

TELL ES-SWEYHAT

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An Early Bronze Age Caravansary and Trading Post?

The recent publication of the final excavation report on Selenkahiye (M. N. van Loon, ed., *Selenkahiye: Final Report on the University of Chicago and University of Amsterdam Excavations in the Tabqa Reservoir, Northern Syria 1967–1975* [Istanbul: Nederlands Historisch-Archaeologisch Instituut, 2001]), a Bronze Age site on the upper Euphrates River in Syria that was initially sponsored by the Oriental Institute in 1967, includes in the study of the pottery a very good example of the one-handled, flat-based jar now described in archaeologi-

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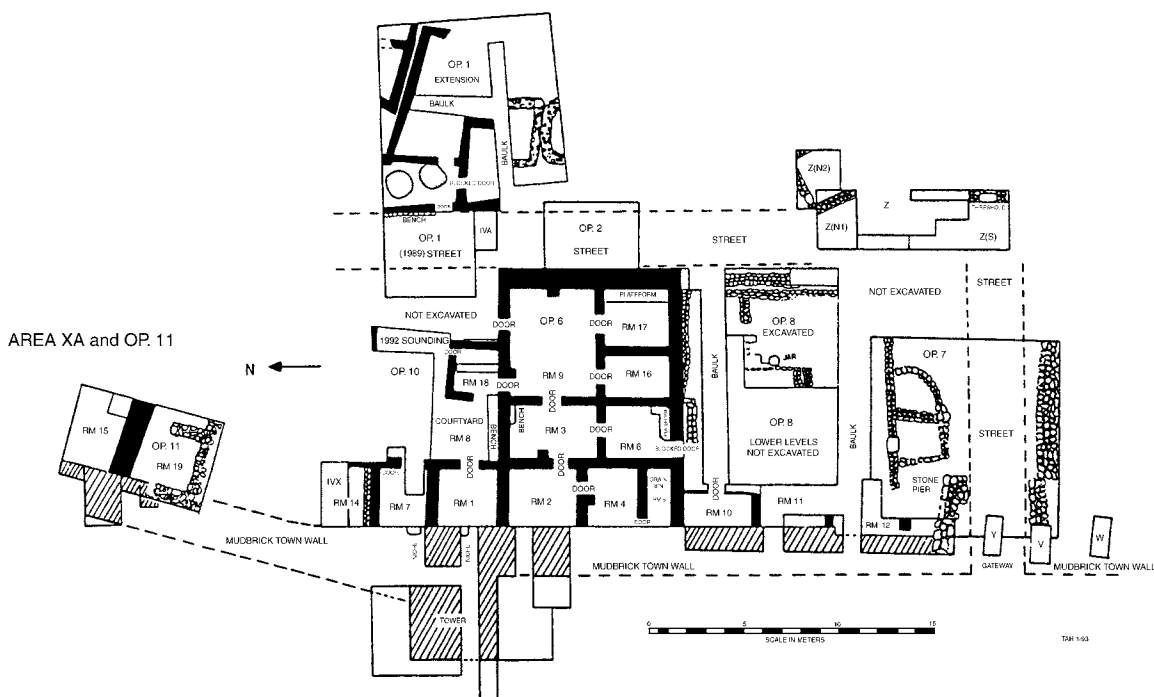


Figure 1. Plan of Areas IV and XA and 1990s Operations 1–2, 6–8, 10–11. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

cal discussions as the “Vounous”-type jar (fig. 8:2 herein). The one-handed, flat-based, jar first appeared in Tomb 164B, No. 9 at Vounous, Cyprus (J. R. Stewart, “An Imported Pot from Cyprus,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* [1939]: 162–65, pl. 27) and was immediately identified as a foreign manufactured vessel (fig. 8:3 herein). Five of these “Vounous”-type jars were excavated at Sweyhat (fig. 7:1–5), one example was published from Tell Hadidi (R. H. Dornemann, “Tell Hadidi: A Millennium of Bronze Age City Occupation,” in *Archaeological Reports from the Tabqa Dam Project, Euphrates Valley, Syria*, edited by D. N. Freedman, fig. 16:18 [Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 44; Cambridge: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1979; fig. 8:1 herein]), and another example was found in a mastaba-type tomb at Giza (S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza 1930–1931* [Cairo: Government Press, Bulaq, 1936], pp. 139–50, pl. 47; fig. 8:4 herein). The publication of the newest example from Selenkahiye (van Loon *Selenkahiye*, pl. 5A.22:a; fig. 8:2 herein) and a recent request for information on the Sweyhat arch from a graduate student, Chiara Dezzi Bardeschi, who is preparing a Ph.D. thesis on roofing systems in Mesopotamia under the direction of Prof. J.-Cl. Margueron in Paris, has led the author to re-examine the large, partially excavated Trench IVN (Rooms 8 and 18) at Sweyhat (figs. 1–2), in which the fifth example of the Sweyhat “Vounous”-type jar was found, along with a substantial three-course wide mudbrick arch, as well as a number of other unusual finds that included metal hasps (fig. 10:4–5), a figurine of a horse that was modeled to represent a domesticated breed (fig. 10:1), model clay wagon wheels (fig. 10:2–3), alabaster objects (fig. 10:6–7), and a diverse pottery assemblage (cf. fig. 9) that may explain the purpose of Trench IVN, which was connected with the large rectangular-shaped building to its south by a doorway giving access from Room 18 to Room 9 in Operation 6 during the original Phase 2A occupation (ca. 2350–2250 BC) of the whole building complex that abutted the inner town wall on the western side of the upper town at Sweyhat; the large rectangular-shaped building with seven rooms (numbered 2–6,

