Excavations at Aziz Dheri
A Stūpa Settlement Site in Ancient Gandhāra
Glimpses from Field campaigns 1993 and 2007/08

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Abstract
Aziz Dheri is one of the largest and best preserved archaeological sites in Gandhāra. In order to understand the nature and cultural profile of the site archaeological investigations have been carried out since 1993. Analysis of the previously published and unpublished reports about these works have revealed a great deal of discrepancy and incongruity. To establish the actual nature of the site and the true chronological sequence of the inhabitants, and to understand the internal landscape of the settlement, a new field campaign to the site was begun in mid-November 2007. Diagnostic study of the site continued for almost three months in eight different areas of the mound that mostly related to the areas which had been excavated during 1993-2006 seasons of field work. Our excavations revealed several occupational phases containing rich cultural materials belonging to periods starting at least from the Indo-Greeks and continuing up to the Islamic period of the 12th century AD. The new excavations also revealed fresco paintings at the site for the first time. Study of the structures and layout of the buildings shows a well organised system of the town planning persuading us that Aziz Dheri remained a site of great political, cultural and religious significance.

I. Introduction

The unique stūpa and settlement site of Aziz Dheri lies in the region of ancient Gandhāra and is regarded as one of the largest archaeological mounds in the area with a rich assemblage of cultural artefacts and well organised town planning. Characterised by all these idiosyncratic features this important archaeological site (N.34.24958; E 72.39449; altitude 350.8m, 1151′) is situated three kilometres west of the village of Ganghu Dher, which itself is located about eight kilometres north of the Jrando bridge that is constructed over a canal on the main Mardan-Swabi road (Fig. 1).

The site is surrounded by several archaeological sites and other important places from all directions. The villages of Naranji (8km) and Sher Dara (10km) are located to its north; Mada Khaila (4km) and Mir Ali (7km) villages lie to the north-west; Qamar Dhand (3km), Palosi (4km) and Baao (4km) are situated to the north and north-east; Aman Kot (4.5km), Tigari (6km) and Rani Ghat, (7km) are situated to the east; Nau Gram (5km), Dubai Banda (7km), Baakar (4km), Gohati (9km) and Bandai Obah (2km) lie to the south-east; Hamza Dher (4km), Spin Kanri (1.5km) and Gangu Dher (1km) lie to the south and south west; and Asota (6km), Karamar (6km), Shewa (4km) and Parmoli (4km) lie to the west.

The mountain ranges to the north are Ghakhai Ghar and Chatra Ghar. To the north-west are Chanri Ghar and Garo Ghar. To the west is Karamar mountain range and to the north-east and east are Kambela Ghar, Baga Ghar and Nogram Ghar.

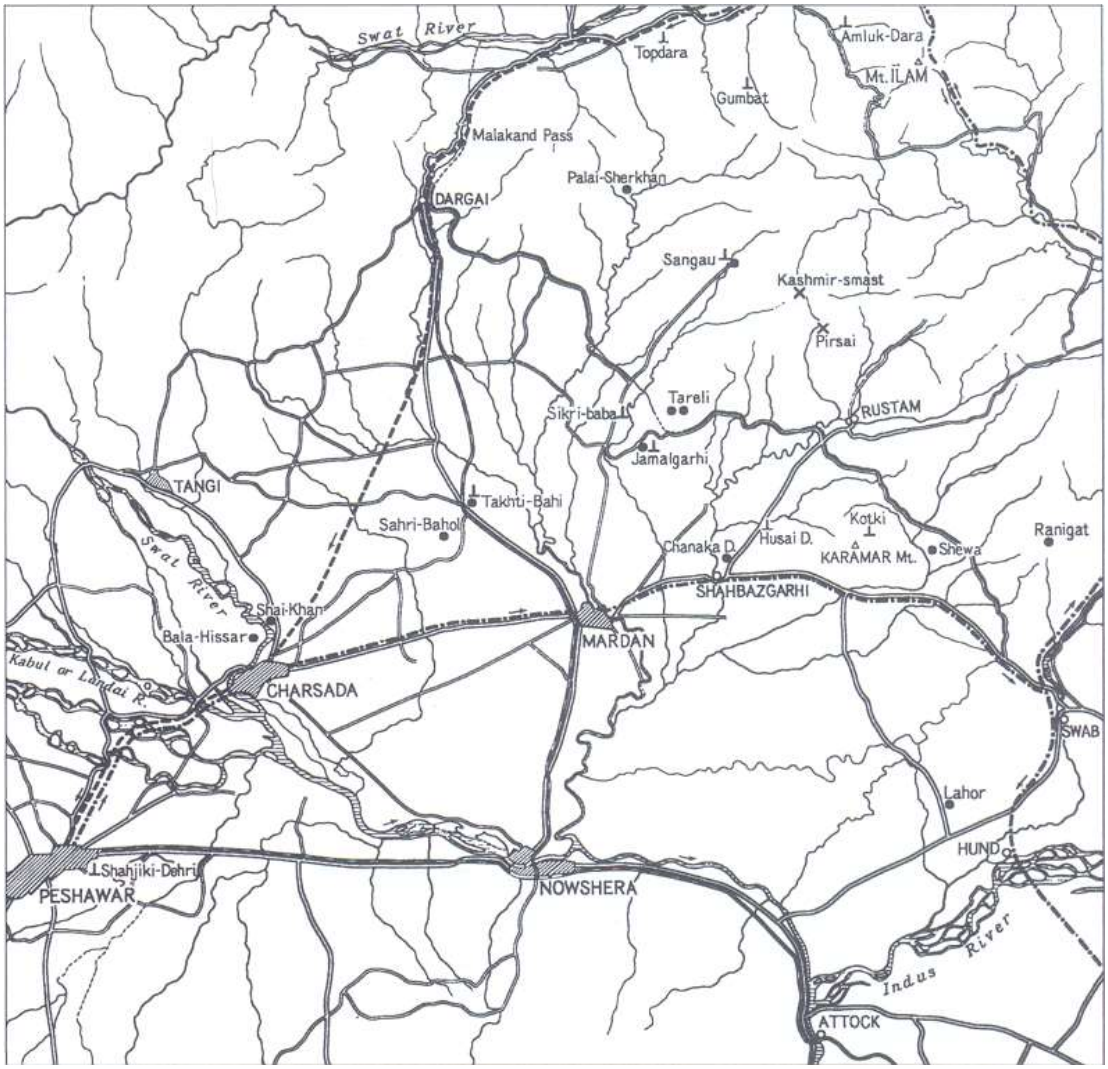


Fig. 1: Location map of Aziz Dheri

II. Previous work at the Site

The site was discovered in 1976 by Ziaullah Sehrai from Peshawar University and Mr. Bruce of the Temple University (USA) (Khan, S.N. 2002: 23). According to Mr. Saleh Muhammad Khan, Director Archaeology, Government of NWFP, Aziz Dheri was discovered in 1990 by Sahib Zada Riaz Noor, the then Commissioner Mardan who, in the light of that discovery and in the same year, also established Mardan Museum in the Town Hall of Mardan. The land was later acquired by the Provincial Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt of NWFP and the first regular excavation at the site was made soon after the establishment of the Directorate in 1993 under the leadership of Prof. Farid Khan, the then Director of Archaeology. Since then excavations have been carried out regularly by the Department of Archaeology

and Museums but unfortunately, so far, very little has been published from the previous excavations (Qazi, M.N 1993, Fazal Sher 1993, Khan, G.R. 1999, and 2008, Khan, S.N 2002).

The total area of the site extends for more than 500x400 meters but the area surveyed thus far measures 300x240 meters, which has been separated into four sectors (Areas A-D) by base and datum lines. These areas are further divided into different grids, each one of 30x30 metres. The previous excavations were mostly conducted in the areas A and B located to the north, east and west of the datum point, fixed at the highest level of the mound (Fig. 3).

During previous excavations (1993-96; 2000-2006) at the site several structures were exposed including the Main Stūpa, some votives stūpas and monk cells, rooms, halls, storages, bathroom/s, workshops, streets, etc. The mass of antiquities found during these excavations is mostly composed of stone and stucco sculptures, coins, seals and sealings, metal, glass, and TC objects, etc. (e.g. see the catalogue). The chronology of the site has mainly been established on the basis of numismatic evidence found generally in stratified deposits or sometimes recovered from debris. One of the sections from the 1993 excavation (Fig. 2) to the east of the datum point shows 10 layers with layers 1 and 2 being associated with the Hindu Shahis period, Layer 3 with the Kidarite era and Layers 4-6 are overlapping Kushano-Sassanian and Late Kushan period deposits (Khan, S.N. 2002). However, Early Kushan coins have been reported from the top layers, and Late Kushan and Indo-Scythian coins have been discovered in levels with Late Kushan occupation, showing the potential for confusion about the chronology of the site. Moreover During the 2004 season of excavation Indo-Greeks coin were reported from a level of about 5-6 meters below the datum point from which area we generally expect antiquities belong to the Kushan or post Kushana period, suggesting that either some coins have been redeposited, or that certain elements of the stratigraphy were not correctly observed and interpreted during the initial excavations.

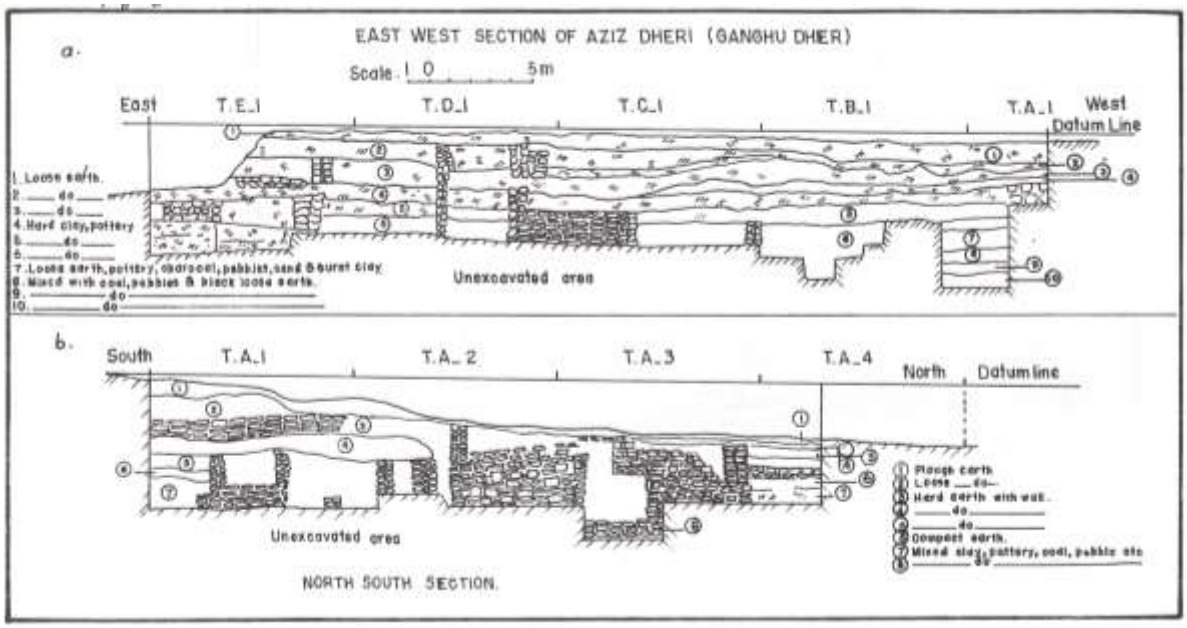


Fig. 2: Southern section (Aziz Dheri excavation 1993)

The few sketchy reports published on the previous field activities at the site do not really show any conclusive or true picture of the chronological sequence of the site. From brief notes prepared on one or another aspects of the site or its materials (Qazi, M.N 1993, Fazal Sher 1993, Khan, G.R. 1999, Khan, S.N 2002) one can assumed that the earliest occupation of the site dates back to the Indo-Scythian period while the last phase of occupation at Aziz Dheri has to be considered as that of the Hindu Shahi's, which is based on pure assumptions and is guessed from a single marble fragment recovered from the surface (Nasim Khan 2007: 163). The Field Director of the last session excavation also confirms (pers comm.), the discovery of Indo-Greek period coins of Menander (e.g., Reg. Nos. AZD 2004-307, 498, 450, 375) were found to the north and north-west of the datum point. Moreover 13 coins of Azez II are also reported from the same area (e.g., Reg. Nos. AZD 2004-15,17,19).

In 2004, a 1x1 meter trench was laid close to the main stūpa with the aim of looking for the earliest level of the site but after half a meter of diggings, the excavator claimed reached to virgin soil composed of a sandy deposit (pers comm.). The finding of virgin soil at this depth means that the total height of the cultural deposit between the datum point and virgin soil should not go beyond 12 meters at its maximum.

