifacts to be conclusively identified as anything more than areas of compacted soil. In the midst of the fill and pits, we excavated a large, earth-filled storage jar. This jar was not clearly associated with any

surface but was likely buried beneath a floor contemporary with the cobblestone surface in the center of the unit.

At a depth of approximately two meters, B1 was covered with earth-filled pits but no architecture or surfaces were apparent. In order to determine the depth to the virgin clay already reached trench B2, we sank a one by one meter probe along the east baulk [figure 11]. To our surprise, this probe immediately yielded the same type of Halaf ceramics that we recovered in area A, trench one. The probe continued for over two meters, and contained Halaf pottery, obsidian lithics, and faunal remains including numerous pig bones. A Halaf surface resting on virgin clay ended the probe. The depth and quantity of Halaf materials recovered from this probe indicate that a substantial settlement likely accompanied the Halaf cemetery discovered in area A.

Despite the lack of significant architecture, several interesting small finds were uncovered in area B. A bronze toggle pin, a cylinder-shaped metal weight, and a Hellenistic ceramic spout with a goat head sculpted above the opening were recovered from debris contexts in B3. In B1 a portion of a Hellenistic ceramic handle containing a sculpted lion head was unearthed in mixed fill. A small palate (7.1 by 3.1 cm) made from polished stone was also recovered from fill in trench B1. One side of this palate is rounded like a half-cylinder, while the other side is polished flat with a small dimple at one end. No other decorations are present on the palate and its function is uncertain. Other small finds from Area B include spindle whorls and loom weights probably also of Hellenistic date.

The Boztepe Survey

In order to precisely determine Boztepe's size and to search for any special activity areas, the UTARP team laid out six transects across the site. We then collected all ceramics in one meter radius circles to a depth of ten centimeters at ten meter intervals. The survey data shows that cultural remains at Boztepe are spread far out into the fields on all sides of the mound giving the impression that Boztepe is a much larger site than we originally assumed. However, as was the case in Area B, soundings placed in these fields (in areas C and D) revealed no architecture. This result, combined with the disturbed nature of archaeological contexts in the upper levels of all of the excavation units, the fact that architecture was almost completely lacking from Area B trenches, and the absence of any Hellenistic structures, suggests that the remains at Boztepe have been severely disturbed by modern construction. Our working theory is that Boztepe was originally quite a bit taller than it is today and that the site was leveled some time in the recent past, possibly to make way for the modern village. This leveling not only mixed the cultural remains and spread them far out into the neighboring fields, but also obliterated the higher levels of the mound where any Hellenistic structures would have been located. Yet it is notable that we still found significant levels dating to the Halaf period in their correct stratagraphic position in the sounding in area C. Thus during the Halaf period the site did indeed extend at least to area C. However, the data from the transect survey suggests that

the material remains discovered to the west and southwest of the main mound are the result of erosion, plowing and/or modern earth-moving.

The Talavash Survey

Talavash Tepe is located approximately fifteen kilometers east of the modern town of Bismil just off the Bismil to Batman highway in an area of rolling hills about five kilometers north of the Tigris river corridor. The site is situated above the 550 meter contour line on a natural hill overlooking a seasonal stream and part-time tributary of the Tigris called the Moradan Œay [figure 1 and 12]. This location offered the inhabitants of Talavash Tepe natural protection from at least two sides.

In order to determine Talavash Tepe's precise size we again laid transects across the site and collected all artifacts in one meter radius circles at ten meter intervals on each transect [figure 12]. The density of artifacts in each circle allowed us to accurately determine the size of the site. Furthermore, diagnostic ceramics collected in this manner also aided us in determining both the chronological range of the site, the concentration of settlement during each period that the site was occupied, and the location of special activity areas. To ensure that we collected an adequate sample of diagnostic ceramics to accurately date the site, and to further localize intersite chronological and functional variation, we divided the site into obvious topographical units and collected surface ceramics by thoroughly walking each unit (for a discussion of this methodology see Parker 1997; Wilkinson and Tucker 1995 and Cherry et al. 1991).

The intensive survey data shows that settlement at Talavash Tepe began in the Late Bronze Age and continued through the Early Iron Age and into the Assyrian Imperial Period when occupation at Talavash Tepe came to an abrupt end. During the Hellenistic period and possibly again in the Islamic period, the ruined mound of Talavash served as a cemetery.