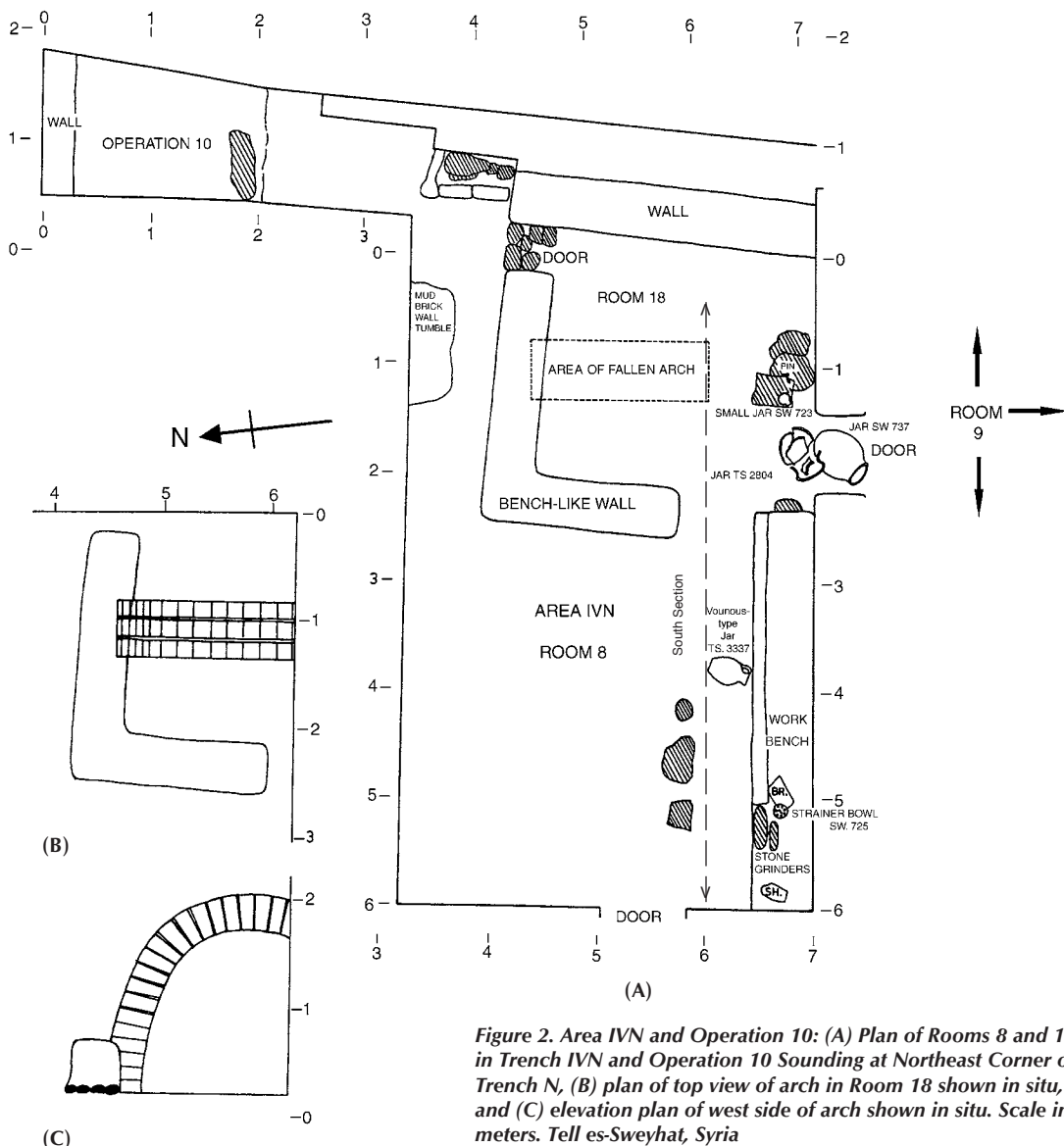


Figure 2. Area IVN and Operation 10: (A) Plan of Rooms 8 and 18 in Trench N, (B) plan of top view of arch in Room 18 shown in situ, and (C) elevation plan of west side of arch shown in situ. Scale in meters. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

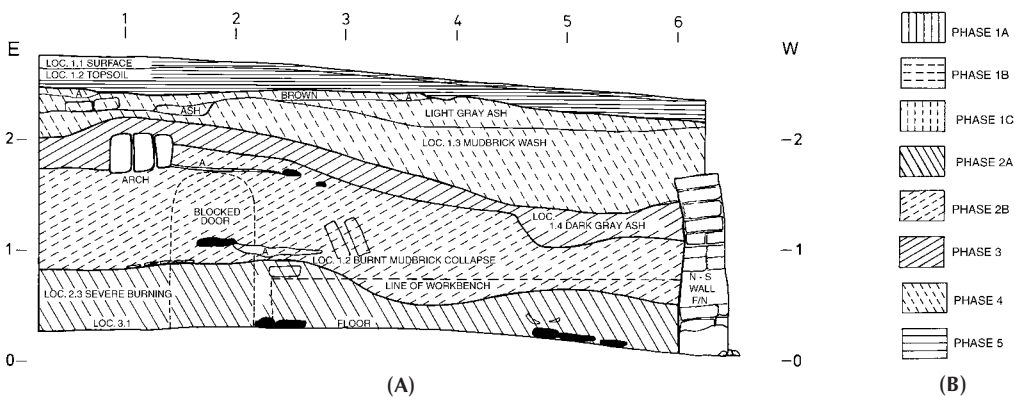


Figure 3. (A) Drawing of Trench IVN South Section and (B) key to hatching of archaeological Phases 1A-5 in Area IV. Scale in meters. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