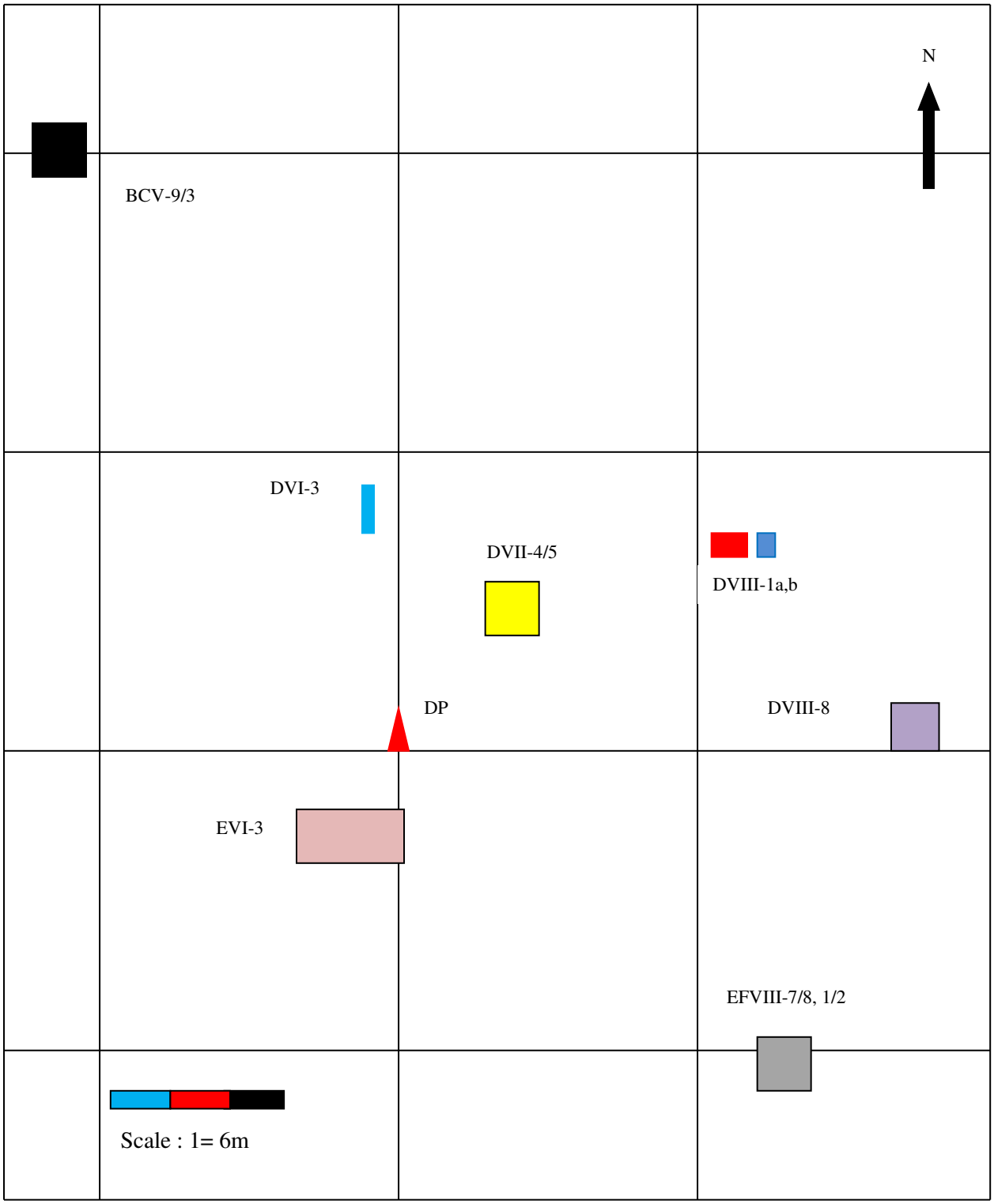
After analysing the published and unpublished reports and based on verbal communication with the previous excavators, it appears that the precise chronology of the site is unclear, leaving many unanswered questions at the start of the 2007/08 campaign to the site.

III. Excavations in 2007/2008

The main problem of excavating at Aziz Dheri site is that there are several different occupational levels each of which generally has a different structural layout compared to those of the preceding and succeeding periods. Therefore, deep vertical digging in a limited area is usually impaired by structural remains that overlap each others. These structures, particularly those of the post-Kushan periods are generally not constructed in the same alignment but are aligned diagonally compared to those of the succeeding periods. During our excavation it was decided to avoid any damage to such structures but at the same time we also wanted to achieve our goals; therefore different areas at different levels of the mound were selected for excavation to get maximum information about the site.

Before starting excavation the mound was thoroughly surveyed and investigated to find suitable places for excavations. Different spots at different levels were selected for diagnostic studies starting from the highest point and continuing to the lowest level of the acquired land. Initially three different trenches (EVI-3, EFVIII 7/8,1/2, DVIII-1a) were laid at three different elevations of the mound. Later on, five more limited areas (BCV-9/3, DVI-3, DVII-4/5, DVIII-1b, DVIII-8) were added to the excavated areas (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Location map of the excavated areas



III.1. Trench EVI-3(10x5m)

This trench was laid in east west direction at 350.8m altitude, five meters to the south and south-west of the datum point, and at the highest level of the mound. The main aim of excavating at EVI-3, was to identify the latest stratified layers on the site, so that we could comprehend the post Kushana sequence at Aziz Dheri. Before starting excavation at EVI-3, information was gathered regarding any previous illegal activities at the area. The selected area for excavation had been the courtyard of the house of the site Chowkidar who was subsequently forced to dismantle his house constructed on the site and move elsewhere.

Although we were ensured about the intact nature of the area, it was clear that previous illegal diggings had been conducted close by, as seen in a deep trench situated to the south of EVI-3, where scientific excavation was started in 2004, and which was abandoned because of traces from illegal diggings (Fig. 4). Added to this, a more than 6 meter deep well shaped trench had also been excavated by antique dealers to the west of EVI-3 under the pretext of getting water for the nearby agricultural land.



Fig. 4: A ditch from illegal excavation to the south of EVI-3

Keeping in mind the above, before making the first cut on the 16th of November 2007 in the north-west corner of the trench, the area was thoroughly investigated, cleared of grass, cow dung and stones left over of the previous activities at the area. The excavation continued until the end of the campaign and was stopped at a depth of 5.90m. The area was found undisturbed except for an about 3 meters deep round

ditch found in the south-east side of the trench (Fig. 13). Good stratigraphy was observed in the three other sections of the Trench and in the western side of the southern sections. Five different phases were observed with a several layers (Figs. 77, 78).

The very thick layer of topsoil was removed. Inclusions of this humus layer, sloping down from the east, were grass roots, snail shells, potsherds, glass fragments and other residues from the last occupation on the site. Layer II was of a grey soil deposit of about 1.5m. Large slabs and stone chips were found mostly fallen from the walls. In addition to charcoals, ashes and bones, the other findings were beads, bangle fragments, potsherds, etc. A Copper coin of Muhammad bin Hassan or Muhammad Husain, one of the Qarlughid rulers, was also discovered at this level.



Fig. 5: Handle of a digger (EVI-3)

Below the Islamic period and at a depth of about 1.5m, a floor level was exposed in the western side of the trench. Stone slabs and stone chips fallen from the side walls were also found. On the floor level (Fig. 6), close to the northern side a hearth made of clay in almost semi circular form was observed. To the left side an oil lamp in clay was found lying in an upright position. Ashes and charcoals were lying inside the hearth. Clay pots and potsherds were found in the section. On the other side and against the southern section, a grinding stone or quern along with pestle and clay pots were found. Some vassals, lot of potsherds, bones, charcoals and ashes were also observed. A good number of beads in clay and stones and bangle fragments, etc were found. A copper coin of the King Vakka Deva of the Hindu Shahi dynasty was discovered (Fig. 7). Painted potsherds (Fig. 8) were also found.

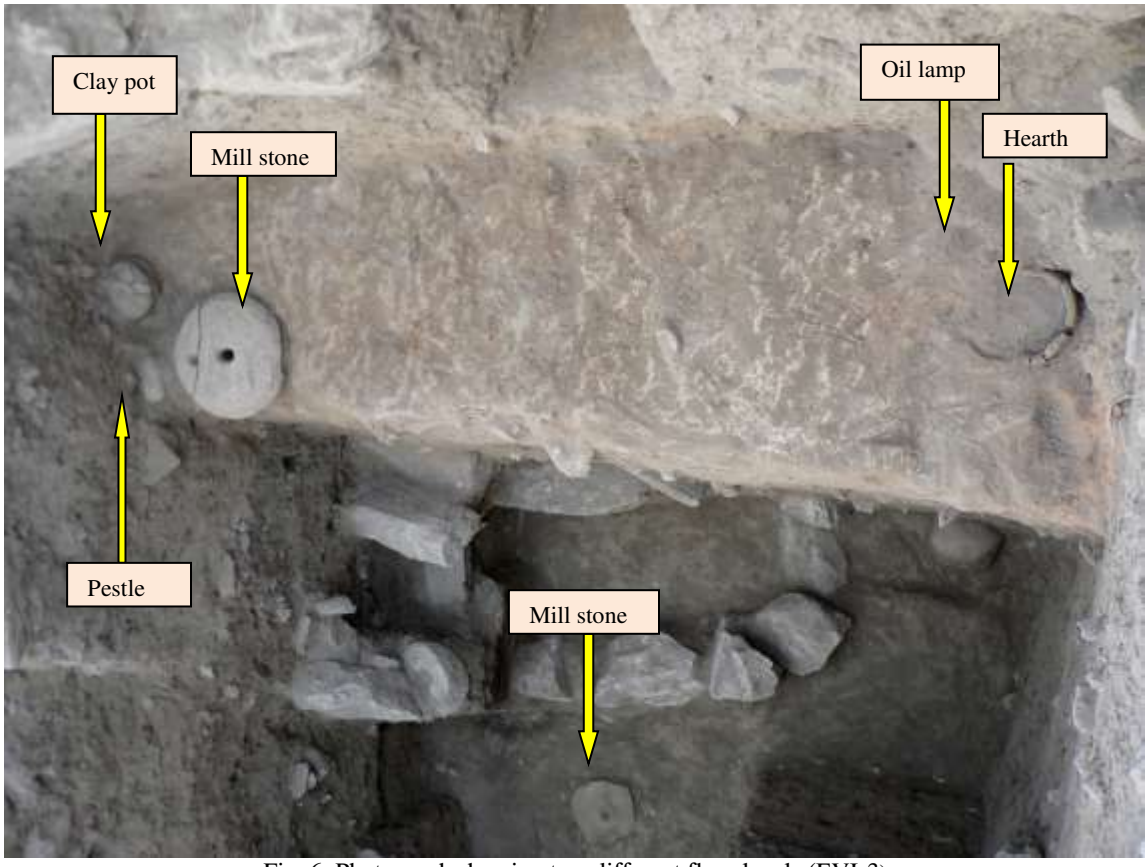


Fig. 6: Photograph showing two different floor levels (EVI-3)



Fig. 7: Copper coin of Vakka Deva from EVI-3



Fig. 8: Potsherd from EVI-3

A very thick layer of loose and compact courses in light brown colour with inclusion of stone blocks, stone chips, potsherds, bones, charcoals, beads, bangle fragments and all other sorts of cultural materials was exposed below the previous layer (Fig. 9). The large size jars mostly come from this level. Several different rusted small coins were found, and the only coin recognisable by its flan is one of Alchon type. Remains of a wall structure constructed in north-south direction can be seen in the northern section (Fig. 10).



Fig. 9: Northern section of the EVI-3

Compared to the previous stratas, this layer is of fine compact clay but with large slabs and stone chips fallen from the side walls. The cultural materials found at this level mostly included potsherds, ashes, charcoals and bones. Beads and bangle fragments were also found in large number. Rusted coins were recorded but these can only be identified by their shape, denomination and flan size. They belong to the Kidara period and can be compared with those from Kashmir Smast (Fig. 11) (Nasim Khan 2008: No. 313).



Fig. 10: Northern section and floor showing burnt bricks (EVI-3)



Fig. 11: Kidara coin

The next and the earliest level of the trench so far excavated revealed antiquities that belong to the Kushano-Sasanians and Late Kushan periods. Several pits have been observed, most probably made during the Kidara period. Two large pits are visible in the eastern section while one or two small in the northern section (Fig. 12). A complex stratigraphy is observed at this level. The most important antiquities recovered from this point are the coins, beads, bangle fragments, some sculptures and burnt bricks of different sizes. A wall was exposed constructed in east-west direction. A platform added with steps was also found adjacent to the wall (Fig. 13).



Fig. 12: Eastern section (EVI-3)



Fig. 13: View of the platform (EVI-3)

III.2. Trench EFVIII-7/8, 1/2 (5x5m)

Excavation was conducted simultaneously in the area EFVIII-8/7, 1/2 situated to the south-west and 70 cm below of the datum point. The objectives were the same as for EVI-3. The hard surface of the selected area was removed (Fig. 14), and the deposit of the humus contained stone chips, potsherds, etc. Below this level the stratigraphy was similar to that observed in EVI-3.



Fig. 14: Area EFVIII-8/7,1/2



Fig. 15: EFVIII-8/7,1/2. Excavation in progress

IV.2. Trench DVIII-1a (2.20x4.35m)

This trench was laid at one of the lowest levels of the acquired land of the mound, in the corridor between the northern wall of the main stūpa and the southern wall of the cells located to the north of the main stūpa (Fig. 16). In the same corridor but in its eastern side excavation was conducted in 1993 and it was said that the foundation of the main stūpa continued to a depth of about 1m below the *pradakshina patha*. Also in 1993, another trench was excavated in the corridor between the cells and the structures to the north where the excavator claimed reached to the virgin soil after less than a meter of digging in the area.