Although none of the typical Late Bronze Age chaff and grit tempered platters were identified in the survey collections, the more durable Square Rimmed Jars are common [figure 13 A and B]. For parallels see Parker 2000 [forthcoming]; Berbeck 1993; Pf,lzner 1995). The Early Iron Age is characterized by an abundance of Corrugated Bowls some of which have incised decorations [figure 13 C, D, E and G]. For parallels see Bartl 1994). Several Iron Age types were identified in the survey collections including some standard Iron Age S-curved and open bowls [figure 13 H, I and N], as well as several indigenous Iron Age types such as the Indented Handle, the Impressed Band and a few Indigenous Painted sherds [figure 13 F, M and possibly J]. For a discussion of these ceramics see Parker 1997 and Parker 2000 [forthcoming]). Two Incurved-rim Bowls [figure 13 L and O] and a few Islamic sherds [figure 13 K] probably come from the later cemetery.

Conclusions

In sum, the 1999 season at Boztepe revealed that the Hellenistic occupation at the site was likely destroyed by recent activity, including plowing and the construction of a modern village on the site. Consequently, only insubstantial domestic remains from the Hellenistic period were discovered. The Iron Age remains are better preserved, as revealed in area A, trench two, where domestic architecture and activity areas were excavated. Nevertheless, ancient pitting and modern earth-moving have significantly impacted the Iron Age settlement, as evidenced by the numerous pits in area A, trenches two through seven, and the complete absence of intact Iron Age material in area A, trench one. In contrast, the best preserved and perhaps most archaeologically significant remains are those from the Halaf period. Safe beneath two or more meters of later occupation and modern debris, the Halaf cemetery and settlement were a surprising but important find that merits further investigation.

Unlike Boztepe, Talavash Tepe is not significantly disturbed by modern construction. This being the case, the combination of transect and area survey proved very rewarding. We believe that the data thus collected gives us a reasonably accurate picture of the size and chronology of the site and therefore provides an important corpus of material with which to compare material excavated at Boztepe and other sites in the region.

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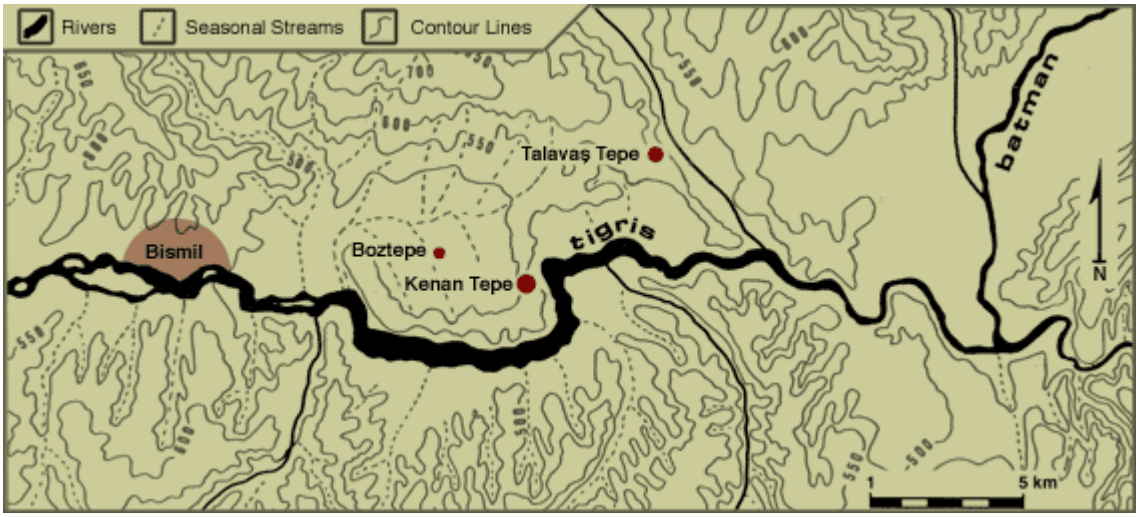
Figures:



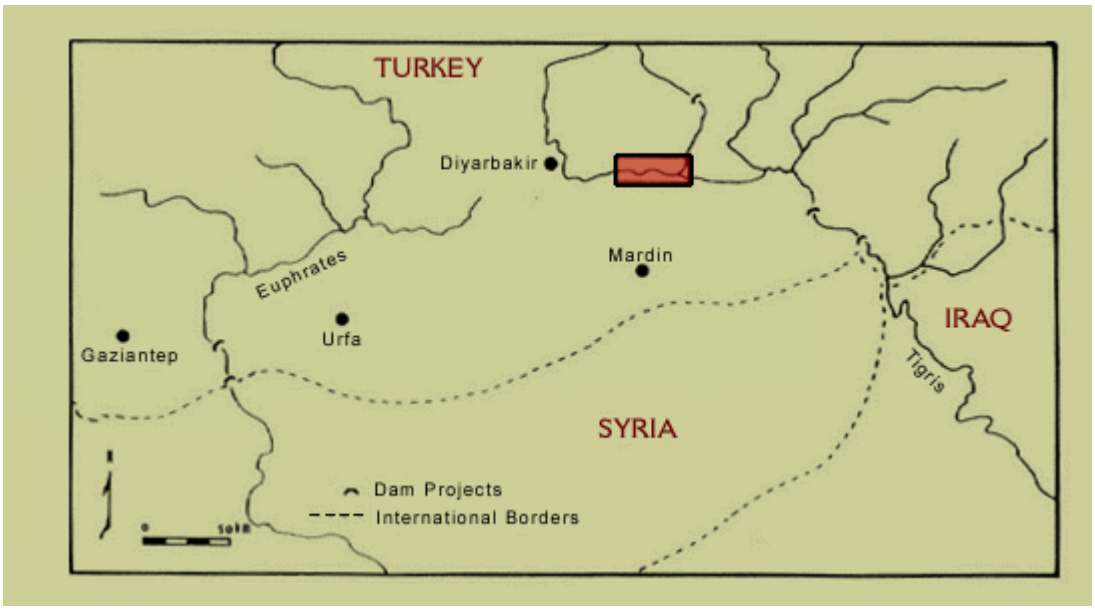


Figure 1: *Maps of Upper Tigris region in southeast Turkey*

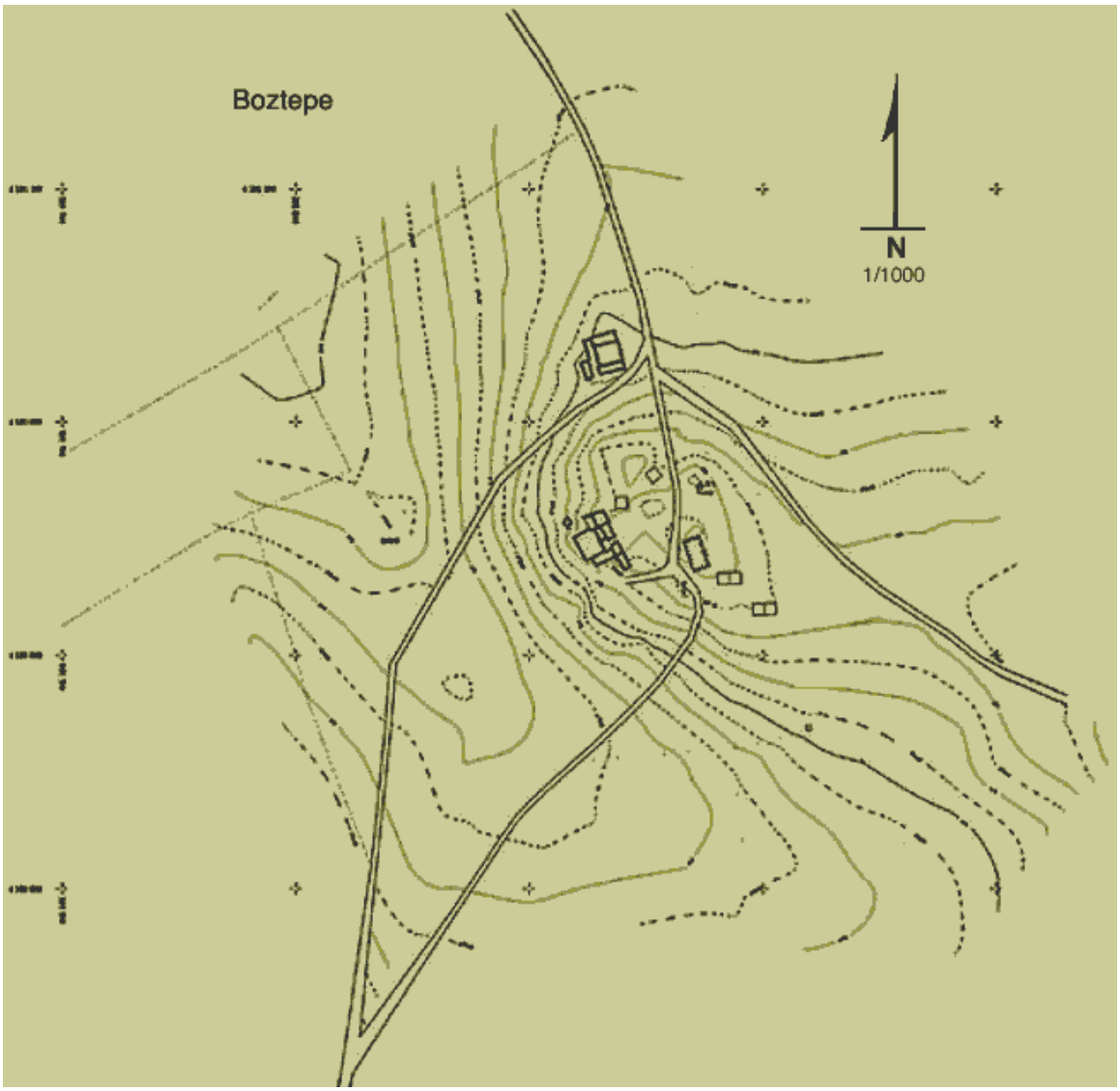


Figure 2: *Topographic map of Boztepe*