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Figure 4. Trench IVN, Room 18: South side of arch and doorway into Area IVP, Room 9. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

largest three excavated Sweyhat “Vounous”-type jars (fig. 7:3–5) were found in Trench IVJ, Room 4, two examples of which (fig. 7:4–5) are assigned to Phase 2B as they were originally stored either on the roof of Room 4 or in a second story room that is now denuded. Room 4 served as a large repository of storage jars and other vessels similar to Room 18 in Trench IVN. The largest known example of the “Vounous”-type jar comes from Room 4 (fig. 7:5) and it is the only example of this vessel type that has vertically painted pinkish-colored bands, from its shoulder to the base of the vessel, on top of a light cream slip. Also, only three of the known “Vounous”-type jars have potter’s marks on their shoulders — the first example from Sweyhat (fig. 7:3) has two vertically positioned incisions on the shoulder of the jar, which is opposite the handle and the second Sweyhat jar (fig. 7:4) has two parallel incisions on the left side of the base of the handle; the Selenkahiye example (fig. 8:2) has three parallel incisions on its upper shoulder; the position in relationship to the handle is not noted in the report.

There is a remarkable resemblance in shape and size between the Sweyhat “Vounous”-type jar from Trench IVJ, Room 4 (SW. 651; fig. 7:3), and the one example from Selenkahiye (fig. 8:2); both vessels have loop handles that are raised above the top of their rims and flattened diagonally to the inside of the rims, which may have been intended as thumb-supports when the vessels were being emptied — this feature is also present, but not so pronounced,



Figure 5. Trench IVN, Room 18: View of partially excavated north side of arch and adjoining bench at lower left with remains of south side of arch extending out from south balk behind meter pole to right. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

16–17) and a large courtyard (number 9), was bounded on its eastern end by a major north-south street, but there was no doorway giving access from the street into the rectangular-shaped building. More rooms and possibly courtyards were constructed against the southern wall of the large rectangular-shaped building, but only Room 10 was completely excavated and an unexcavated doorway in the southwest corner of Room 6 gave access to a room or courtyard that had a connecting doorway on its western side into Room 10, which contained one of the Sweyhat “Vounous”-type jars that was only partially mended (fig. 7:2); the

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capacity of these vessels. Therefore, the pottery marks must either indicate the trade mark of an individual potter/pottery kiln or represent the actual contents for which the vessels were made.

The main Sweyhat area under discussion is primarily concerned with the partially excavated area (Trench IVN) that adjoins the central portion of the north wall of the large rectangular-shaped building, which is connected by a doorway between Courtyard Room 9 and the “arch” Room 18 (figs. 1, 2a). The sounding designated Operation 10 was made in the northeastern corner of Trench IVN during the 1992 season in an effort to establish the northernmost bound-



Figure 6. Trench IVN, Rooms 8 and 18: General view of arch and south balk before south wall of Tr. IVN was excavated, showing collapse of eastern wall of Room 18. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

ary of Courtyard Room 8. A portion of an east-west wall belonging to the Phase 2A occupation in Trench IVN at the northern end of the 1992 sounding in Operation 10 most likely defines the northern boundary of Trench IVN, which would make the north-south distance 6.80 m. The present known east-west distance of Trench IVN is 7.70 m; if this area is in fact one building unit and extends eastwards to the street it would measure 10.10 m in length, a space much too large to have been roofed in its entirety. The whole area of Trench IVN, including Rooms 8 and 18, therefore has been designated as a courtyard (the complete publication is forthcoming in T. A. Holland, *Tell es-Sweyhat Syria, Volume 2: Archaeology of the Bronze Age, Hellenistic, and Roman Remains at an Ancient Town on the Euphrates River* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, forthcoming).

Excavations in Trench IVN during the 1970s revealed that this area was probably an internal courtyard belonging to a large building complex since most of the excavated portion of the Phase 2A “floor” surface was paved with a lime-type concrete with many small pebble inclusions. The remains of an arch, preserved to a height of 1.75 m, and a wall oriented north-south were found in the eastern portion of the trench (fig. 2A–C), as well as the remains of an L-shaped mudbrick structure, which was identified as a “bench.” Part of another, working-type, bench, with grinding stones and a complete strainer bowl (SW. 725; fig. 9:8) on top of its western end and with three paving stones set into the surface of the floor just in front of the bench, was excavated in the southwestern corner of this area. A door in the south wall, west of the arch, had been blocked up with mudbricks and storage jars (Types JR. O.II.b and JR. P.II.b; fig. 9:16, 20) at some time during the beginning of the slightly later Phase 2B, but this was not initially discovered as it had been so well plastered over that it appeared to be part of the wall dividing Courtyard Rooms 8, 18, and 9. Although the top courses of a wall were excavated in the eastern end of the trench, which appeared to have a door between the north edge of the wall and the north section of the trench, the 1992 excavations indicated that this north wall is architecturally related to the 1970s bench as there is a doorway between its northwestern end and the eastern end of the northern arm of the L-shaped bench. The eastern section of the working bench, flush with the southwestern wall of Room 8, was excavated during 1992, which showed that the bench continued eastward as far as the west side of the door into Courtyard Room 9 and also ended opposite the north-south oriented arm of the L-shaped bench.

