

الجمهورية اللبنانية

مكتب وزير الدولة لشؤون التنمية الإدارية  
مركز مشاريع ودراسات القطاع العام

With compliments  
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Beirut

# BEIRUT CITY EXCAVATIONS 1995

Republic of Lebanon  
Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform  
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## COOPERATION

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Interim Sketch on Archaeological Excavations  
Place Debbas, Beirut Central District

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**Interim Sketch on Archaeological Excavations  
Place Debbas, Beirut Central District (Bey 024)**

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS ON PLACE DEBBAS (BEY 024)

### 1. Background

At the invitation of the Director General of Antiquities, Dr. Camille Asmar and Solidere Company, the authors of this report have been coordinating a program of archaeological investigations in downtown Beirut. The excavation area is situated at the southeast border of the Beirut city district on Place Debbas (fig.1).

Place Debbas covers an area of ca. 51m to 38m. Within this limit the excavation stretches over an area of 50m x 25m or 1250m<sup>2</sup>. The excavation area (fig.2) is limited to the east and west by modern building activities.

The excavation of the Freiburg/Berlin team lasted for 10 weeks, from August 14<sup>th</sup> until October 21<sup>st</sup> 1995. The team consisted of Prof. Dr. Marlies Heinz/Freiburg and Dr. Karin Bartl/Berlin as directors, 4 German and 5 Lebanese students.

### 2. The Excavation

The excavation was designed to meet a variety of objectives, amongst which are:

- the study of the occupational-history of this part of Beirut
- to establish a ceramic ware and form type series
- the training of Lebanese archaeologists

#### Preliminary results after 10 weeks of excavations

Excavation work at Place Debbas produced evidence of the following periods:

- stray finds of the Upper Palaeolithic period (50.000-20.000 B.C.)
- stray finds of the Hellenistic and Early Roman Period (2th cent.B.C.-2nd cent. A.D.)
- settlement structures of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine era (3rd/4th-6th cent. A.D.) - level I
- occupation of the Late Ottoman period (late 19th/20th cent.) - level II

## a. Architecture

### Late Roman/Early Byzantine period

The excavation on Place Debbas proved that this area of ancient Beirut has been settled mainly in two periods: during the Late Roman-Early Byzantine period (I) as well as Late Ottoman times (II).

Building level I is characterized by extensive building activities, resulting in several building phases<sup>1</sup>. As a result nearly no building can be traced in its original ground plan. Only parts of houses have been preserved. Part of a large structure stretching over a distance of at least 17m east-west and 15m north/south has been preserved in squares E4/5 and D5 (fig.3). With erecting the structure, an older water pipe, running through this area, went out of use (fig.4, photo 1). The size of the building suggests a function rather of a public building than as a place for domestic activities. Until pottery and small finds have been analysed, a more detailed functional interpretation should not be proposed.

To the north-east of that large building a row of smaller rooms existed (fig.5). Obviously these parts of the excavated area had been used as workshops. One of the rooms (photo 2) contained a thick layer of pure clay, thick layers of ashes, worked stones and pots, still kept within the clay-layer. The find of an oil lamp mould gave evidence to lamp production in this area. Interpretation of this room as potter's workshop or an area for melting material seems to be possible. Further analysis has to show whether these rooms have been built somewhat later than the main building to the south. A period of simultaneous use seems to be possible as well.

Within the excavated area the northern part is marked by a distinct descent (fig.6). Again, several levels of building activities can be separated. The earliest level shows a square-like house of rather large dimensions (fig.7). Foundations walls are partly made of large stone slabs. To the south this building was bound by a stone wall with a concrete-like plaster surface of 30 cm thickness. This wall runs over about 20 m in east-west-direction and might have been a protection against erosion of the slope (photo 3). Research on the exact stratigraphical connection of this area with the southern part of the settlement has still to be done. Later structures like hearths and ovens connected with ashy, burnt soil point to domestic activities.

Below this main building level and probably belonging to the same phase several burials were discovered. Stratigraphical context and the variation of

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<sup>1</sup> At least 4 building phases can be separated. A detailed analysis of the architectural structures is being prepared.

burial types (see below) point to different phases.

#### Ottoman Period

After a hiatus of more than thousand years the area of nowadays Place Debbas was settled again. Due to modern building activities, building level II was only preserved in the western part of our excavation area, squares D-F : 4 (fig.8). This building level consisted mainly of a living house and a complex drainage system (photo 4).

#### Palaeolithic finds

Underneath the Late Roman-Early Byzantine buildings we found a layer of red-brown earth, stretching with varying thickness over the whole area. No building remains have been detected underneath this layer which seems to be the result of erosion activities within the area (photo 5). Within the red-brown soil, Palaeolithic finds have been traced. Worked flint stones of different shapes and functions could be recovered. They date into the Late Palaeolithic, i.e. the Levallois-Moustérien (date 50.000-20.000 B.C.).

#### b. Pottery

During the excavations nearly 35.000 sherds were collected, separated by find units. 7.200 (21%) of these could be used as "diagnostic" sherds (i.e. rims, bases, handles and decorated body sherds) and will be processed later in detail. During the field work 2.400 sherds were drawn. This will be the base for a form type catalogue.

The preliminary ware type catalogue consists of 15 ware types, which occur with different frequency. Common wares are the most frequent - more than 70% of all sherds belong to different groups of buff, reddish and dark reddish brown wares (photo 6). All these wares are minerally tempered. Among the common ware types dark brown cooking pot wares with horizontally ribbed surface and specific rim shapes are the most characteristic (fig.9).

Very few pieces belong to different types of glazed wares - they are mostly dating into the Ottoman period. Among the fine wares quite a large number of red-slipped wares occurred (fig.10, photos 7-8). These significant wares can be distinguished into so-called "Late Roman C", "Cypriot Red slip" and "African Sigillata", all of them dating into the Late Roman/Early Byzantine

period. Besides, "Eastern Sigillata A" appeared occasionally out of context. Hellenistic black glazed ware occurred as well. These pottery types gave evidence of corresponding settlement levels in the bordering areas of Place Debbas.

Concerning the datation of the pottery the broad variety of amphora shapes is of special value. Moreover, the typology of fine wares will give more information about the exact date of the different levels. Further research work will concentrate on these aspects.

### c. Small finds

Among the small finds which show a broad variety of all kinds of objects of daily use several groups are of special value concerning the dating of the layers of the site: clay pipes, coins and lamps.