The idea of excavating at Trench DVIII-1a was, therefore, first to excavate in a thin deposit to reach to the virgin soil and also to learn about the pre-Kushan level of the site. The second objective was to verify the nature of the foundation of the main stūpa and to understand the cultural deposits below the present level. The third and last aim was to study the different phases of construction of the main stūpa as reported by others.



Fig. 16: View of the main stūpa and its northern corridor

After few centimetres of diggings against the *pradakshina patha*, slabs were observed in the south-west corner of the trench. To the north and opposite to the *patha* a row of small and fixed standing slabs were found. Most probably these slabs were used for drainage purposes; with the small standing

slabs in particular probably being meant for the control of the water. At the same level, slabs were found in the centre and eastern side of the trench. It is also possible that these were residue of the floor level made of stone slabs.



Fig. 17: Remaining part of a drainage (DVIII-1a)

Below this paving, the area was found undisturbed. Beneath the level of the *pradakshina patha* well stratified deposits were observed; including a mixture of thin and thick layers with inclusions of rich cultural materials like potsherds, bone fragments, beads, iron objects and coins. A wall structure was exposed at a depth of about 1 m which runs parallel to the southern wall of the northern cells. Because of the presence of this structure and the drainage, our area of excavation was reduced. Some more structures below the foundations of the exposed wall and to the southern and western side of the trench were exposed that constrained our excavation to an area of about 1mx50cm. We continued our digging but reaching to a total depth of 4.80m we have to abandon our excavation for two reasons. Firstly, further digging in that restricted area was extremely difficult (Fig. 18) and secondly a heavy rain fall with hail caused serious damage to the trench (Fig. 19). After the rain the trench was converted into a deep pond or well full of water and fortunately the sectional drawings were already made before the rain starts (Figs. 20, 21).



Fig. 18: Trench DVIII-1a; view from the top



Fig. 19: View of DVIII-1a after rain



Fig. 20: View of Fig. 19 from the east.



Fig. 20: Southern section of Trench DVIII-1a

A 1x1 m cut was made in the southern section of the trench below the votive stūpa constructed close to the north-west corner of the main stūpa. But after digging for about 1.5m we could not find any trace of any kind of earlier stupa below the visible *pradakshina patha* (Figs. 18, 22). For the same purpose we laid another trench DVIII-1b to the east of the previous trench, which had been refilled after it was emptied of rain water.

Materials recovered from excavation at DVIII-1 includes potsherds, beads, iron objects, bone and two coins, one of the Indo-Greek ruler Apollodotus II and the other one of Aziz II an Indo-Scythian king.



Fig. 22: Cut in the southern section (DVIII-1a)

III.3. Trench. DVIII-8

The votive stūpa No 2 (Fig. 23), which is situated to the south of the main stūpa is enclosed by walls on all sides with steps from the northern wall providing access to the room. The main purpose of excavation was to understand the reason for hemming the stūpa in the room and also the reason for the difficult access. We were also looking for the floor level of the stūpa and for any evidence to give a certain date to the stūpa itself and the structures that surround it. Lastly, we were keen to investigate below the floor level of the stūpa and to know whether the stūpa was constructed on a natural soil or whether cultural activities continued before the construction of the stūpa and the room.



Fig. 23: General view of the Trench DVIII-8

Excavation was started in the western corridor where the soil was found quite loose and disturbed. Potsherds, bone fragments and fragments of lime plaster were found in abundance. After 30 centimetres of digging we reached an undisturbed deposit where inscribed potsherds in grey ware (Fig. 83), late Kushan copper coins and other cultural materials were found in large number. But the most exciting discovery was of the remains of some beautiful fresco paintings (Figs. 24, 25) which were found added to the moulding of the platform to the north, east and west of the votive stūpa (Fig. 23).



Fig. 24: Destruction of the lime pilaster (DVIII-8)

Although the finding of these paintings has to be regarded as unique at Aziz Dheri, its proper preservation posed a serious problem. No immediate action was possible for its suitable safeguarding therefore the trench was refilled and the paintings were covered to protect them from any natural and human hazards until necessary arrangements has been made towards its proper protection and conservation (Fig. 26).



Fig. 25: Lotus flowere, at DVII-8



Fig. 26: Refilling of DVIII-8

III.5.Trench DVI-3

DVI-3 was selected for excavation with two rationales. First, the area was one of the deepest points of the excavated mound and it was hoped to reach the earliest level of the mound after a few meters of digging and to confirm the claim of reaching the virgin soil after two meters of diggings made during 2004 season field work. Most of the supposed Indo-Greek coins were previously found at this level of the area. Our second objective was, therefore, to make certain the claim of finding these at this level of the mound.



Fig. 27: Trench DVI-3

A small trench of 1.20mx3.40m was laid in the entrance of a room in north-south direction. After removing the thick humus layer resulting from erosion we reached a thin layer of lime previously laid with an intention to prevent grazing in the area. Below layer 2 several Kushan copper coins were found in a very thin deposit of only 20 cm. The stratigraphy was found very well preserved and was rich in datable cultural materials. The most important discovery was the finding of a Kushan hoard (Figs. 28, 29) of copper coins and a gold coin of king Kanishka (Fig. 74).



Fig. 28: Kushan hoard from Trench DVI-3



Fig. 29: Discovery of the coin hoard (DVI-3)

Excavation was stopped at a depth of 4.70m depth due to a limited space for digging (Fig. 30), which was once again restricted by the wall structures exposed in the trench. Another trench was laid further to the north at the lowest level of the mound but this time outside the already excavated area (see below).



Fig. 30: DVI-3. View from the top

III.6. Trench DVII-4/5 (5x5 m)

Trench DVII-4/5 (Figs. 31, 32) was laid in the courtyard of Block-C. This is the middle of the excavated area close to the datum point and located at an altitude of about 245.3m and about 5.5m below the level of the datum point. The main aim of excavating in this area was to fill the gap between the Kidarites, the presence of which was already attested in EVI-3, and those of the Early Kushan. A total digging of 3m was made in the deposit and antiquities recovered from these layers consisted among others the Late Kushan, Kushano Sasanians and early Kushan coins which perfectly fit into the chronological sequence of the site.



Fig. 31: General View of Block-C of the excavated areas



Fig. 32: Eastern view of DVII-4/5

III.7. Trench BC-9/3

The area is the lowest point of the acquired land of the mound (Fig. 33). Excavation was carried out at an area of 5x5 m which was found intact. Excavating at this point of the mound the objective was to know about the earliest level of the site or to reach to the virgin soil that could not be probed in the other areas of the mound. Unfortunately after a few weeks of digging we had to stop it due to shortage of funds and time and the objective could not be achieved. We only reached to a depth of about 3.70m (Fig. 34).



Fig. 33: Trench BCV-9/3. Preparation for excavation



Fig. 34: BCV-9/3. Eastern section

Most of the antiquities recovered from this trench consisted of coins, pots and potsherds and a good number of cowry shells. Beside coins of the Early Kushan period, the two rhytons and a tulip shaped pot (Figs. 35, 36), discovered below the Kushan level, were also found in this area.

The level where the excavation was stopped could not be assigned to any particular

dynasty because the antiquities recovered from the last level were mostly pots, potsherds and cowry shell. But if we compare the rhytons with one recovered from DVIII-1a, they are of the same type and might have been used for the same purpose. The rhyton from DVIII-1a was found below the Indo-Scythian level and therefore could be easily dated to pre-Kushan period, the date which could equally be given to the so far early level of the excavated area at BCV-9/3.



Fig. 35: Rhyton from BCV-9/3



Fig. 36: Pot from BCV-9/3

IV. Periodization

We could not probe the earliest level of the site or reach the virgin soil, therefore, we do not know when the site was first occupied. During our excavation eight different trenches were laid at different elevations of the mound with several different objectives one among these was to know about the cultural profile of the site. To sum up, the total excavated areas of the eight different trenches was about 27x37m while the total absolute depth reached was approximately 14m below the datum point (Fig. 37). Based on the antiquities found in the strata, 9 different periods were observed starting from the Indo-Greeks and continuing to the Qarlughids, which seems to have been the last period of occupation at the site.

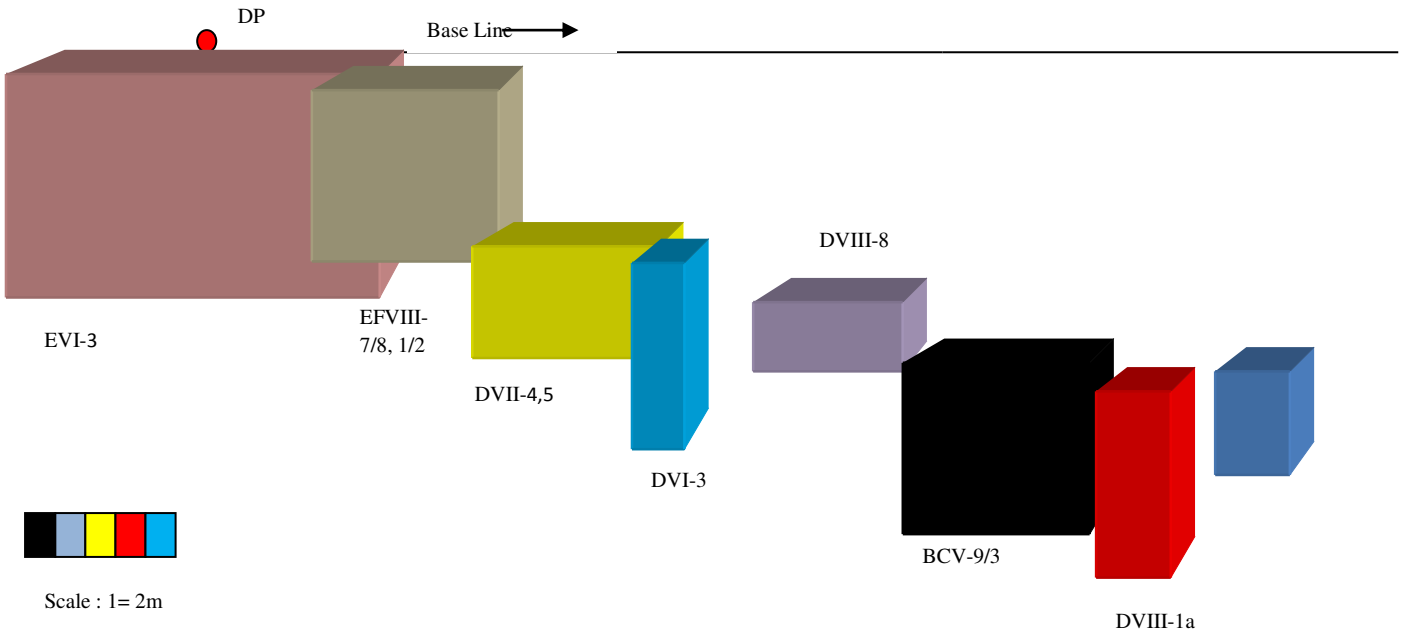


Fig. 36: Diagram showing elevations of the excavated areas

Post Mauryan Period: In trench DVI-3 below the Early Kushan level a small coin was found at a depth of 2.65m. The coin is of a small denomination measuring 0.58gr (Fig. 3). It seems a silver plated copper coin with designs that might belong to the Type IV B 51 of Hardekar. Most probably the date would be 1st half of the 2nd century BC.



Fig. 37: Punched marked coin from DVI-3 (Cat. 534)

Indo-Greeks: Presence of the Indo-Greeks is attested by the occurrence of a single coin of Apollodotus II found in Trench DVIII-1a at a depth of 2.05m below the *pradakshina patha* of the main stūpa (Fig. 38). Potsherds were also found at the same level and below but without any significant features.



Fig. 38: Coin of Apolodotus II from Trench DVIII-1(Cat. 529)

Indo-Scythians: As for the Indo-Greeks, we have only one coin (Fig. 39) which confirms the presence of the Indo-Scythians at Aziz Dheri. The coin was found close to the southern section of Trench DVIII-1a at a depth of 1.05m, just above the slabs that could be a floor level. During previous excavations at the site a single coin of Azes II was found in the area close and to the north of the trench DVIII-1b.

As noted above, a broken rhyton shaped object was also recorded at this level; similar to the objects found with tulip shaped pot in BCV-9/3 at or below the Early Kushan level (Figs. 41, 42). The same type of object was also recovered from the famous site of Shaikhan Dheri [Sehrai 1966: 143, Fig. 17: 21, 23]. BCV-9/3 most probably belongs to the pre-Kushan period.



Fig. 39: Coin of Aziz II from Trench DVIII-1(Cat. 509)

Early Kushan: Among other antiquities of the early Kushan period coins were found in large number mostly discovered at a depth of seven meters below the datum point. They were mainly found at areas DVII-4/5, DVI-3 and BCV-9/3. This group of coins mostly includes Wima Takto (Fig. 44), Wima Kadphises, Kanishka, Huvishka and coins issued by Vasudeva II. The presence of these coins clearly suggests the impact of the Early Kushan rulers at Aziz Dheri.