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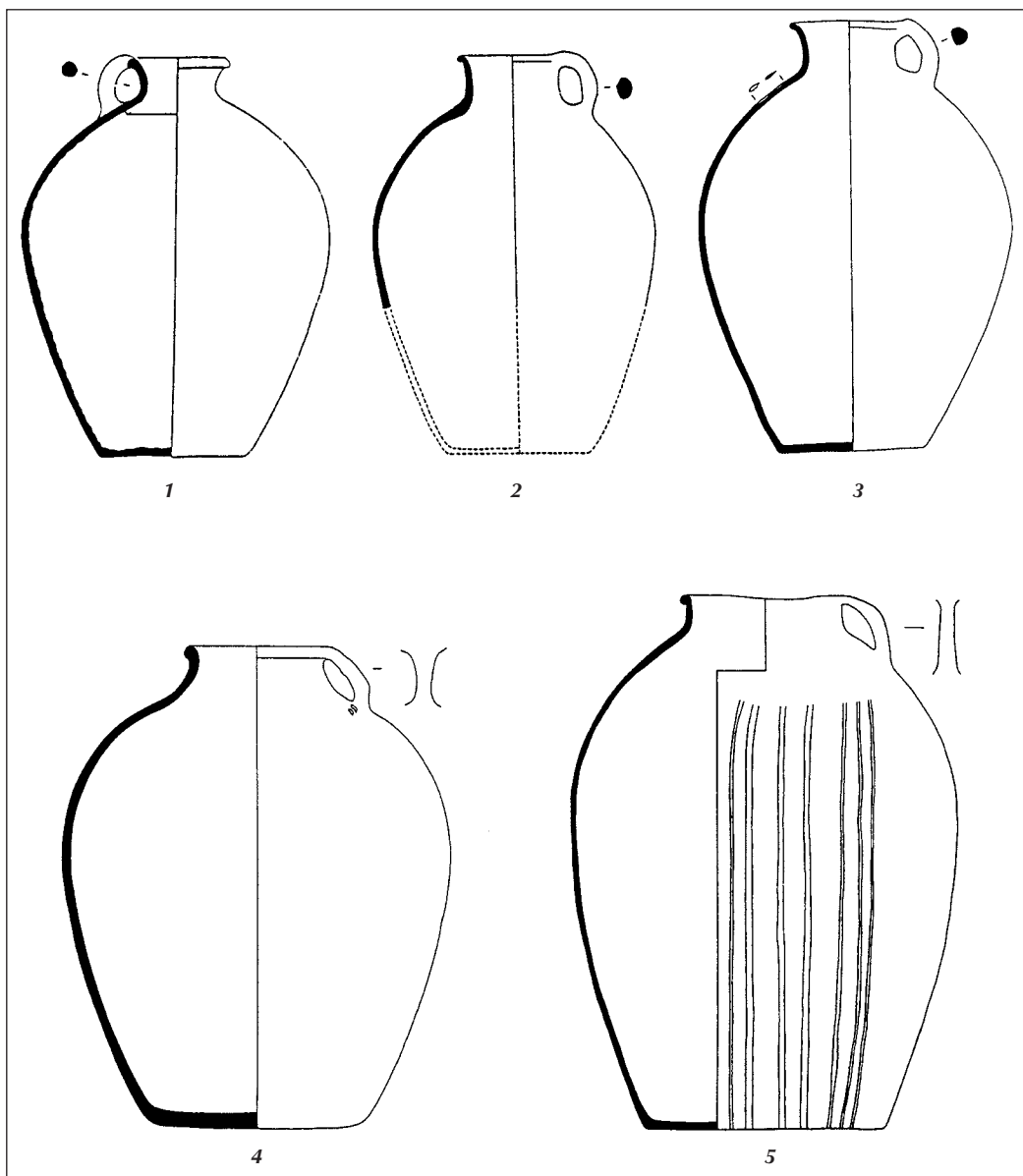


Figure 7. "Vounous"-type one-handed jars: (1) Type L.I.a, Tr. IVN, Room 8; (2) Type L.II.a, Tr. IVO, Room 10; (3) Type L.II.a, Tr. IVJ, Room 4; (4) Type L.I.a, Tr. IVJ, Room 4; and (5) Type L.II.b, Tr. IVJ, Room 4. Scale 1:7. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

It would appear that when the door in the south wall of Trench IVN was blocked, secondary structures, including the L-shaped bench, the arch, and the eastern wall, were constructed in the middle and south side of the courtyard as possibly an enclosure area for the storage of vessels. All of the architectural components of the secondary structure are labeled Room 18. The L-shaped bench-like structure had a good natural stone foundation but was only constructed to a height of 50 cm; it had a thick gypsum plaster facing on all of its surfaces. This bench-like structure was built prior to the arch as the northern side of the arch was constructed partially onto the top and side of the southern half of the east-west oriented portion of the L-shaped structure. The bricks used to construct the arch were of an unusual measurement, 11 × 15 × 33 cm. Three courses of bricks were mortared together to construct the arch (fig. 2B), which had a total thickness with its plaster mortar of 55 cm; the arch was preserved to a height of