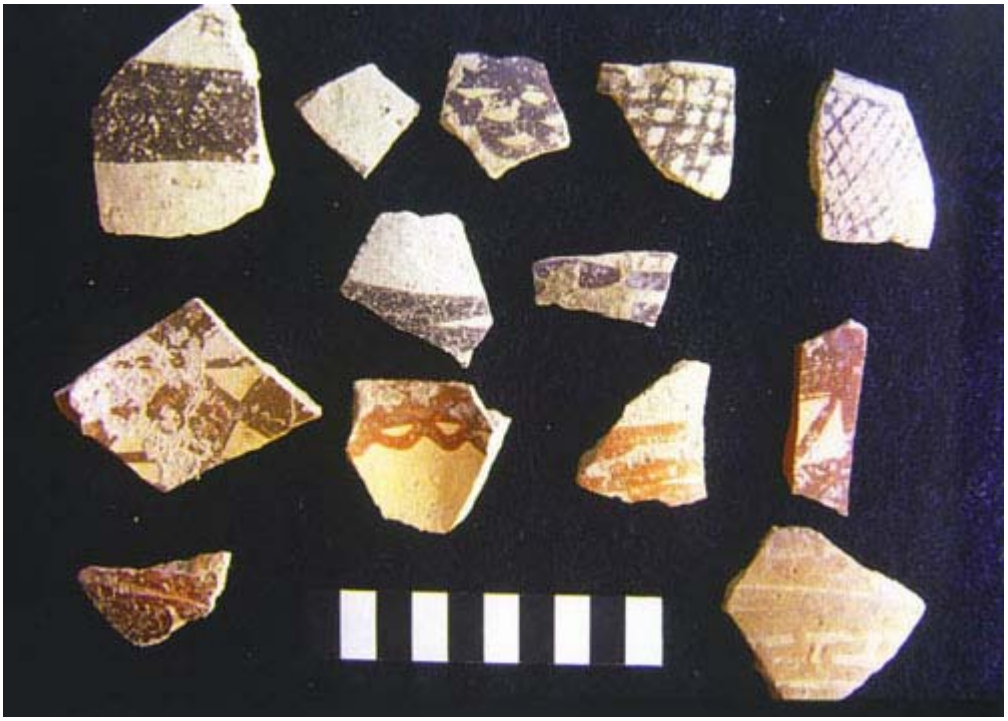


Figure 3: *Halaf sherds from area A trench 1.*

Figure 4: *Halaf pot from burial 3 in trench A1.*

Figure 5: *Halaf pot from burial 1 in trench A1*