#### Clay pipes

A huge number of clay pipe heads are the most characteristic finds of the Late Ottoman period. They can be divided into parts of narghile and normal tobacco pipes (photos 9-10). Both types show a broad variety of decoration like stamped or cut motives or painting. They date into the 19th/20th century.

#### Coins

During the excavations 51 coins were found, 22 of which were datable. All of them are dating into the Roman period, mostly into imperial times (photo 11). 8 coins showed legible inscriptions and allow a more precise dating. They belong into the time of the emperors Geta (A.D. 209-212), Licinius I. (A.D. 308-324), Constantinus I. (A.D. 307-337), Constantinus II. (A.D. 337-361). Coins of the period of Constantinus II. (photo 11-12) are the most frequent. Only one coin is datable into pre-Christian times. It bears a late Phoenician inscription. Although the very limited amount of legible coin inscriptions should not be overrated the concentration into the 4th century A.D. is striking.

#### Lamps

Within the area of Bey 024 200 fragments of oil lamps were found. 40 pieces were part of identifiable oil lamp types, 10 lamps were almost complete. The upper part of a limestone oil lamp mould gave evidence of production at the site (photo 14). Among the more or less complete pieces several types could

be distinguished:

- oval-shaped lamps with large filling hole and oblong nozzle
- round lamps with small filling hole
- fine ware lamps with flat decorated discus (scenes of different types, surrounded by concentric circles) and small wick hole (fig.11; photo 15)
- oval-shaped lamps with geometric pattern and cone-like handle (photo 16)

These lamp types can be dated into the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period. Few pieces, like a folded piece with interior seem to date into Islamic times (fig.12).

#### e. Flint tools

Within the sterile sand layer below the main settlement level of Bey 024 a large amount of flint artifacts were found. Apart from find spot 2038 (see photo 17) where a concentration of flint tools and raw material was uncovered all the other silex objects were single finds without context. Besides numerous unretouched flakes, several cores, scrapers (fig.13; photo 18) and blades (photo 19) were found. All tools can be dated into the Upper Palaeolithic.

#### f. Bones

During the excavations at Place Debbas three burials were uncovered. Among these one was a pot burial, two others were earth graves. Burial 2 showed an individual in stretched position with some gifts, burial 3 contained four individuals in disarticulated position (fig.14; photo 20). Both inhumations were covered by structures of level I. It is planned to investigate the human bones in Germany.

In the debris inside the building structures quite a few of animal bones were discovered - all out of primary context. However, in general the bones could be assigned to occupational layer II. The investigation of the bones by Chiara Cavallo of the IPP/Amsterdam is still in progress. According to her analysis ca. 1.000 animal bones could be processed. Pig bones are dominating.

### 3. Summary

The main occupation layer of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period was founded on a sterile layer of sand, probably originated by fluvial sedimentation. Within this sand layer quite a few of flint tools and flakes were detected. They can be dated into the Upper Palaeolithic. These artifacts are to be treated as stray finds - the actual find spots do not represent the primary context.

The Late Roman/Early Byzantine structures uncovered so far in this area belong to public as well as domestic buildings and can be dated into the timespan between the 4th and 6th century in general. Further investigations of the material will refine this general view. The 1995 excavations at Place Debbas have shown that the Late Roman/Early Byzantine city Berytus extended more than formerly expected. Reasons and exact date of the abundance of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine settlement are not clear. However, traces of violent destruction (earthquake) were not visible.

Stray finds of the Hellenistic and Early Roman period point to corresponding settlement levels in the vicinity, probably north and west of Place Debbas. Between the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period settlement and the subsequent Late Ottoman occupation (late 19th/20th century) a settlement hiatus of more than thousand years followed. Although the building activities of that period destroyed much of the older structures through the construction of deep foundation trenches it seems unlikely that early and middle Islamic levels in the area existed originally. The Late Ottoman period produced structures of domestic type which were partly disturbed by 20th century drainage systems.

It can be summarized that ancient occupation at Place Debbas was of rather short duration and lasted not more than three hundred centuries. Connection to the central part of Late Roman/Early Byzantine Beirut situated north of Place Debbas can only be clarified by further excavations.



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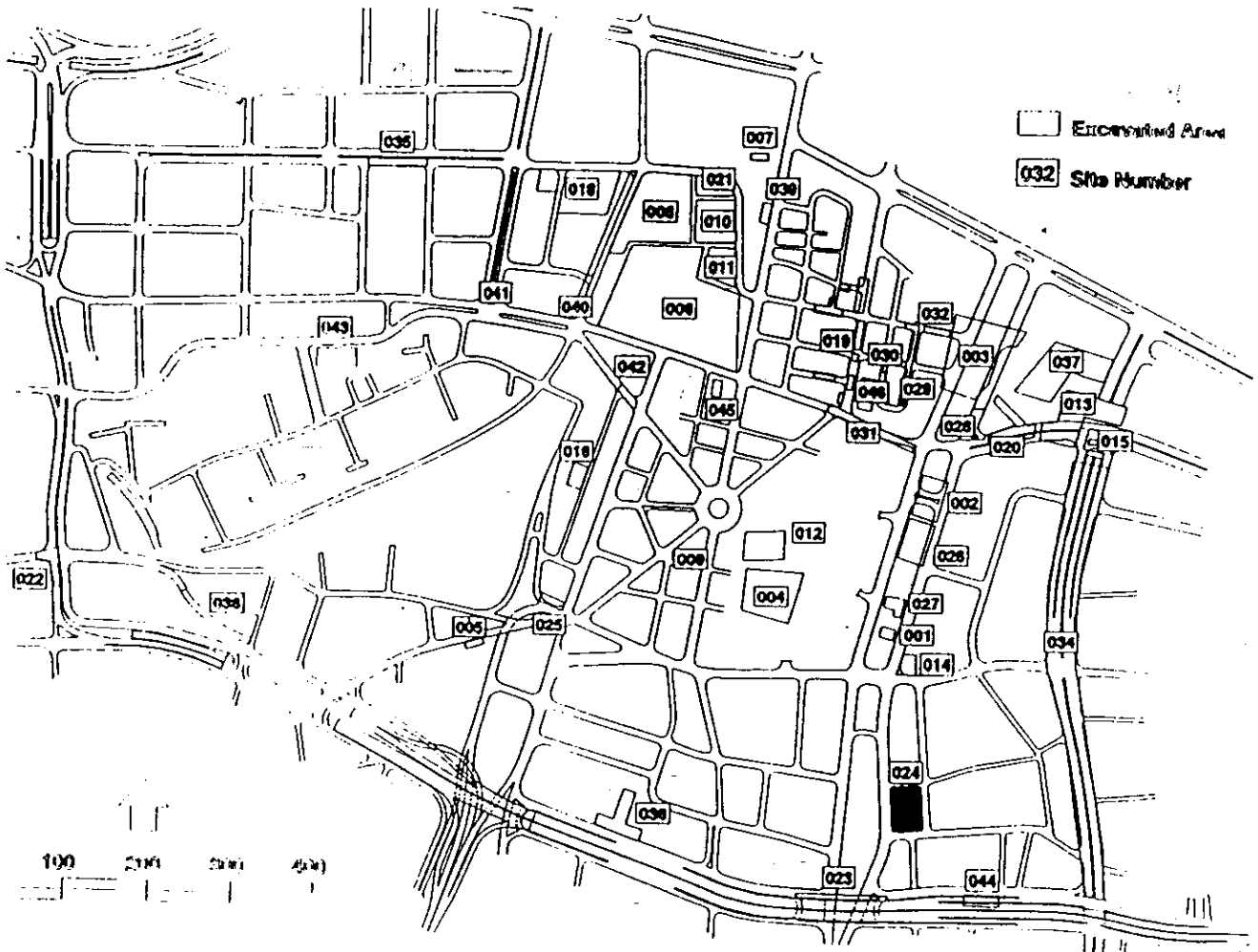