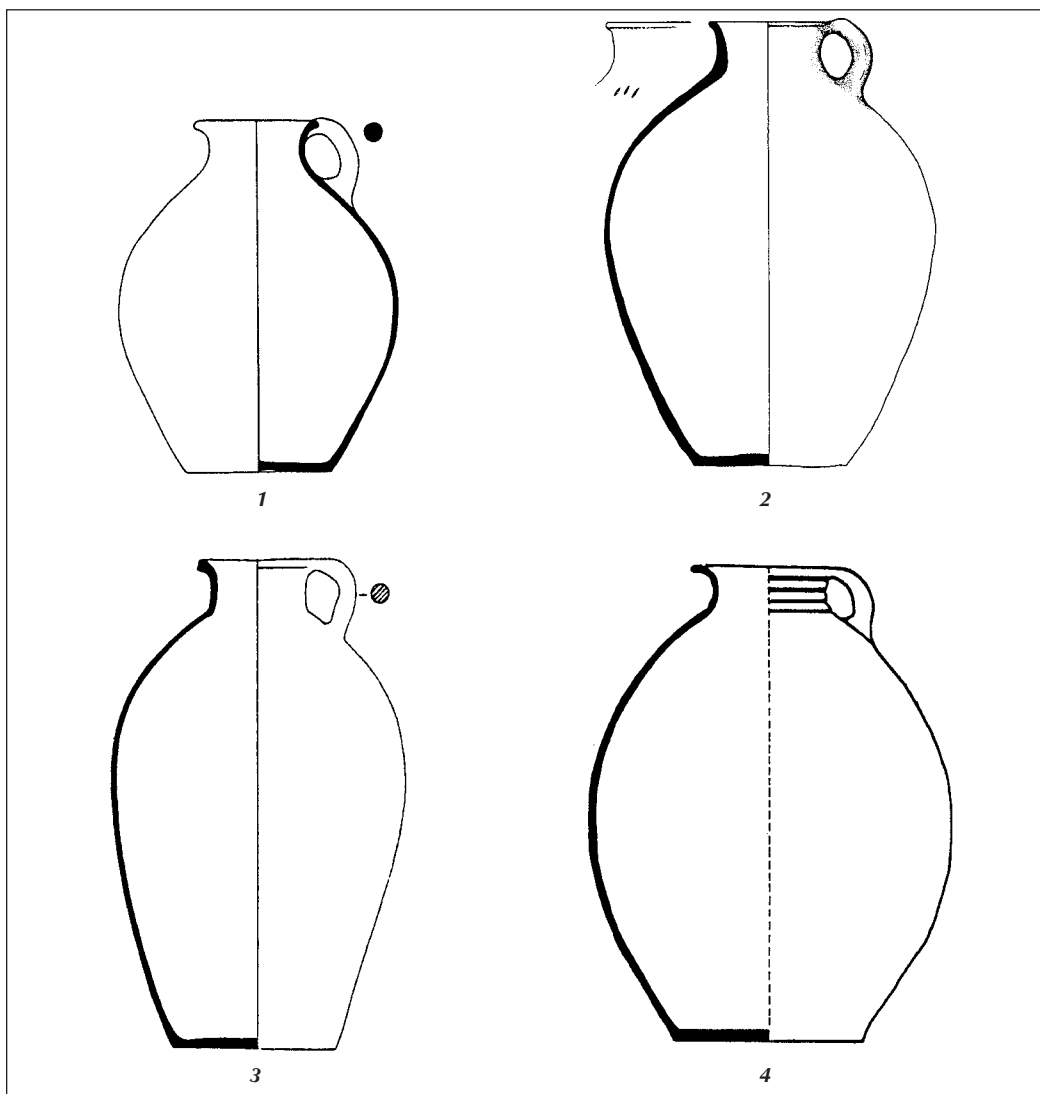


Figure 8. "Vounous"-type one-handed jars from other sites: (1) Tell Hadidi, Syria; (2) Selenkahiye, Syria; (3) Vounous, Cyprus; and (4) Giza, Egypt. Scale 1:7

1.75 m (figs. 2C, 3A) and had a width of 2.25 m at its base but collapsed after drying out in the summer sun on the following day of its excavation (figs. 4–6). There was no evidence that the arch had supported either a timbered roof or matting, such as the mat impressions that were found on the fallen roof libn that was originally part of the roof ceiling in Room 6. The arch could possibly have provided support for a temporary cloth type of covering that was suspended over it as protection against either rain or sun.

Although the Trench IVN courtyard is still not completely excavated, it contained the second highest number of pottery vessels in the Phase 2A assemblage of the Area IV trenches, a total of seventy-five examples; the bulk of the assemblage was composed of thirteen cups/small bowls, eleven bowls, and thirty-five jar forms. The wide bowl with a deep collar rim, Type BR. F.IV.e (fig. 9:6), is similar to an example from Shams ed-Din, Area B, Grave 60 (J.-W. Meyer, *Gräber des 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr. im syrischen Euphrattal: 3. Ausgrabungen*

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in *Samseddin und Djerniye*, [Schriften zur vorderasiatischen Archäologie 3; Saarbrücken: Saarbrücker Druckerei und Verlag, 1991], pl. 6:22). The large storage jar with an upright, very thick ribbed collar rim, Type JR. D.X.b (fig. 9:11), has a good parallel at Tell Mardikh (Ebla), Period IIB1, dated ca. 2300 BC (P. Matthiae, "Preliminary Remarks on the Royal Palace of Ebla," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 2/2 [1978]: 13–40, fig. 4:6). The tall-necked jar with an internal cavity below the rim, for supporting a lid, Type JR. G.I.c (fig. 9:12), is characteristic of similar jars found in tombs at both Sweyhat, Tomb 5 (R. L. Zettler, *Subsistence and Settlement in a Marginal Environment: Tell es-Sweyhat, 1989–1995 Preliminary Report* [MASCA Research Papers in Science and Archaeology 14; Philadelphia: Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 1997], fig. App. 3.3:aa) and Tawi, Tomb T 19–22 (I. Kampschulte and W. Orthmann, *Gräber des 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr. im syrischen Euphrattal: 1. Ausgrabungen bei Tawi 1975 und 1978* [Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 38; Bonn: Habelt, 1984], pls. 23:138, 26:207). The complete strainer bowl, Type SR. C.I.a (fig. 9:8), found in situ on the workbench, is comparable to an EBIVa example from Tell Jidle, Level 5 (M. E. L. Mallowan, "Excavations in the Balih Valley, 1938," *Iraq* 8 [1946]: 111–59, fig. 9:8) and to another example from Tell Mastuma, Level IX (N. Egami and S. Masuda, *Tell Mastuma: Excavations in Idlib District, Syria, 1982* [Preliminary Report of Archaeological Researches in Syria 3; Tokyo: Ancient Orient Museum, 1984], pl. 10:12). The one-handled "Vounous"-type jar, found beside the workbench, Type JR. L.I.a (fig. 7:1), is a slightly larger version of an example from Tell Hadidi Area C (fig. 8:1); another newly published example comes from Tell Selenkahiye (see discussion above). The Type L, one-handled jars with a flat base, appear to be a local product, most likely used for the export of liquids as the handles would have facilitated the users in tipping these vessels for pouring out the contents.

