

TELL ES-SWEYHAT

Thomas A. Holland

Area V Step Trench

A final study of the archaeology and finds from the Tell es-Sweyhat area V step trench during this year has added new information with regard to the extent of the original occupation at the site during the first half of the third millennium BC and has provided evidence for new pottery forms dated to both the Early Bronze Age and the Hellenistic period.

The area V step trench (fig. 1) was situated on the steepest northern portion of the central mound along the north-south grid line that bisected the tell at its highest point, 13.5 m above the present-day surface of the lower town surrounding the original site (figs. 2, 3–5). One 2.0×5.5 m trench and six 2.0×5.0 m trenches were initially excavated, labeled VA to VG from the lowest northern end to the highest southern end, with 1 m wide baulks between each trench; when the baulks were removed, the total length of the step trench measured 41.5 m.

Although nine phases of occupational and wash debris levels have been identified in the step trench, the excavation depths were unequal in all seven trenches and therefore not all of the phases are represented in every trench (figs. 6–9). Phase 1, represented by the lowest excavated levels in trenches VA to VC (figs. 7–8), for example, was not excavated in trenches VF and VG and represents considerably later occupational material than that represented in phase 3 of trenches VD and VE (figs. 6–7, 9), which are located higher up the northern slope of the mound

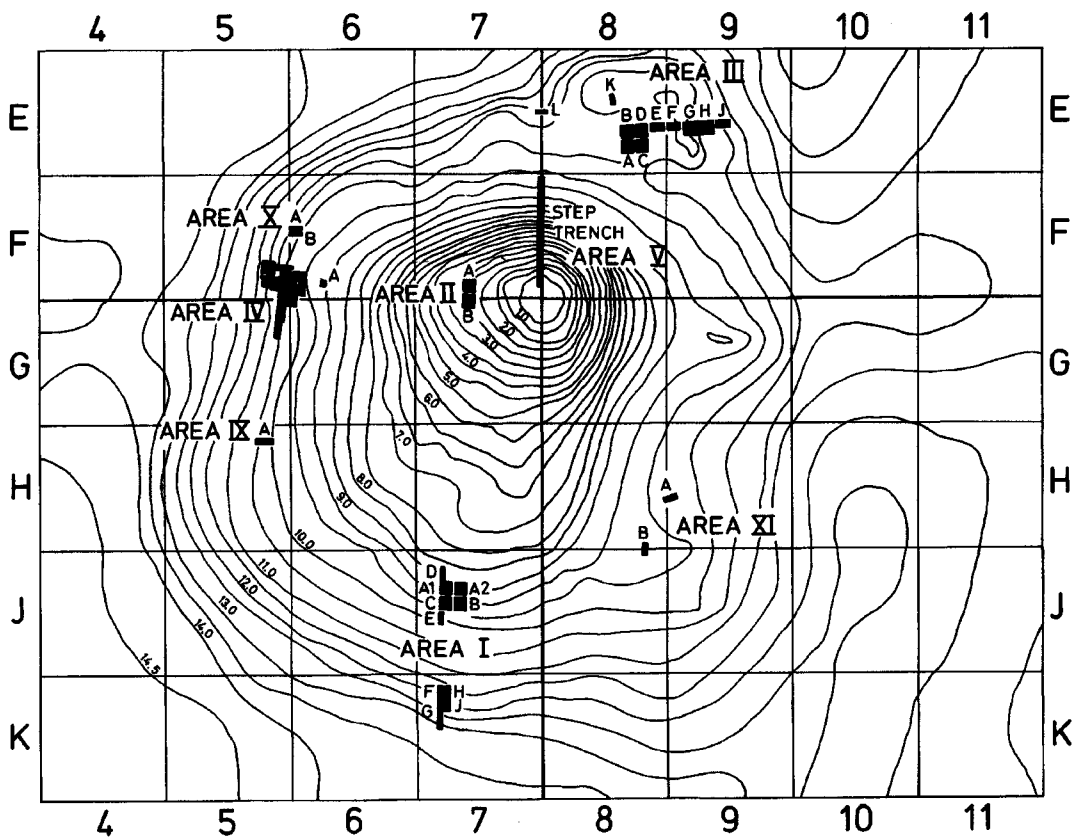


Figure 1. Contour plan of central mound, showing position of area V step trench. Tell es-Sweyhat

and which reached into earlier third-millennium remains belonging to the initial settlement of the site confined to the basal mound. The relationship of the nine phases in trenches VA to VG is given below in tabular form:

Phases 1–9 in Trenches VA to VG

<i>Period</i>	VA	VB	VC	VD	VE	VF	VF-G	VG
Hellenistic	4	4	4	5, 9	5, 9	9	7–9	9
Late Third Millennium	1–3	3	3 ^a	4	4	4–6	6–7	6–8
Mid-Third Millennium	—	—	3	3	3	—	—	5
Early Third Millennium	—	1	1–2	— ^b	3 ^c	—	—	—

^a Phase 3 in trench VC is mixed with both middle and late third-millennium pottery types.

^b The bottom of the phase 9 late Hellenistic pit 2.4 in trench baulk VC-D and trench VD (fig. 9) cut into the top portion of the surviving remains belonging to the Early Bronze Age I period of the basal mound.

^c Lower portion of pit 1.4.

The wide bowl with a splayed-out wall and upright rim (type BR.B.II.a; fig. 10:19) from pit 2.4 in trench VD is equivalent to the same bowl forms from the Early Bronze Age I phase 2 in the deep sounding of area IIA, located on the western slope of the basal mound; a comparison of the relative depths of trench IIA and trench VD on the west-east and north-south cross-sections of the central mound reveal that the Early Bronze Age I phase 2 in the area IIA trench is about the same as the lowest point reached in pit 2.4 of trench VD (figs. 1–2). The Early Bronze Age I period is also represented in trench VC, phases 1–2 and the Early Bronze Age II period has been cut into by pit 1.4, the lowest levels reached in trench VE (fig. 6). The early third-millennium material from trenches VC, VD, and VE now indicates that the northern part of the basal mound extended at least to the 8.25 m contour or 40 m north of the zero datum point located on the highest surviving portion of the mound. Pottery vessels similar to early third-millennium examples found in trenches IIA and trenches VC, VD, and VE, as well as from the deep sounding in area IC on the southern slope of the main mound, phases 2–4, indicate that the Early Bronze Age I settlement at Tell es-Sweyhat extended at least another 125 m to the south of trench VG. The only early third-millennium level reached on the extreme western side of the mound was in a deep sounding below the floor of room 7 in area IVM (fig. 1), which contained an early cooking pot form with partially incised circular impressions on its outer wall (see *Levant* 9, fig. 5:5a, 5b) that compares well with Early Bronze Age I and II examples from the Amuq phase G excavations (cf. OIP 61, fig. 229). Although no deep sounding has been conducted on the east side of the tell, the present evidence from the area V step trench, the deep sounding in area I (trench C),