Fig. 40: Coin of Wima Takto (Cat. 448)

Late Kushan: Late Kushan antiquities were mostly found in Trench DVIII-8, early levels of DVII-4/5, top levels of DVI-3 and early levels of EVI-3 at a depth of 5-7 meters. The most significant discoveries belonging to the Late Kushan or Kushano-

Sasanian period are the fresco paintings (Fig. 43), inscribed potsherds (Fig. 27) and copper coins. The inscribed potsherds and fresco paintings were only discovered in the area of DVIII-8. The most common coins are those of to Kanishka II (Fig. 41) and Vasudeva II (Fig. 42).



Fig. 41: Coin of Kanishka II



Fig. 42: Coin of Vasudeva II



Fig. 43: Fresco painting from area DVIII-8

Kushano-Sassanian Period: The Kushano-Sasanian period, which sometimes overlaps with Late Kushan period was confirmed by the discovery of a coin hoard in 1993 (G. Rahim 1999); situated to the east of the main stūpa. Few rusted coins of the period were also recovered at EVI-3 during the 2007/08 campaign to the site.

Kidara period: Several different coins of the Kidarites, mostly corroded and illegible, were found in the Trench EVI-3 but they are recognisable by their shape and flan (Figs. 11, 44). One of the coins bears probably a Brahmi legend Shahi already attested at Aziz Dheri as well as at Kashmir Smast (G. Rahim 1999: No. 273; Nasim Khan 2008: 313).



Fig. 44: Coin of the Kidarites from EVI-3

Alchon Period: The Alchon period is marked by the discovery of a single copper coin badly damaged and it is only by its flan size that we can associate it to the Alchons (Fig. 45). Moreover a sealing was found close to the DVII-4/5 area at a depth of 5.5m below the level of the datum point. It bears a Brāhmī inscription that belongs to the $4^{th}/5^{th}$ century AD (Fig. 46). It is inscribed in the lower field or below the figure of a lion and reads: *Śrir Maha Devasya* which means sealing of Śri Maha Deva.



Fig. 45: Copper coin of the Alchon period (EVI-3)



Fig. 46: Seal in clay (Cat. 61)

Hindu Shahi Period: Many antiquities that date to the Hindu Shahi period were found during excavation. Two coins, one of them belongs to Vakadeva, were also discovered, one was found at Trench EFVIII-7/8, 1/2 and the other one at the area EVI-3 (Figs. 7, 47).



Fig. 47: Coin of Sri Vakadeva (Cat. 598)

Islamic Period: The last phase of occupation at Aziz Dheri was that of the Qarlughids (12 century AD). This is confirmed by a copper coin belong to Muhammad bin Hassan (Fig. 48).



Fig. 48: Coin of Muhammad bin Hassan (EVI-3)

V. Internal Landscape

Until the whole site is exposed and excavated it would be difficult to give a clear picture of its internal landscape. The so far exposed area shows that the buildings are arranged in at least four different blocks, A-D starting from the east (Fig. 50). It seems that each of these areas is separated by a thick wall, constructed in north-south direction, generally without any access from one block to another as to be observed from the lay out drawing of the exposed structures (Fig. 50). Block A to the east seams a sacred area where the Main and the votive stūpas as well as monks cells are located. The Main stūpa and the monks' cells to the north were probably constructed during the Early Kushan period while the votive stūpas to the south might belong to the Late Kushan or Kushano-Sasanian period as evidenced from the antiquities recovered from the area. Most of the Buddhist sculptures were in fact found in this area and in the corridor to the east of votive stūpa No. 2 and to the north of stūpa No. 3 (Fig. 49).

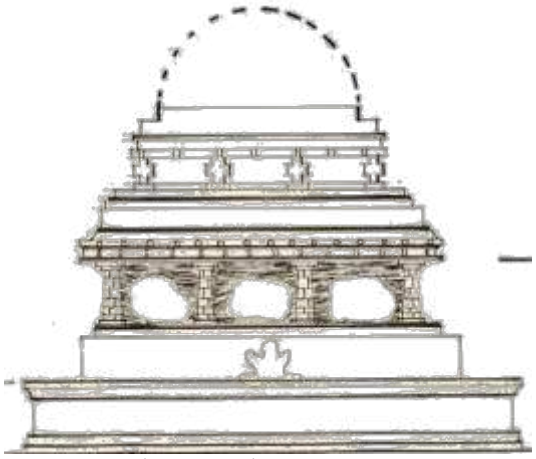


Fig. 49: Votive stūpa No. 3.

To the south of the votive stūpas, a large room was exposed during previous excavation which shows a thick deposit of burned clay with inclusions of charcoals, ash and a good number of iron fragments which would suggest that this particular area might have been used as a smith area for making metal and other objects.

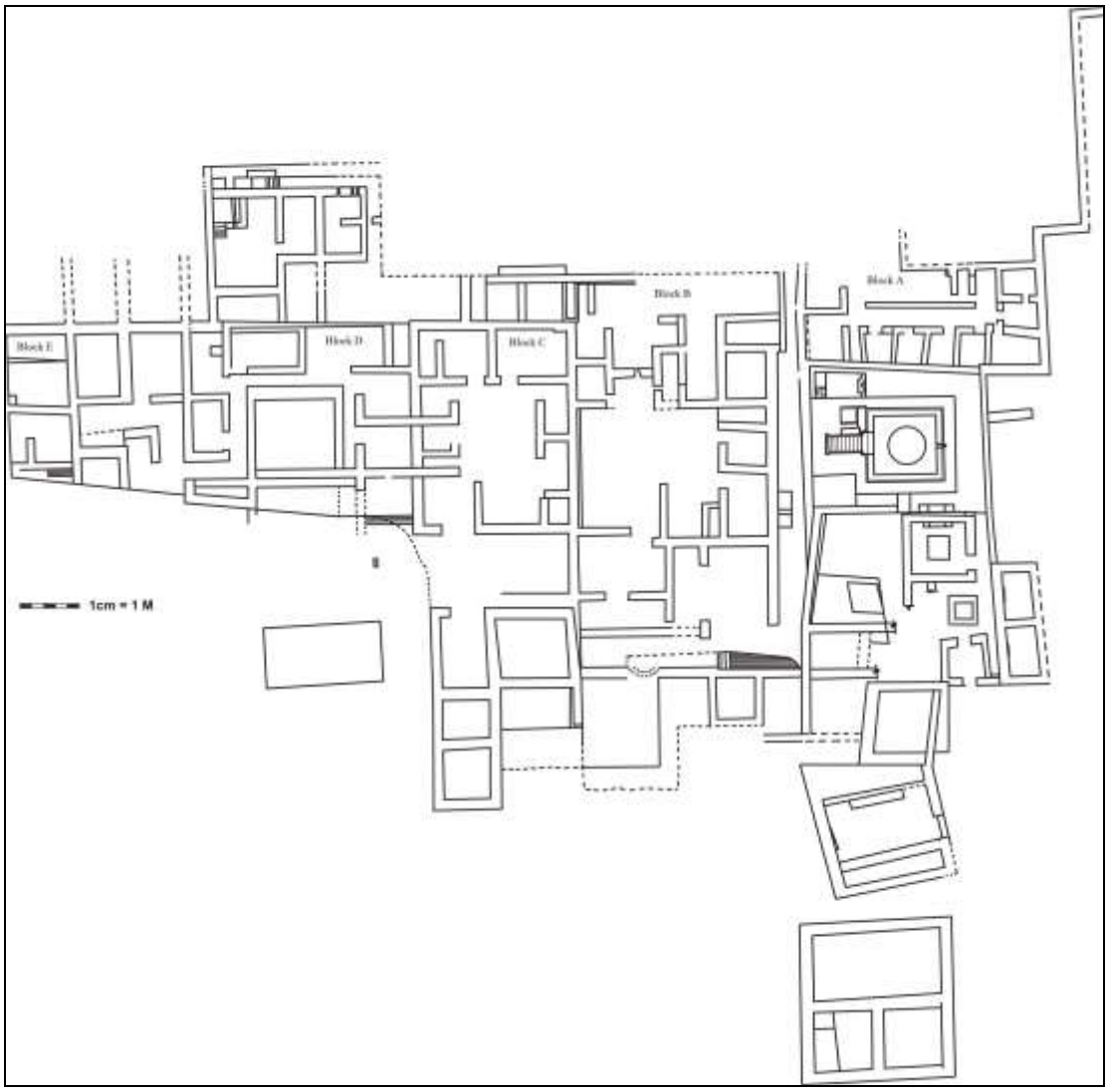


Fig. 50: Layout drawing of the exposed structures at Aziz Dheri

Block-A is separated from Block-B by almost a one and half meter street running in north-south direction. Access to this area seems to be from the north. The structures in this block generally consist of large halls or courtyards with small rooms on either side. It was from one of the rooms or cells of this area that a clay model of a Hindu temple was recovered (Nasim Khan 2008: 161, Pl. 18.9).

Similar to Block B, Block C shows big halls or courtyards and small rooms where some of the entrances were blocked by walls of later periods. Most probably a few had added bathrooms which were also observed in Block B.

Block D to the west is consisted of a hall or courtyard and several small rooms sometime added with bathrooms. This block, constructed on a high platform, shows a huge embankment or compound wall to the north in the shadow of which several rooms have been exposed to the north of the embankment wall; it was from this area that an unfinished sculpture and some tools were recovered during the 2004

excavations. A Kanishka hoard along with other objects of historical interest was also recovered from the area.

VI. Conclusion

There are at least three significant reasons to believe that Aziz Dheri is one of the most important archaeological sites in ancient Gandhāra. First, it is the only stūpa settlement site discovered so far in the area; secondly, it is one of the largest settlement sites in the region, and thirdly, like Kashmir Smast, it presents a complete and un-interrupted cultural profile of the historic period of Gandhāra. Excavation conducted in the different zones of the site provides enough information to believe that the area initially remained a habitation site, founded most probably before the Indo-Greeks. The addition of religious buildings probably happened during the Early or Late Kushan period. The later addition of the stūpas, particularly those structures to be found in Block A, probably occurred during the Kushano-Sasanian period. In the later periods, besides adding new structures, the old buildings were probably re-arranged or reshaped according to current needs.

The layout of the so far exposed structures shows that a perfect system of town planning was adopted, particularly in the time of the late Kushan or during the Kushano-Sasanian periods. The visible structures belong certainly to the mentioned dynasties but they were superimposed by structures made during later periods. Apart from modification and adjustment in the structures, some of the entrances were blocked with wall structures. The whole area was divided into four large sectors or blocks; each one is separated by a thick long wall constructed in north-south direction as far as the visible monuments is concerned. Some time later the large room were divided into small rooms according to current requirements while in some cases the later structures did not follow the same axis but runs perpendicularly.

Each of the four blocks certainly plays a particular role in the community life. The sacred area might be Block A where the Main stūpa, votive stūpas and monk cells were recorded. The southern side of the Block A, could also be another separate block, and is characterised by the discovery of great number of iron lumps and objects which suggest that the area was a kind of workshop for making metal objects. This is also confirmed by a big room where charcoal, ashes and a thick deposit of burnt clay were observed.

The big and small rooms, sometime added with bathrooms, and the courtyards of Block B and C suggest these were residential and for public meetings or could also have been used for an administrative purposes.

Block D situated to the west is most probably used for residential purposes where several small rooms are recorded. To the north of Block D behind the compound wall a good number of antiquities were found including dozens of coins, metal objects and an unfinished sculptures suggesting that the area was used either a market place or a workshop.

Acknowledgements

Archaeological investigations at Aziz Dheri site in 2007/08 would have not been possible without the financial support of the Provincial Directorate of Archaeology and Museums which was generous enough to facilitate me during the whole period of this campaign. I am very much grateful to Mr. Saleh Muhammad Khan, Director Archaeology and Museums for his

cooperation and for providing us maximum convenience to carryout in all ease during the 2007/08 fieldwork. I very much appreciate his dynamism and his efforts for strengthening the good relations between the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar and the Provincial Directorate of Archaeology and Museum, Govt. of NWFP. Let me also acknowledge the cooperation and support extended by my colleagues of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar. I express my great debt of gratitude to Professor Dr. Muhammad Farooq Swati, Chairman Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar for relieving me from my other responsibilities to carryout archaeological investigations at Aziz Dheri.

I would also like to acknowledge the help of each member of the team and all those who in one way or another supported me during this campaign. In this regards special thanks are due to Mr. Faridullah , Mr. Akhtar Munir, Mr. Khan Faraz, Mr. Javad, Mr. Iftikhar, Mr. Arif, Mr. Ismail and all of the labours. I am also thankful to the representatives of the Directorate of Archaeology, especially Mr. Tahir, Mr. Nawaz and Ms Bushra for providing their help whenever I needed.

One thing that I want to conclude with is to acknowledge is that the success of this report would have never been possible without the support of the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and the British Council in Pakistan that sponsor my visit to UK which was an opportunity to use the rich libraries over there and to have individual counselling with the relevant scholars working in the British Museums and at the Department of Archaeology and the MacDonald Institute, University of Cambridge. In this regard I should own my sincere gratitude to Dr. Cameron Petrie, Dr. Kirsch, Dr. Harriet, Mr. Joe Cribb, Dr. Elizabeth Errington and Mr. Robert Bracey.