The pottery finds from Room 18, the enclosed space with an arch in the southeastern corner of Courtyard/Room 8, are discussed here as this room has a close association with Room 8 and the pottery belongs to the same assemblage. This room contained the third highest number of pottery vessels in the Phase 2A pottery assemblage of Area IV, a total of sixty-nine vessels, and was probably used primarily for storage. The main categories of vessels were small bowls/cups (e.g., fig. 9:3–4), bowls (e.g., fig. 9:5), small jars (e.g., fig. 9:9–10), large storage jars (e.g., fig. 9:13–14, 17–19), and cooking pots (e.g., fig. 9:21–22).

The small globular-shaped bowl type with an upright rim with a slightly thickened collar band outside, Type SBR. D.I.e (fig. 9:4), is the same form which appears at Selenkahiye (van Loon, *Selenkahiye*, fig. 5A.9:g–l). The deep bowl with a slightly ribbed upper wall and with a thick, wide, inturned collar rim, Type BR. F.IV.d (fig. 9:5), may be compared to an example from Tell Halawa, Planquadrat Q (J.-W. Meyer, "Grabungen in Planquadrat Q," in *Halawa 1977 bis 1979: Vorläufiger Bericht über die 1. bis 3. Grabungskampagne*, by W. Orthmann, pp. 10–35 [Saarbrücker Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 31; Bonn: Habelt, 1981], pl. 43:21) and to another good example from Qara Qūzāk, Level III-2 (C. Valdés, "La Cerámica de la Edad del Bronce de Tell Qara Qūzāq Campaña de 1991," in *Tell Qara Qūzāq-1: Campañas 1–3 (1989–1991)*, edited by E. Olávarri et al. [Aula Orientalis, Supplementa 4; Barcelona: Editorial AUSA, 1995], fig. 19:3). The small, burnished, metallic-like, gray ware jar, SW. 723, Type SJR. C.II.m (fig. 9:9), found broken on a paving stone just east of the southern doorway (fig. 2A), contained one bronze hasp and originally a second bronze hasp, which had fallen out of the small jar onto the same paving stone (fig. 10:4–5). This Type C small jar was mended to completion and has a very distinctive upright ribbed neck and a flat base, similar to another smaller example from Room 3, Type SJR. C.II.l, but neither vessel appears to have any close