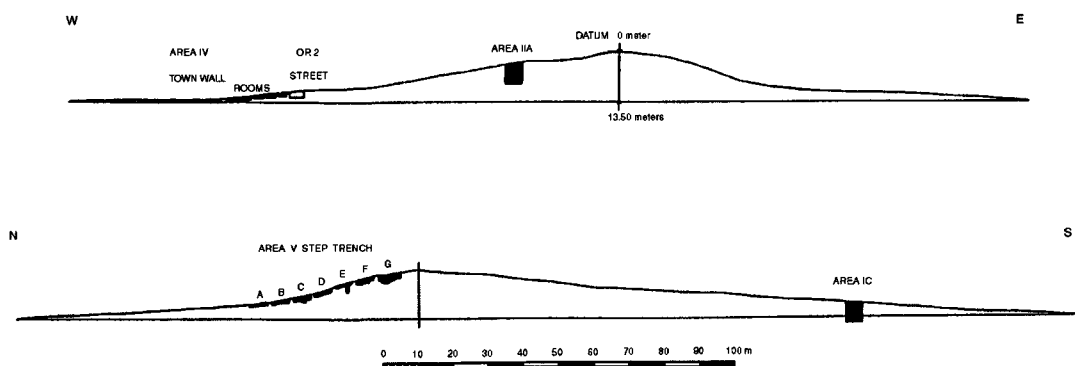


Figure 2. Cross-sections of west-east and north-south elevations of central mound. Tell es-Sweyhat

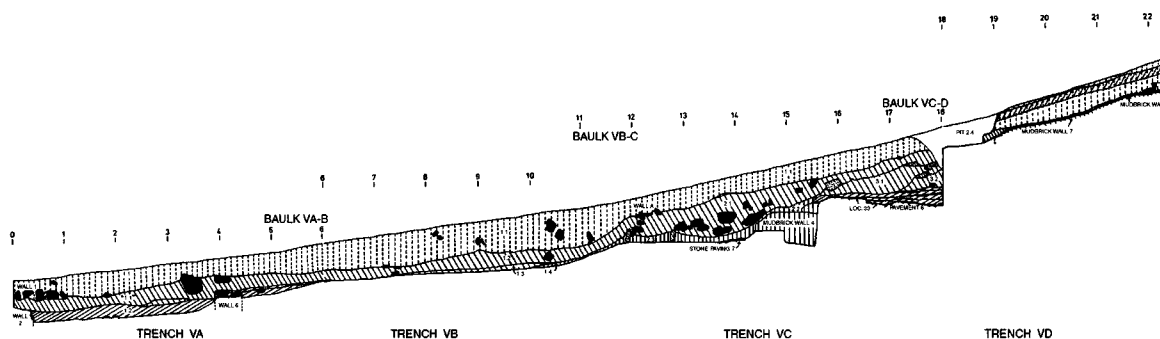


Figure 3. East section of trenches VA to VG. Tell es-Sweyhat

located on the south end of the mound, and the trench IVM deep sounding, located on the west side of the mound, strongly suggests that the initial Early Bronze Age I settlement at Sweyhat was situated in most of the area now forming the central mound at the site, which measures about 250 m east-west and at least 200 m north-south.

The mid-third-millennium remains from the area V step trench, dated to the Early Bronze Age III period (ca. 2700–2350 BC), were recovered from trenches VC, VD, VE, and VG. In trench VC, the main architectural remains consisted of a wide mudbrick installation identified as wall 4 in phase 1, which had a grooved channel partially lined with paving stones (fig. 8); just to the north of wall 4 in front of the channel a large area was covered with more paving stones, which might have been used for a working surface as well as deflecting any liquid contents escaping from the channel above it. During phase 2 the western portion of wall 4 was preserved and rebuilt and the entire excavated area to its east was filled with large flat paving stones, which again suggests that this was an industrial or working area. Although no pottery or finds were recovered from trench VC phases 1 and 2, the overlying phase 3 (fig. 7) had a good mid-third-millennium pottery assemblage, a selection of which is illustrated in figure 10, nos. 7–14.

In trench VD, the phase 3 large mudbrick wall (wall 6; fig. 9) is a continuation and rebuilding of the phase 2 wall 5 in trench VC. The paving stones to the east of wall 5 in trench VC, phase 2, appear to have gone out of use when another mudbrick wall (wall 7) was constructed flush along the eastern side of wall 6 during phase 3; however, a late Hellenistic pit (pit 2.4) cut into this area and destroyed the stratigraphical relationship between the phase 3 remains in both trenches VC and VD. The phase 9 pit 2.4 cut into occupational remains just below wall 6 on the southern side of baulk VC-D, which contained one derived bowl (type BR.B.II.a; fig. 10:19) that is similar to Early Bronze Age I forms in trench IIA; a new type of a holemouth jar (type JR.R.I.b; fig. 10:20) that was made of coarse straw-tempered ware also belongs to the early third-millennium pottery assemblage at Sweyhat. The lower level of the phase 5 wash level overlying the mid-third-millennium remains contained two interesting bowl forms: the first, a small bowl or cup (type SBR.C.II.a; fig. 10:17) is also comparable to Early Bronze I forms in

