

# CULTIC ACTIVITIES IN THE SACRED AREA OF ISHTAR AT EBLA DURING THE OLD SYRIAN PERIOD: THE *FAVISSAE* F.5327 AND F.5238

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## 1. Introduction

Recent excavations conducted by Paolo Matthiae in Area P at Tell Mardikh/Ebla have revealed a large sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Ishtar.<sup>1</sup> The sacred compound occupied a rectangular area of c. 150 × 100 m at the north-western foot of the Acropolis (fig. 1). It was limited on the northern side by a *temenos* wall,<sup>2</sup> and on the western and southern sides by the roads connecting the Lower Town with the north-western gateway and the Acropolis.<sup>3</sup> The Sacred Area was delimited to the east by the retaining wall of the Acropolis.<sup>4</sup> Two main religious buildings flanked a 40 m wide square, which was the cen-

tral space of the sacred compound. Although they have different alignments, being oriented respectively according to the northern and to the western roads, both Temple P2<sup>5</sup> and Monument P3 open towards this square, where a series of rock-cut cisterns were arrayed in two rows.<sup>6</sup> Religious practices took place in this central space, as well as on the top of the high terrace, as a number of findings and cultic installations demonstrate. The area also had a utilitarian function, serving as a draining device for collecting the rain water from the northwestern slopes of the Acropolis.<sup>7</sup>

## *The Sacred Area of Ishtar: Temples and Cultic Installations*

The area had been devoted to religious functions since the Early Bronze IV. The most recent evidence seems indeed to confirm the hypothesis that Building P4 of EB IVA (2400–2300 BC)

1. Excavations in this area of the tell started in 1988 and continued up to 1995 (Matthiae 1990a, 410–14; 1990b; 1991: 322–25; 1992; 1993a; 1994a; 1994b; 1995a; 1995b). For the dedication to the goddess Ishtar see Matthiae (1993a, 656; 1993b, 6). F.5238 was excavated in 1991, 1992 and 1994, while F.5327 was excavated in 1995.

2. M.4095 has been brought to light both to the east and to the west of the rear front of Temple P2, marking a natural step of 1.5 m between the sacred area and the neighboring palace district.

3. The southern road separates the Sacred Area from the adjacent northern façade of the Western Palace (Matthiae 1991, 321).

4. The foot of the rampart has been identified in the square EaVI5i. The rampart itself is badly preserved, having lost its outer revetment. Nevertheless, some soundings conducted in the late 1960s on the western slope of the Acropolis, immediately below Temple D, had already revealed that the slopes were subdivided into three terraces.

5. The front of Temple P2 is oriented to the south, as are the other Ebla temples (Temple D, Temple B1), except Temple N, dedicated to the Sun God Shamash, which is oriented to the east.

6. The general alignment of the cisterns is with the axis of the Temple P2.

7. In order to gather the rainwater, a long drain was built (C.5212, fig. 3), running parallel to the foot of the Acropolis and linking the different mouths of the cisterns. It was the presence of these drainage installations that gave the name of "Square of the Cisterns" to the area (Matthiae 1994a).



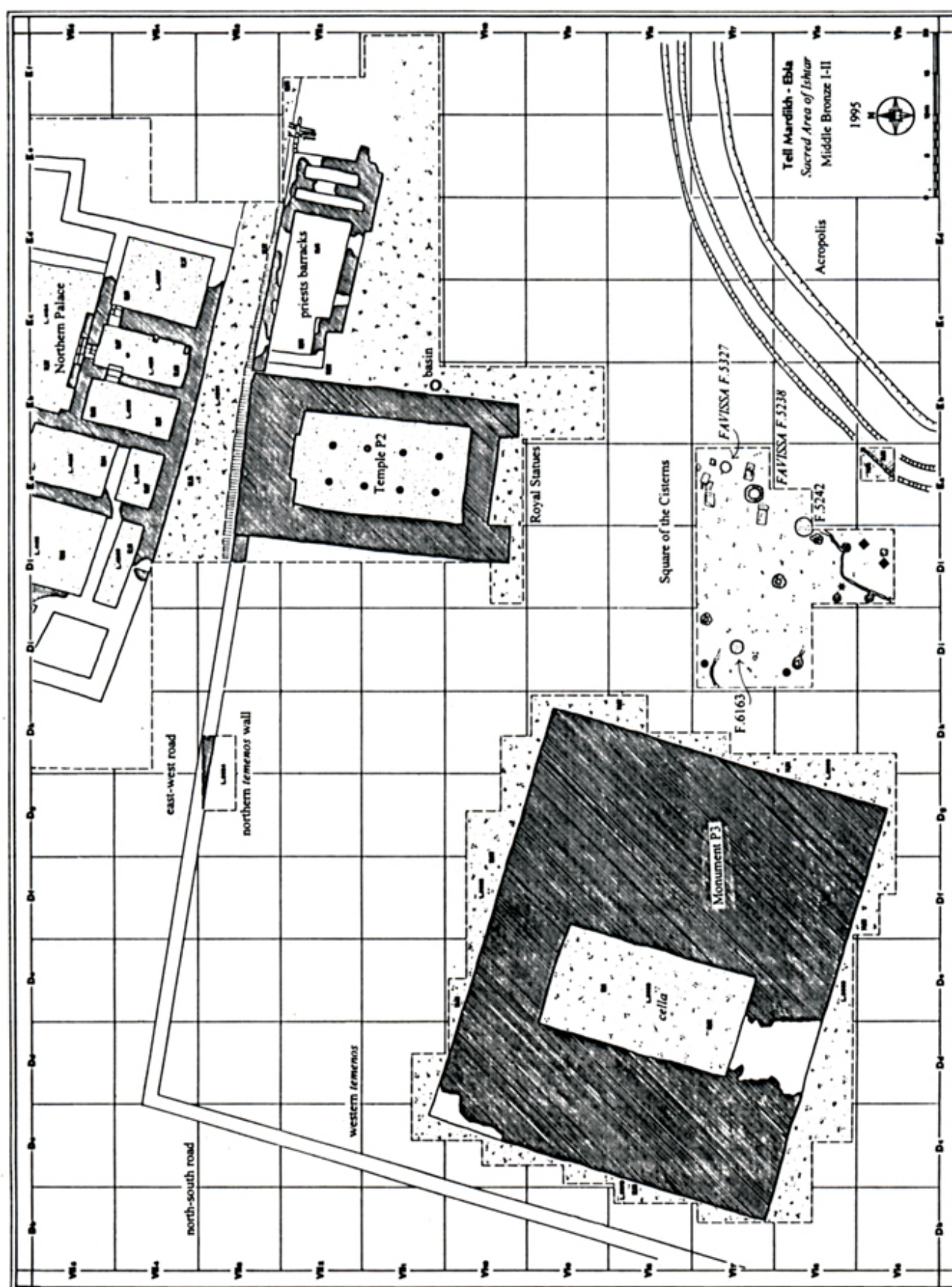


FIG. 1. Tell Markikh/Ebla: plan of the Sacred Area of Ishtar, Middle Bronze I-II.

◆ dog burials; \* sheep burial; ● statue; ● human and goat heads burial



depended on a public, perhaps religious, institution.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the presence of a small shrine in between the foundation walls of the Temple P2 (fig. 2), dating from the Early Bronze IVB,<sup>9</sup> is a clear indication of the continuity of religious utilization of the area from the Early to the Middle Bronze.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is not possible to have a detailed idea of the architecture of the earlier sanctuary, it is probable that the sacred area of the beginning of the Middle Bronze I had a form similar to that of the succeeding periods. The main features of the sacred compound, Temple P2, Monument P3, the *temenos* wall, as well as the large central square achieved their basic arrangement in this phase, and maintained it until the end of the Middle Bronze. While the long temple and the high terrace preserved their general shape during the whole period, the central square underwent several significant transformations, perhaps due to changes in cultic practice (§4).

Temple P2 is an *in antis* temple, 33.5 m long and 20 m wide (Matthiae 1993a, 648), with 4 m thick built of mud-brick side walls built on 3.5 m deep stone foundations. The cella, the roof of which was probably sustained by a double row of pillars (Matthiae 1990, fig. 1), had a large niche in the center of the rear wall, where the *simulacra* of the goddess Ishtar and her companion Hadad were sheltered.<sup>11</sup> Monumental towers (4 × 4 m) flank each side of the entrance porch, upon which stood statues of kings of Ebla (Matthiae 1989c; 1992; 1996b). Temple P2 belongs to a classic



FIG. 2. View from the northeast of the EB IVB shrine in between the foundation walls of Temple P2

Syro-Palestinian architectural typology, deeply rooted in north Syrian tradition,<sup>12</sup> also represented by the late MB IIB temples of Megiddo and Shechem.<sup>13</sup> Monument P3, on the other hand, is an exceptional building; nothing like it has been found among the excavated religious centers of the region, but P. Matthiae has convincingly identified it with the biblical *bamah*.<sup>14</sup> This high

8. This Building has an extension of ca. 600 sq m and housed storerooms, production units, and the workshop of an artisan, where numerous luxury goods were found (Marchetti and Nigro in press b).

9. The ceramic materials associated belong to the Mardikh IIB2 horizon.

10. This shrine belongs to the broad-room type, which had a large diffusion in this period, as shown by many contemporary examples, such as the shrines of Byblos (*Chapelle Orientale*: Saghieh 1983, pl. XXII) and Megiddo (late Temple 4040 with platform 4009 of strata XIVb–XIVa: Dunayevsky and Kempinski 1973, figs. 10–11; Kempinski 1989, 36–39, figs. 16–17; Nigro 1996, 218–20).

11. The cult of Hadad in Temple P2 is suggested by the finding of a fragmentary basalt stele of this god in the area (Matthiae 1993c; Matthiae et al. 1995, 396, n. 244).

12. North Syrian religious buildings from the middle of the third millennium, such as the *in antis* temples of Tell Khuera, from the beginning of the II<sup>nd</sup> Millennium, such as the Temple of Area C at Tell Bi'ya/Tuttul (1987, 40–46, fig. 22), as well as the so-called Temple of Dagan at Mari, testify to the early origin of this typology (for complete list see Margueron 1982, 130–36). At Mari one may also recognize a hybrid tradition of high terraces, which unifies western and eastern aspects and which comes down from the Early Dynastic Period, with the *Massif Rouge* and the *Massif à Redans* (Margueron 1985, 491–501).

13. Actually, Temple P2 is the prototype of a classic MB IIB religious typology, as the MB III Palestinian examples of Megiddo and Shechem demonstrate (Loud 1948, 102–4, fig. 248; Wright 1965, 87–91, fig. 41; Matthiae 1990b, 113–16).

14. Although it might be compared with some north Syrian religious buildings, such as the massive mud-brick structures of Mari (see n. 12), Monument P3 has to be clearly distinguished, due to its selfstanding structure and its function as





FIG. 3. Aerial view of Monument P3 from the northeast. In the foreground are the foundation walls of the southwestern tower of Temple P2

terrace, measuring  $5.5 \times 42$  m ( $100 \times 80$  Eblaic cubits) was built entirely of large limestone blocks that were laid in superimposed courses of decreasing height (fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> The walls have battered faces, since the blocks are set back 1/10 of a cubit each course. A large court ( $23.60 \times 12.60$  m,

i.e.,  $44 \times 24$  cubits) opens in the western half of the monument, with no entrance.<sup>16</sup>

At the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age, the area was paved with a layer of crushed limestone, pebbles, and sherds and the ruins of the collapsed or reemployed structures of Building P4

an independent open cult place. In fact, it represents a peculiar Syro-Palestinian religious architectural typology, which, in its first millennium derivatives was called *bamah* by the Biblical redactors (Matthiae 1993a, 650–51, especially n. 90).