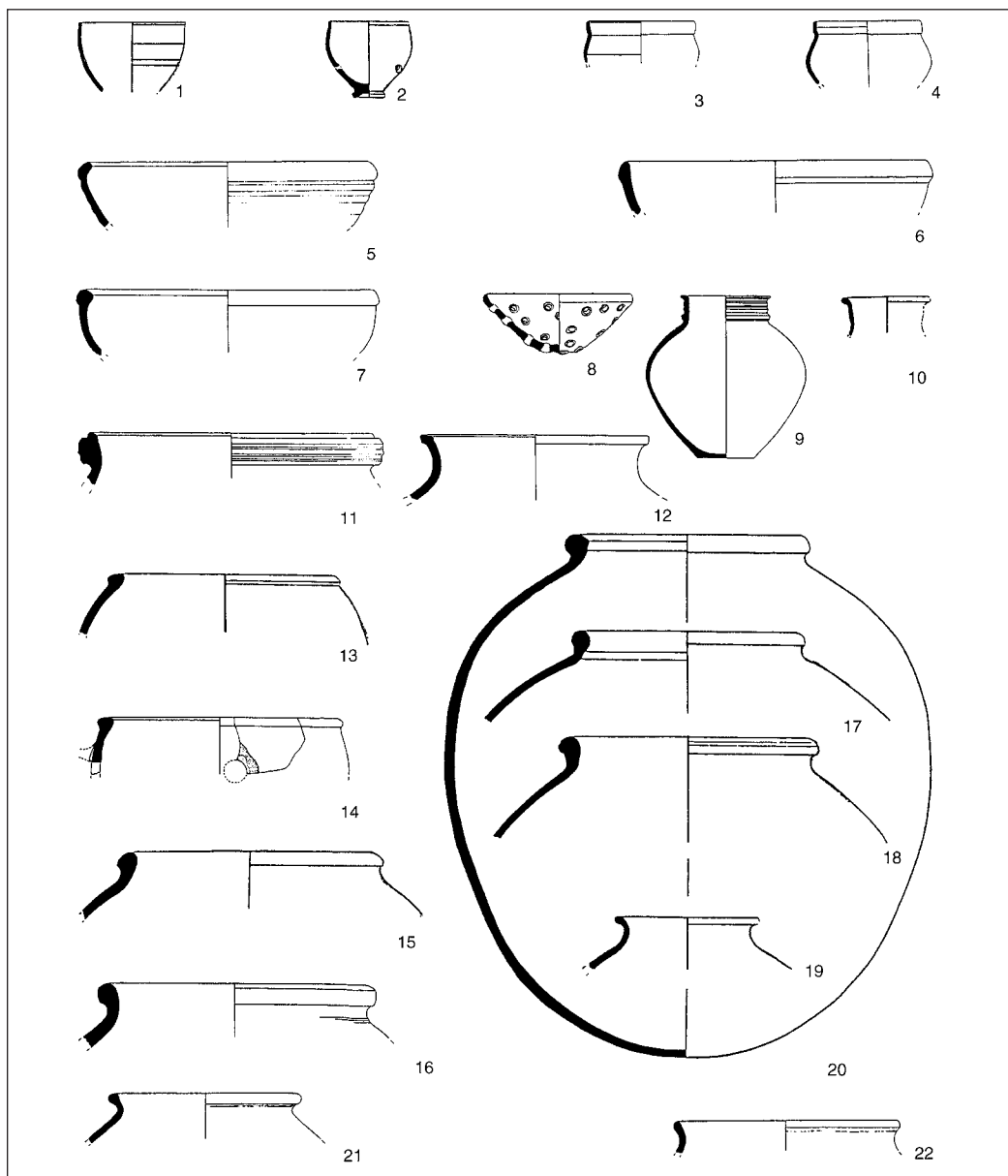


Figure 9. Selection of various pottery vessel types from Area IVN, Rooms 8 and 18. Scale 1:7. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

parallels in the published Early Bronze Age pottery sequences from other sites. The large storage jar shown on the plan of Trench IVN (fig. 2A) just in front of the southern doorway, Type JR. P.II.b (TS. 2804), was not mended to completion; it had a round base, but like some of the other larger storage jars published here, there are no close parallels for it. The large jar shown in the doorway on the Trench IVN plan, Type JR. O.II.b (fig. 9:20), could have come from either the Trench IVN courtyard or from Trench IVP, Room 9.

The large number of vessels in the arched and enclosed portion of the Trench IVN courtyard, Room 18, particularly the twenty-two storage-type jars, indicate that this area must have been reserved for a pottery vessel repository. Also, the presence of twenty-four small bowl/

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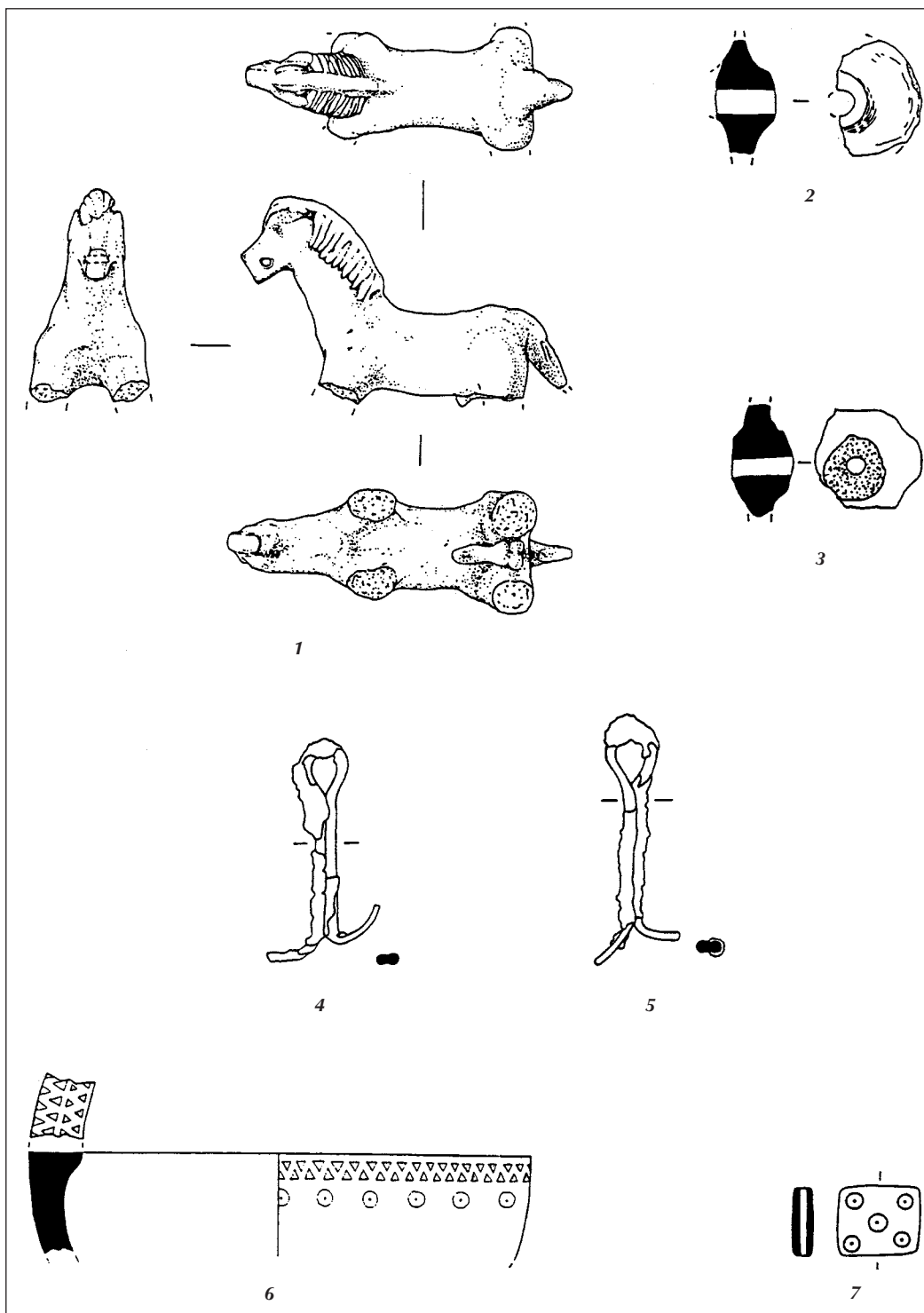