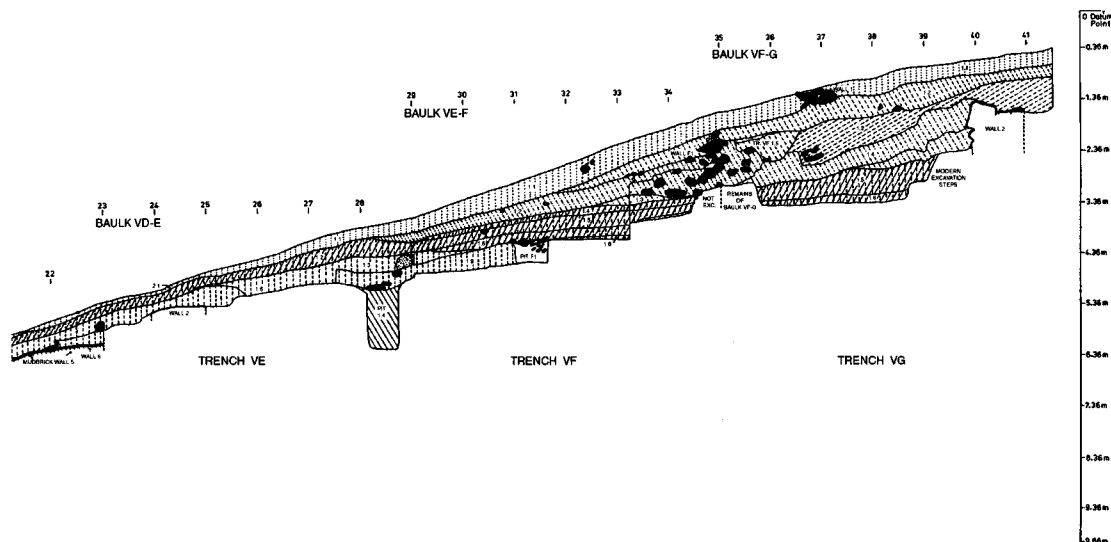


Figure 3 (cont.). East section of trenches VA to VG. Tell es-Sweyhat

trench IIA; the wide bowl with a carinated upper wall (type BR.C.I.c; fig. 10:18) belongs to the Sweyhat Early Bronze-Middle Bronze Age pottery assemblage (cf. an example from Hama, period H, tomb G III, in HAMA 2/1, pl. X:5B 616).

The earliest third-millennium remains excavated in the southern portion of trench VE came from a Bronze Age pit (pit 1.4) assigned to phase 3 (see figs. 6, 9). Two of the distinctive pottery vessels from this pit were the cyma-shaped cup (type SBR.A.I.h) and the wide-mouth jar with a splayed-out rilled rim (type JR.G.I.b; fig. 11:1–2).

The highest and southernmost step trench (trench VG) was only excavated to a depth of 3 m. The earliest phase, phase 5 (see figs. 6, 9), is dated to the mid-third millennium, along with the phases discussed above in trenches VC, VD, and VE. No architectural features were found in this phase and only a few pottery fragments were recovered from the lowest strata (locus 1.6); the most diagnostic vessel was a high-necked storage-type jar (type JR.J.III.x; fig. 11:18), which is comparable to other examples from Tell B at Halawa, located south of Sweyhat, that are dated to the same period and even earlier (cf. SBA 31, pl. 57:10)

Due to the general narrow width and shallow depth of excavation in all of the area V step trenches, no architectural features were entirely defined; however, the largest stratified pottery assemblages were recovered from the late third-millennium phases in all of the trenches. In trench VA, stone foundations belonging to one or two rooms in phase 1 were associated with a flagstone paved doorway in the eastern half of the trench (fig. 8). Although no pottery vessels came from the initial occupation associated with these walls (phases 1 and 2), the phase 3 destruction debris above the walls (locus 1.1; fig. 7) contained good Bronze Age pottery examples that included a wide, collar-rim type of bowl (type BR. L.III.h), and a high-necked storage-type jar (type JR.J.III.e; fig. 10:1–2). The contemporary destruction layer in trench VB (fig. 7) also contained a substantial collection of pottery forms, some notable examples of which are illustrated in figure 10:3–6. In trench VC, the destruction level (phase 3) has a mixture of both middle and late third-millennium pottery forms (fig. 10:7–14); the earlier forms include two small cups (fig. 10:7, 9) and a number of storage-type jars (fig. 10:10–14), and the later forms

ARCHAEOLOGY

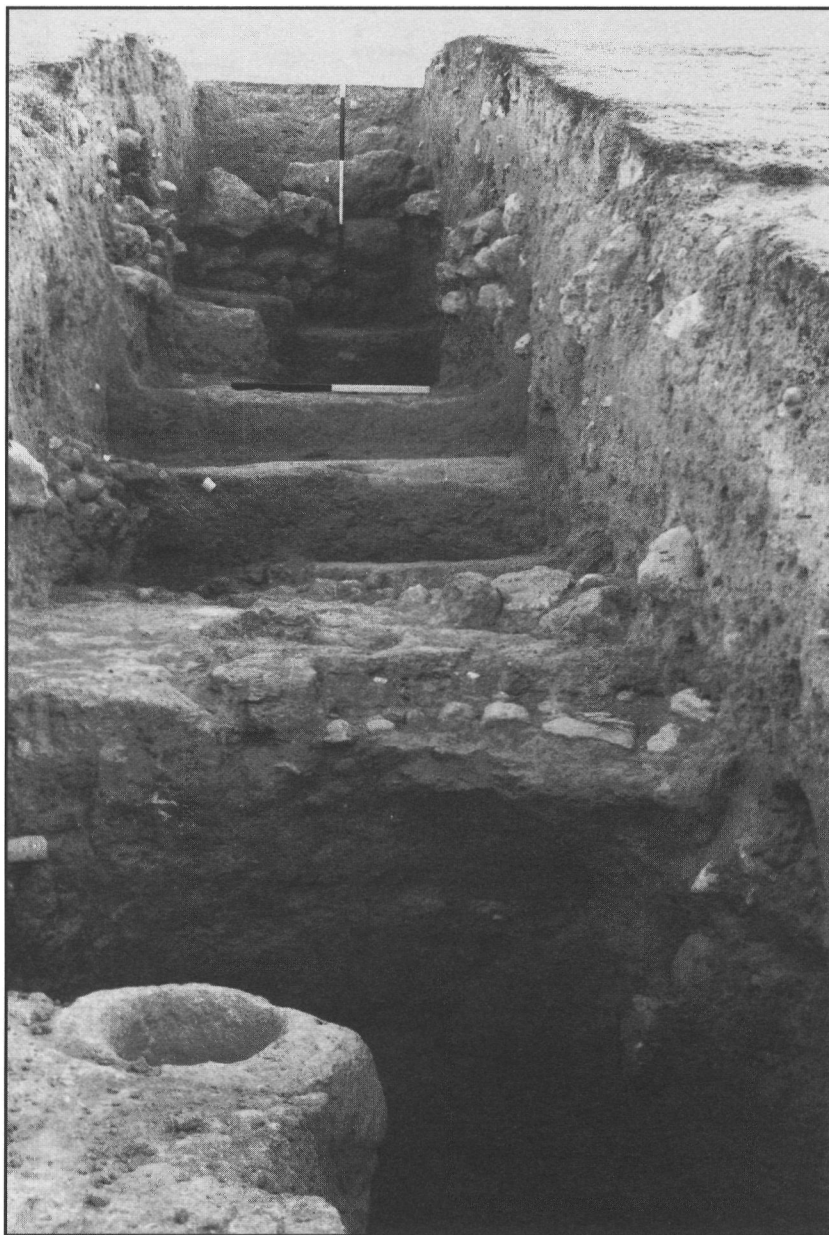


Figure 4. View of highest, southern portion of step trench with stone mortar in left foreground. Tell es-Sweyhat

include the small narrow collar-rimmed bowl and the high-necked jar with a potter's mark on its shoulder (fig. 10:8, 13).