fig. 1

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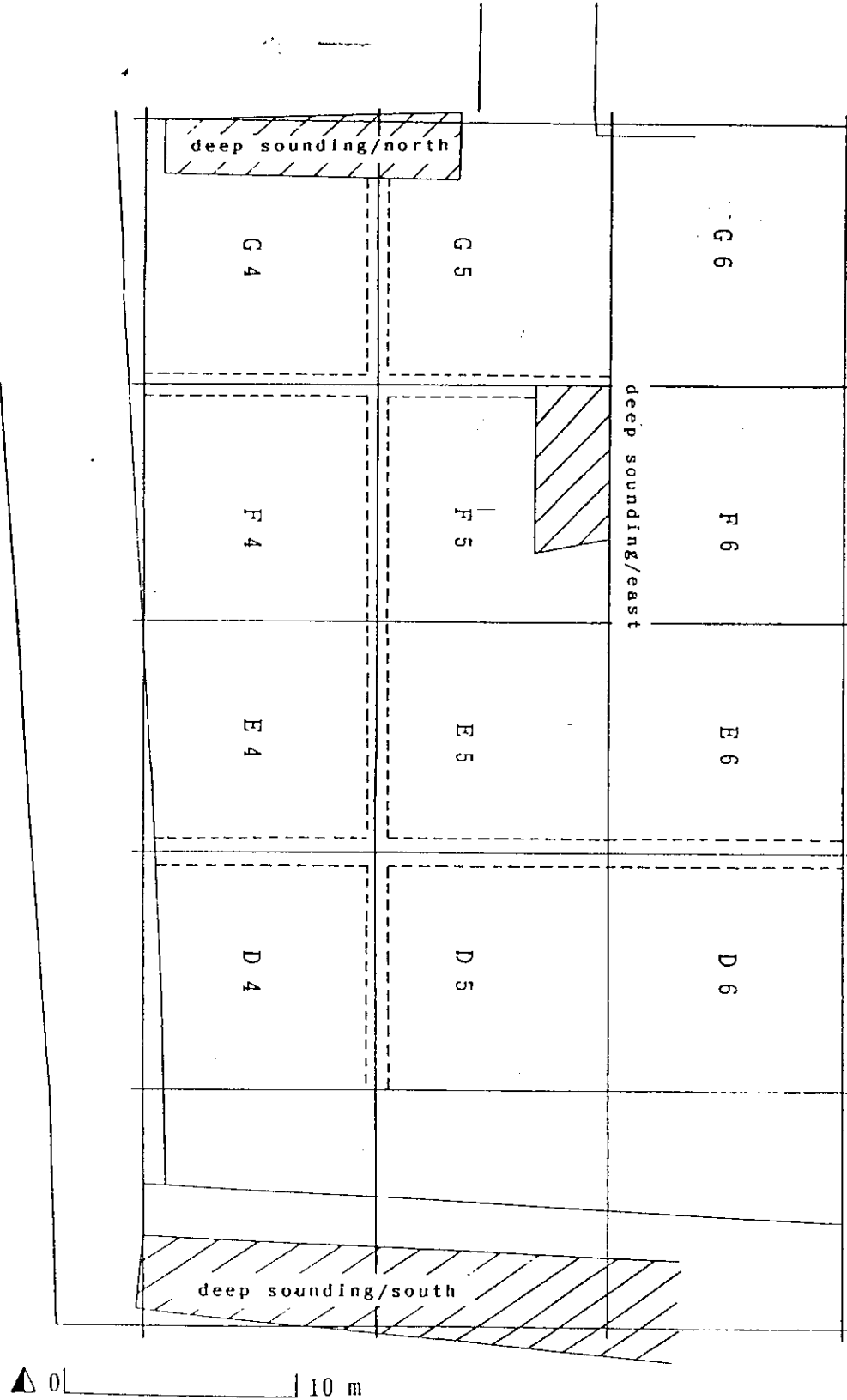