15. The so-called Egyptian Royal Cubit corresponding to 0.525 m was adopted. P. Matthiae has noted that the limestone blocks are set back ca. 1 horizontal cubit for each 10 cubits in height (Matthiae 1993a, 643). However, since in the lower three courses, the height of the blocks decreases by 0.10 m each course (the lowest measures 0.8 m, the overlying 0.7 m, etc.: Matthiae 1993a, fig. 18), it is conceivable that the upper course had a regular height of a cubit (0.525 m). That means an overall height for the monument of ca. 3.15 m if their

courses were 5 of 4.72 m if they were 8 or of 5.75 if they were 10. In the latter case, as the inferior blocks were partially inserted into the floor, the real height of the monument was 5.5 m (i.e., 10 cubits) with a backwards displacement of the upper course of 1 cubit.

16. The courtyard was enclosed by the massive masonry of the building and had no entrance at the floor level on the southern side, where the structures had deteriorated in later times. The floor of the courtyard interrupts in a line, which preserves the follows of the blocks that had been plundered. P. Matthiae has surmised that this courtyard served as a precinct for sacred animals or plants of the goddess. This hypothesis is supported by the representations on a class of Old



of EB IVA were leveled. This operation was part of a more complex planned urban rebuilding, which included the reconstruction of the ramparts of the Acropolis with a stone retaining wall and other important transformations of the town.<sup>17</sup>

During this initial phase (Mardikh IIIA1, 2000–1900 BC), a peculiar installation was built in the middle of the square, enclosing a 2 m large cistern (P.5223). This installation, like Monument P3, was oriented to the northeast and southwest, and was surrounded by votive pits. Two dog burials were discovered to the south of the small precinct, while to the east and to the west were found two *bothroi* storing votive objects and food offerings.<sup>18</sup> In front of the eastern façade of Monument P3, several ritual deposits were excavated: a burial in which a human and a goat's heads were associated, a human deposition, a *bothros* and a disarticulated burial of a sheep.<sup>19</sup>

In the following phase the small precinct was buried under a new raised floor of the square and two votive cisterns were dug immediately to the northeast (Mardikh IIIA2, 1900–1800 BC). While there is no evidence for the ritual use of the earlier cistern (P.5223),<sup>20</sup> the two Middle Bronze IB cisterns were filled with votive offerings and ritual objects, indicating that they had been dug intentionally for religious purposes. This is fur-

ther demonstrated by the fact that they do not have a stone-built water-proof mouth, but were cut through the mud-brick eastern boundary wall of Building P4 (Matthiae 1993b, fig. 1), and then dug for a depth of 10–11 m into the virgin rock of the mound.

The central area of the Sacred Square continued as a crucial space for cultic activities during the entire Middle Bronze Age (fig. 4). Around 1850 BC the square was raised anew by a layer of beaten earth, the first cistern was sealed with a ritual filling, and a second one (F.5238) was opened immediately to its south. The latter was in use until the first decades of the Middle Bronze II, when another renovation of the Sacred Area caused the definitive abandonment of these votive wells and a new thick crushed limestone flooring of the square closed the cistern. However, four massive limestone blocks were placed forming a square precinct in order to distinguish the area of the *favissae*, where many votive materials had been piously buried.

The new floor of the sacred area was also used to gather rain water into a huge underground cistern with several inlets. Six stone-lined openings were arrayed in the southern half of the square in two rows parallel to the foot of the Acropolis, and to the east, a 12 m long drain (C.5212) collected the water into three of these. The central one remained in use until the beginning of the Late Bronze Age, when it was used as a *favissa* where the broken furniture of the destroyed Temple P2, such as probably the carved base of a basalt altar blocking its mouth,<sup>21</sup> and several offerings were deposited.<sup>22</sup>

Since no *bothroi* or votive pits are known from the square of late MB IIA, a change of cultic

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Syrian cylinder seals, where a stylized structure is depicted similar to the high terrace with crouching lions over it (Matthiae 1994a).

17. One main trait of the urban reorganization of Ebla after the destruction of Mardikh IIB1 was the new placement of the Royal Palace in the Lower Town (the Archaic Palace), the erection of massive fortifications of the Acropolis, which was separated from the Lower Town (on the contrary, one of the most characteristic features of the EB IVA town was the openness of the Royal Palace of the Archives with respect to the surrounding quarters of the Lower Town), and the erection of two major sacred areas one on the western Acropolis and the other in the Lower Town (Matthiae 1984, 110–12; Matthiae 1991, 314–16).

18. The largest of these pits, F.5242, was dug and filled in a secondary phase of utilization of the installation, since the pit had partially cut its eastern wall.

19. D.5314 in D1V15iv; around this burial other bones of sheep were scattered.

20. The only hint at a cultural interpretation is constituted by its central location inside the small precinct, roughly at the center of the Sacred Area.

21. The filling and the closing of P.5213 by means of the altar TM.91.P.717 occurred just after the end of the MBA, at the beginning of LB I (Mardikh IVA), although this peculiar type of basalt altar should rather be dated to the end of MB IB or beginning of MB IIA (Matthiae 1994b, 176–77, figs. 3–4, n. 54).

22. In the uppermost two meters, the filling was exclusively made up of earth and bones, while the lower filling, partly excavated during the 1996 season, was full of pottery vessels and small objects.

The large number of sheep bones suggests the performance of a ritual consumption, perhaps to be related with a communal rite.







activities may be surmised. Moreover, the absence of particular cult devices in the center of the sacred square suggests a different locus for religious practices. These were shifted to an area in close proximity to the sides of Monument P3 and Temple P2, to the porch with the statues of the Ebla kings.<sup>23</sup> On the eastern side of the temple was found a round limestone basin that was similar to the one brought to light in the square facing the Temple D on the Acropolis,<sup>24</sup> and fragments of a carved basin attest to the presence of cultic furniture similar to that found in the other MB temples of Ebla (Matthiae 1996a). Both were presumably used for ritual ablutions that preceded sacrifices or visits to the temple.<sup>25</sup> Some barracks occupied the area east of the Temple P2, serving the priests and other installations connected with the cult. A coarsely made basalt statue of a man was found in front of Monument P3 and it is possible that this was a votive statue of a worshiped ancestor.<sup>26</sup>

Most of the cisterns were discarded in the final phase of utilization of the sacred area (Mardikh IIIB2, 1700–1600 BC), and the drains were partially filled. The limestone blocks, which bounded the area formerly occupied by the *favissae*, kept their position, although no further votive deposits were made in the area. Numerous pits, dug in the floor of the square (sometimes due to the collapsing of underground graves), filled with stones and sherds, sometimes containing a few objects and miniature vessels, provide ample evidence of a structural and functional decline. There is no evidence of animal sacrifice from this phase, although some scattered burnt bones testify to the practice of food offerings in the area.

23. The royal statues probably flanked the entrance to Temple P2, thus indicating that the sovereigns were under the protection of Ishtar, and that their authority was religiously legitimated (Matthiae 1989c; 1990a, 423–31; 1992, 112).

24. This temple, like Temple P2, was dedicated to Ishtar, in her role as protector of the Eblaic dynasty (Matthiae 1986, 352–54).

25. The presence of water installations in the vicinity of the temples is frequent at Ebla.

26. F. Pinnock (Matthiae et al. 1995, 393, no. 239) has published a stele of a similar style found in the sacred area of the Acropolis (in front of the Temple D). For some comments about this coarse production see Matthiae (1987, 450, n. 7).

### *The Inner Stratification of the favissae*

The stratigraphical analysis of the ritual fillings of the *favissae* (fig. 5) provides numerous suggestions about the cultic practices to which the sacred cisterns were related.

The first cistern (F.5327) was filled with materials dating from the first half of the nineteenth century BC, thrown into it during ritual practices. The shaft has an elongated shape with a 6 m long cylindrical neck (elevation 415–409 m a.s.l.) with a regular diameter of 1.1 m, which becomes 1.5 m at 408, 2.1 m at 406, and 2.5 m at the bottom (elevation 404.2 m). The deposits consisted of three different layers of earth and archaeological materials, separated by fills. The lower layer contained numerous small jars with ovoid body and everted rim, which were deposited in the cistern as containers for food offerings.<sup>27</sup> They were found in a stratum of gray earth rich in charcoal and ash. A 3.75 m layer of earth and ash overlies this first group of offerings, including numerous animal bones, fragmentary pots and objects. While the first stratum contained almost complete materials, probably because they were deposited on the bottom of the cistern, the second seems to include only discarded objects and fragmentary vessels. This thick deposit containing dismissed materials was sealed with a fill of virgin soil. On the top of this stratum there was a thick layer of bowls and small vessels containing burnt food offerings. The bowls were deposited in rows and numbered more than one hundred specimens. In some cases the vessels still maintained the original contents. Dove and goat bones were mixed with charcoal together with an as yet unidentified substance that had stained the walls of the bowls. One cannot exclude the possibility that they sometimes also contained ritually broken or burnt objects, numerous examples of which have been found nearby. A sterile filling stratum, 1 m thick, of a fine textured reddish earth, containing nothing but some small burnt wooden sticks was laid on

27. The vast majority of these jars was sealed with small ceramic disks used as caps, which have been found scattered in the filling, and perhaps contained animal fat or a similar stuff, according to the preliminary analyses.