The late third-millennium occupation in phase 4 of trench VD primarily consisted of destruction debris (locus 2.1; fig. 7) that contained an unusual cooking pot (type CP.B.I.h; fig. 10:16) and a pottery spindle whorl manufactured from a broken pot sherd, which suggests that this area of occupation on the basal mound was of a domestic character.

In trench VE, the late third-millennium occupation in phase 4 consisted of a 1.25 m wide mudbrick wall (wall 2) oriented in an east-west direction (fig. 9). A large stone mortar, associated with wall 2, was located 1.5 m to the south of the wall (see left foreground in the photograph, fig. 4). The

pottery assemblage in locus 1.3, clustered to the south of, and associated with, the use of the mortar, consisted of both eating and storage-type vessels such as the three drinking cups (types SBR.A.I.c, A.I.h, C.II.c; fig. 11:3–5), a wide shallow bowl (type BR.A.I.f; fig. 11:6), and the two high-necked jars (type JR.F.II.a; fig. 11:7; and type JR.G.I.c, which has an internal ledge below the rim for placement of lid to seal the jar's contents; fig. 11:8). The goblet-shaped cup with a deeply ribbed wall (type SBR.A.I.c; fig. 11:3) is, at present, a unique shape at Sweyhat.

Three phases of late third-millennium occupation were excavated in trench VF, which are designated phases 4, 5, and 6 (figs. 6, 9). Although no architecture was encountered in phase 4, the pottery assemblage that was present included three small bowl forms (fig. 11:9–11), which

indicate this was an area of domestic habitation. During phase 5 the area appears to have been transformed into a likely industrial working place. The area on the north end of the trench and continuing into baulk VE-F contained a pit (pit F1), a mudbrick platform type of surface (locus 1.7), which was surrounded on two sides with cobblestones that contained much ash, as well as a one-meter square area located to the northwest that was paved with large flat paving stones. Among the pottery vessels in phase 5 were one small bowl (fig. 11:12), two storage-type jars (fig. 11:13–14), and the remains of a large cooking pot (fig. 11:15). The remains of stone foundations (wall F1), with a destroyed mudbrick superstructure, covered the south end of trench VF and baulk VF-G



Figure 5. View of lower, northern portion of step trench at end of excavations. Tell es-Sweyhat

during phase 6, which may have been a retaining wall that was associated with the contemporary occupational material belonging to the phase 6 wall 2 in trench VG. The phase 6 pottery associated with wall F1 included a large storage-type jar and the remains of a wide-mouth cooking pot (fig. 11:16–17).

The only architectural feature in trench VG, dated to the late third millennium, was the phase 6 wall 2, which is stratigraphically related to wall F1 in trench VF (figs. 6, 9). The phase 6 pottery assemblage included two wide-mouth, platter-type bowls, one deep bowl with pierced vertical lug handles used for suspension, and a large storage-type jar with a deeply rilled collar rim (fig. 11:19–22). The destruction levels above phase 6, designated phases 7 and 8, contained a