fig. 2

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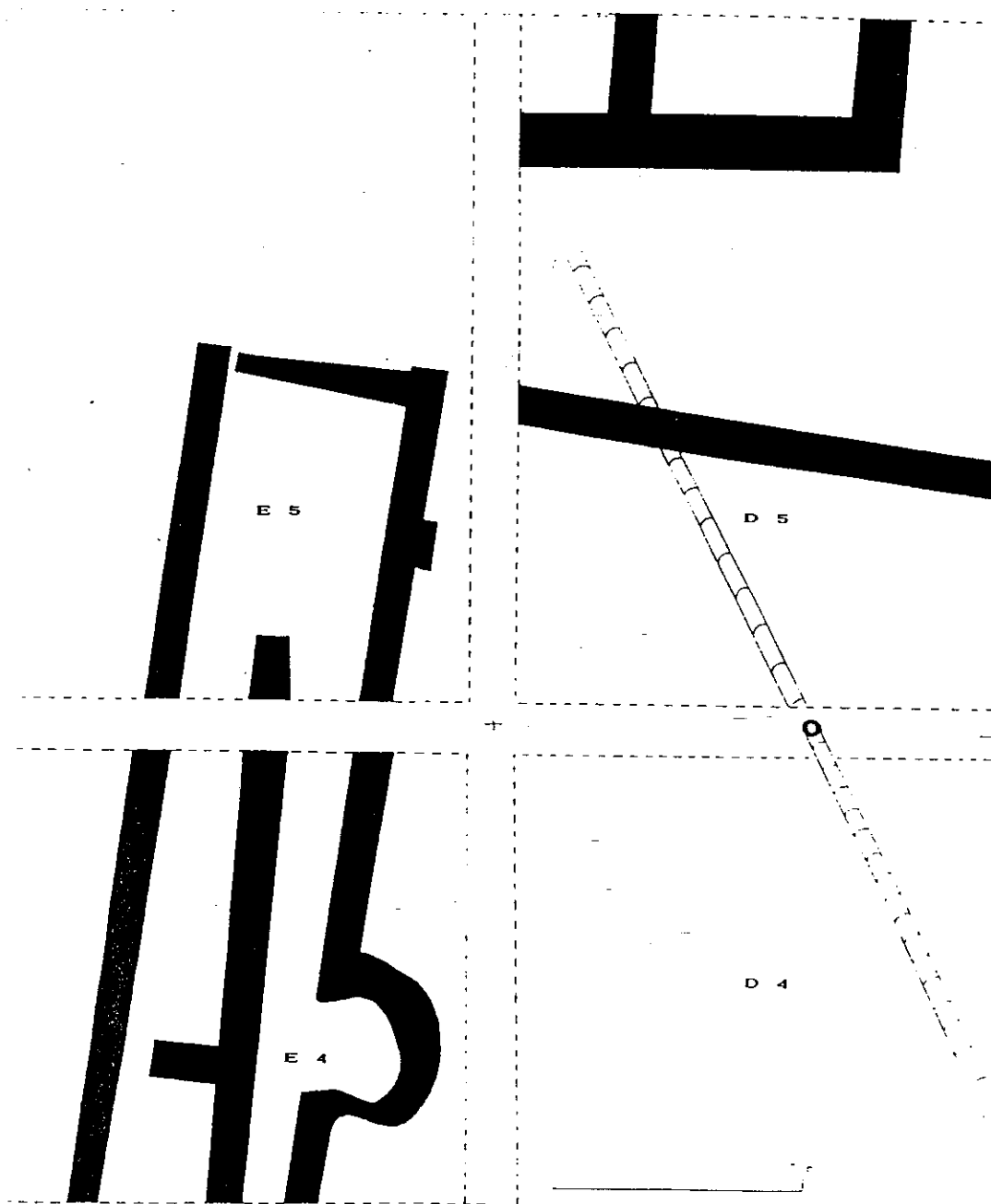


fig. 3

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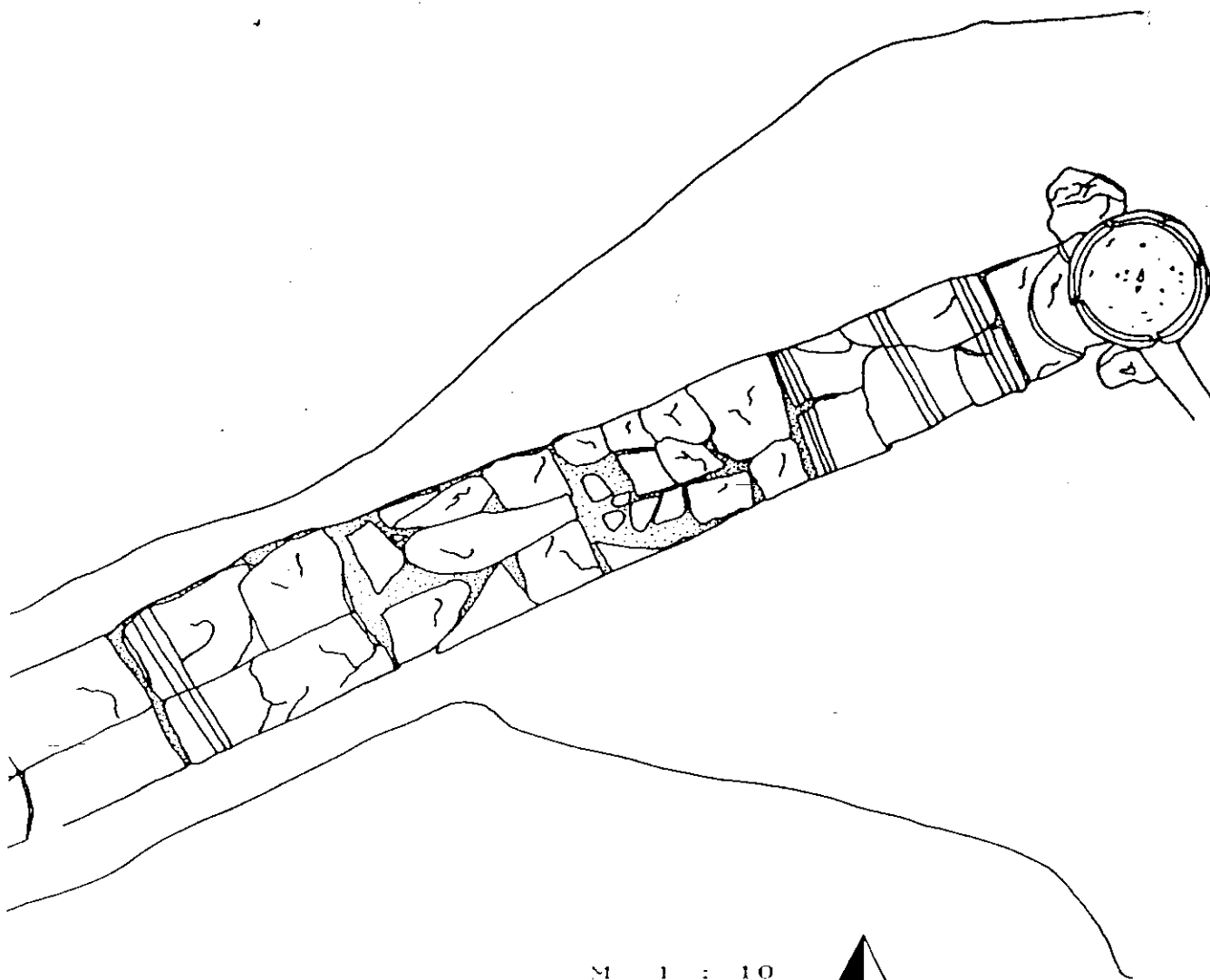