Figure 6: *Plaster lined pit cutting into Iron Age house at Boztepe*

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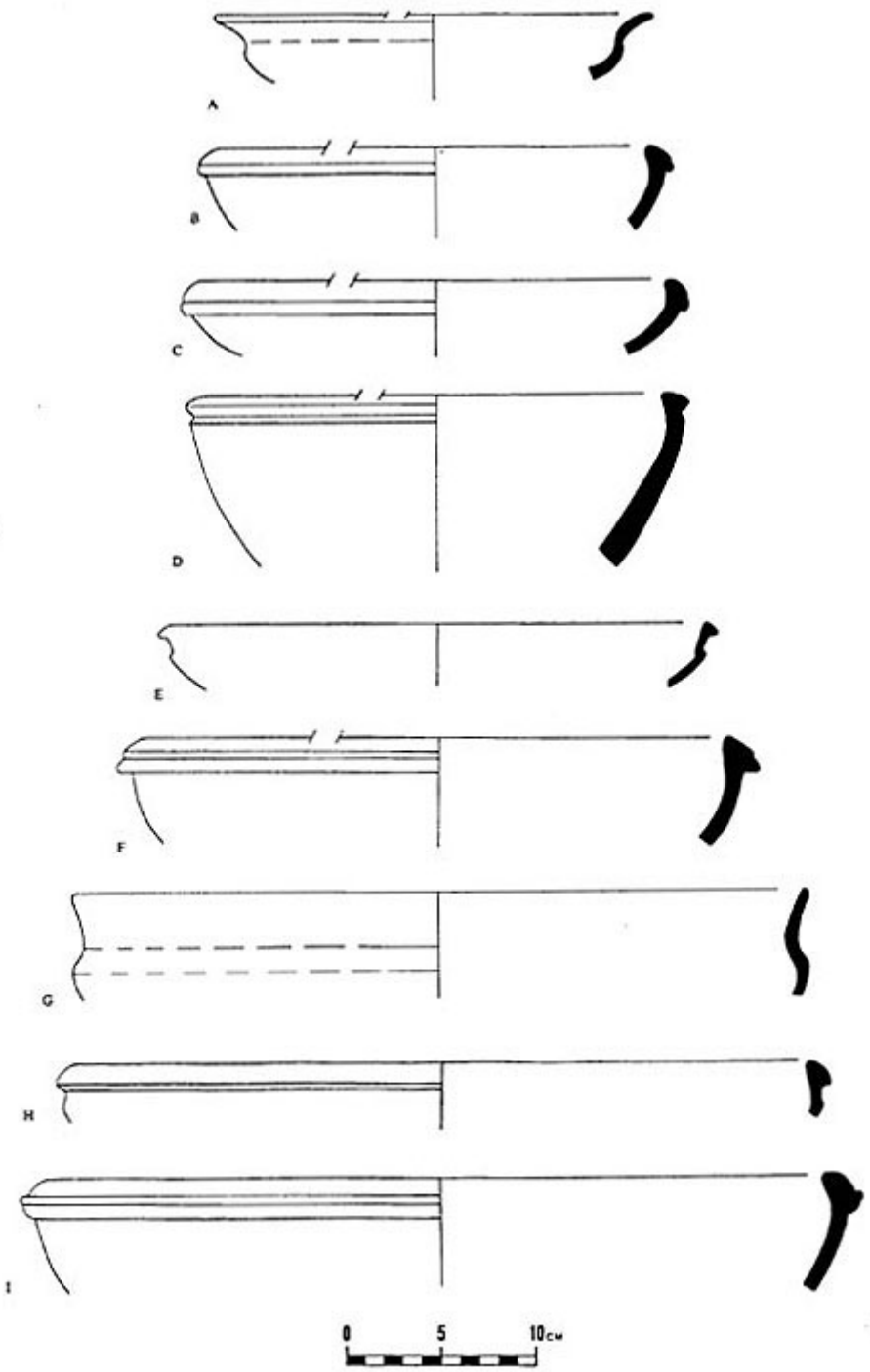