Catalogue of selected objects discovered during 1993-2008



Fig. 51

Head of Bodhisattva
(PM-AZD 1993-96)

A beautiful head of Bodhisattva in grey schist most probably broken from a panel. He is wearing an elaborate crown profusely studded with different kinds of gems. The front displays the figure of a Buddha seated with crossed legs.



Fig. 52
Seated Buddha Preaching
(Reg. No. AZD 1993-119)
Size: 12 x 27.5 cm

Green Schist
Buddha depicted with almost round face bearing a high *uṣṇīṣa* of wavy hair secured by a fillet. He is seated crossed legged on a seat of inverted lotus flower and wearing a robe covering both shoulders. The falling of the gathered drapery covers the lap. Thick curved lines with round edges are shown in the drapery.

Beside and above the halo are dense leafy branches that hang down.



Fig. 53

Dream of Queen Māyā
(Reg. No. AZD 1993-253)
Size: 28.5 x 11.5 cm

A rectangular panel depicting Queen Māyā lying on her left side, head high most probably against one or two pillows. She lies on a bead under a simple flat-topped canopy with sloping sides supported by Persepolitan half-pilasters with bases. The couch has legs with turned and round elements. The textile hangs down with folds in fish tail designs, on either side. The elephant, with a halo in the background, is marked against the upper bar of the canopy and is also shown in the upper part. A female (?) figure is shown in the background, close to her legs.

The female guards (*yavanīs*) stand under *caitya* arch on either end. The figure to the left is probably holding a spear in her right hand; the other hand rests on the waist. The figure to the right carries some kind of arm in her left hand while the other hand rests on the waist. On the right is shown a Persepolitan column sunken in a panel: the left seems to be missing. Further to the right a female (?) figure standing under the arch.



Fig. 54

Offering of Dust

(Reg. No. AZD 1993-156)
Size: 11.5 x 15.5 cm

Part of a broken panel representing haloed Buddha with three other figures. Judging by the Buddha filling the height of the scene, the entire slab must have originally been very large. The head of the haloed Buddha standing in front is inclined to the left looking sideways and leaning down towards the two boys; one of them is Jaya and the other Vijaya of the *Divyāvadāna* where the two boys are playing in the dust while Buddha is shown on his begging round. Buddha's left arm, which is broken, seems raised while the right one holds a begging bowl and extends towards the nude standing figure. Buddha wears the over robe covering both shoulders. The hem of the robe almost reaches to the lower end of the undergarment which stays above the ankles.

On the left is an almost naked standing child, with the head missing, which extends his right arm towards the begging bowl. To the right is another similar child but this time seated with hands joined together and head raised to look towards the Buddha. The seated child has a vertical right leg and a horizontal left leg. A woman, with her head missing, stands behind

holding what are probably peacock feathers (cf. Zwalf 1996: Fig. 217).



Fig.55

Dīpaṃkara Jataka (?)
(Reg. No. AZD 1993-131)
Size: 20.2 x 14.5 cm

This broken frieze must have originally been a large slab, and depicts the figure of the Buddha and an ascetic. Buddha's upper body is missing. He wears a long robe and a lower garment. On his right side, an emaciated figure wearing an ascetic tunic is depicted inside a nich/caitya, decorated by a saw-tooth profile. He is in a curved posture on hand and knees, with his long hair extending below the Buddha's feet. This scene might possibly represent part of the Dīpaṃkara jātaka or it could be a small section of another event.



Fig.56

Worship of the Relics

(PM-AZD 1993-116)
Size: 38 x 19 cm

This long rectangular panel portrays five human figures including a group of musicians. The object of their attention is the relic on a throne, which lies beneath a canopy made of a cloth, with a zigzag design on its border that stretches over thick simple poles on the top and sides, with its ends hanging down on the right and the left. Hanging loops of garlands, hang beneath the canopy, one on either side. The relic is displayed on a high throne covered with cloth with folds beneth. Folds of a cloth can also be seen in the background. The legs of the throne are with round or rectangular (for similar representation of the canopy see Ackermann 1975: Pl. LXIII; Behrendt 2007: Figs. 22, 24). The relic-casket is in a barrel shaped form with a deeply incised line on its surface and a thick round base. The top is covered with a lid shown with a two storied knob. Against the throne at the front is a fire altar or incense burner composed of a solid pedestal that supports a shaft which is surmounted with a large capital on which is placed a pitcher shaped pot with flaring flame inside. The pitcher shaped pot could also represent a basin with fire placed over on a rounded shaped object (see e.g. Ackermann 1975: LXXIX; Behrendt 2007: Fig. 21; Zwalf 1996; Vol. II. Nos. 48, 111).

The group of five figures include two female and one male musician; a male drummer, a female flutist and a female dance with clasped hands. To the extreme right is the figure of the female flutist, who is playing. She wears an upper garment, covering both shoulders, and a dhoti. She is bedecked with bracelets and anklets. The second figure on the right is a princely haloed figure in añjali honouring the relics. He wears a dhoti and is bedecked with a crown, ear ornaments and bracelets. On the other side is another figure in the same *añjali* gesture wearing a dhoti covering his left shoulder. The figure behind is a male drummer who also wears a long dhoti; although his face is damaged. The figure to the extreme left is a female dancer with clasped hands who is presented in the same posture and wearing the same type of garment

and ornament as the figure to the extreme right of the panel.



Fig. 57

Panel with three figures
(PM-AZD 1993-125)
Size: 21 x 20.5 cm

This is an almost square panel showing two male (?) and one female figure. The central figure in the frame, partially damaged, stands on a pot with a narrow neck and everted rim with two incised parallel lines in the centre of the body. Beneath the pot is a low stepped plinth. The figure has his/her left raised hand to touch the leaves that are visible above the head while the right hadn rests on the hip. The figure stands, with crossed legs, on the heel of his right foot and probably on the tip of the left one. He/she probably wears a scarf or *duppata* i.e. the Kushan type of garment and wears anklets.

The figure to the right is a woman who is shown frontally but with her face turned to her left in a ¾ view. She is shown with prominent breasts and wears a dhoti. Most probably she is holding a stalk, the upper end of which terminates with a bunch of flowers. She is bedecked with earrings, necklace, bracelets and anklets. The figure to the left is a man moving to his right. He is wearing a *dhoti* with a knot on his left thigh. He holds an object that has been damaged and it thus unclear. He is shown with urna and wears only ear ornament.



Fig. 58

Musicians

(PM- AZD 1993-113)
Size: 27.5 x 19.5 cm

A rectangular panel portrays two couples of musicians. The figure to the right is a female drummer who wears a long draped garment with round edge around the neck and a long undergarment. The hem of the undergarment touches the ground, and covers almost her feet except the toes. Her hair is arranged in tight curls and adorned with ear ornament and bracelets. She is carries the drum against her chest with left hand lies on it. The bearded man to her right wears a short tunic falling down above his knees which leaves his thighs bare. He is shown dancing, standing on the tip of his right bared foot and heel of the left. He extended his arms towards the drum with clasped hands, may be clapping. The face is damaged but the hair combed backward suggests Central Asian style.

The figure to the left of centre is a harpist. The female figure holds her harp at thigh level to her left and is facing the man standing to her right. She is playing the harp with her right hand. She is wearing the same type of garment as the drummer except for the round edge of the upper garment around the neck. In the present case the part of the upper garment is open and covers only the shoulders. She wears bracelets and her wavy hair is combed backward. The bearded man to the left stands facing his right and has his head turned to the harpist. He has the same type of garments as the other figures on the panel. He stands on his left leg while the other one is raised. He puts both hands together maybe the gesture for clapping. The hair style shows more Greek style than Indian or Central Asian. The garment worn by the men is of Greek style.

Similar instrument to the harp depicted are attested on one of the panels in the Royal Ontario Museum where it is identified as a gabled box or chest (Jongeward 2003: 109, Fig. 34). The main difference between the two is the arrangement of the strings; in our case they are arranged vertically, while in the other case the strings are horizontal. The harp is

attested elsewhere in Gandhara (Zwalf 1996: Nos. 330, 333, 335)

Fig. 59



Unclear

(Reg. No. AZD 1993-88)
Size: 11.5 x 13 cm

This slab shows the backside of a standing naked figure with the body above his buttocks missing. The legs indicate a muscular form of body probably male, which is wearing bulky round anklets. The most interesting aspect is the object behind the legs. It shows two parts – the rounded 'squirrel-tail' shaped upper part and the oval lower part. One of the possibilities for its identification would be of a turban most probably dropped from the head of the figure, which might have originated from a part of the scene that is missing.

Fig. 60



Stucco Head of Buddha

(Reg. No. AZD ?)
Size: 11.5 x 17.5 cm

A very well preserved head of the Buddha with finely modelled features. He is shown with long ear lobes, and the curly hair is combed backward and is crowned with prominent ushnisha. Urna is missing.

Fig. 61



Seated Figure
(Reg. No. AZD ?)

Measurements:
Weight:
Size:

This figure, head missing, is made of red sand stone and shown seated on a low couch with a large low pedestal. The hands lie on the knees, the right on the right knee and the left on the knee of the left knee. The fold in the lower garment shows that the figure is dressed. The figure, possibly a woman, is bedecked with bracelets.

The top and bottom of the seat are large while the post or the shaft of the seat is of a smaller diameter in the centre. The design in the shadow of the top of the seat is similar to a band of beaded decoration or a band decorated with dentals, and stretch across the entire capital of the seat. The same dotted design is applied to the base.

Fig. 62



Terracotta Figure
(Reg. No. AZD 1993 – 176)
Measurements:
Weight:
Size:

A very small size naked male figure with a rounded face and fully opened eyes. His left arm, right hand and both feet are missing.

He wears neck jewellery and bracelets. His penis and testicles are prominently depicted.



Fig. 63

Clay Model of Temple

(Reg. No. AZD 1993 – 238)
Size: 5.5 x 5 cm

This appears to be part of a temple model, of which fifty percent is missing. The existing part and its comparison with other such models from Gandhara (Nasim Khan 2008) help us to reconstruct the missing element of the temple. It is a hollow squarish structure and could depict four arches, each with one entrance. The entrance that is complete shows a single round shaped arch with round broad moulding added with petals of a lotus on the outer surface; the representation being very similar to an example from Kashmir Smast (Nasim Khan 2008: Fig. 6). Three round shaped designs are applied to each arch at three different points: one each to the base of the arch and the third one to the upper curve. Such representation occurs in an example from Shahji-ki-Dheri (Nasim Khan 2008: Fig. 8). The top and the right side circular designs of the arch show holes, one added to each point. In the entrance is a wedge shaped design with a pointed upper end. Above each arch is a hole comparable to those in the Kashmir Smast model. Four pilasters are added to the four corners of the model, one on each corner. Each of them supports a *āmalaka* surmounted by a pot. The pilaster is based on the shape of a Corinthian pillar with an indent and can be compared with the pilasters of the Pir Pai vaulted temple (Nasim Khan 2008: Fig. 2). There are cuts on both side of the pilaster, one on each side, as it is the case in the Kashmir Smast as well as the Charsadda model.

Fig. 64

Inscribed potsherd
(PM-AZD 2007/2008-130a)
Weight: 31.70 gr.
Size: 6.7 cm x 4.4 cm



Context
DVIII-8/2

Small fragment of a pot in grey ware (see fig. 83) bearing a four letter inscription in Kharoṣṭhī characters. It could be part of long inscription which is missing. The remaining part of the inscription reads +*ṣamiḍe* without any certain etymology.

Fig. 65

Gold coin of Kaniṣka
(PM-AZD 2007/2008-868)
Weight: 7.88 gr.
Size: dia. 1.95 cm; thick. 0.2 cm





Context
DVI-3

Obv: Standing king facing left sacrificing on altar in front. He is holding a long sceptre in his left hand. In the margin Greek legend: ÞAONANO ÞAO KA-NHÞKI KO ÞANO "Great King, the King of Kings, the Kushan Kinishka"
Rev: Four-armed Oheṣo standing frontally with head turned to left. He is holding a vajra in his right upper hand, a water flask in lower right, trident upper left and the lower right is either resting on the hip or holding antelope by the horns. A Kushan tamga is in the left field and the Greek legend OHPO in the right field.

Fig. 66



Crystal bead
(PM- AZD 2007/2008-228)
Weight: 7.14 gr.
Size: 2.2 x 1.4 cm

Context
EVI-3/2

An oval shaped bead of light transparent quartz.

Fig. 67



Carnelian or plastic bead
(PM-AZD 2007/2008-229)
Weight: 0.3 gr.
Size: Dia. 0.5 cm; Height 0.5 cm

Context
EVI-3/2

A round bead of medium brownish peachy orange colour possibly carnelian.

Fig. 68



Carnelian bead
(PM-AZD 2007/08-323)
Weight: 0.98 gr.
Size: Dia. 0.9 cm; Height 0.5 cm

Context
EVI-3/2

A round carnelian bead of medium dark brownish orange colour.

Fig. 69



Lapis lazuli bead
(PM-AZD 2007/2008-298)
Weight: 0.34 gr.
Size: Dia. 0.5 cm; Height 0.4 cm

Context
EVI-3/2

A round bead of strong blue colour.