ARCHAEOLOGY

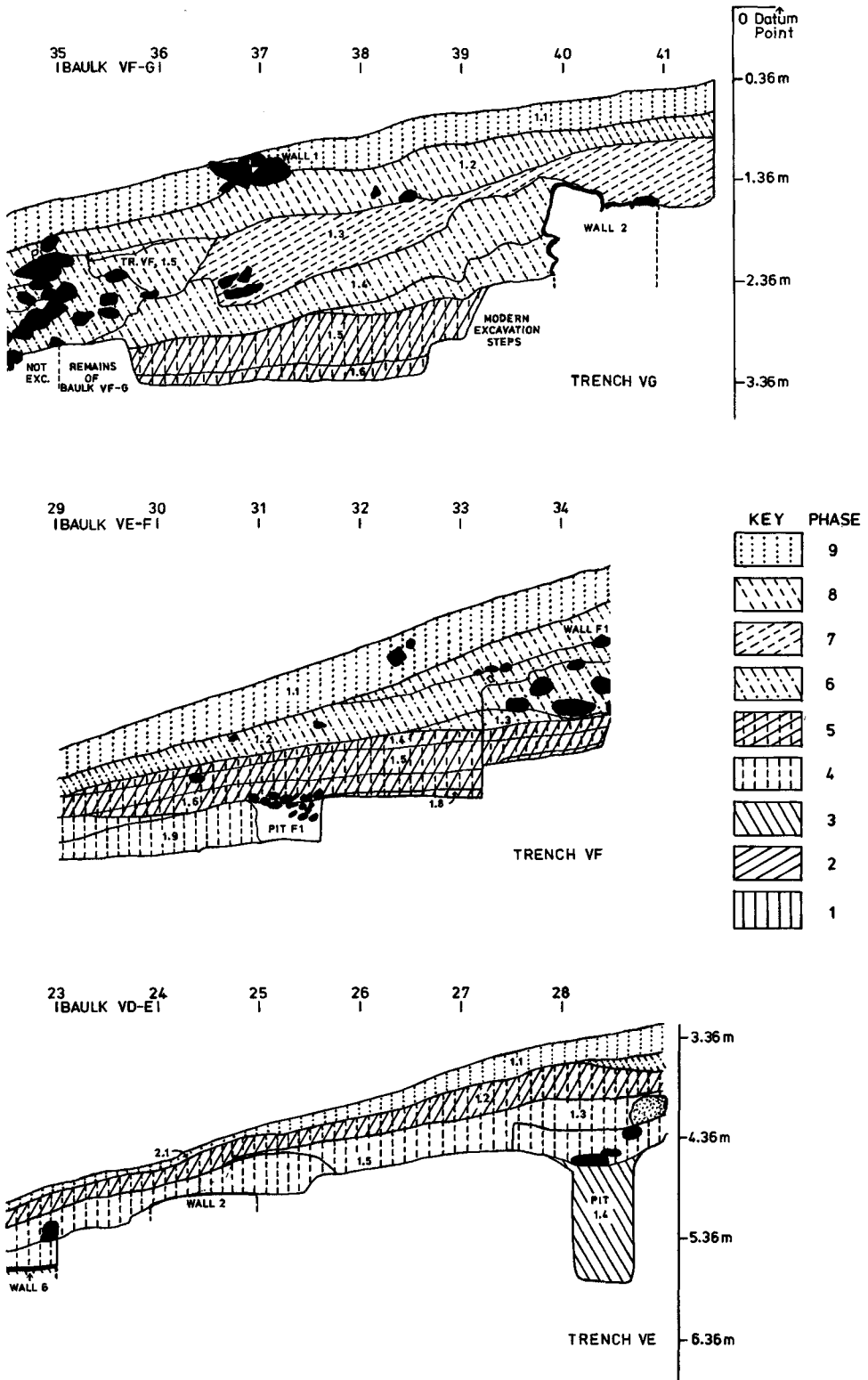


Figure 6. East sections of trenches VG, VF, and VE with key to hatching of phases 1-9. Tell es-Sweyhat