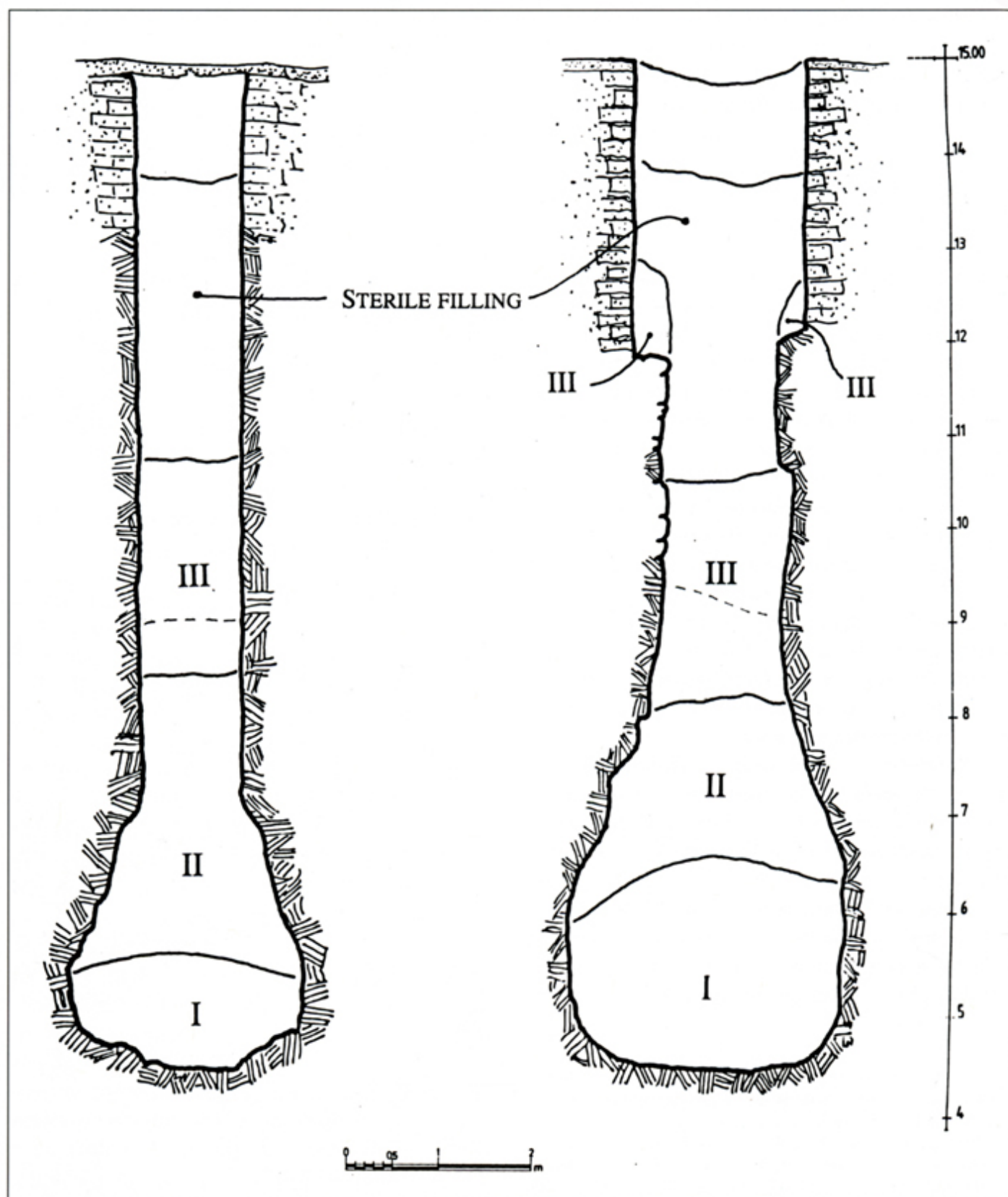


FIG. 5. Schematic section of the *favissae* F5327 and F5238



top of the preceding layer. The earth was brought in from outside the town, apparently in order to seal the ritual deposit with ritually pure soil. Finally, the *favissa* was closed by a cap made of sherds and broken vessels,<sup>28</sup> among which were some offering bowls.<sup>29</sup>

The second cistern, F.5238, is larger than the first one (1.1 to 3.5 m in diameter), and has a more complicated stratigraphy largely due to internal subsiding. The cistern is bottle-shaped and sunk almost 8 m into the rock, with the upper 3 m cutting through the mud brick wall of Building P4. The upper edge of the rock was reinforced with a stone collar. Three layers of the filling corresponding to ritual activities have been distinguished. The lowest layer (F.5238/i) consisted of broken vessels forming a cone-shaped pile, thus testifying that it represents an accumulation of materials thrown from above. It consists mostly of crushed medium and small size jars and other objects. Around and over it are numerous fragments of limestone that had fallen from the upper walls of the cistern, presumably at a time during which the *favissa* was out of use. Immediately over this layer, there was an intentional filling of gray earth with scattered pottery and objects (F.5238/ii). Although the large number of bowls suggests a use similar to that of the third layer of F.5327, their sparse distribution points to a comparison with the second layer of the latter.<sup>30</sup> The overlying 1 m stratum of sterile reddish earth presumably represents a ritual sealing of F.5238/ii or an intentional preparation for a second layer of offerings. The successive layer is in fact a thick stratum of gray earth composed of ashes, charcoal, burnt animal bones, and smashed vessels and

objects. The quantity of materials found in this layer is noteworthy; more than 200 complete vessels and 100 objects were squashed one over the other. This stratum originally also occupied the upper section of the cistern (dug through the mud bricks of Building P4), but after the closing of the *favissa*,<sup>31</sup> more precisely after the abandonment of the town at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, an internal collapse caused the central part of the filling to sink, so that the inner stratigraphy was shifted. Due to this inner subsiding, the stone lined pit,<sup>32</sup> filled with sherds and sealed by the thick floor of crushed limestone of the MB II square, which constituted the upper cover of the filling, collapsed into the cistern together with one of the huge blocks flanking the mouth.

## 2. Food Offerings and Discarded Vessels: The Pottery Assemblages

The majority of the finds from the *favissae* were ceramic vessels.<sup>33</sup> They were thrown or deposited in the sacred cisterns containing food offerings or precious liquids.<sup>34</sup> These pottery materials are of outstanding interest because of the chronological homogeneity of each stratified assemblage, which provides a representative typology of a precise archaeological phase. Moreover, due to the particular destination of the filling, the ceramic inventories are mostly composed of complete shapes, something that is rare in inner Syrian sites from the MB IB–IIA periods.

Three chronologically different pottery assemblages can be distinguished. The earliest is from F.5327, which may be dated to the beginning of

28. The presence of charcoal and objects as well in this small deposit suggests that it also descends from a burial ritual or something similar.

29. It has not been possible to establish whether these bowls actually contained offerings when they were deposited in this cap, or if they are simply discarded vessels.

30. The fillings of the two sacred cisterns show several similarities. Both have a large group of small and medium size jars on the bottom, which is followed by a layer with discarded pottery materials, temple fittings and objects. The successive stratum is comprised, in both cisterns, of numerous bowls deposited with offerings. A sealing strata of pure soil probably constitutes the ritual closing of the *favissae*.

31. Only the materials lying on the round collar of the section hewn into the rock of the *favissa* held their original position, while the others collapsed downwards.

32. This was present only on the southeastern side of the mouth of the *favissa*.

33. The three layers of F.5238 are numbered from bottom to top "i, ii, iii" and they will be cited so; for the chronology of the *favissae* see §5; here it suffices to recall that F.5327 and F.5238/i date to MB IB (nineteenth century BC), while F.5238/ii–iii date to the beginning of MB IIA (first half of the eighteenth century BC).

34. The analysis of all the archaeobiological materials is currently being carried out by Claudia Wachter-Sarkady, Munich University.

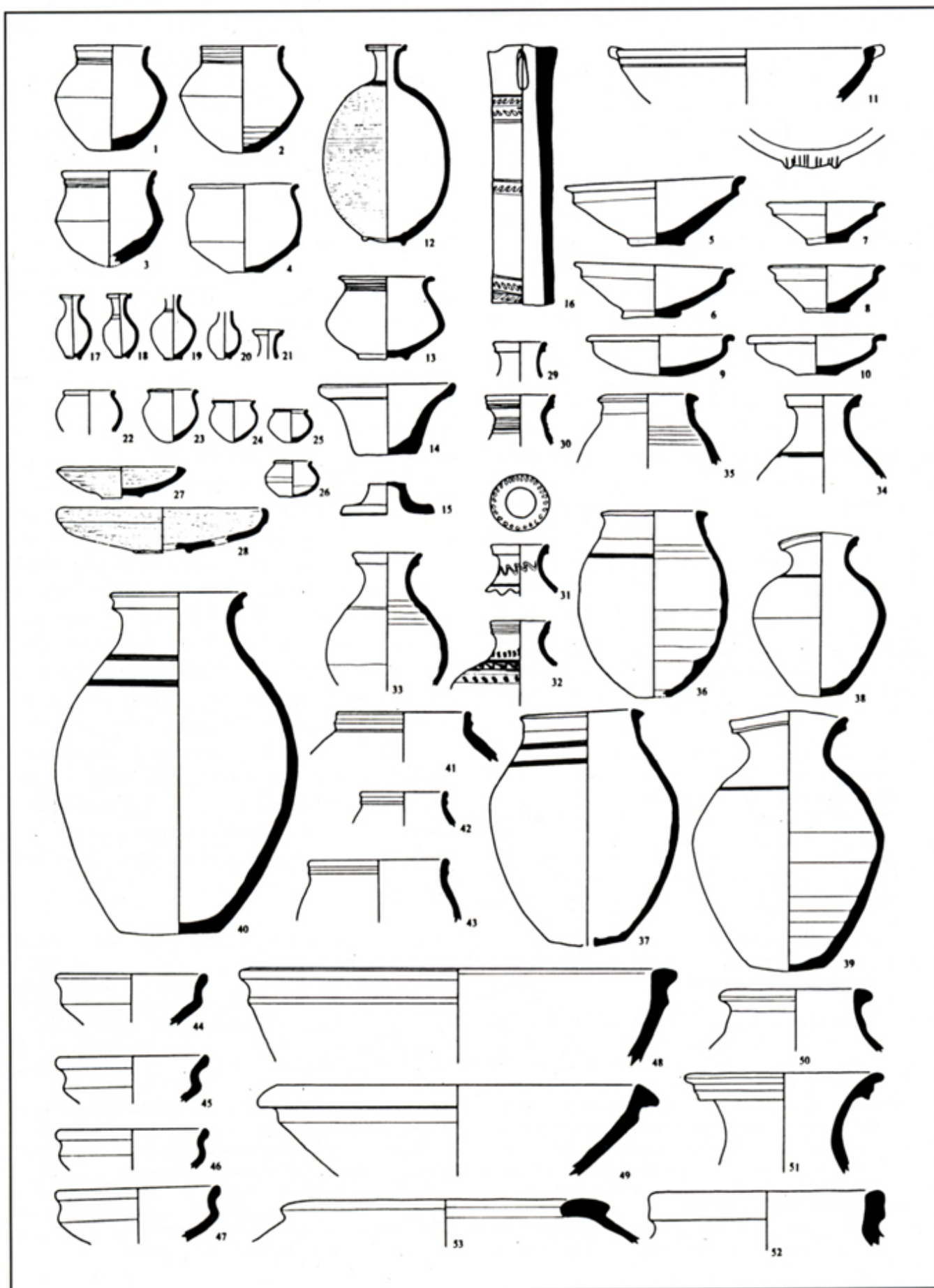


FIG. 6. Vessels from F.5327 (MB IB)

Fig.	Reference number	Findspot	Strat.	Period	Class	Color	Surface Treatment
1	TM.95.P251/12	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/3	grooved on the neck
2	TM.95.P240/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	grooved on the neck
3	TM.95.P251/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/6	grooved on the neck
4	TM.95.P243/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/3	
5	TM.95.P250/4	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	2.5YR6/6	
6	TM.95.P230/101	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/3	
7	TM.95.P230/7	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
8	TM.95.P233/12	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR6/4	
9	TM.95.P231/3	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5Y8/2	
10	TM.95.P231/2	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	5Y8/2	
11	TM.95.P263/9	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/3	outer whitish slip
12	TM.95.P263/2	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/3	whitish burnished slip
13	TM.95.P263/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	10YR7/2	gray slip; grooved neck
14	TM.95.P263/3	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/4	
15	TM.95.P263/4	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/6	
16	TM.95.P257/4	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	2.5YR6/6	outer gray slip.
17	TM.95.P244/7	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	7.5YR7/6	black burnished slip
18	TM.95.P244/8	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	7.5YR7/6	black burnished slip
19	TM.95.P244/4	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR4/1	black burnished slip
20	TM.95.P244/6	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
21	TM.95.P244/3	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
22	TM.95.P244/9	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
23	TM.95.P244/11	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
24	TM.95.P244/12	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	BBW	10YR4/1	black burnished slip
25	TM.95.P244/13	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
26	TM.95.P243/22	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	10YR7/3	
27	TM.95.P244/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
28	TM.95.P244/2	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
29	TM.95.P238/26	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/3	
30	TM.95.P238/41+	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR8/2	grooved on the body
31	TM.95.P238/17+	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/4	scrabbled wavy decoration
32	TM.95.P238/36	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/4	scrabbled wavy decoration
33	TM.95.P238/29	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/3	
34	TM.95.P238/5	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/6	
35	TM.95.P259/29	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
36	TM.95.P238/46	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	2.5Y8/2	combed band shoulder
37	TM.95.P259/30	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	2 combed band shoulder
38	TM.95.P255/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	combed band shoulder
39	TM.95.P254/4	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	combed band shoulder
40	TM.95.P254/3	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	combed band shoulder
41	TM.95.P255/37	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR7/2	
42	TM.95.P255/39	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR7/2	
43	TM.95.P235/40	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR7/2	
44	TM.95.P253/29	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	10YR7/3	
45	TM.95.P253/20	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR7/6	
46	TM.95.P253/35	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR7/6	
47	TM.95.P253/19	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IA	SW	7.5YR6/6	
48	TM.95.P253/6	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
49	TM.95.P253/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/6	
50	TM.95.P239/9	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	PW	2.5Y8/2	
51	TM.95.P239/1	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	PW	10YR7/4	
52	TM.95.P261/5	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	PW	10YR8/1	
53	TM.95.P261/13	F.5327	IIIA2	MB IB	PW	7.5YR7/3	

N.B. "Color" refers to the core; SW=Simple Ware; KW=Kitchen Ware; PW=Preservation Ware; MW=Miniature Ware; BBW=Black Burnished Ware.