Fig. 70



Lapis lazuli pendant
(PM- AZD 2007/2008-327)
Weight: 0.42 gr.
Size: Dia. 0.4 cm; Height 0.5 cm

Context
EVI-3/2

A cylindrical bead of light blue colour.

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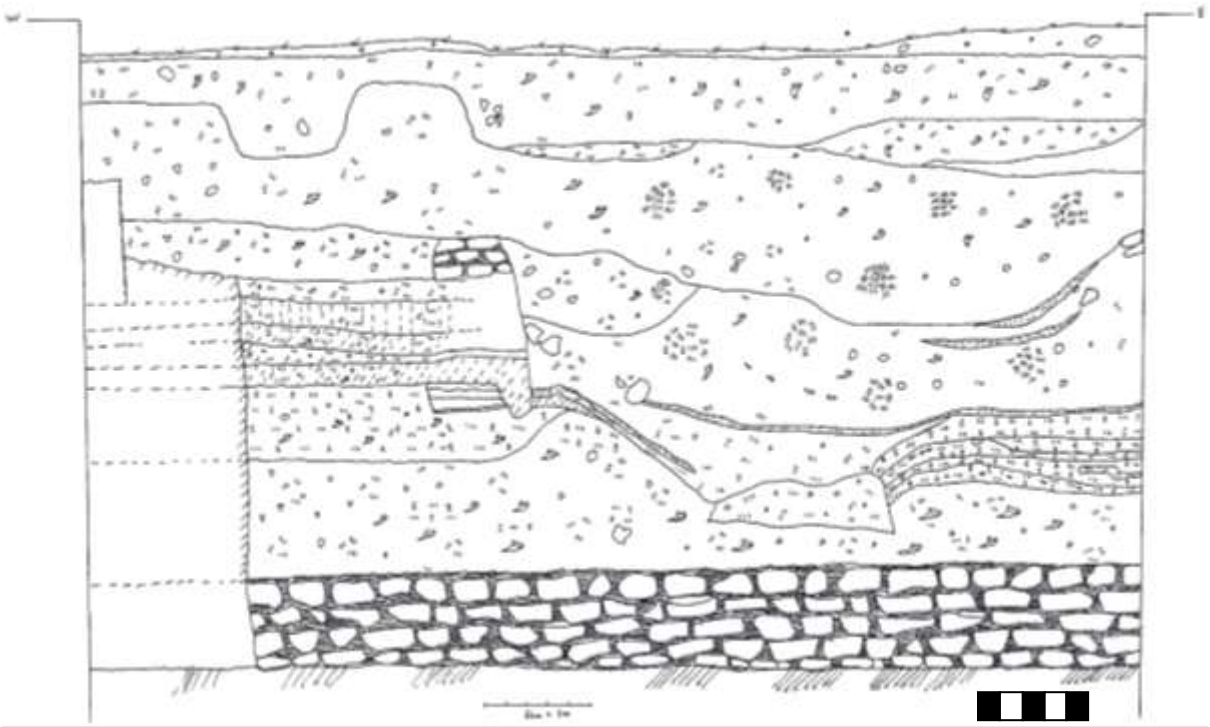