Figure 7: *Iron Age pottery from domestic contexts at Boztepe*

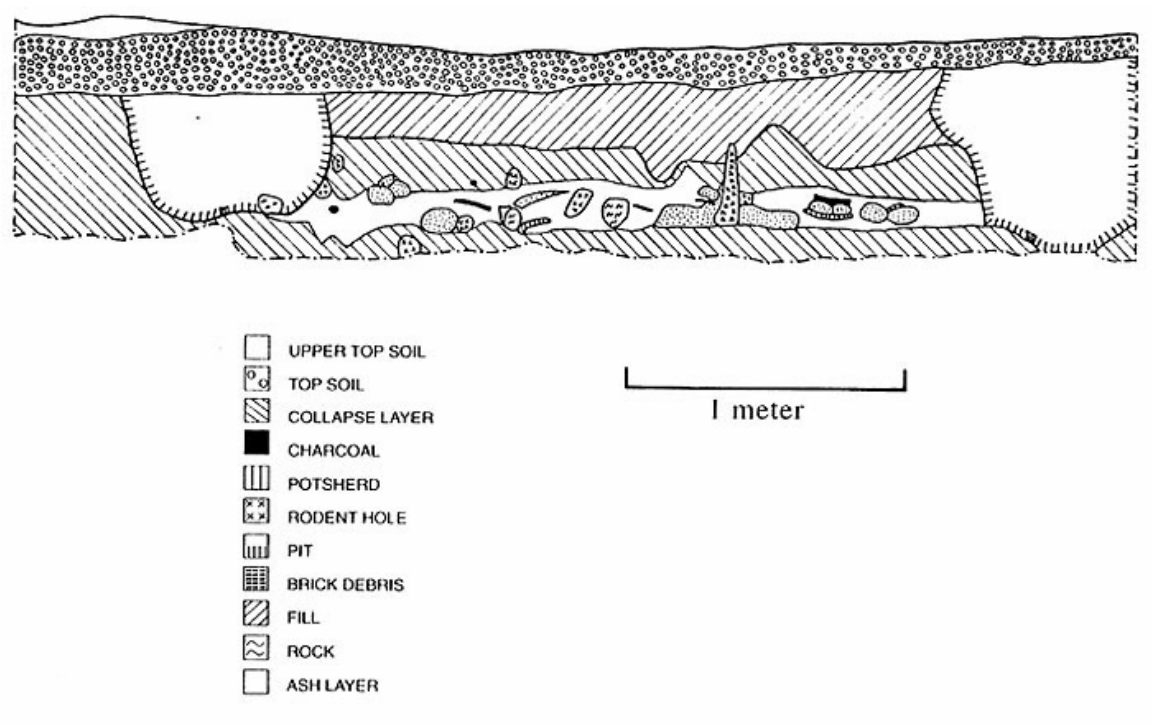

Figure 8: *Section drawing from trench A3*

Figure 9: *Sherds from enigmatic vessel discovered in the Iron Age destruction layer in trench A2.*

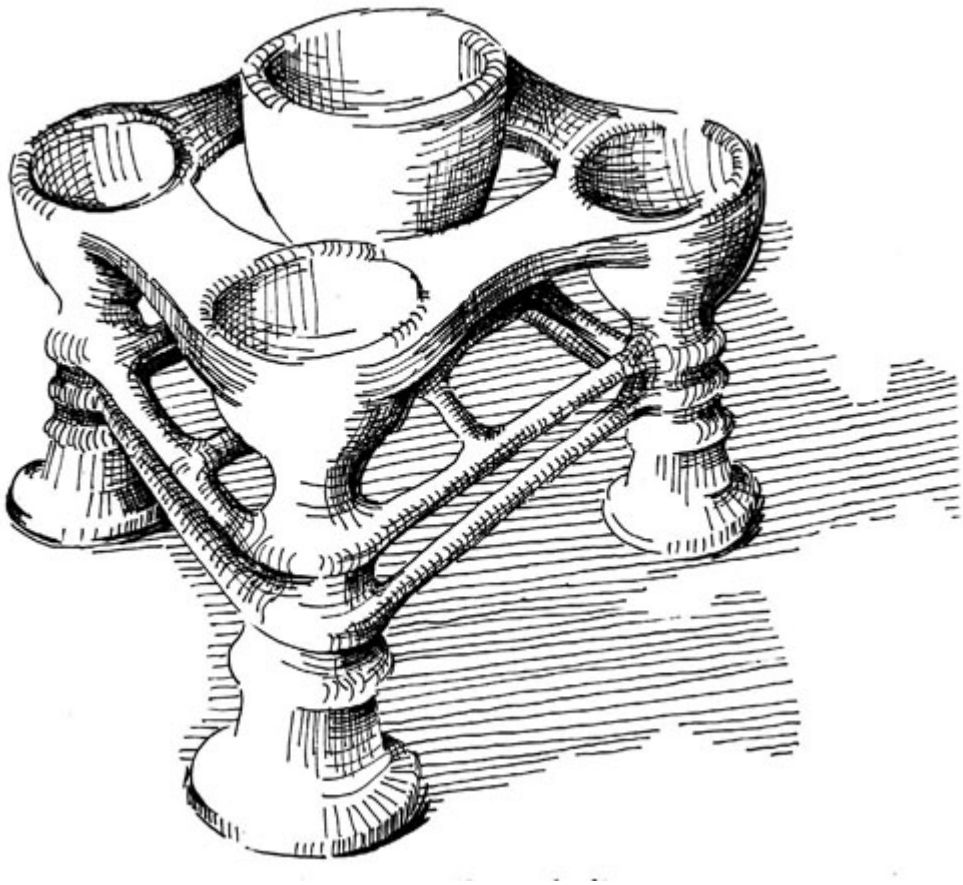

Figure 10: *Reconstruction of enigmatic vessel discovered in the destruction layer in trench A2.*