MB IB, the second is represented by the materials of the lower layer of F.5238, dating from the end of the same phase, and the last consists of the vessels found in the two upper layers of the same votive cistern (F.5238/ii-iii), which cover the very beginning of the following period (MB IIA).

In the assemblage of F.5327 (fig. 6), the most common type of vessel is the bowl with high carination<sup>35</sup> used as a container of food offerings (fig. 6.5-8). They were filled with burnt bones of doves and goats and with charcoal. A second type of bowl, extremely rare in domestic contexts, is made of a greenish porous fabric and has a flat horizontally everted rim (fig. 6.9-10). Some specimens of collared bowls, of the early type, occur in this assemblage (fig. 6.1-3). The presence of a carinated bowl (fig. 6.4) similar to the so-called Gublite bowls<sup>36</sup> of the high type (Montet 1929, pl. LXXI, no. 607), seems to corroborate the hypothesis that during its formative phase strong links existed between the collared bowl and some Levantine prototypes.<sup>37</sup> The contemporary

35. The prevalent type of this phase (Mardikh IIIA2) is that with disk-base. This feature decreases during the second half of the nineteenth century, in favor of the plain-base. Three different types have been distinguished according to size. Smaller bowls, which are rare in the contemporary domestic contexts, are instead numerous in the assemblage of the *favissa*, presumably due to the votive utilization of these small vessels.

36. W. F. Albright (1933, 69) recognized the type of carinated bowl imitating metallic prototypes as a hallmark of the initial phase of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) in the Levant. Since the most representative specimens of this typology were those found in the Montet Jar from Byblos, dated to the very beginning of the MBA (Tufnell, Ward 1966, 214, fig. 9.209-10), this type was called "Gublite," although it is spread not only throughout the Levant (frequently in a red-slipped production), but also into inland Syria-Palestine (Tubb 1983, 49-50; Gerstenblith 1983, 79; Nigro in press, fig. 1.14-15).

37. The progressive formation of the collared bowl occurred during the last quarter of the twentieth century and first quarter of the nineteenth century BC. Since this shape reached its canonic form around 1850 BC, the earlier specimens, such as those from F.5327, which differ from the later ones especially from the point of view of the fabric used, may be considered proto-collared bowls. The derivation of the collared bowl from the so-called Gublite bowl is suggested by a series of sharply carinated bowls imitating metallic prototypes, which presents a distinct neck, sometimes decorated by a series of grooves. These characteristic MB IA-B transitional types are rarely attested at Ebla, but are very well-represented at Hama

attestation of these hallmarks points to a dating from the very beginning of MB IB for the entire assemblage. The same date is indicated by a bowl (fig. 6.13) that represents a diagnostic MB I type also known at Hama.<sup>38</sup> It descends from the same tradition of the Gublite bowl, even though it has a gentler carination and shows several grooves on the short flaring neck.<sup>39</sup>

The group of vessels containing food offerings also comprises a series of archaic bowls, belonging to two typical MB IA classes, that provide further proof for an initial MB IB dating of F.5327.<sup>40</sup> These are the bowls with slight carination (fig. 6.44-47) and the large bowls with outer expanded rim and high pronounced carination (fig. 6.48-49). The latter were used as plates and were presumably deposited in the cistern with food. Both are vestigial types of the preceding period.

A conspicuous group of miniature vessels is surely of votive purpose, as well as a series of peculiar vases not otherwise known at Ebla. The miniature vessels belong to two different productions. They are usually made of a yellowish high sieved fabric (Miniature Ware), but sometimes also of Black Burnished Ware (see below). The two classes may also be distinguished according to the shapes. The forms that imitate vases of the Simple Ware are usually made of the yellowish ware. In this case, the miniature vases are presumably intended to symbolically substitute the real ones. Conversely, miniature bottles, such as the containers of perfumes or precious oils (fig. 6.17-20), were always made of Black Burnished Ware.

among the materials from the Silos (from Silos 16: 3B913, 3B912, 3H982; from Silos 17: 3A898, 3A900, 3A895, 3A897; from Silos 15: 3B926), from Grave I (5A791, 5A792), in the tombs of Selimiyeh (Louvre AO12326), Osmaniye (AO12353; AO12366), and Tomb I of Mishrifeh/Qatna (AO9527).

38. This type is attested to in Silos 15 (3B926) and 17 (3A896, 3A897) and in Grave I (5A791, 5A792) at Hama (Fugmann 1958, fig. 110, pl. X).

39. Like some bowls inspired by metallic prototypes (see n. 36), this unique vessel is made of a low fired fabric of the Cooking Ware, with big sandy inclusions. It was coated with a heavy gray slip, in order to make it waterproof.

40. The stratified materials of this initial MBA phase (Mardikh IIIA1, MB IA, ca. 2000-1900 BC) come from the excavations of the second reconstruction of the Archaic Palace in Area P North at Ebla (Matthiae 1995a; 1995b).



The ovoid bottles with inner stepped rim and ring-base are the typical shape of the latter production (fig. 6.21), although a complete specimen (fig. 6.12), made of the high sieved yellowish ware, has been found intact, thus indicating that it was carefully deposited into the cistern. The surface presents a whitish wheel-burnished slip, which aims at reproducing the brilliant look of the metallic prototypes.<sup>41</sup> Another common miniature vase is the deep bowl with simple everted rim and rounded bottom. Four specimens are made of Black-Burnished Ware (fig. 6.22–25), while only one of the more common yellowish fabric (fig. 6.26). Also several miniature bowls with high carination, imitating normal size specimens, have been found.

Two bowls with inturned rim and ring base (fig. 6.27–28) complete the group of Black Burnished vessels found in F.5327.<sup>42</sup> This production is characterized not only by the specific composition of the fabric, which incorporates black quartz sand, but especially by the surface treatment, which includes a thick black slip and a horizontal and vertical burnishing. The shapes of Black Burnished Ware generally derive from metallic prototypes, as is indicated by diagnostic morphological traits such as the pronounced carination and ridges (fig. 6.4) and the ring base, as well as, of course, by the lustrous look obtained by means of the burnish. However, in the case of the small miniature jars, it is hard to identify a metallic derivation, although some small silver vases found in the Royal Tombs of Byblos may be compared with

the miniature vessels from the *favissa* (Montet 1929: pl. CXVI.790).<sup>43</sup>

Among the vessels with a specific cultic purpose,<sup>44</sup> the incense burners were especially well-attested. They have always been found in a fragmentary state of preservation,<sup>45</sup> presumably because they were intentionally broken before being thrown into the sacred cistern. They were usually smashed into three parts: the high cylindrical pedestal (fig. 6.16), the upper bowl, and their joining section.<sup>46</sup> This fact suggests that they were objects of a rite of obliteration, since, due to their character of temple furniture, especially devoted to the cult of the goddess (by means of perfume burning), they must be destroyed as they were removed from their original function.

Some vases retrieved from F.5327 are not represented in the MBA assemblage known from palace and domestic contexts. A bowl with out-grooved rim and bar knobbed handle is made of Miniature Ware and shows an incised decoration on the rim (fig. 6.11). P. Gerstenblith had already identified it as an indicative MB IB shape (1983, 80, fig. 30).<sup>47</sup> A special vessel is a bowl with flaring walls and plain base (fig. 6.14). It might be a piece of the cultic equipment, since it is without

43. The deposit 9445–9462 of the *Chapelle Orientale* also demonstrates the votive nature of Miniature Ware (Dunand 1950, pl. LXX). Other Miniature Ware vessels have been found in religious contexts at Ugarit (Period "Moyen 2") (Schaeffer 1949, fig. 110.1, 8, 14, 25, 27–37).

44. It has not been possible to fit in the fragments of two jars (TM.95.P.247/1–2) with applied cups on the shoulders, which presumably were ritual vessels. It may be surmised that such vases were used in ritual where liquids were involved.

45. No restorable specimens have been retrieved. Since these vases were part of the temple equipment, they were partly buried after having been devoutly broken in order to impede their further use. Thus, they testify to the occurrence of an obliteration rite.

46. As is known from several representations in glyptics, these burners were used to burn incense in honor of the deities and were placed in front of the statues of the gods. In an unpublished Old Syrian cylinder seal, now in the Louvre (AO29434; see n. 93), a king represented in front of the great goddess holds an incense burner of this type in the right hand.

47. Especially the specimen from the Palestinian cemetery of 'Ain es-Samiyeh (Gerstenblith 1983, fig. 30.20) is similar to that from F.5327.

41. This typical MB IB vessel is rarely attested at Ebla. The only specimen so far known was found in the Tomb of the Lord of the Goats (TM.78.QIB.64). This kind of bottle is in fact largely used in funerary equipment, as is demonstrated by the assemblages of Graves VI (5B381, 5B384, 5B385, 5B401) and II (5B494) at Hama, and the tombs of Selimiyeh (A. Zaquq p.c.) and Osmaniyyeh (AO12360, AO12362) where it belongs to Black Burnished Ware. This type was strongly related to the burnished piriform juglet with inner stepped rim and ring base, largely spread in the Levant in the Middle Bronze I.

42. Especially the small type is a peculiar shape also known from Tomb I at Mishrifeh (AO11224), apart from other specimens, now in the Louvre (AO28697, AO29342, AO29365).