Fig. 71: Trench EVI-3 – Northern Section

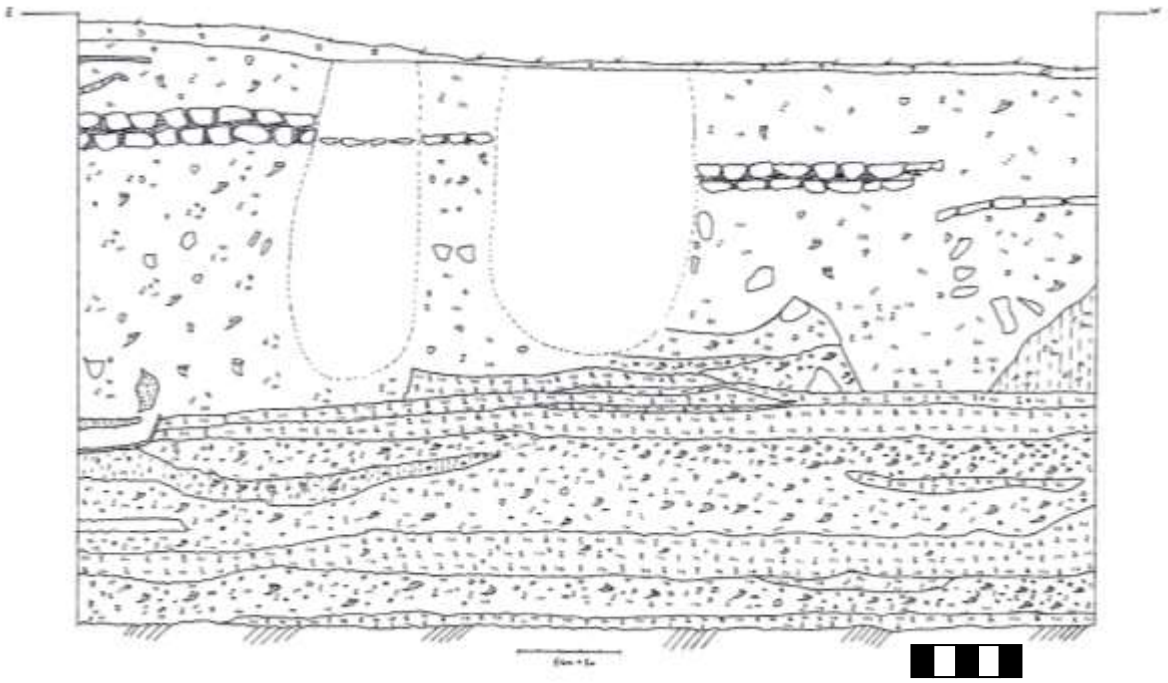

Fig. 72: Trench EVI-3 – southern Section

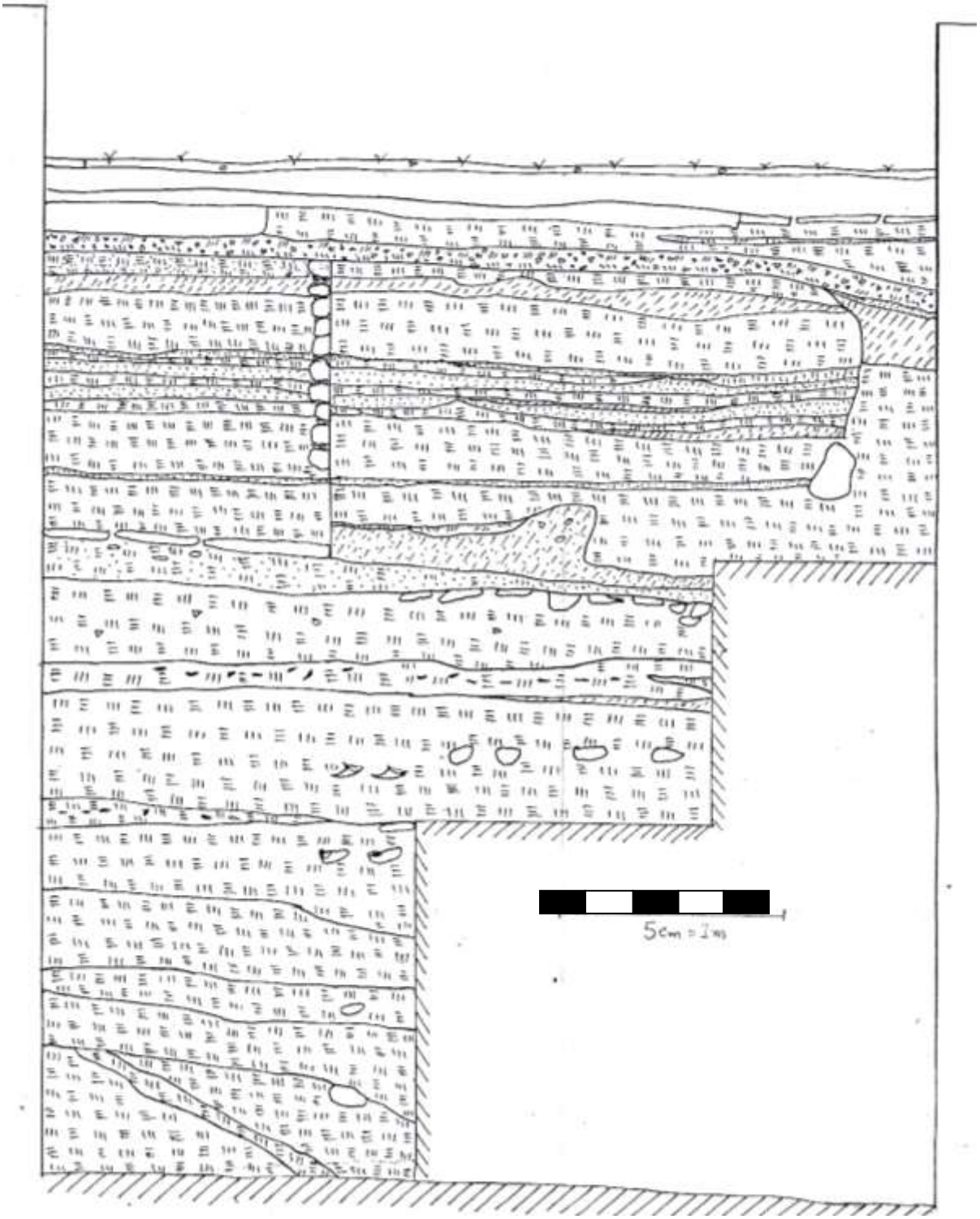

Fig. 73: Trench DVIII-1a. Southern section

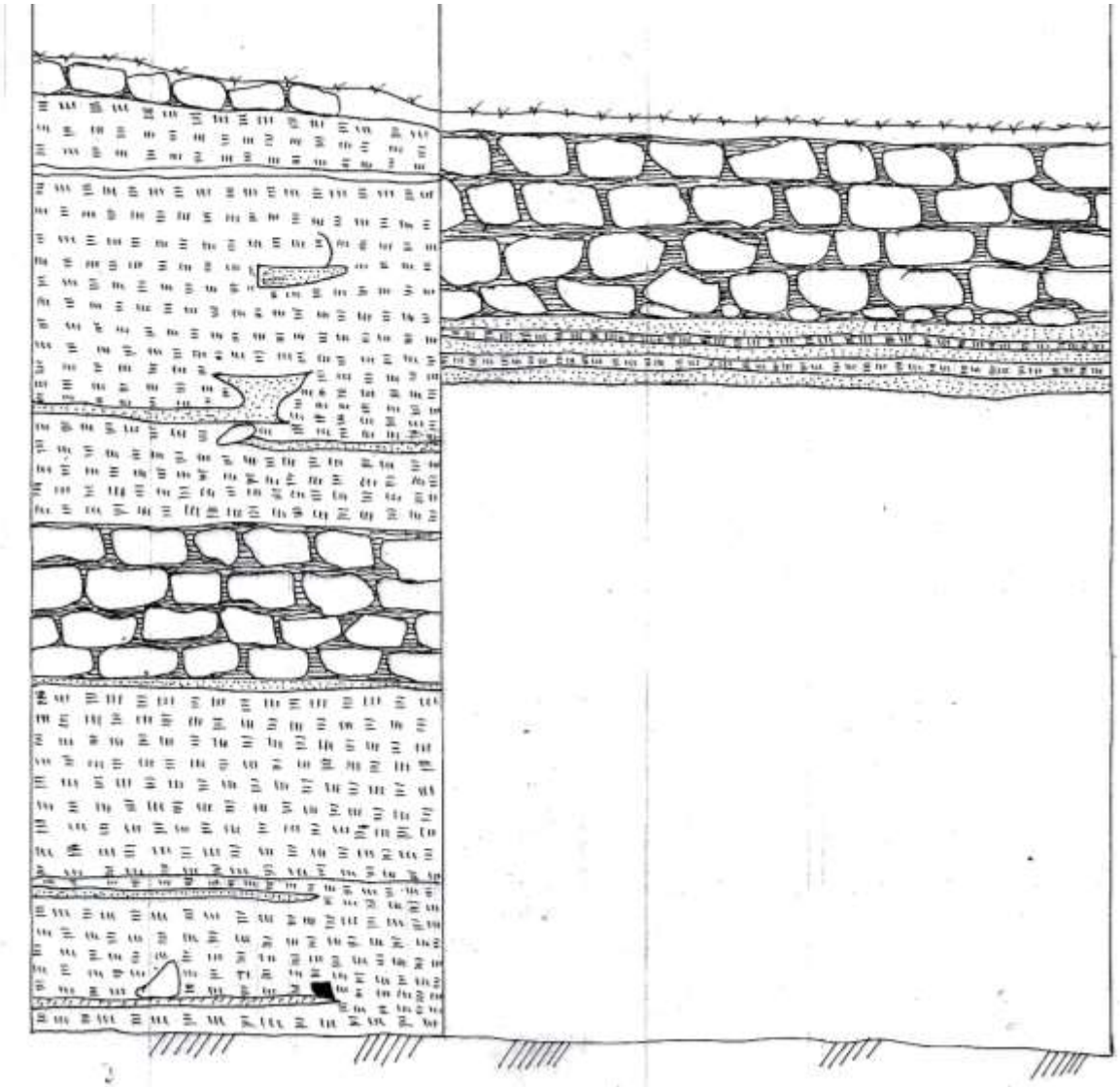

Fig. 74: Trench DVI-3 – Northern and western section

5 cm =1 m

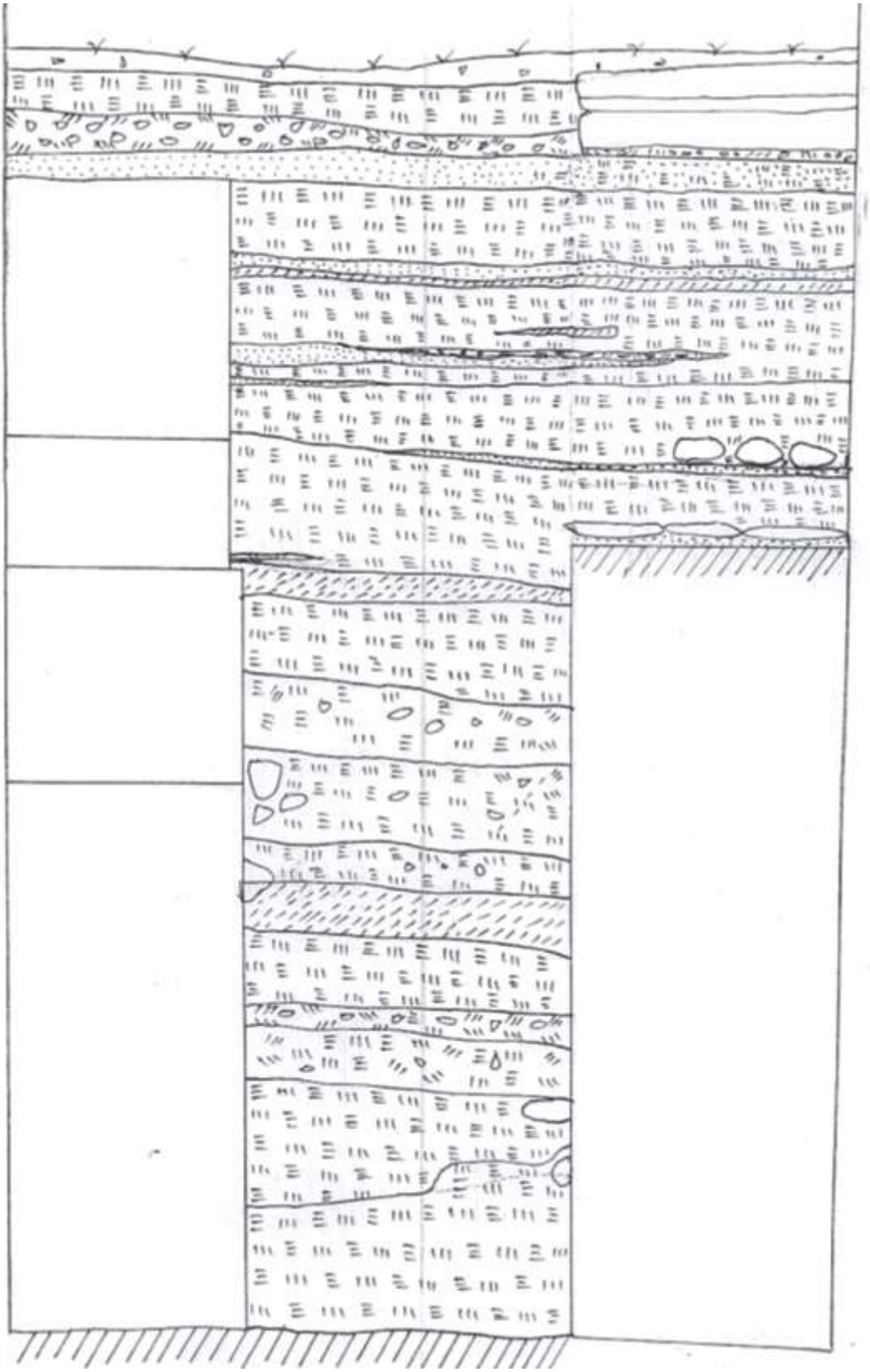

Fig. 75: Trench DVI-3 – Eastern Section

5 cm = 1 m

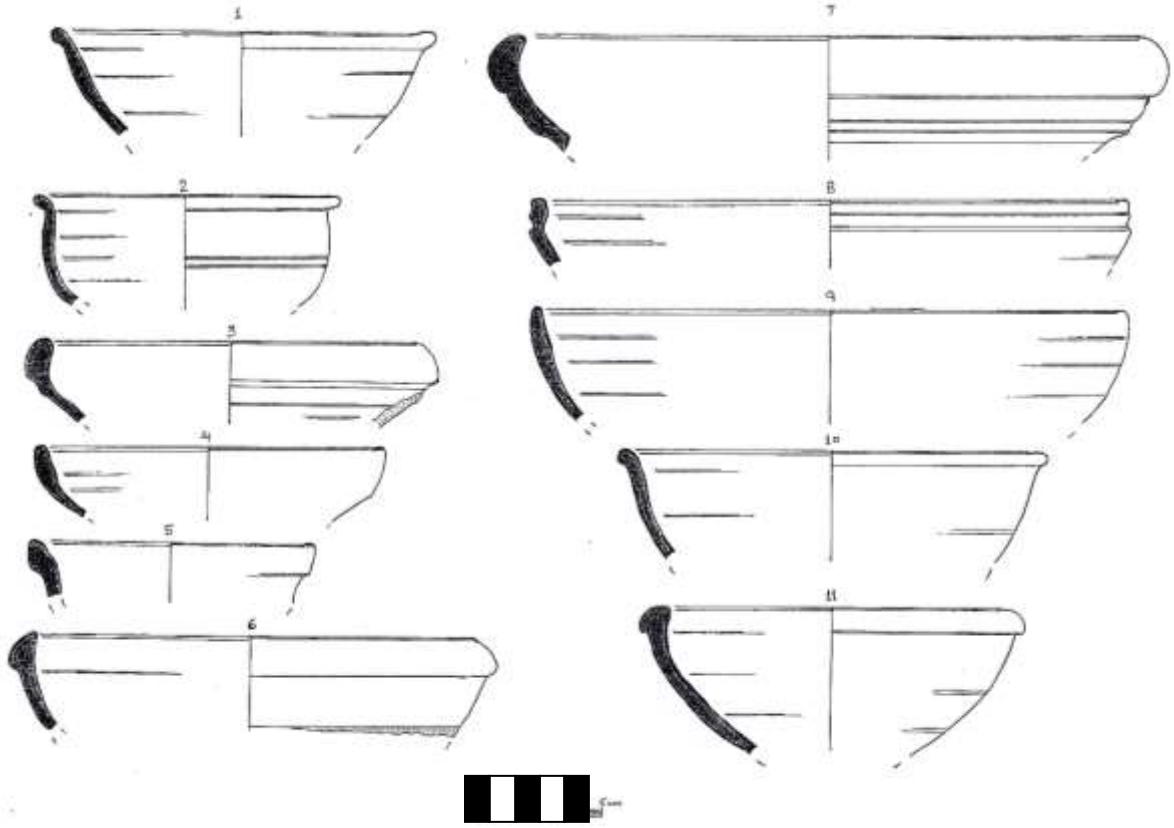

Fig. 76: Indo-Scythian period vessels (convex side bowls) from DVI-3.

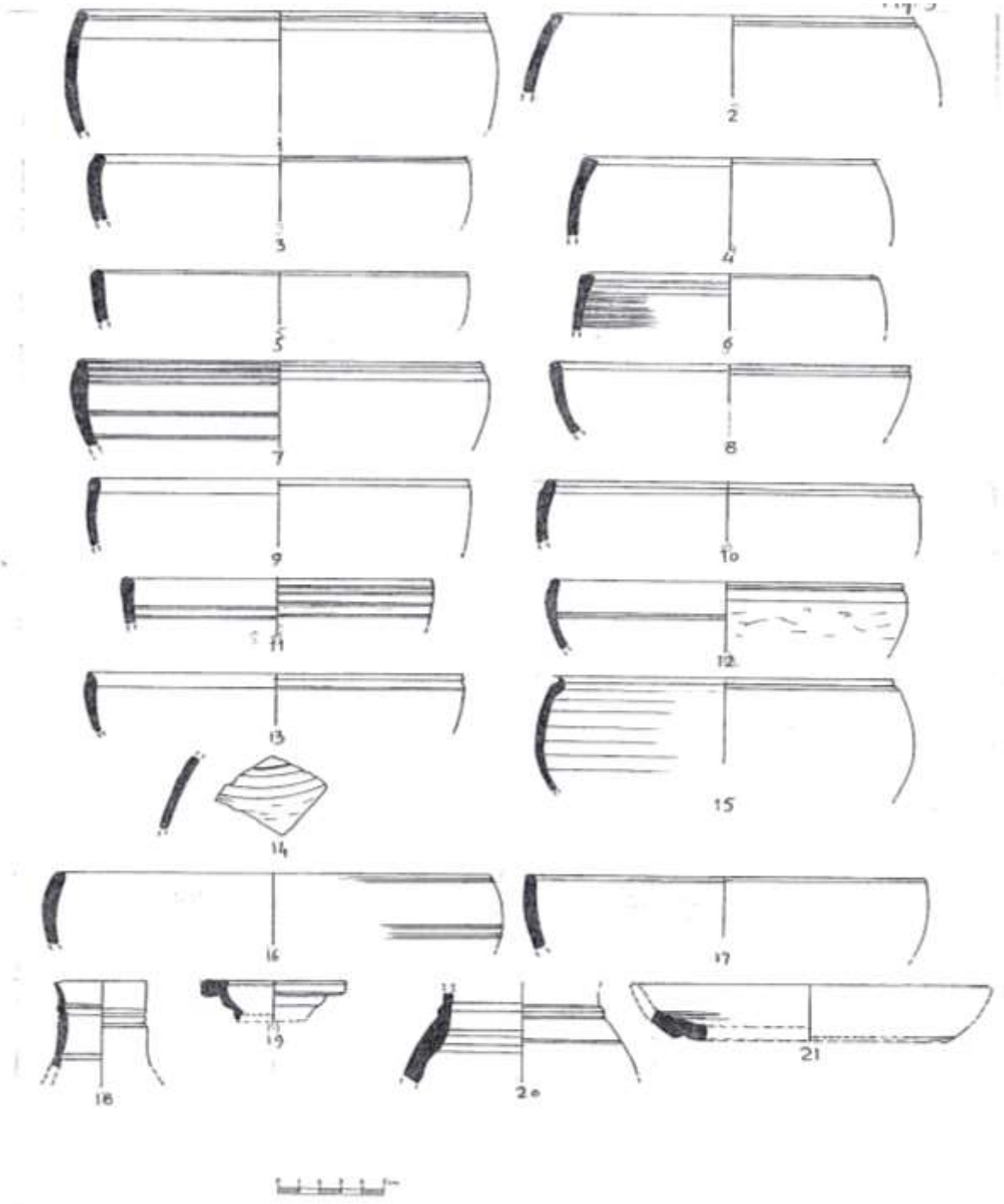

Fig. 77: Early Kushan period vessels

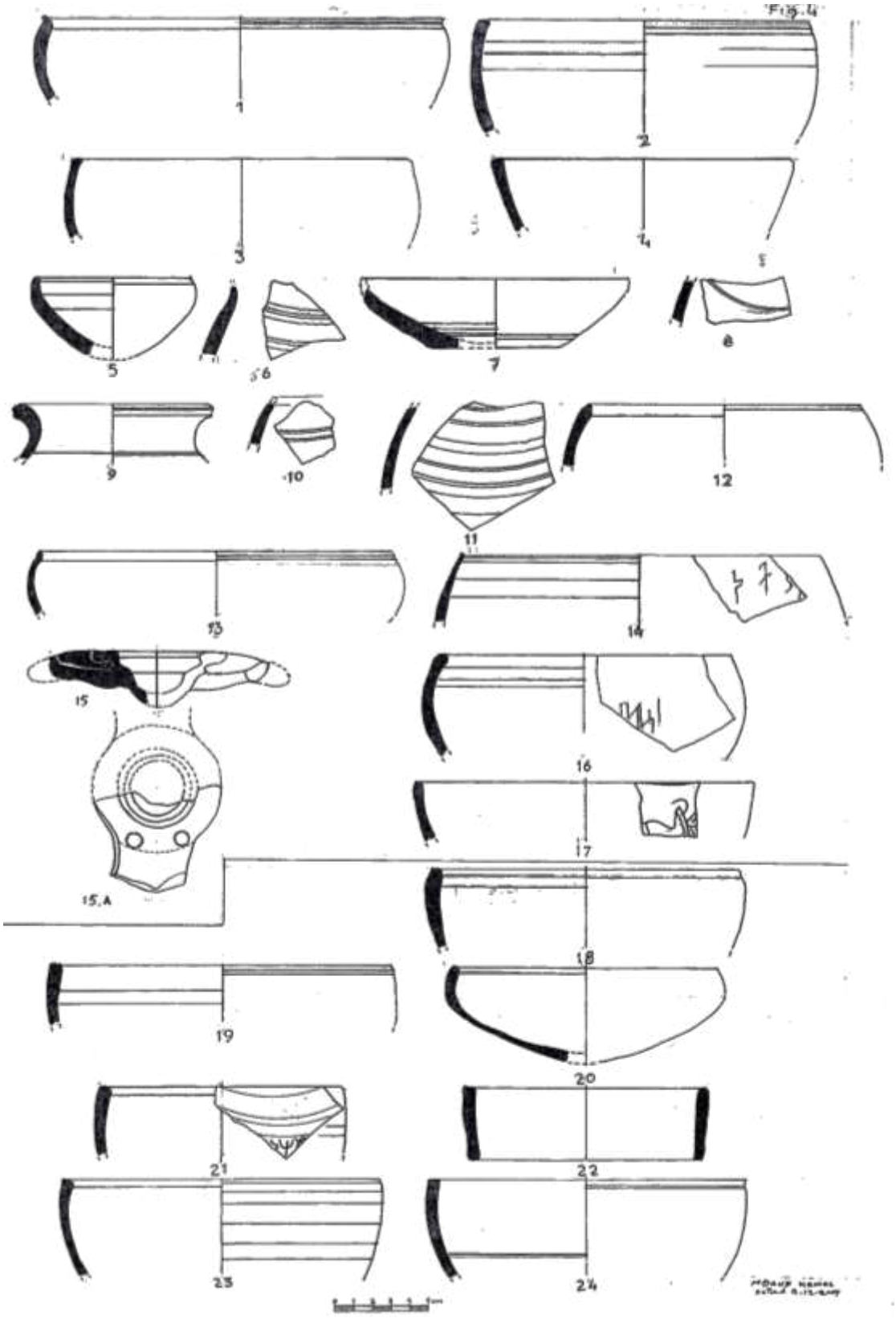

Fig. 78: Bowls (except 15, 15A) in grey ware with convex sides and external grooves from DVIII-8. Late Kushan period