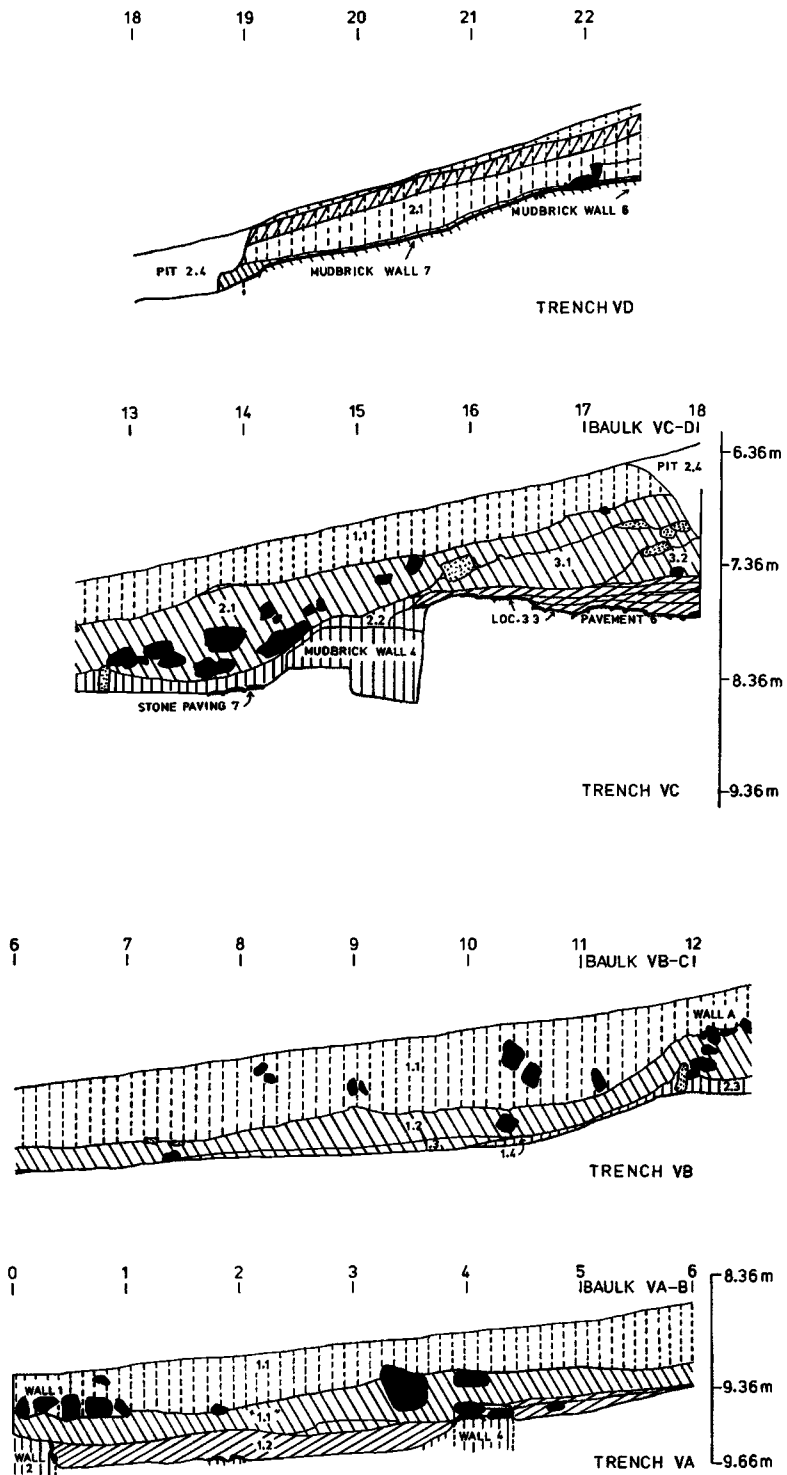


Figure 7. East sections of trenches VD, VC, VB, and VA. Tell es-Sweyhat

ARCHAEOLOGY

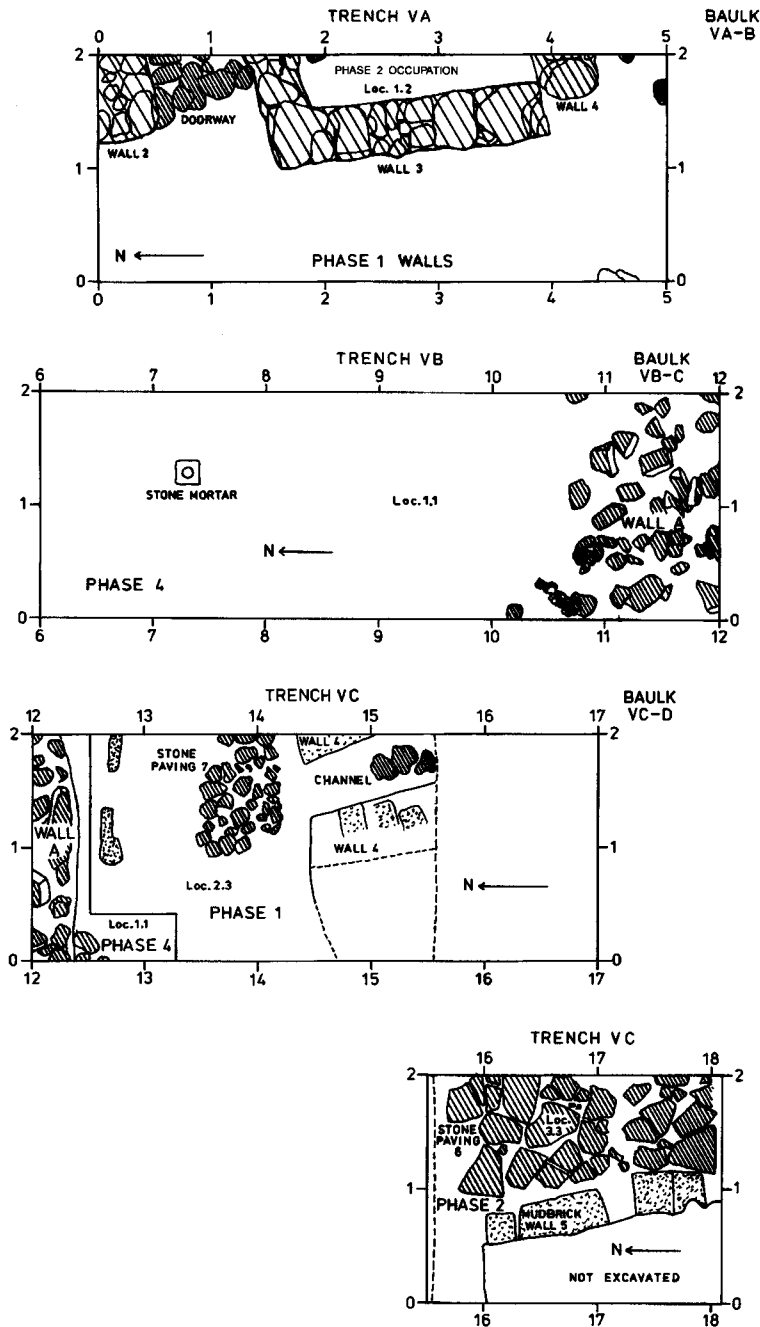


Figure 8. Plans of trenches VA (phase 1), VB (phase 4), and VC (phases 1, 2, and 4). Tell es-Sweyhat

large number of other Bronze Age (late third millennium) pottery vessels as well as a few Hellenistic vessels derived from the wash level that extended down the north slope of the mound from the Hellenistic watch post, which had been constructed on the top of the basal mound. Phase 7 contained a wide-mouth jar (type JR.F.I.a; fig. 11:23) and a narrow, high-necked storage jar (type JR.J.II.i; fig. 11:24). The pottery assemblage in phase 8 included a small jar with an upright broad ribbed collar rim (type SJR.C.II.u; fig. 11:25) and a probable Early-Middle Bronze Age jar with the remains of a potter's mark on its shoulder (type JR.B.III.b; fig. 11:26).

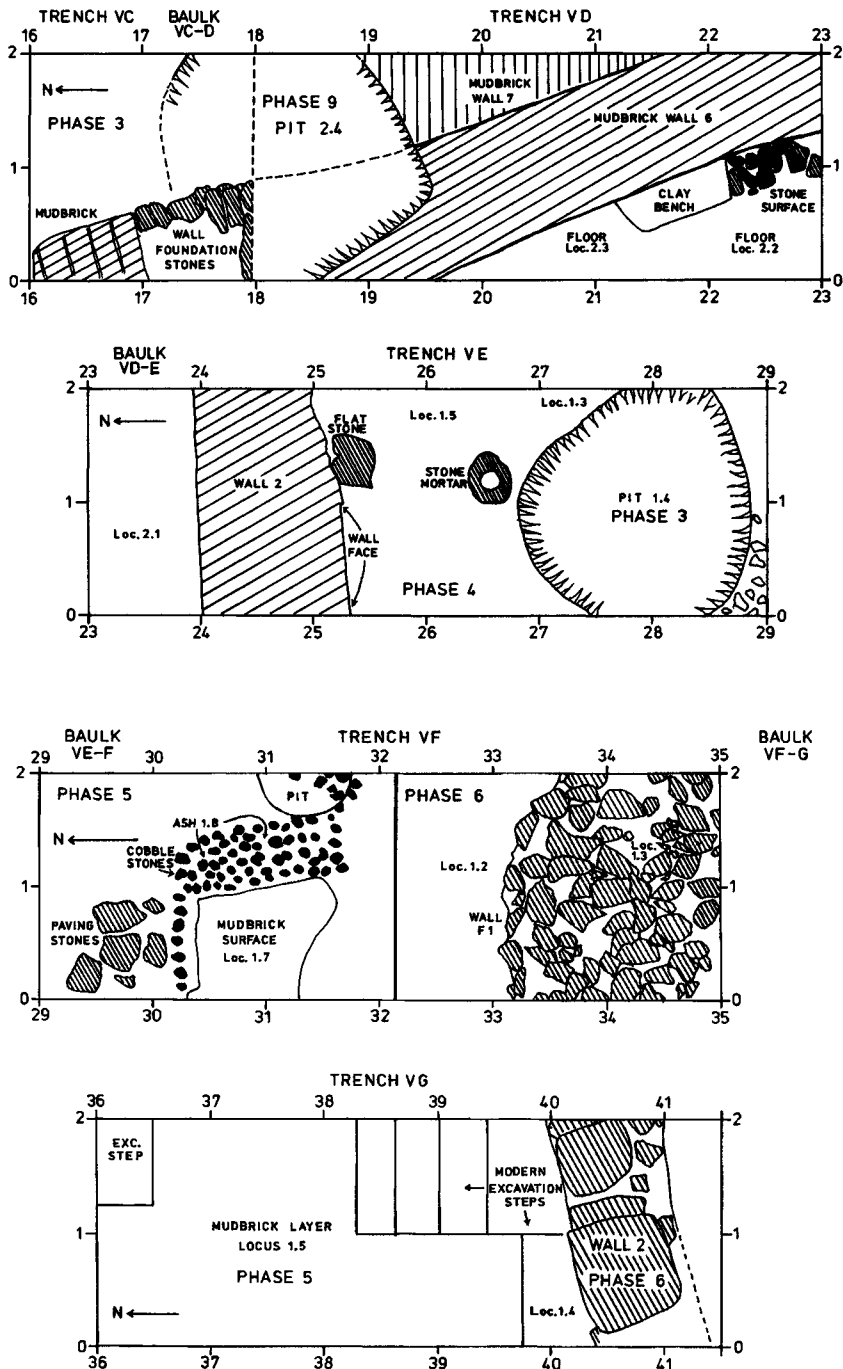


Figure 9. Plans of trenches VD (phase 3), VE (phases 3 and 4), VF (phases 5 and 6), and VG (phases 5 and 6). Tell es-Sweyhat