fig. 4

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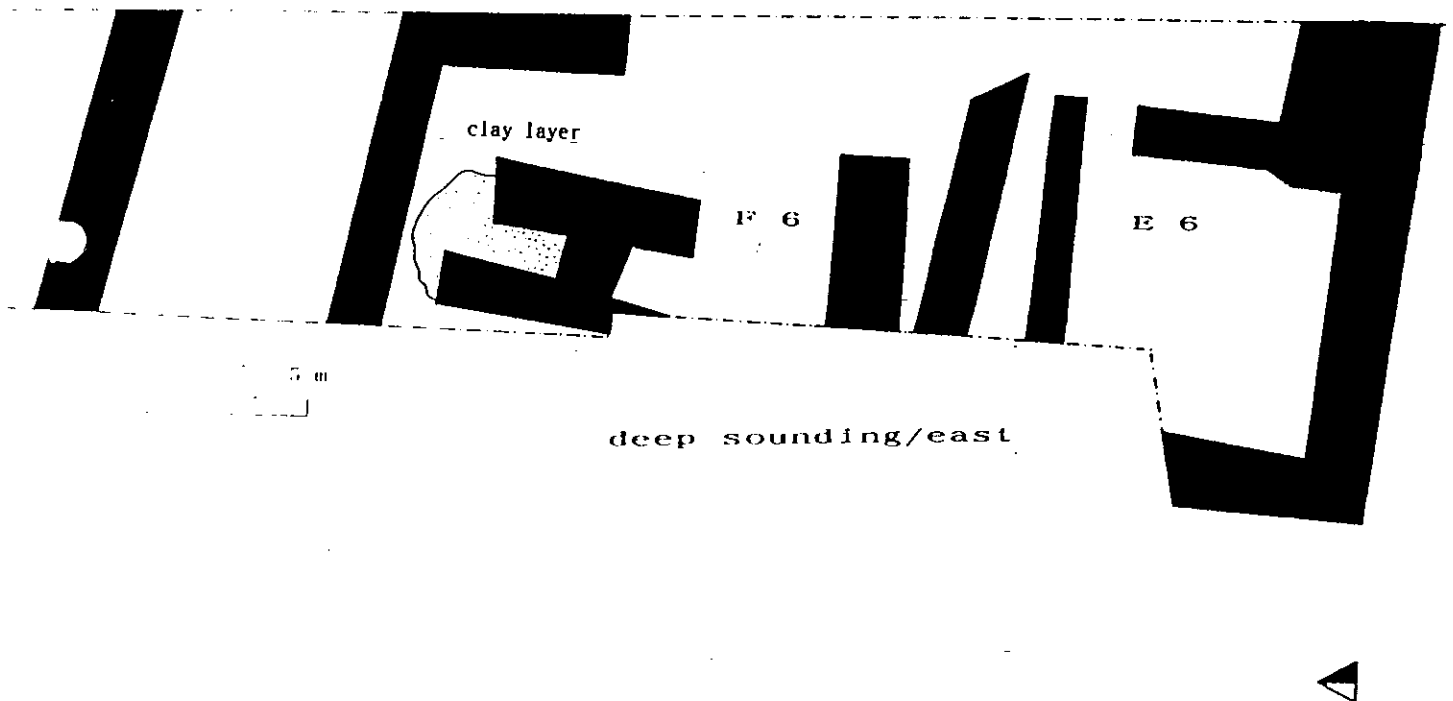


fig. 5

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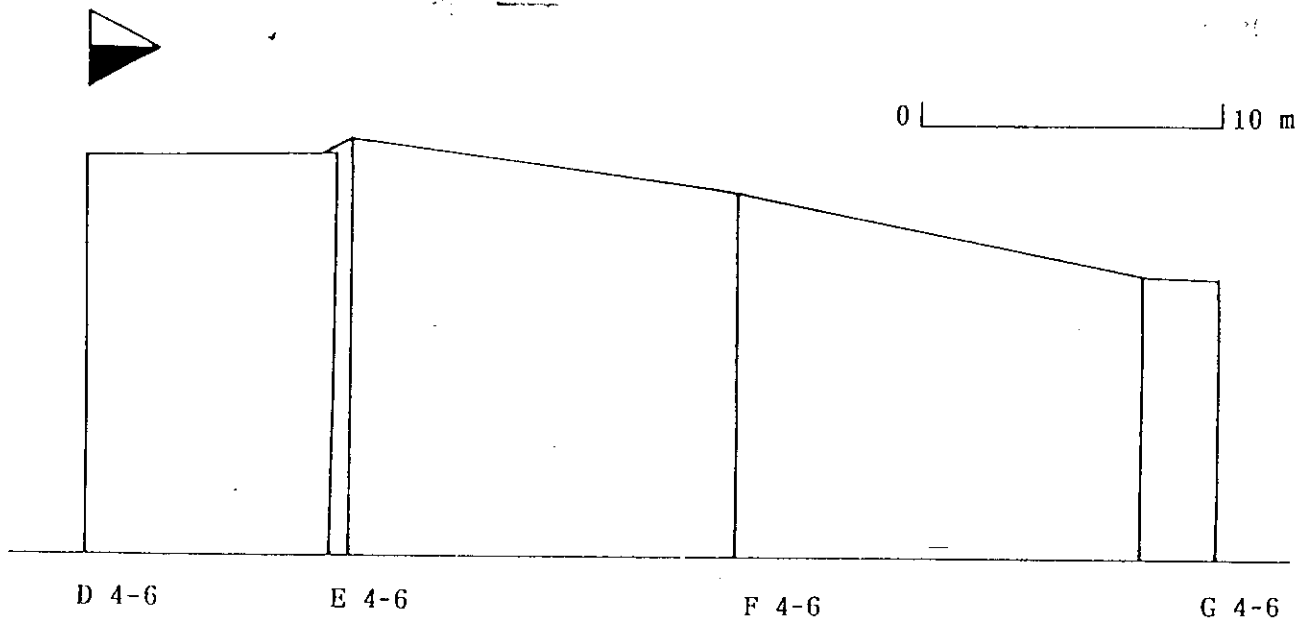