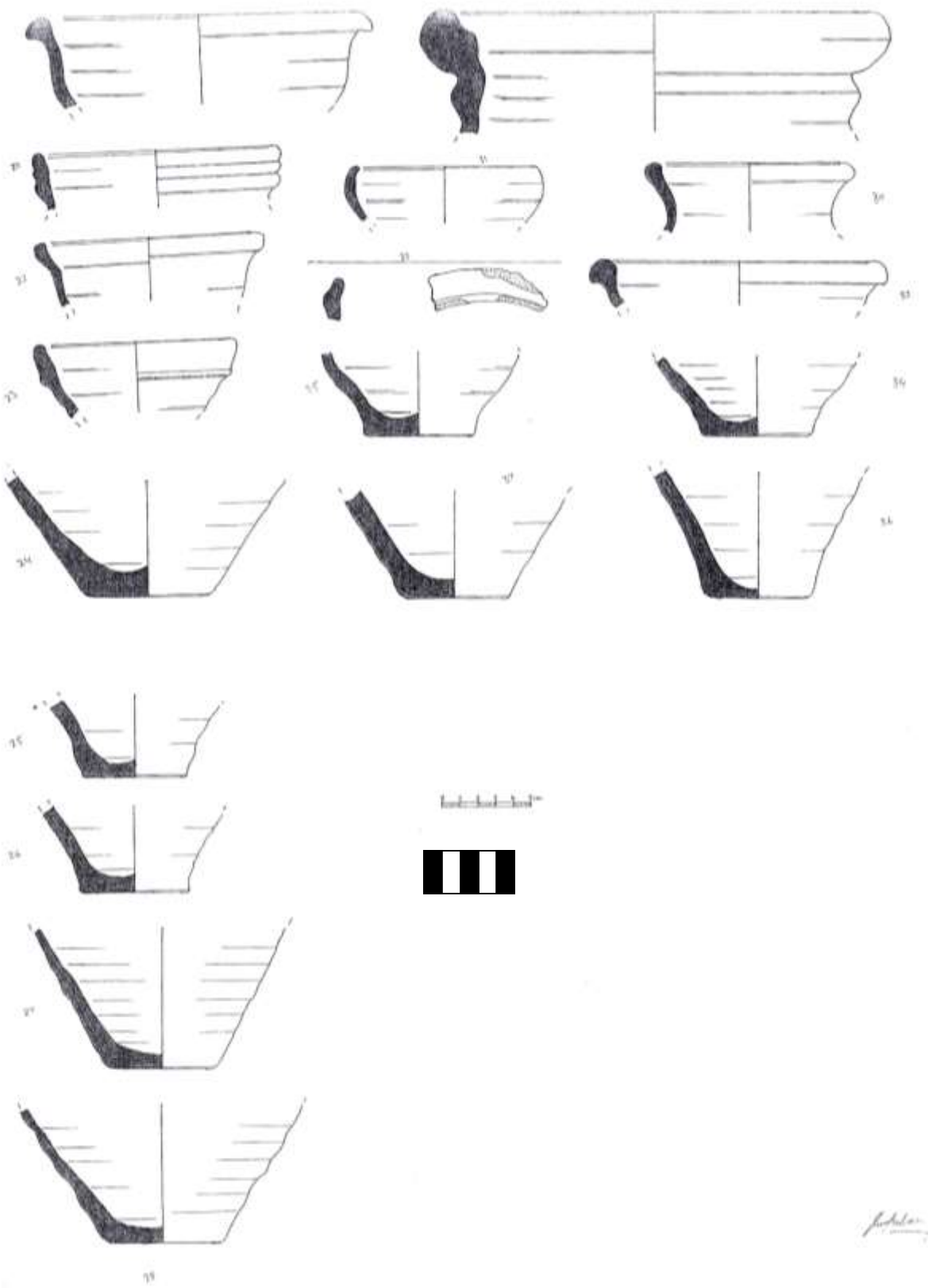

Fig. 79: Post-Kushan vessels ((storages and bowls) from EVI-3, layers 1, 2 (Islamic and Hindu Shahi periods)

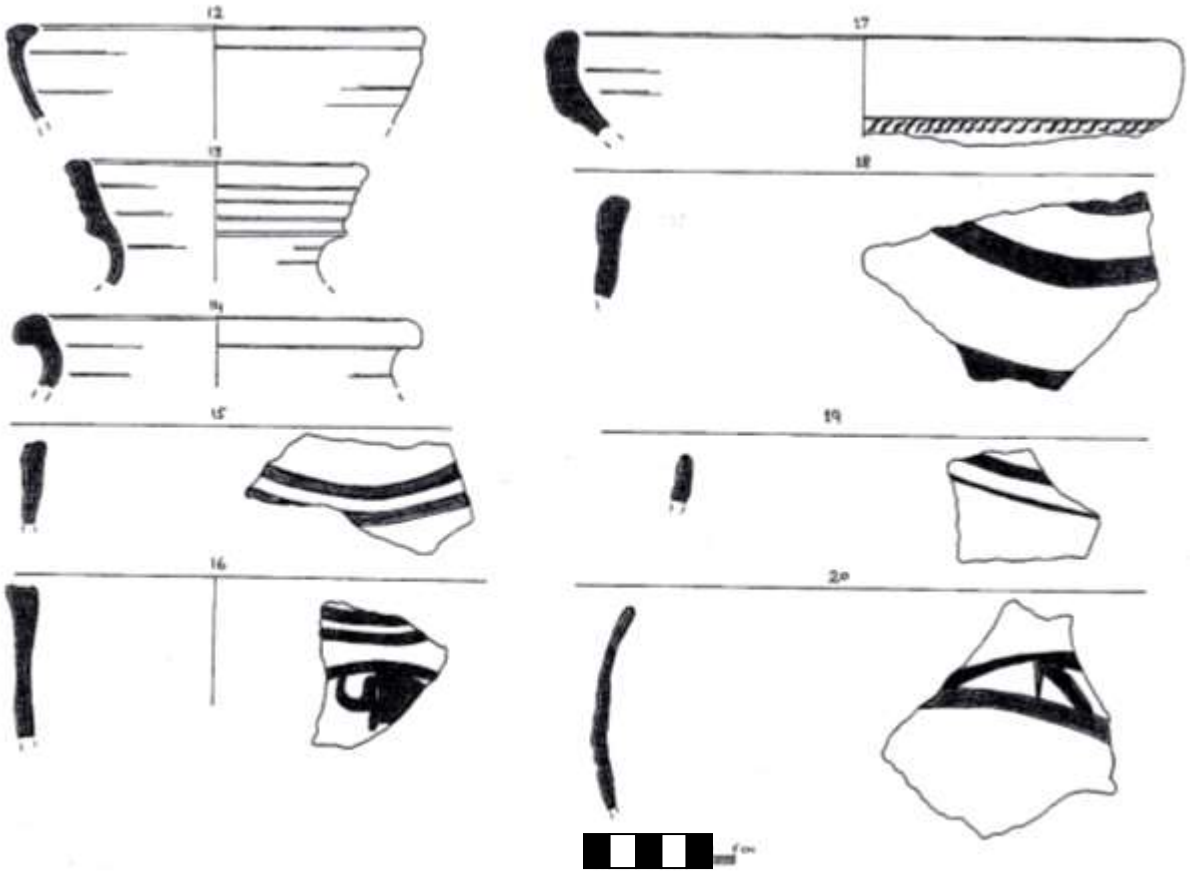

Fig. 80: Hindu Shahi period vessels from EVI-3.

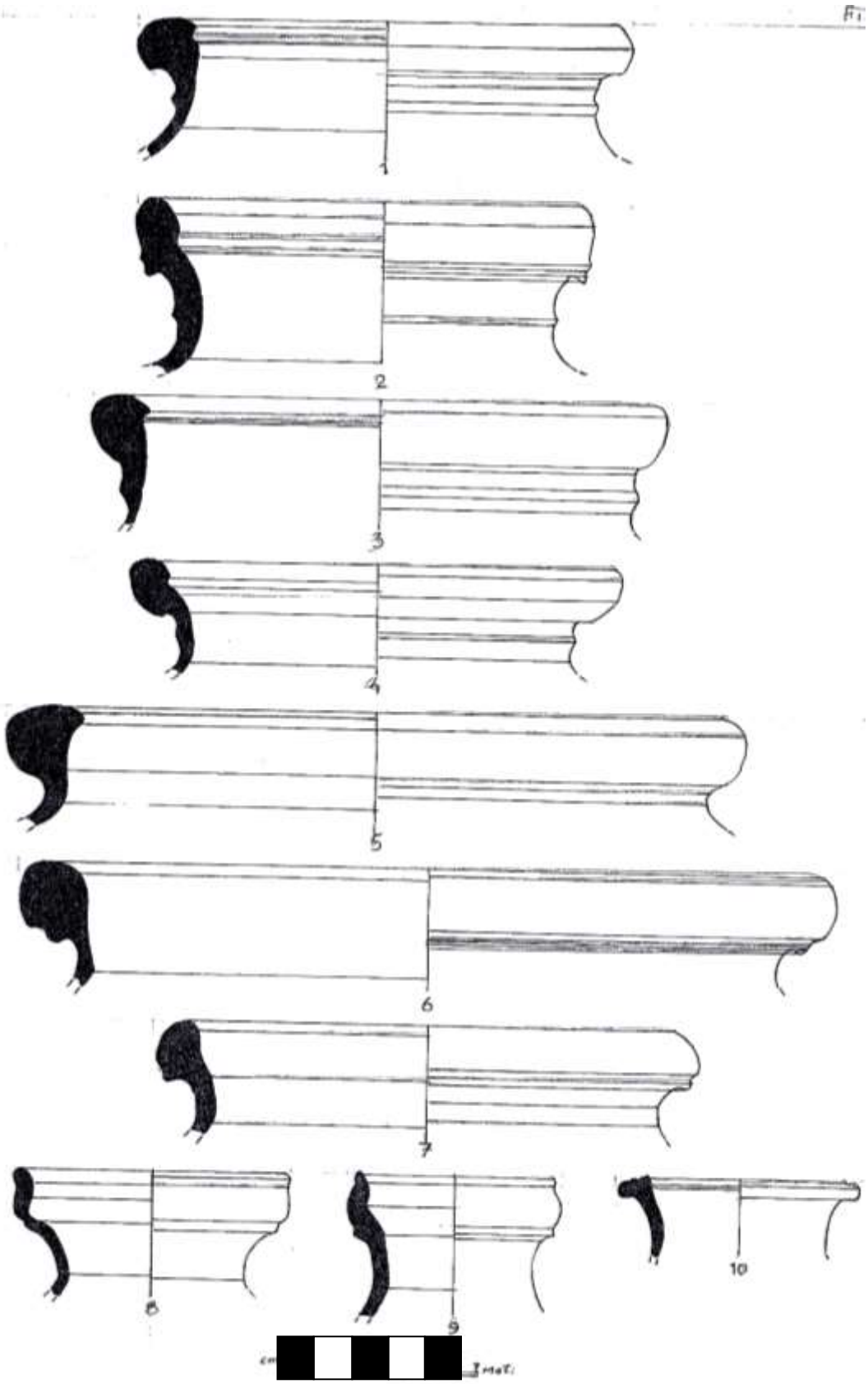

Fig. 81: Storage jars, with thick corse rim, and pitchers from EVI-3, layer 1 (Islamic period).