FIG. 7. Vessels from F5238/i (MB IB)

Fig.	Reference number	Findspot	Strat.	Period	Class	Color	Surface Treatment
1	TM.94.P1008/1	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/4	
2	TM.94.P1103/9	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
3	TM.94.P1103/10	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
4	TM.94.P1102/10	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	2.5YR6/6	
5	TM.94.P1102/26	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5YR6/6	
6	TM.94.P1102/30	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5YR5/6	
7	TM.94.P1102/100	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5YR7/6	
8	TM.94.P1101/4	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/3	
9	TM.94.P1101/42	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
10	TM.91.P842/7	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/4	
11	TM.94.P1114/2	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR8/3	
12	TM.94.P1101/22	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	7.5YR7/4	
13	TM.94.P1101/34	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR 7/4	
14	TM.94.P1114/12	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/3	
15	TM.94.P1006/5	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	7.5YR6/4	
16	TM.94.P1010/2	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/4	
17	TM.94.P1110/22	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/4	
18	TM.94.P1110/20	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5YR8/2	
19	TM.92.P158/44	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/4	
20	TM.94.P1006/4	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5YR8/3	
21	TM.92.P158/7	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	10YR7/3	combed band
22	TM.94.P1004/4	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	10YR7/4	
23	TM.92.P158/28	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	10YR8/3	combed band
24	TM.94.P1110/34	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/2	
25	TM.94.P1110/33	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	MW	2.5Y8/4	
26	TM.94.P1113/25	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
27	TM.94.P1113/3	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
28	TM.92.PX15	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
29	TM.94.P1113/20	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	5YR6/6	brownish red burnished slip
30	TM.94.P1113/2	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
31	TM.94.P1113/1	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	BBW	10YR6/1	black burnished slip
32	TM.94.P1109/1	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	10YR4/1	buff outer slip
33	TM.94.P1104/2	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	10YR4/1	buff outer slip
34	TM.92.P177/15	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	2.5YR6/8	reddish-brown burnished slip
35	TM.94.P1109/22	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	5YR5/6	reddish-brown burnished slip
36	TM.92.P177/9	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/6	reddish-brown burnished slip
37	TM.94.P1109/34	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	KW	2.5YR6/8	buff outer slip
38	TM.94.P1107/1	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/3	combed and indented bands
39	TM.94.P1107/4	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
40	TM.94.P1005/8	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR8/3	
41	TM.94.P1107/7	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	10YR7/4	
42	TM.94.P1007/1	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5Y8/6	scrabbled and indented decor
43	TM.94.P1101/100	F5238/i	IIIA2	MB IB	SW	5Y8/2	

N.B. "Color" refers to the inner core; SW=Simple Ware; KW=Kitchen Ware; PW=Preservation Ware; PtW=Painted Ware; MW=Miniature Ware; BBW=Black burnished Ware.



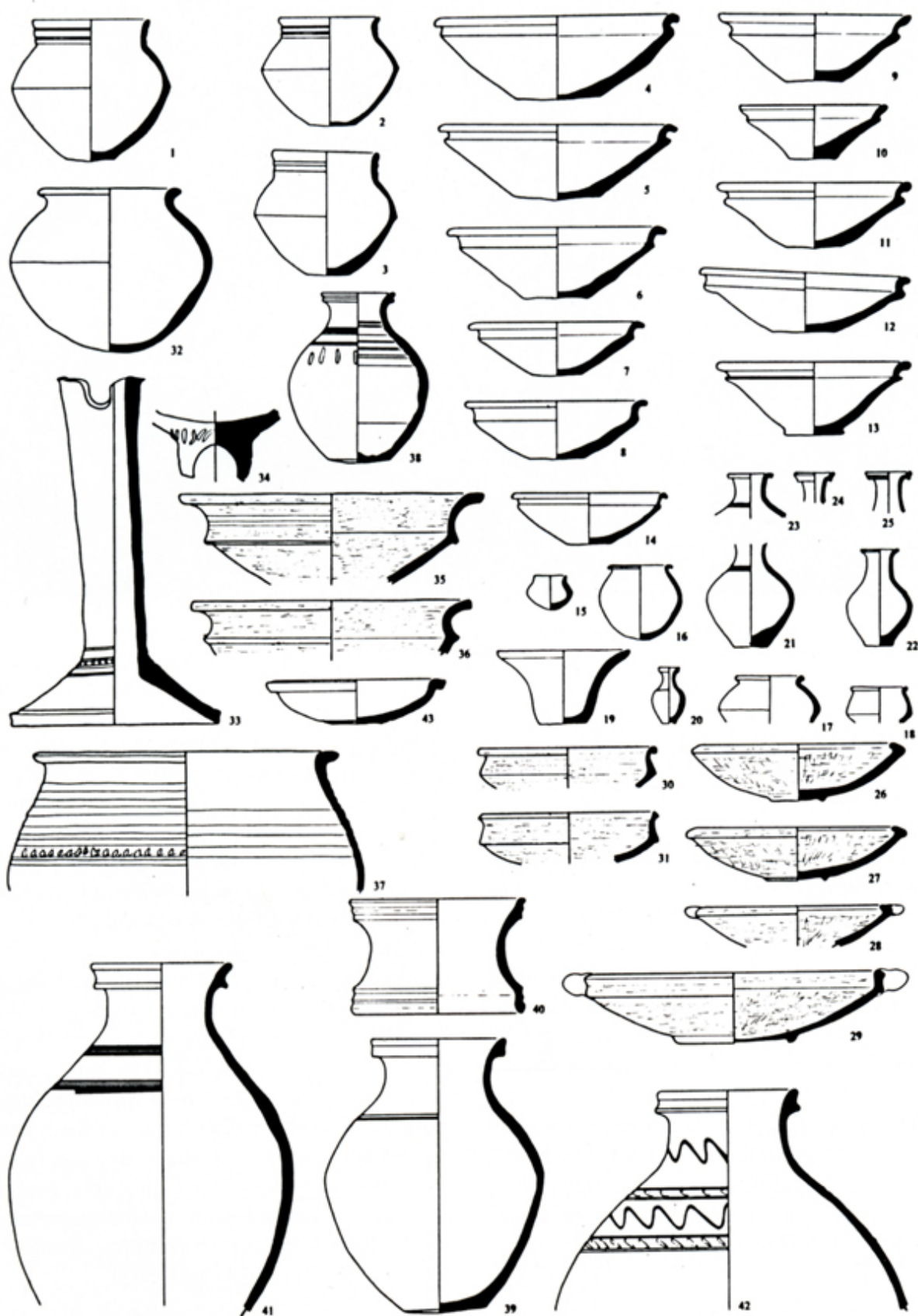






FIG. 8. Medium size jars with everted rim from F.5327 (layer I)

comparison at Ebla, except for an identical specimen from F.5238 (fig. 7.19).<sup>48</sup>

The Miniature bottles testify to another kind of offering, the performance of which is also attested to by numerous small ovoid jars (12–15 cm high) of Simple Ware. These have in fact been found in large numbers in the votive cistern. They usually have double everted rim (fig. 6.29, 33–34, 38) and are characterized by a peculiar grooved, combed and indented decoration (fig. 6.30–32), which is not so frequent in the jars of the same profile from different contexts. These decorated vessels were in fact deposited in the cisterns containing precious substances or oils, as is demonstrated by the finding of numerous clay lids with diameters corresponding to the rims of the jars themselves (fig. 6.15) and by the remains of these semi-liquid materials on the surfaces of the vessels.

48. An interesting parallel was found in Mishrifeh in the vicinity of the open cult place (Mesnil du Buisson 1935, 118, fig. 38).

Among the closed shapes, other particularities of the findings may be outlined. Small and medium size jars of the same type were presumably associated, constituting a sort of little service (fig. 6.36–37, 38–39). While small jars contained substances such as oils or perfumes, present on the inner walls of medium size jars of the very popular MB I type with double everted rim and combed band at the bottom of the neck (fig. 6.40), were thick incrustations of an animal fat, also detected on other vessels, but presumably kept only inside these jars (fig. 8).<sup>49</sup> The pottery assemblage is not homogeneous, especially from the point of view of the distribution of the types, and the great quantity of medium size jars found on the bottom of the cistern, probably containing food supplies, may be interpreted as destined for or resulting from cultic consumption, rather than as personal offerings to Ishtar.

49. Chemical and physical analyses have not yet furnished any more detailed information about these materials.



Besides the evidence of the slightly carinated bowls quoted above, the dating of this assemblage from the initial phase of the Middle Bronze IB is confirmed by the findings of a series of jars with short ridged rim and biconical body, which recalls a common MB IA class of jars (see Nigro in press, fig. 1.24–26). To the same early MBA pottery horizon also belong some fragments of preservation jars (fig. 6.50–53), which are important chronological indicators.<sup>50</sup> Of course, these are not in their primary archaeological location. Nevertheless, they display some classic types of the period such as that with outer expanded rim and slight ridge at the middle of the neck (fig. 6.50), that with shallow grooved rim (fig. 6.52), or that without neck and swollen horizontal rim (fig. 6.53), either descending from the triple grooved rim jar and the hole-mouth jar of the EB IV. Some fragments of clay basins, with applied rope decoration along the borders, testify that some pieces of the temple equipment, such as the clay vats or basins were also thrown in the *favissa*.

The pottery assemblage of F.5238 is almost twice as large as that of F.5327 and includes three stratified groups of vessels. The vases found in the bottom layer of the filling still belong to MB IB, though slightly later than those found in F.5327. This is the flourishing period for the collared bowl, as the basic type of Simple Ware. The specimens found are of two different sizes (fig. 7.1–3). However, the most attested vessel is the bowl with high carination,<sup>51</sup> which represented the ordinary offering thrown or deposited in the sacred cistern by the worshipers. The lower layer of the *favissa* has, in fact, provided more than 150 specimens of this vase (fig. 7.4–13). They were grouped with a mass of burnt bones and charcoal, and may be interpreted as the result of a single cultic activity.

50. Two different outcomes of the triple grooved rim jar of the EB IV may be distinguished. One preserved the band structure of the rim, losing the clear distinction of the grooves (fig. 6.52), the other conversely maintained this latter trait, but in a shorter and more everted rim (fig. 6.51).

51. The adoption of the disk base in this shape sharply decreases during the last part of MB IB, and the flat base becomes prevalent. The smallest specimens show a more conservative tendency with respect to the disk base (figs. 6.7–8; 7.13).

At the bottom of the cistern, a large group of small and medium size jars has been found. The greatest number were jars with double everted rim (fig. 7.39, 41–42). Since they are frequently not complete, they probably did not contain anything when they were thrown in the *favissa*. A rite of obliteration is thus the most convincing hypothesis for this kind of ceramic burial. Sometimes they are accompanied by pot stands (fig. 7.40) or present fine decorations (fig. 7.42), suggesting that they had belonged to peculiar equipment.<sup>52</sup>

F.5238/i has provided a large corpus of special vessels, including the bottles (fig. 7.20–25), of the types with simple everted rim (fig. 7.21–23) or with narrow neck and stepped rim (fig. 7.24–25), frequently burnished on the ovoid body. A related class is that of Miniature Ware, the forms of which imitate the same bottles or the large bowls with everted rim (fig. 7.15–16). An extremely sieved whitish fabric, with a smoothed surface characterizes the Miniature Ware. Among the vessels that were thus imitated are bowls with high carination (fig. 7.14), small jars (fig. 7.20) and Gublite bowls (fig. 7.17–18), testifying to the conservative trend of this votive production.