fig. 6

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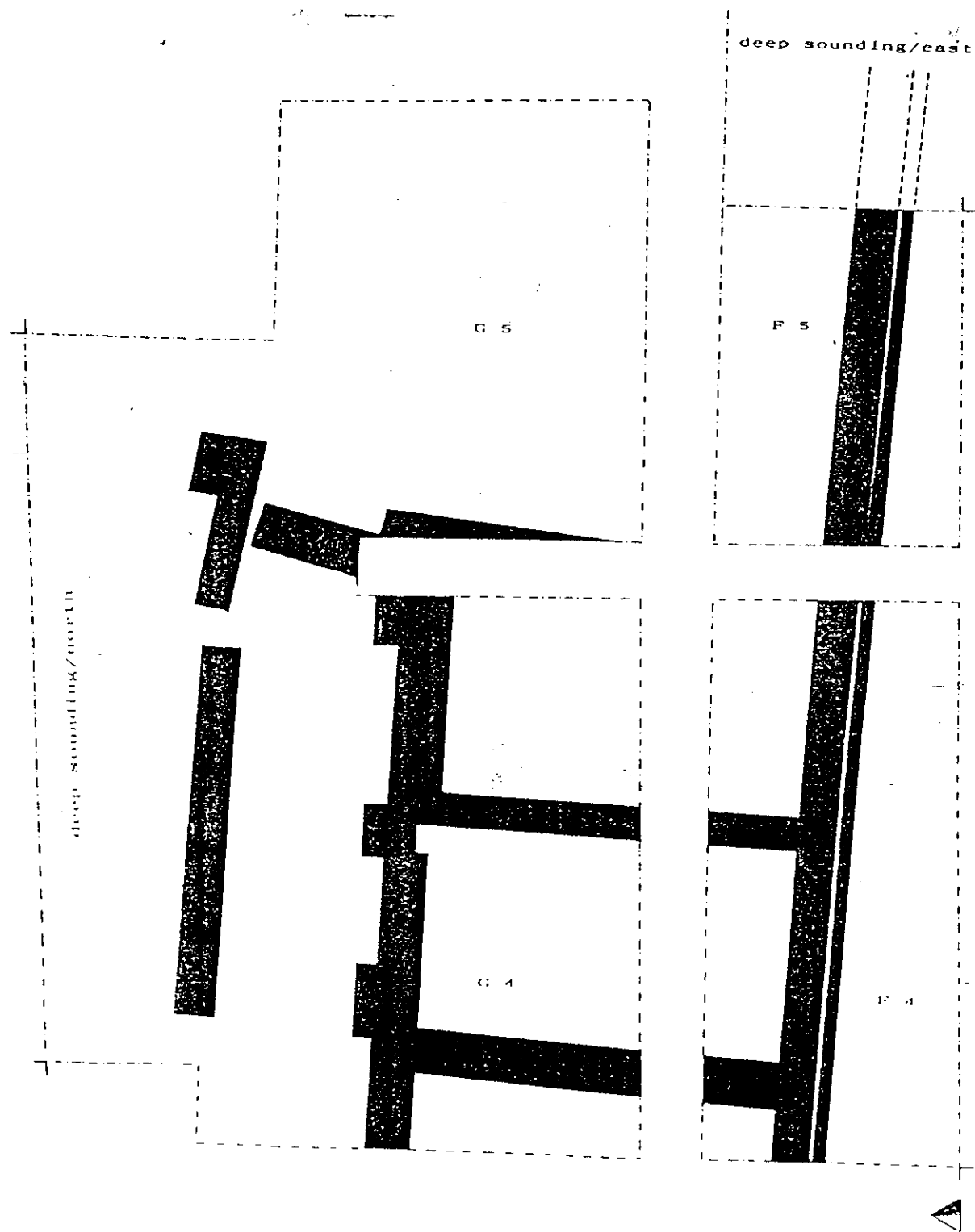