Although stone foundations of a roughly square-shaped structure were noted at the top central portion of the mound, they were not excavated as the main Syrian geographical survey point was situated there and served as the main datum point for all measurements taken on the site during the excavations. These foundations were identified as belonging to the Hellenistic period

ARCHAEOLOGY

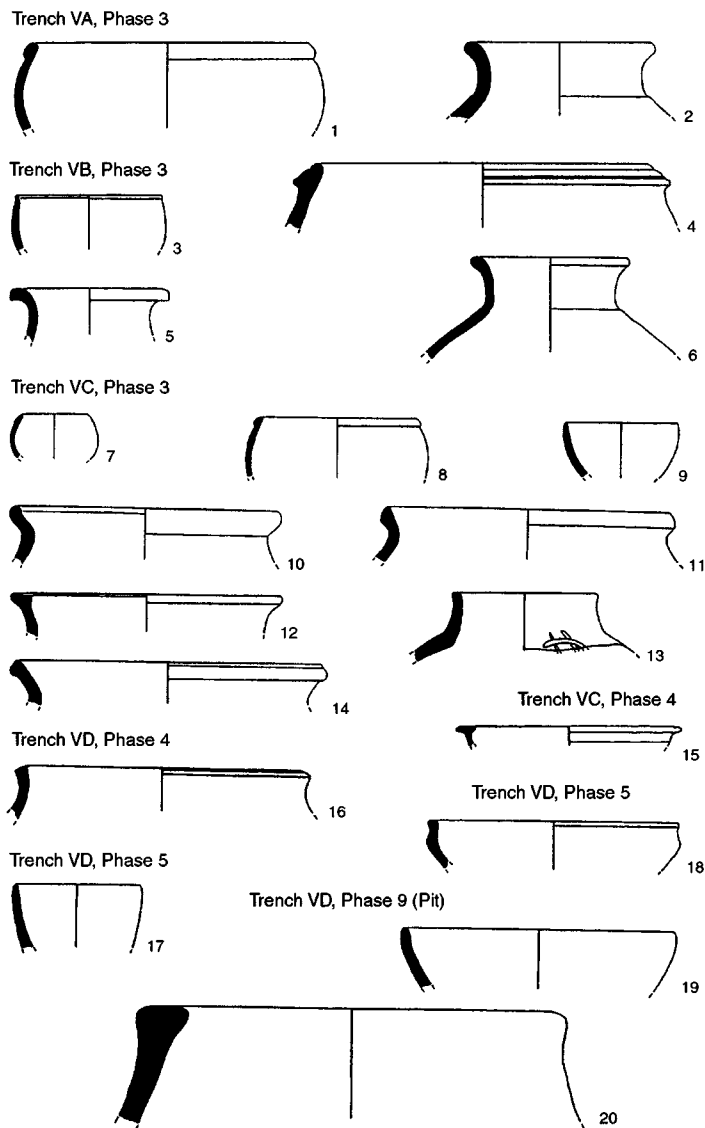


Figure 10. Selection of Early Bronze Age pottery types from trenches VA to VD. Tell es-Sweyhat. Scale ca. 1:7

derived from the small settlement situated on top of the Early Bronze Age remains.

A selection of some of the most noteworthy examples from the 160 sherds belonging to the Hellenistic pottery assemblage from the area V step trench is given in figure 12. The most common ware that occurred in all of the trenches consisted of red-slipped vessels, particularly the wide shallow bowls (35 rim and wall examples and 1 base) with either upright rims (type C, 7 examples) or inturned rims (type D, 17 examples) that are similar to the examples illustrated from trenches VF, phase 9, and VG, phase 9 (fig. 12:18, 21). The remainder of the red-slipped bowl forms are: type A, with a straight splayed-out wall (4 examples; cf. fig. 12:1 and 16); type B, globular shaped bowls with either plain or everted rims (1 example with plain rim, fig. 12:17); and type E, miscellaneous shapes (4 examples; cf. the one example with a vertical loop handle from trench VB, phase 4, fig. 12:7, and another example with a simple, slightly everted

and interpreted as a “watch post” since Hellenistic occupation and pits were excavated in area II, situated near the top of the mound to the west of the datum point and the area V step trench. The uppermost surviving levels in the area V step trench also contained a broad spectrum of Hellenistic pottery remains, therefore confirming that the existing top of the main mound at Sweyhat must be dated to the Hellenistic period; epigraphic evidence from trench IIB indicates that this period should be dated between about 300 and 280 BC.

The uppermost wash levels in the step trench of area V sloped steeply down the north face of the mound from 0.36 m below the zero datum point at the top of the tell at the south end of trench VG to a depth of 9.66 m at the bottom north end of trench VA (fig. 3). The upper deposits were more shallow in trenches VD to VG than in the lower deposits in trenches VA to VC, which were more horizontal and less prone to wind and rain erosion. All of the upper levels in the step trench contained Hellenistic pottery that was primarily de-

rim, fig. 12:11). One example of the type A red-slipped bowls stands apart from the other examples in the form of its decoration; while most examples are partially or completely covered with red slip inside and outside, the example from trench VE, phase 9 (fig. 12:14), is only decorated inside with a painted pattern of loops below the inside of the rim and with a diagonal leaflike pattern towards the base of the vessel; this type of vessel decoration has been identified elsewhere as a “festoon” style, particularly at the Failaka [Kuwait] Hellenistic fortress dated to period I (late first century BC into the first century AD), the date of which is considerably later than the Sweyhat period of Hellenistic occupation (cf. IKAROS 2/2, nos. 432–35, pl. 44:432). Small red-slipped jars were uncommon with only three examples, one good example of which came from trench VA, phase 4 (fig. 12:2).