A contiguous ceramic class is that of small combed jars with applied figurines on the neck. They represent single or double headed birds, possibly doves, with open wings.<sup>53</sup> In one exceptional case a lion-headed eagle (Anzû) may be recognized (fig. 9; Matthiae et al. 1995: 417, no. 274). The bottom presents a high columned pedestal (fig. 10.28) and, sometimes, a small spout (fig. 10.30), perhaps an outlet for liquids.<sup>54</sup> It suggests

52. The numerous vases retrieved from the *favissae* are decorated only by incised motives, such as the combed horizontal bands, very popular in the Middle Bronze Age, or the scrabbled wavy lines. No painted vases have been found, thus suggesting that at Ebla either Painted Ware was preferred in funerary contexts or that the substance usually stored in painted pitchers, jugs and jars—i.e., the wine—was not an object of ritual offerings.

53. Frances Pinnock, to whom we are grateful for much information, is studying the entire corpus of the Applied Ware from Ebla.

54. No complete vessels of this type are known from Ebla, although the entire profile may be reconstructed in some cases (TM.94.P.1002/1), as in an unprovenanced specimen from the Orontes Valley, now in the Louvre (AO12795).





FIG. 9. Neck of a Miniature Ware jar with applied figurines of a lion-headed eagle (Anzû) and two birds from F.5238/ii

a cultic use of these vases in libation practices.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the peculiar decoration testifies to their belonging to the temple equipment; their consistently incomplete state of preservation demonstrates that they were already broken when they were thrown into the *favissa*.

Several fragmentary incense burners have also been found in F.5238/i. They have the classic MB IB shape with a high pedestal, composed of a large foot and a cylindrical body decorated with scabbled horizontal lines framing oblique strokes (fig. 7.33). A rope-like ridge (fig. 7.34) always marks the inset of the bowl on the pedestal and immediately below it lies a triangular opening aimed at favoring the circulation of the air. The

55. In the MB II, a coarse production of Applied Ware spreads, as it is demonstrated by numerous findings in palace and domestic contexts. These vases are generally decorated with multiple rows of schematized bird's heads on the upper part of the body (Matthiae et al. 1995, 455, nos. 363–67).

MB IB burners present a rounded everted rim, with a pronounced carination, reinforced on the outer side by a protruding ridge (fig. 7.35–36). They are made of the reddish coarse fabric of Cooking Ware, but are coated with a thick burnished slip. The presence of several cooking pots suggests that some offerings included processed food. These offerings were contained in small globular cooking pots (fig. 7.32), while numerous fragments of large pots may be interpreted as temple vases ritually buried (fig. 7.37).

Some bowls of Black Burnished Ware have also been found in F.5238/i. They have a ring base and an inturned rim (fig. 7.26–27), which sometimes also have small handles (fig. 7.28). Although the high burnishing makes the surface extremely lustrous, it is difficult to affirm that these vases are metallic imitations. On the contrary, two carinated bowls, belonging to the same production, may be compared confidently with metallic prototypes, for their sharp carinations and concave walls (fig. 7.30–31). A carinated bowl with two symmetrical bar-handles, which is made of a porous reddish fabric and is coated with a reddish burnished slip, finds several comparisons from MB I Palestine at Megiddo and Aphek.<sup>56</sup>

The upper layers of the *favissa* (F.5238/ii–iii) have provided a similar assemblage of offerings and ritually buried vessels. Again a large part of the offerings were deposited in carinated bowls (fig. 10.5–12)<sup>57</sup> of the later types (with the carination degenerated into a groove: fig. 10.10–11) or in the inturned rim bowls (fig. 10.13–16), a mass-produced type that is the hallmark of MB II.<sup>58</sup>

56. It provides an interesting comparison, since the shape is very similar. The specimen from Megiddo (Loud 1948, pls. 15: 15, 116: 18) has been ascribed to level XIV, but, since it comes from a burial (T.3162), it is conceivable that it actually belongs to level XIII or, perhaps, XII (see Kenyon 1969, 25–26); that from at Ras el-'Ain (Aphek), dating to ca. 1850–1800 BC, proves the widespread diffusion of this type in this period (Beck 1975, 54–56, fig. 4.17; 1985, 192, fig. 5.1).

57. One hundred twenty-five carinated bowls and 165 inturned rim bowl have been found in the top layer of the *favissa* F.5238.

58. The chronological setting of the upper layers of F.5238 is also suggested by several rims of preservation jars (fig. 10.32–36), among which the horizontally everted rim jar with slight ridge at the bottom of the neck (fig. 10.33, 35–36) makes its appearance together with some MB I vestigial types, such as the jar without neck (fig. 10.34).



These bowls, in fact, are made of an extremely coarse fabric, and show an irregular profile, due to the standardization of their production, which characterizes the central and late phases of the Middle Bronze Age in northern inner Syria.

Few collared bowls of the late type, with high grooved neck and elongated profile, are attested (fig. 10.1–4). They testify to the continuity of ritual practices, being no longer a popular type in this period.

Food offerings were also put on several plates (fig. 10.24–25, 37), which were typical Cooking Ware open shapes of the banquet service.<sup>59</sup> This kind of assemblage is also brought to mind by a fine buff ware jug (fig. 10.17), which has a striking comparison in Grave X at Hama.<sup>60</sup>

Among votive and ritual vessels, these layers of the *favis* yielded numerous incense burners of the type with flaring foot and high cylindrical body (fig. 10.21–22). Besides the classic type with large upper bowl with round everted rim and ridged carination (fig. 10.18), some smaller types also appear, with simple rims (fig. 10.19–20). One specimen has been found together with a globular pot (fig. 10.23) made of the same fabric of Cooking Ware. It may be surmised that both were part of the temple ceramic equipment.

The presence of Miniature Ware is less evident in the upper layers of F.5238, although some small jars and applied vessels have been found (fig. 10.26–30). Especially the specimens with inferior spouts indicate that they had a ritual use for libations.<sup>61</sup>

An outstanding vase found in F.5238/ii–iii is a large double everted rim jar, entirely decorated with incised lines on the body (fig. 10.31). The shoulders are also decorated with three scrubbed wavy lines edged by rope-like ridges with oblique strokes. On the bottom the incised bands have a radial orientation. Since this vase has no

parallels at Ebla, we are probably dealing with a proper cultic vessel, an interpretation also supported by the fact that it was thrown into the sacred cistern already broken.<sup>62</sup>

Small jars (46) and jars with large mouth and biconical or carinated body (13) of Simple Ware were also part of the assemblage, presumably containing food offerings or liquid substances. These jars, together with the numerous bowls containing food, may be interpreted as the remains of a consumption ritual, perhaps of a banquet in honor of the great goddess, the remains of which could not be discarded, but had to be ritually buried.

Though belonging to the same chronological phase, pottery materials from layers F.5238/ii and F.5238/iii are clearly distinguished for the distribution and the typology of offerings. While in F.5238/ii discarded vessels prevail, also including peculiar ceramic offerings such as miniature and applied vessels, in the upper layer, the presence of containers for food offerings deposited hint at the occurrence of a rite open to many worshipers. One of the interpretations that may be put forward is that this feast took place in association with a refurbishing of Temple P2, thus explaining the presence in the *favis* of discarded cultic vessels.

From a chronological point of view, F.5327 and F.5238 are of outstanding interest, especially as regards some important ceramic hallmarks. F.5327 displays the transition from the slightly carinated bowl to the Gublite bowl, and, then, from the Gublite to the type with grooved neck (the so-called proto-collared) and to the collared bowl. The latter appears around 1850 BC and reaches its maximum diffusion during the central MBA, as several specimens from F.5238/i testify to, gradually becoming the bowl with high flaring neck and pronounced shoulder (see the later

59. See the specimens from the Royal Tombs (Matthiae 1979, 165, fig. N1; Matthiae et al. 1995, 498, nos. 453–55).

60. The whole pottery assemblage from this Grave, which was examined in the National Museum of Copenhagen, points to a MB IIA dating for this vase (Fugmann 1958, pl. X).

61. A complete vessel of this type is an applied miniature jug, now kept in the Louvre (AO12975). It has an applied coil forming the arms of a baboon.

62. No painted vessels (but three small sherds) have been found in the sacred cisterns, probably because of the non-ritual function of the painted pitchers, jugs and juglets. The painted vessels seem to be connected mainly to the domestic and funerary traditions of the upper classes, while the *favis* actually were the final result of popular cult and practices and, apart from some probably templar precious or rare vessels, contained vases of the ordinary production.

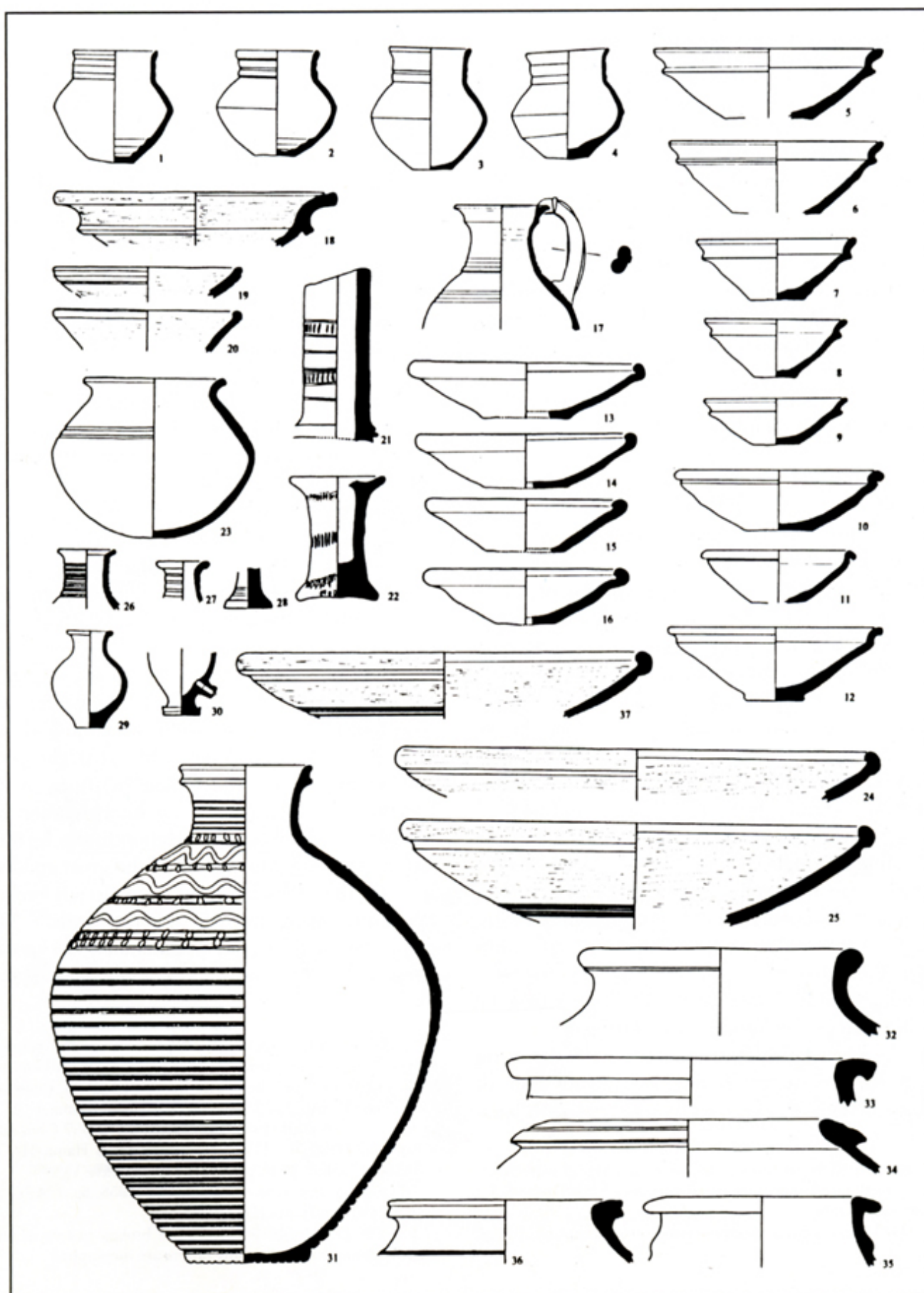


FIG. 10. Vessels from F.5238/ii-iii (MB IIA)