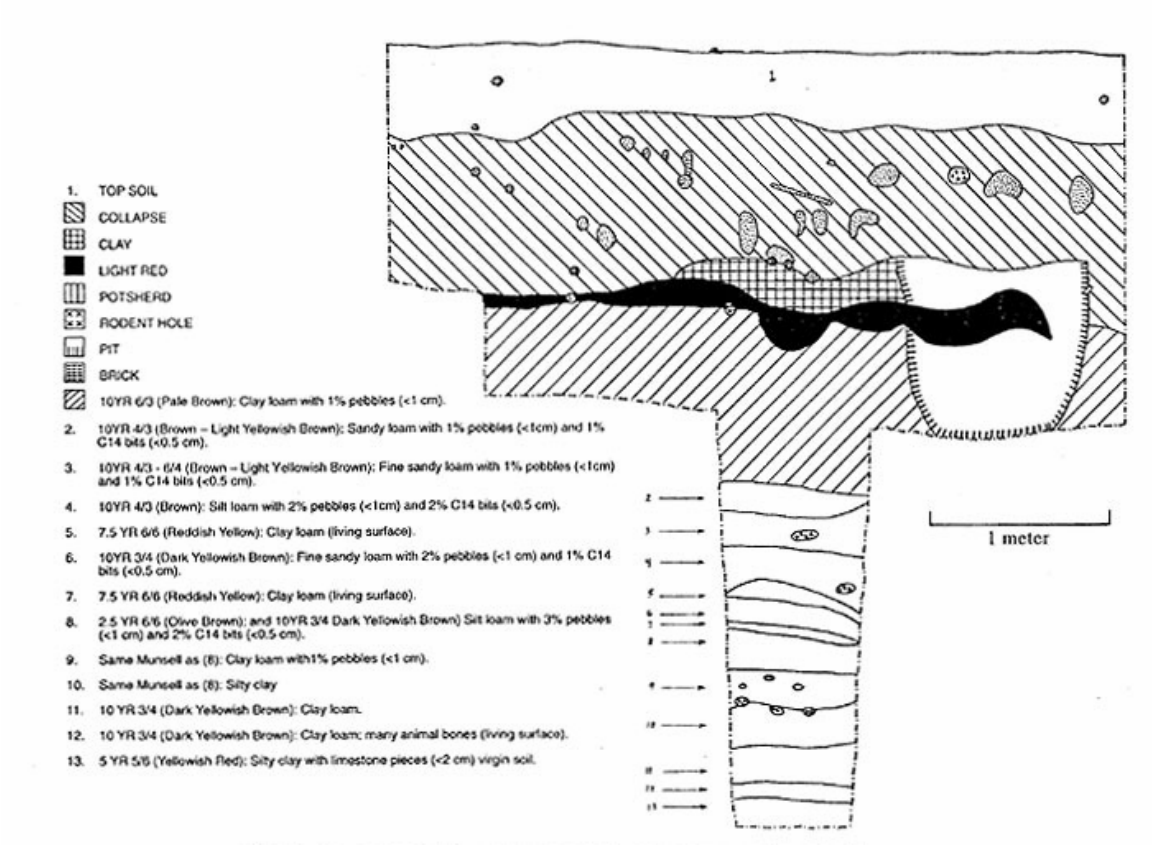

Figure 11: *East baulk section drawing of trench B1*

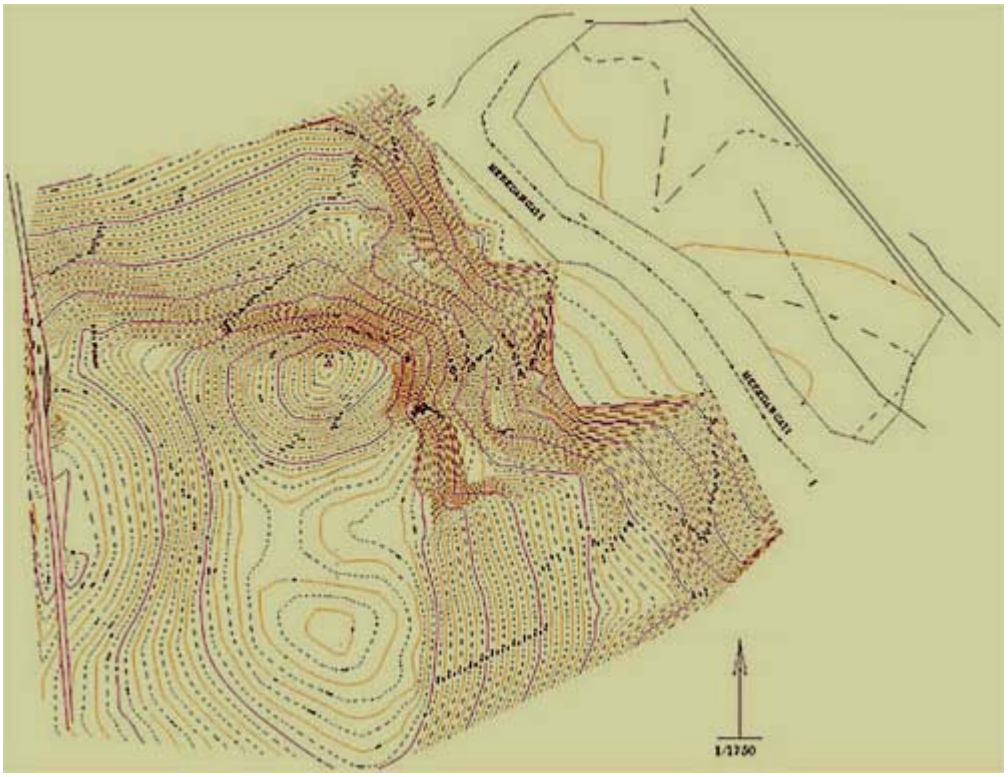