The second largest assemblage of Hellenistic period vessels in the step trench consists of thirty-one various types of storage jars, the most common being the narrow-neck form with a deep collar-like rim such as the example from baulk VF-G, phase 9 (fig. 12:20); other examples had more barrel-shaped bodies and thickened collar-type rims similar to the example from trench VD, phase 5 (fig. 12:12). Wide mouth jars were the next most numerous vessels with 29 examples; these jars had a variety of shapes such as the examples from trench VB, phase 4 (fig. 12:8), and trench VF, phase 9 (fig. 12:19). Bowls were also numerous with twenty-five examples, which were also manufactured in a variety of shapes such as the examples illustrated here from trench VB, phase 4 (fig. 12:6), and trench VE, phases 5 and 9 (fig. 12:13, 15). The presence of ten cooking pot types implies that the preparation of food was done within or very near the Hellenistic watch post; the one illustrated example from trench VA, phase 4 (fig. 12:5),

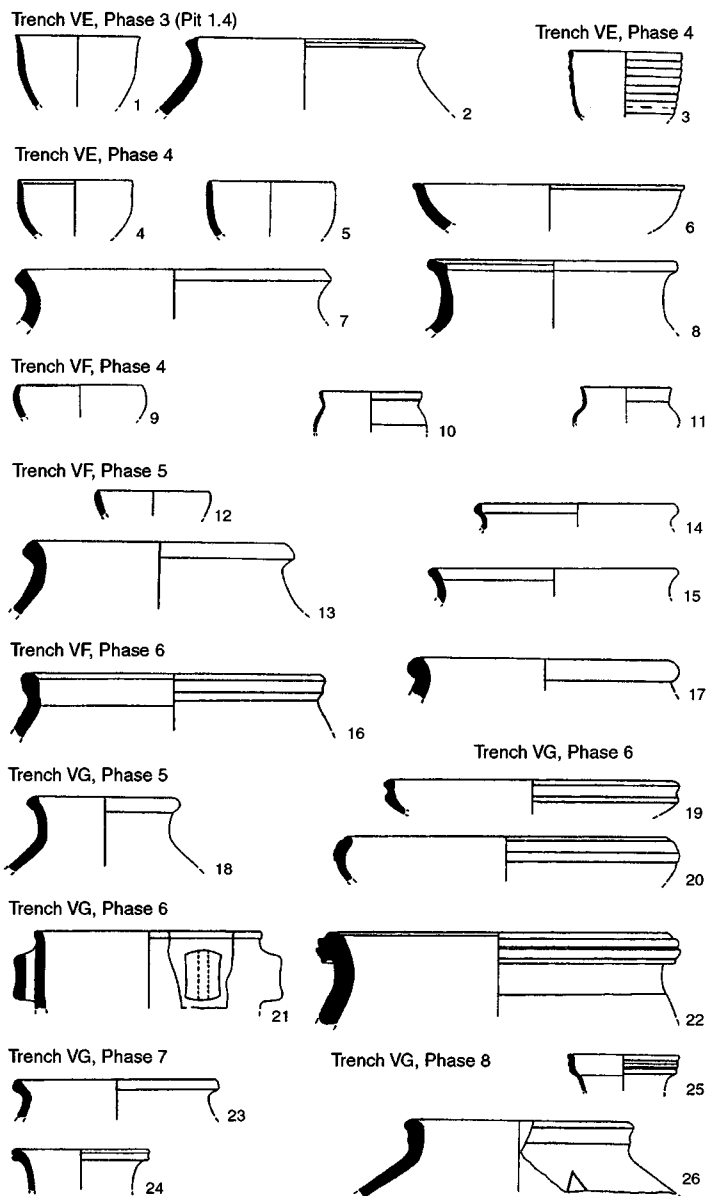


Figure 11. Selection of Early Bronze Age pottery types from trenches VE to VG. Tell es-Sweyhat. Scale ca. 1:7

ARCHAEOLOGY

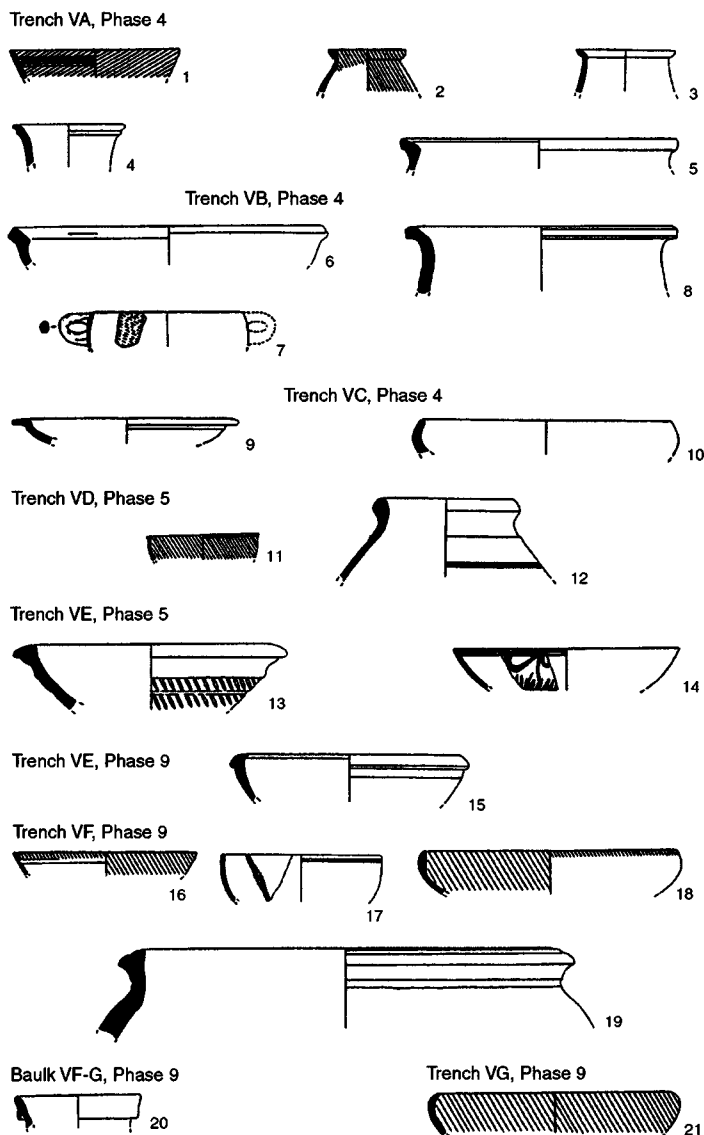


Figure 12. Selection of Hellenistic pottery types from trenches VA to VG. Tell es-Sweyhat. Scale ca. 1:7

had a very wide mouth and an everted rim with an internal ledge for the placement of a lid. Although they were very rare in the Hellenistic pottery assemblages, the gray burnished, almost glaze-like, type of ware occurred with only five examples, three in area II and two in step trench VC, phase 4 (fig. 12:9–10), and were most likely imports. The remaining Hellenistic vessel types included six small bowls, three small jars, six jugs (cf. example from trench VA, phase 4, fig. 12:3), one lid, two pot stands, and seven bases, one of which came from a red-slipped bowl that had a stamped palm-leaf decorative pattern on its inside.