Fig.	Reference number	Findspot	Strat.	Period	Class	Color	Surface Treatment
1	TM.92.P158/2	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	7.5YR7/4	
2	TM.92.P160/5	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/4	
3	TM.92.P148/3	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/3	
4	TM.92.P158/100	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB 11A	SW	7.5YR7/6	
5	TM.92.P170/1	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/4	
6	TM.92.P167/5	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/3	
7	TM.91.P843/3	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/4	
8	TM.92.P167/5	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	7.5YR7/6	
9	TM.92.P170/11	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB 11A	SW	7.5YR7/6	
10	TM.92.P127/3	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR7/3	
11	TM.92.PX9	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB 11A	SW	10YR8/3	
12	TM.92.P127/14	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	5YR5/6	
13	TM.91.P826/1	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB 11A	SW	10YR7/4	
14	TM.91.P826/2	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	5YR5/6	
15	TM.91.P826/12	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	5YR7/6	
16	TM.91.P826/5	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	2.5YR6/8	
17	TM.92.P125/24	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	5YR7/6	
18	TM.91.P845/18	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/4	brownish slip
19	TM.92.P177/21	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/4	brownish slip
20	TM.91.P845/32	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/6	brownish slip
21	TM.92.P177/13	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR6/6	brownish slip
22	TM.91.P845/33	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	2.5YR6/8	brownish slip
23	TM.92.P177/24	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/6	buff slip
24	TM.91.P845/1	F5238/iii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/6	brownish red burnished slip
25	TM.92.P177/5	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5YR5/6	brownish red burnished slip
26	TM.92.P158/31	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	2.5Y8/2	grooved on the body
27	TM.92.P158/32	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	7.5YR8/2	grooved on the body
28	TM.92.P158/25	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	10YR8/3	
29	TM.92.P187/2	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	10YR7/4	
30	TM.92.P158/50	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	MW	10YR//3	
31	TM.92.P1	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	SW	10YR8/2	
32	TM.92.P185/4	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	PW	10YR7/4	
33	TM.92.P185/62	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	PW	7.5YR//2	
34	TM.92.P185/56	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	PW	7.5YR/7/2	
35	TM.92.P185/44	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	PW	10YR7/4	
36	TM.92.P129/16	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	PW	10YR8/3	
37	TM.92.P137/6	F5238/ii	IIIB1	MB IIA	KW	5Y5/6	brownish red burnished slip

N.B. "Color" refers to the core; SW=Simple Ware; KW=Kitchen Ware; PW=Preservation Ware; MW=Miniature Ware.







examples from F.5238/ii-iii), typical of the final phase of the Middle Bronze Age. Another representative transformation is the sudden and massive attestation of the inturned rim bowl in the upper layers of F.5238. This diagnostic type is in fact the marker of the MB II horizon,<sup>63</sup> which progressively reverses the figure of its presence versus the bowl with high carination. Similar typological observations might be drawn for all the classes attested to in the *favissae*, but it would be beyond the goal of this paper. What is essential to stress is that the fillings of the two votive cisterns have furnished a precise and not chronologically contaminated set of archaeological materials, of invaluable importance for defining the MB IB horizon and the transition to MB IIA at Ebla (§5).

### 3. Votive Offerings: The Objects

The objects retrieved in the *favissae* belong to several functional classes. Since in most cases they do not differ from similar specimens found in secular contexts, their interpretation in cultic contexts depends upon their distribution and state of preservation (i.e., intentionally broken, discarded or deposited). The overall reconstruction of the cultic activities is discussed in §4, where the evidence offered by the various layers of F.5327 and of F.5238 is reviewed, while this section examines the object classes, both functionally and chronologically, since in many cases it is possible to single out a clear development. The objects may be broadly divided into clay figurines, personal ornaments (including bronze pins, beads, and jewels), and bronze and stone tools. In addition, there are a few objects in clay and other materials, such as inlays and some objects in gold, belonging to small pieces of furniture.<sup>64</sup>

The clay figurines from F.5327, all dating to MB IB, are mostly fragmentary. Only four of these belong to the naked female type with open

arms and parallel combings on the back and on the front representing the pubis, which is the main feature of MB IB female figurines in Inner Syria.<sup>65</sup> The small number of female figurines from F.5327 sharply contrasts with that of the other *favissa*, where they are almost half of the total (39; fig. 11). In the first layer of F.5238, slightly later than F.5327, several well-preserved figurines have been found, all belonging to a basic type (TM.94.P.547, TM.94.P.641), although their variety attests to the presence of different production areas at Ebla at the end of the MB I period.<sup>66</sup> Many features are typical of MB IB, such as the heads with only one hole in the ears and an applied strip from the front to the top in the first specimen, but some other characteristics are common to the beginning of the following period, such as the modeled face in the second figurine and small heads rounded on the top. In the two upper layers of F.5238, dating from MB IIA, two main types, with triangular pubis, are attested, one with open arms (TM.92.P.518) and one with hands holding the breast (TM.92.P.875) with more elaborate ornaments, such as necklaces and bracelets and three or four lateral holes (Matthiae et al. 1995: 416, nos. 270, 272).<sup>67</sup> The latter is the type typical of MB II, while the former disappears after the beginning of MB IIA. The presence of many complete female figurines in the *favissae* of Ishtar support an interpretation for the naked female type in relation to the fertility aspects connected to the cult of the great goddess. It seems that these figurines were already broken when they were thrown into the wells.<sup>68</sup> The other clay figurines, all fragmentary, are mostly animal, mainly representing rams and equine

65. One vestigial specimen still belongs to the column-shaped type, deriving from the EB tradition and still attested to during MB IA and the beginning of MB IB (cf. Fugmann 1958, figs. 117.3A8, 117.3A23, 120.2B461 from Hama 4-3).

66. See Fugmann (1958, fig. 110.3A652, 3A337 from silos H11η and H10δ, fig. 117.3A15, 2B619 from Hama H4, pl. X.5B160 = Ingholt 1940, pl. XVIII.4 from Grave VI).

67. For the first type see Fugmann (1958, fig. 124.2B189, 124.2B248 from Hama H2).

68. The best-preserved pieces are broken in two or only slightly damaged, while many others are incomplete.

63. See Nigro (in press) for the technological aspects related to the diffusion of this mass produced bowl, made of a very coarse fabric.

64. The excavation numbers cited refer to captions in figs. 11, 13, 14.



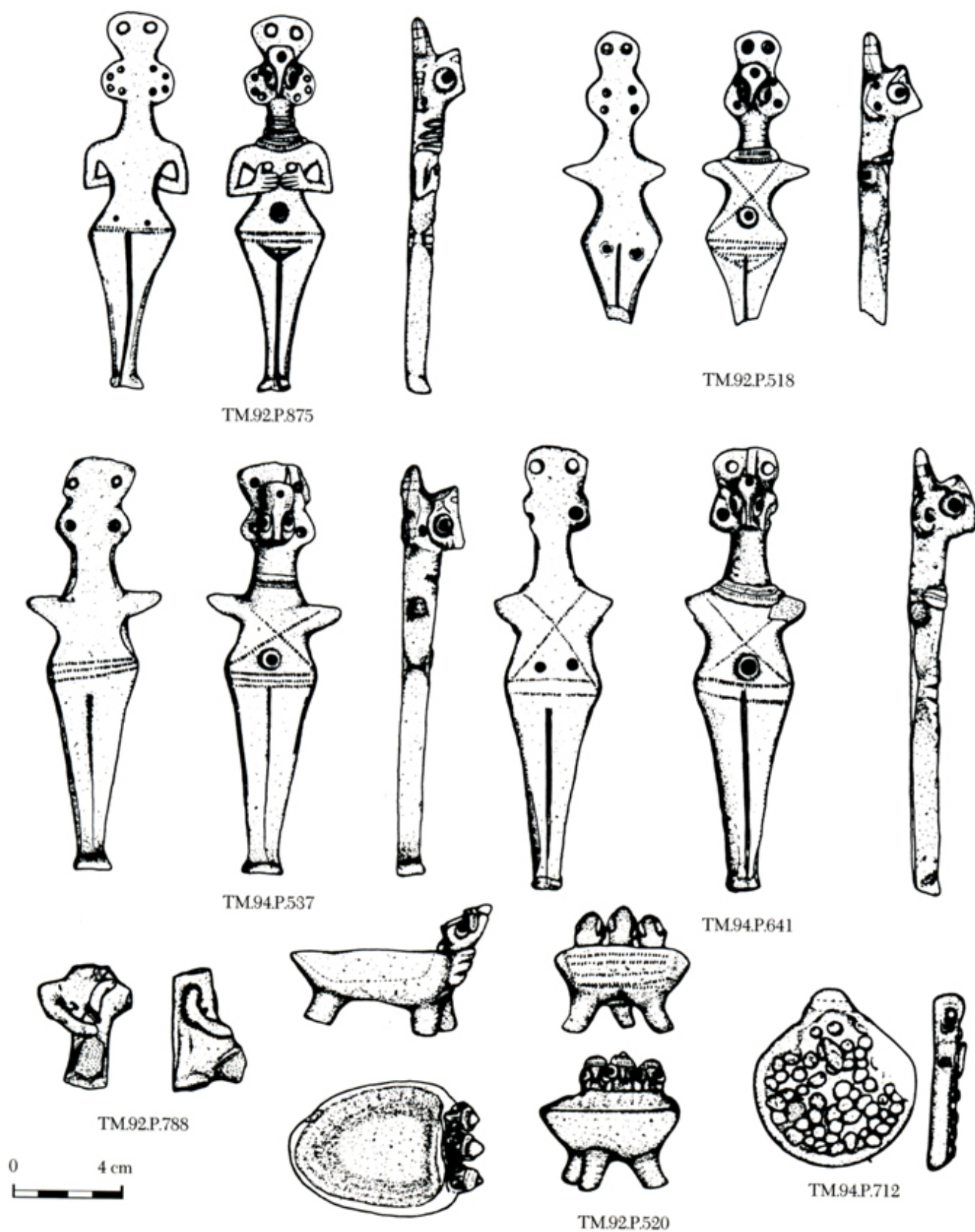


FIG. 11. Clay figurines from F5238 (MB IB—MB IIA)





FIG. 12. Bull-headed chariot model  
from F.5327 (MB IB)

figurines, while a few are male, divided into two basic types: riders and, only in F.5238/ii-iii, seated figurines holding a scepter against the shoulder (TM.92.P.788), an Old Syrian ceremonial motif.<sup>69</sup> A miniature vessel decorated with three male heads (TM.92.P.520) belongs to the series of clay fittings of the Old Syrian choroplastic, and, although it apparently lacks any practical usage, its function is not strictly cultic, since it is found also in other contexts at Ebla. An outstanding piece with few parallels,<sup>70</sup> is represented by a zoomorphic chariot (TM.95.P.282) of large dimensions (fig. 12). The front part is a horned head and so must belong to a ram or a bull; the middle section is empty and the broken upper edge shows that some kind of elongated vessel was applied to it. It was already in pieces when thrown into the *favissa* F.5327, since many parts were missing. The four wheels are, uniquely, decorated with four radial applied strips, imitating spokes.