Figure 12: *Topographic map of Talavash*

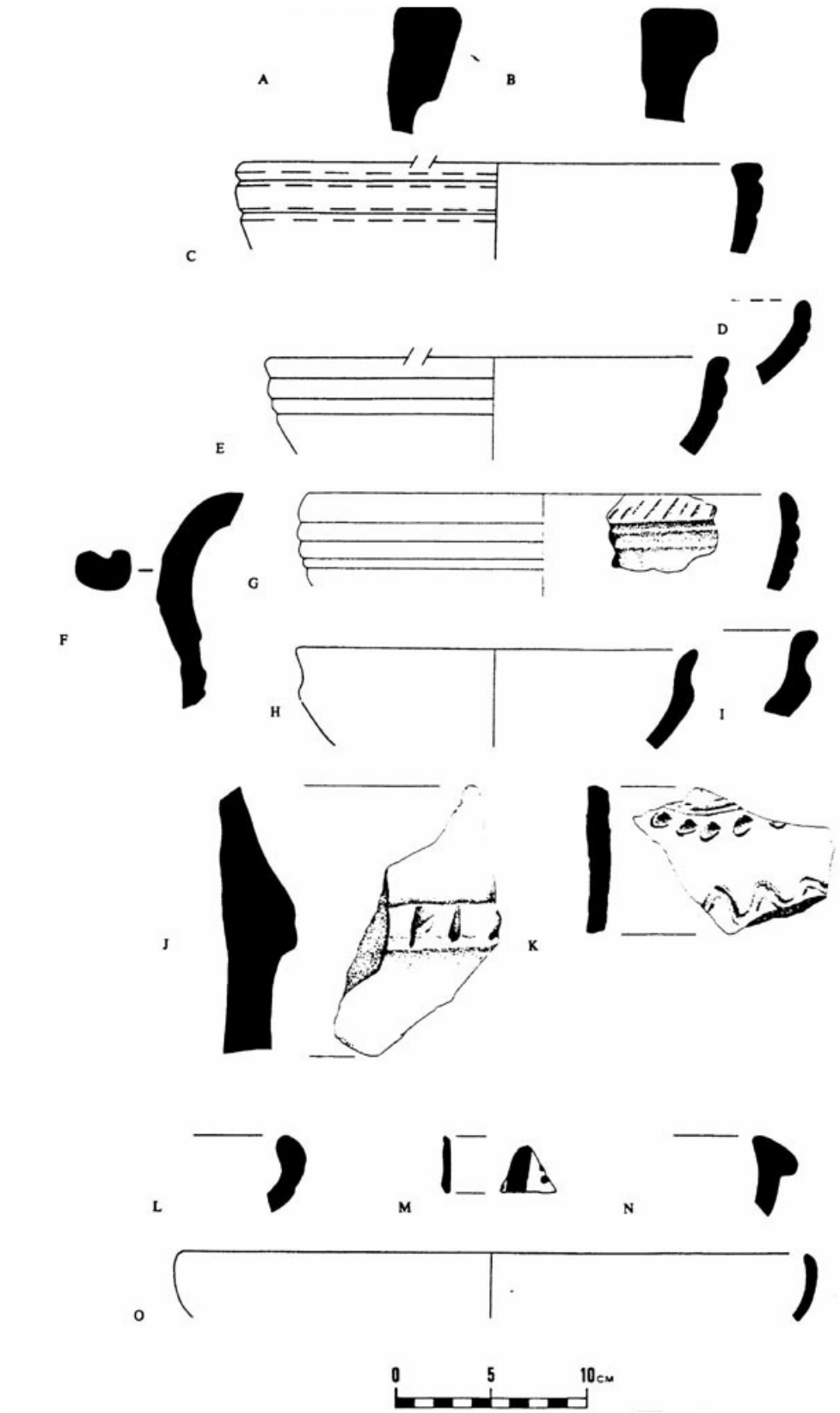

Figure 13: *Selection of pottery from Talavash*