fig. 7

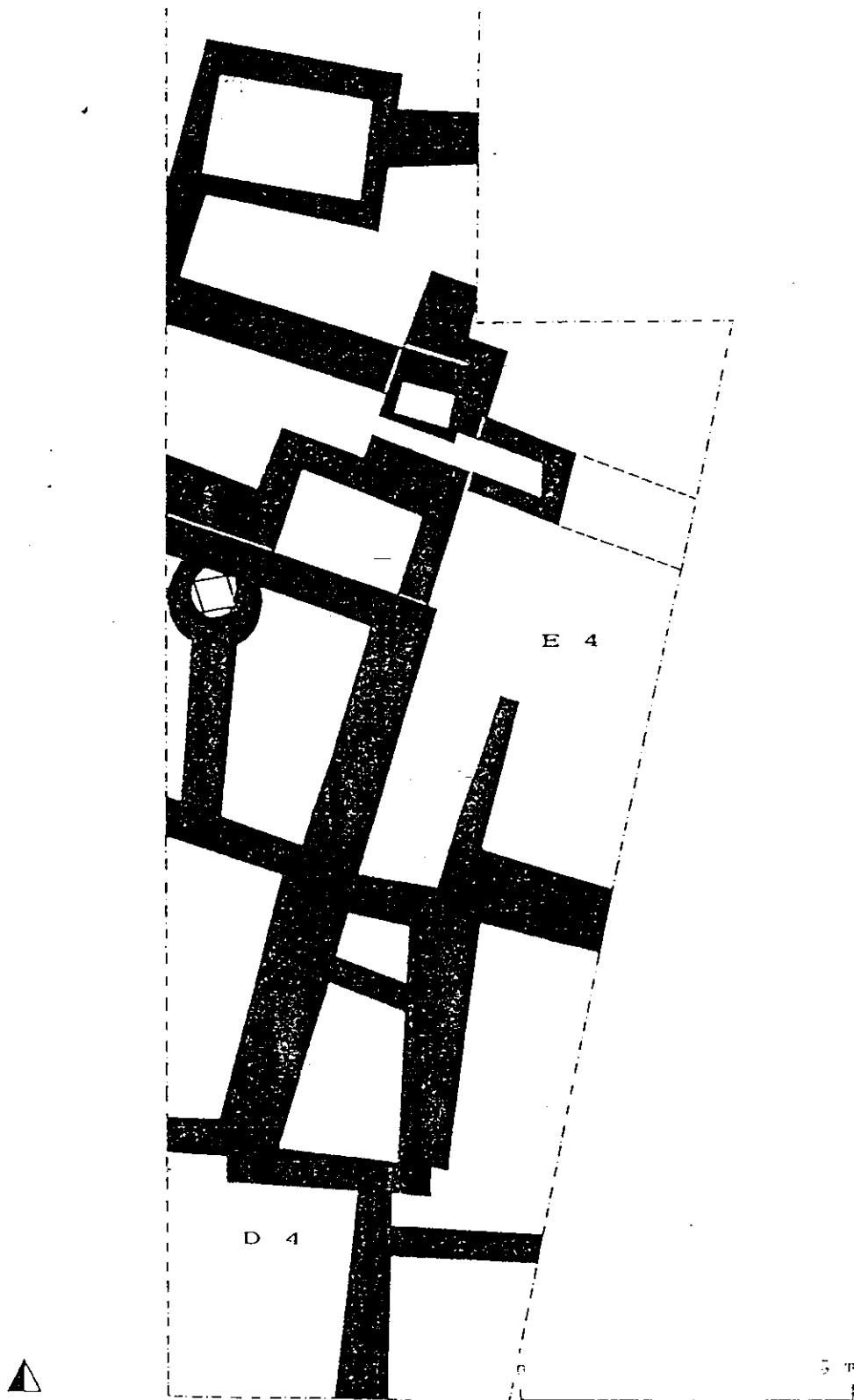


fig. 8



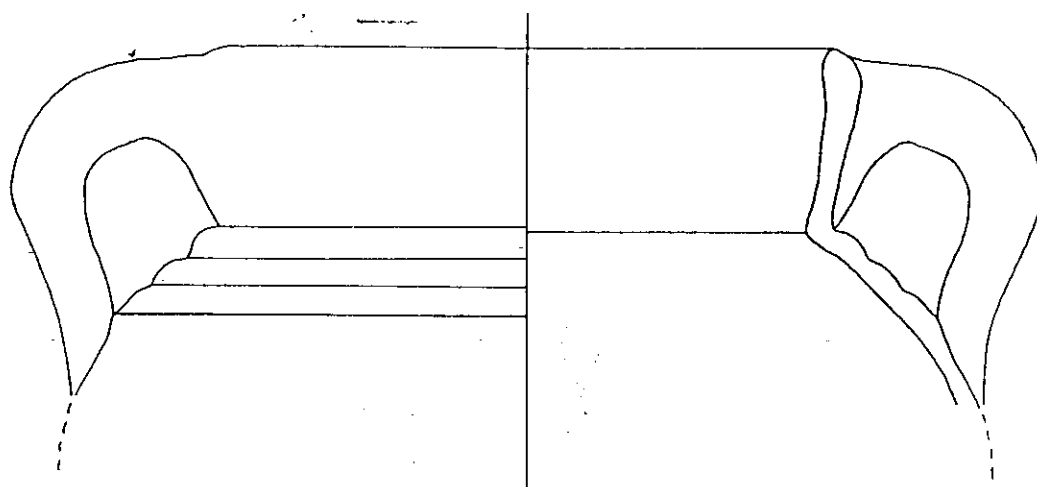
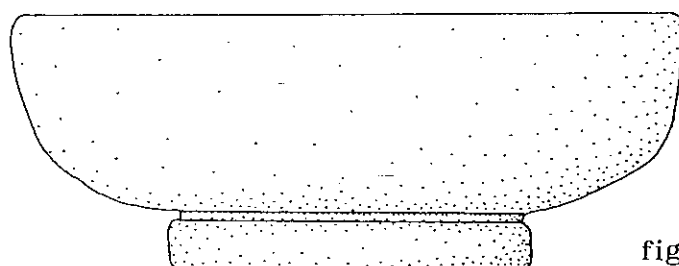


fig. 9



M 1 : 1

fig. 10

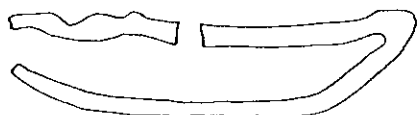
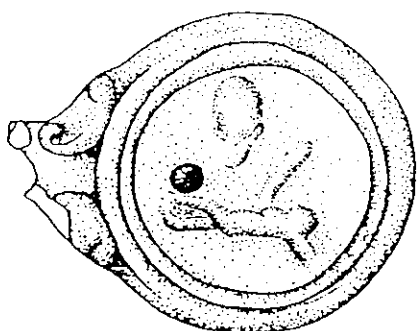
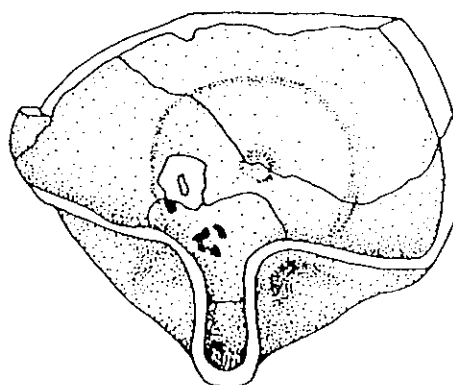


fig. 11



5 cm

fig. 12

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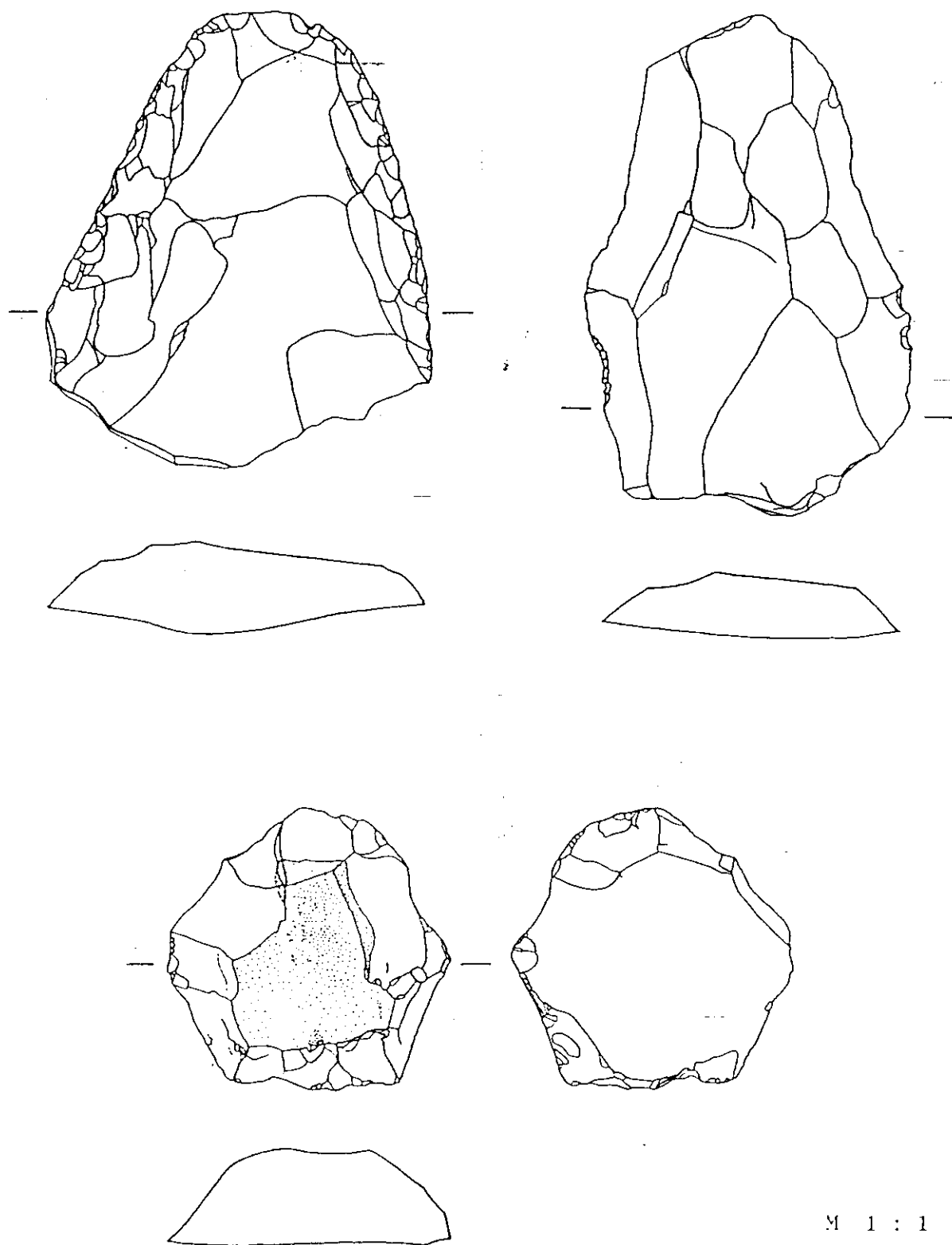