Although it is still premature to draw precise conclusions about the function of MB clay figu-

rines, their ultimate significance must reside in their symbolic value, too general to be connected with specific deities, but for this very reason very widespread in Old Syrian society. Male figurines were probably related in some way to the ceremonial iconographic type of the pious king or high officer. Miniature furnishings are often replicas of cult fittings, as also are rhyta and similar objects. Animals and riders are difficult to explain but are likely to be part of this same general symbolic domain; it is uncertain whether broken animal figurines were intended to be substitute sacrifices.

Some objects have a precise symbolic function in relation to the cultic activities connected to Ishtar (figs. 13, 14). In the upper layer of F.5238, seven bronze snakes of various types (TM.91.P.682) and a large bronze head of a snake were found. Although in the Old Syrian world the association of Ishtar with snakes has not yet been proved, this animal clearly points out the connection of the goddess with the earth, which, elsewhere (for example in the Stele of Ishtar), is symbolized by an anguiform monster related to the subterranean ocean, in the interpretation of P. Matthiae. In the earlier *favissa* F.5327, a single silver snake (TM.95.P.245) of the simplest type was present, but it proves the cultic significance of the snake at Ebla at least from the beginning of MB IB down to the beginning of MB IIA.<sup>71</sup> A bronze bull (TM.91.P.686) definitely hints at the weather god Hadad, the great god of Aleppo, whose cult is likely to have been introduced at Ebla at the end of the nineteenth century, with the growing influence of the kingdom of Yamkhad in northern Syria.<sup>72</sup> Two carnelian beads

69. For similar iconographies from the Eblaic milieu see Matthiae (1989, 182–83, pls. 148–150; et al. 1995, 505, no. 470 for a funerary amulet representing the dead king; et al. 1995, 441, no. 254 for a statue of a king or high officer). For similar figurines, although holding axes, cf. Ingholt (1940, 61, fig. 1, pl. XIX.3 = Fugmann 1958, fig. 110.3A389 from silos H105, MB IB).

70. Similar chariots are well-known in MB I and II, when they are of different shapes, smaller and with cups on the back (see e.g., Suleiman, Gritsenko 1987, 233, pl. L56 from Ansari V.1, late MB IB), although they may also be provided with wheels.

71. For other snakes from F.5238 see Matthiae et al. 1995, 414, nos. 265–266. A slightly later bronze snake, dating from late MB IIB, comes from the sacred area BB at Megiddo, Stratum X (Loud 1948, pl. 240.1). For the symbols associated with the naked goddess since the MBA down to the Christian Era, see, in general, Matthiae (1985, 489, sub fig. 426d).

72. Several bronze bulls, of which many similar to the Eblaic specimen (=Matthiae et al. 1995, 415, no. 269, from F.5238/iii) have been found in the offering deposits of Byblos (see, e.g., deposits ε, ζ, ι, ν, ξ, ρ in the *Enceinte Sacrée*; see n. 99). For the cult of Hadad at Ebla and his association with Ishtar see Matthiae (1993d). In some Old Syrian seals, the god holds the reins of a bull upon which is standing a nude goddess, on



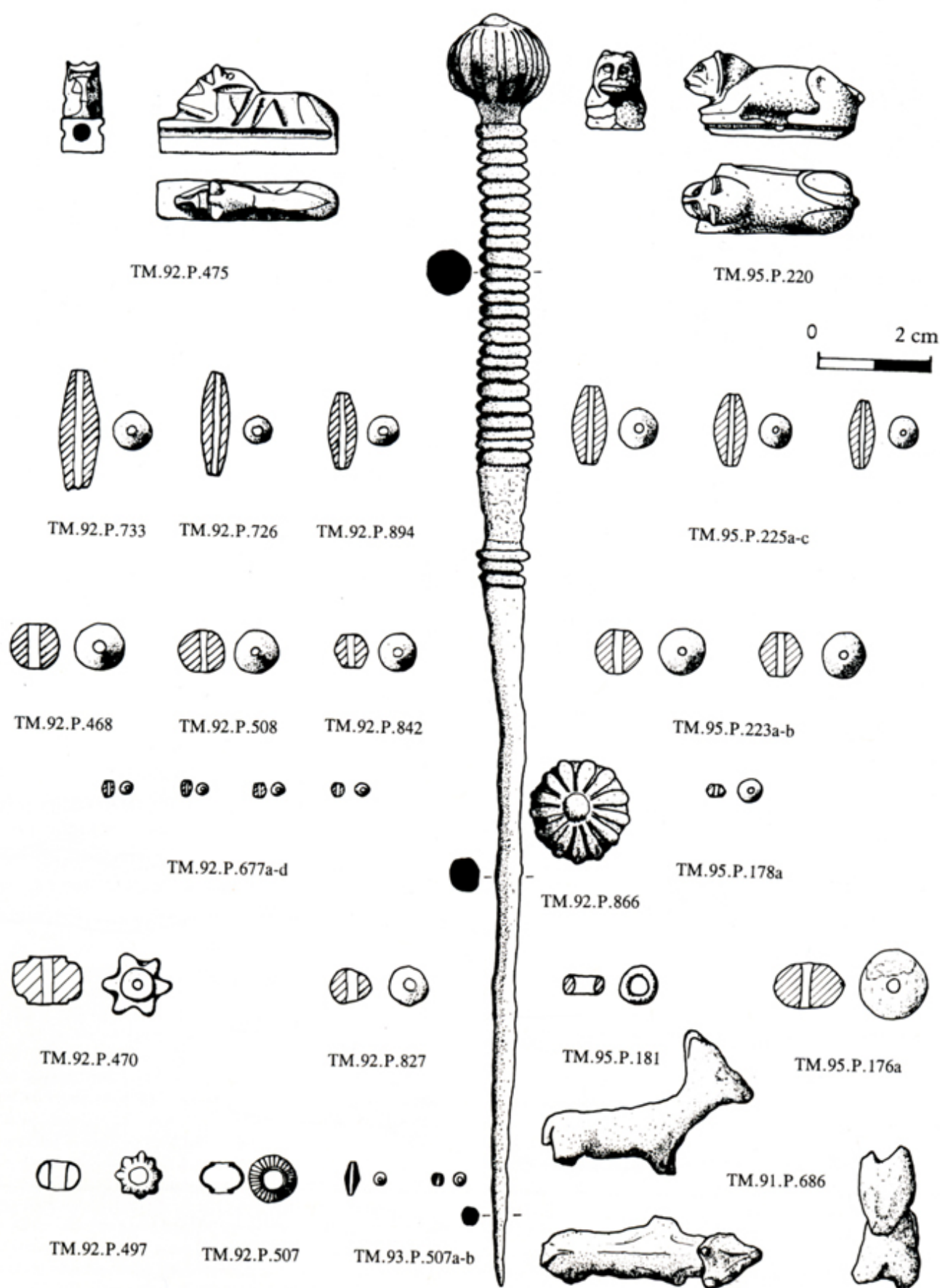


FIG. 13. Objects from F5327 (right) and F5238 (left) (MB IB—MB IIA)



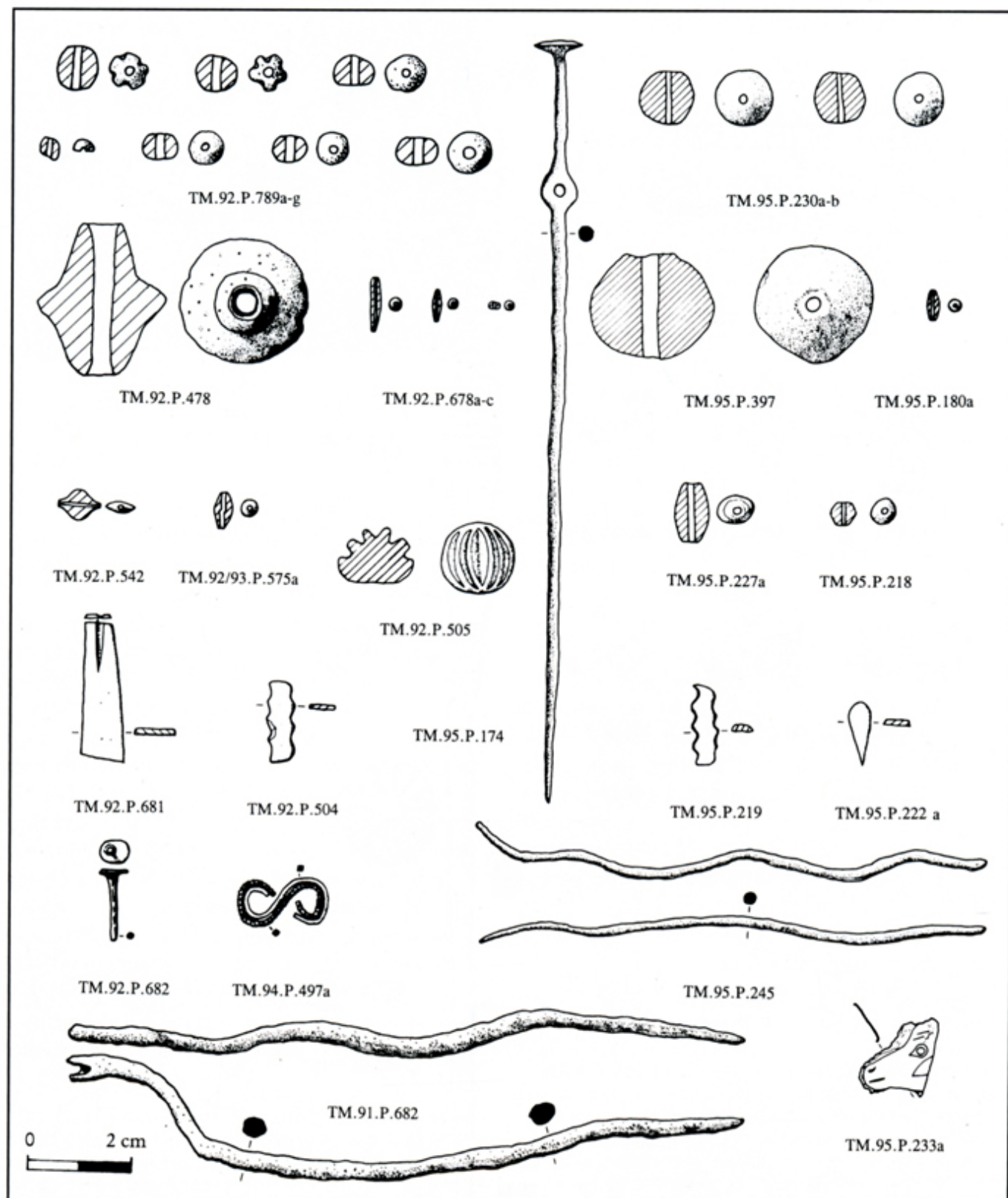


FIG. 14. Objects from F5327 (right) and F5238 (left) (MB IB-MB IIA)