Figure 10. (1) Modeled clay horse figurine, (2-3) model wagon wheels, (4-5) bronze hasps, (6) alabaster bowl, and (7) alabaster counter or pendant. Scale 2:5. Tell es-Sweyhat, Syria

cup-type vessels suggests that more than one family unit was involved in the use of these eating/drinking vessels. The two bronze hasps may have been used to secure a box containing more valuable objects or they could have served as part of a horse's trappings, especially as the model horse figurine that was found near Room 18 at the eastern end of the Courtyard/Room 8 confirms that the domesticated horse was known at Sweyhat during the EBIVa period. Although a slightly larger number of vessels came from the excavated portion of the remainder of the Trench IVN Courtyard, Room 8, it would appear from the type of vessels and other objects found there that this portion of the area was reserved for the preparation, distribution, and eating of food, and possibly even for the stabling of horses or other animals, especially as the floor was very solidly constructed with a plastered pebbled surface. The long workbench built flush against the wall along the southwestern portion of the courtyard still had in situ food preparation vessels and two grinding stones, along with one of the "Vounous"-type vessels (TS. 3337) beside the bench (fig. 2A). The complete strainer bowl (SW. 725; fig. 9:8) and the one-handed jar could have served to transfer more liquid types of food or possibly wine directly to either smaller eating/drinking vessels or even to larger storage-type jars that were transferred from the storage repository, Room 18, and then possibly distributed to long-distance traders who used this portion of the upper town at Sweyhat as one caravansary stop along the trade route from east to west.

The writer is assuming that the long-distance trade route, at least as far as the "Vounous"-type jars are concerned, was limited to a western oriented market from Sweyhat as there are no known examples of this vessel type so far that have been published from sites east of the Euphrates River except for the five Tell es-Sweyhat examples. The presence of the only known Sweyhat examples occur solely in the Area IV building complex, which implies that this was the center of distribution of the "Vounous"-type jars and whatever their contents might have originally been. The other known four external examples of the "Vounous"-type jars are limited to one jar each at two sites near Sweyhat, but on the west bank of the Euphrates River at Tell Hadidi (ancient Azu) and Selenkahiye; while the other two jars occur at a great distance from Sweyhat, one example from a tomb in Vounous, Cyprus and another in a tomb at Giza, Egypt; both of these vessels were imported into both Cyprus and Egypt and at present it would appear that they came from either Sweyhat or another major site on the upper Euphrates River in northern Syria.

The fairly high neck of the "Vounous"-type vessel with an out-turned rim, as well as one attached loop handle from the lip of the rim to the top of the shoulder, suggests that this vessel was used to export a homegrown and refined liquid product, which may have been wine, unknown kinds of oil, or possibly even perfume. Evidence for wine production in the form of carbonized grape seeds comes from a northern Euphrates River site in Turkey, Kurban Höyük, dated to as early as the beginning of the third millennium BC (T. J. Wilkinson, *Town and Country in Southeastern Anatolia*, Volume 1: *Settlement and Land Use in the Lower Karababa Basin* [Oriental Institute Publications 109; Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1990], p. 94). There is also evidence from the Emar tablets for wine production on the right bank of the Euphrates River south of Sweyhat during the Late Bronze Age (D. E. Fleming, "A Limited Kingship: Late Bronze Age Emar in Ancient Syria," *Ugarit Forschungen* 1993: 64, 66). Wine production was still possible in the Sweyhat Euphrates area as late as the Hellenistic/Roman periods as Tony J. Wilkinson discovered treading floors and collecting basins of wine presses that were cut into the limestone along the floor of the Euphrates River bluffs that were dated to these later periods (T. J. Wilkinson, *Tell es-Sweyhat*, Volume 1: *Settlement and Land*

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Use on the Margin of the Euphrates River and in the Upper Lake Tabqa Area [Chicago: The Oriental Institute, forthcoming].

Apart from the modeled figure of a domesticated-type horse (fig. 10:1) and the bronze hasps (fig. 10:4–5) mentioned above, other small finds from the Trench IVN Rooms 8 and 18 shed further light on the importance of this area in the upper town at Sweyhat during the Early Bronze IVa period of occupation. Two of the four model-type wheels (fig. 10:2–3) found in the Area IV rooms came from the large courtyard and arched room under discussion. Three of the examples have thickened cylindrical-shaped hubs extended outwards from both sides of the axle socket holes in the central part of the wheels, a feature that distinguishes this type as earlier in date than the examples with only a slight thickening around the axle socket holes. The presence of these model wheels suggests that they were probably modeled after examples used on life-sized transportation vehicles such as the modeled four-wheeled covered wagons that are known from Sweyhat Tomb 5, dated to about the third quarter of the third millennium (R. L. Zettler, *Subsistence and Settlement*, fig. 3.22) and elsewhere. Two alabaster “counters” or “pendants” were found, one in Courtyard/Room 8 (fig. 10:7) and the other in Room 10, which also contained one of the “Vounous”-type jars discussed above. Both of the alabaster objects were incised on one side of their square-shaped surfaces with a design of five circular rings, which also had their centers slightly pierced; both of the objects were pierced with a drilled cylindrically-shaped hole through the central portion of the narrow side, possibly for stringing for use as a pendant or for being tied to a storage-type vessel to indicate quantity or an ancient form of trademark? The very attractive stone bowl carved from a light-colored yellow alabaster (fig. 10:6), which was decorated on top of its flat inturred rim with a double register of incised triangles and with one register of incised triangles and a row of incised circles just below the outside of the rim, was also found in the Trench IVN Courtyard/Room 8. This stone bowl must be considered a luxury item and may even have been traded or purchased from the dealers who were engaged in the long-distance trade route and who may possibly have used this area of Sweyhat as one of its caravansary stops.