fig. 13

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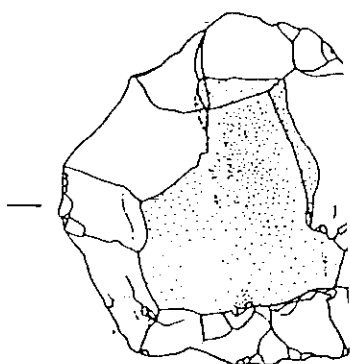
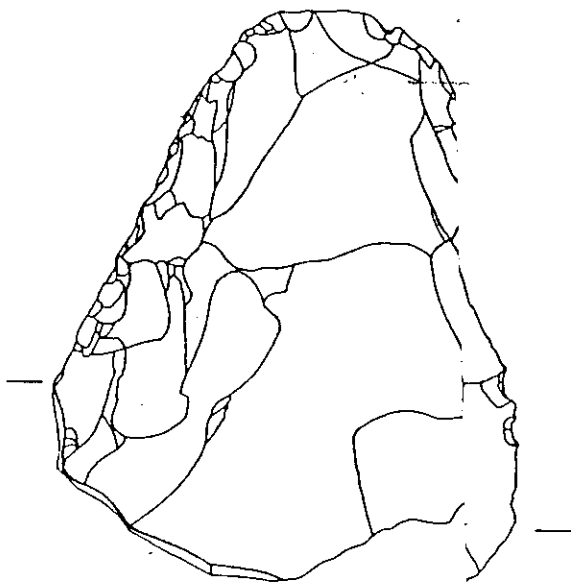


fig. 13

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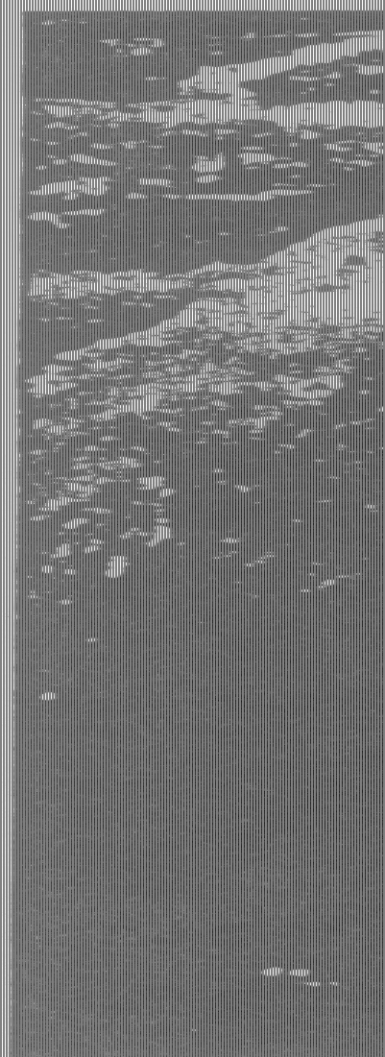
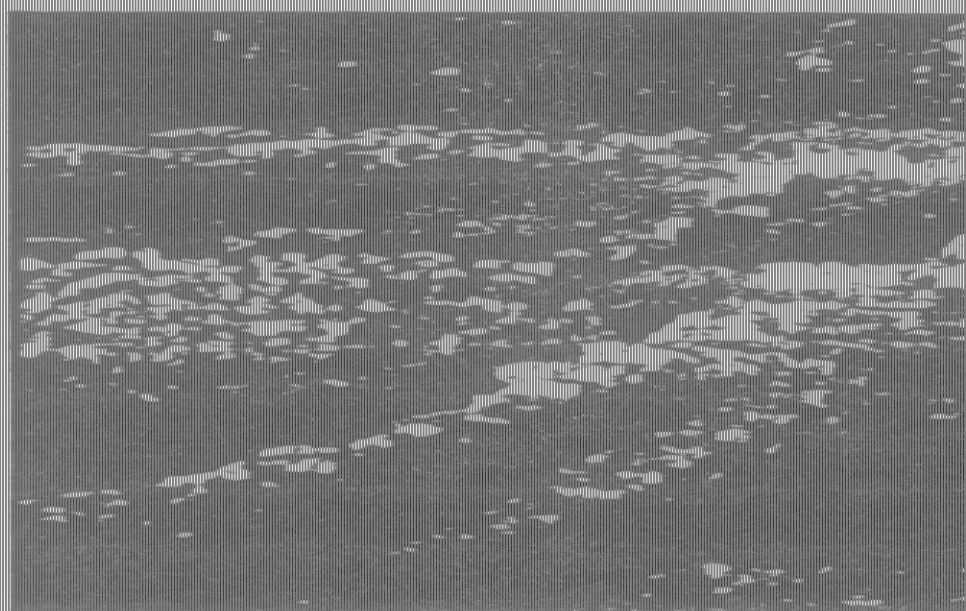
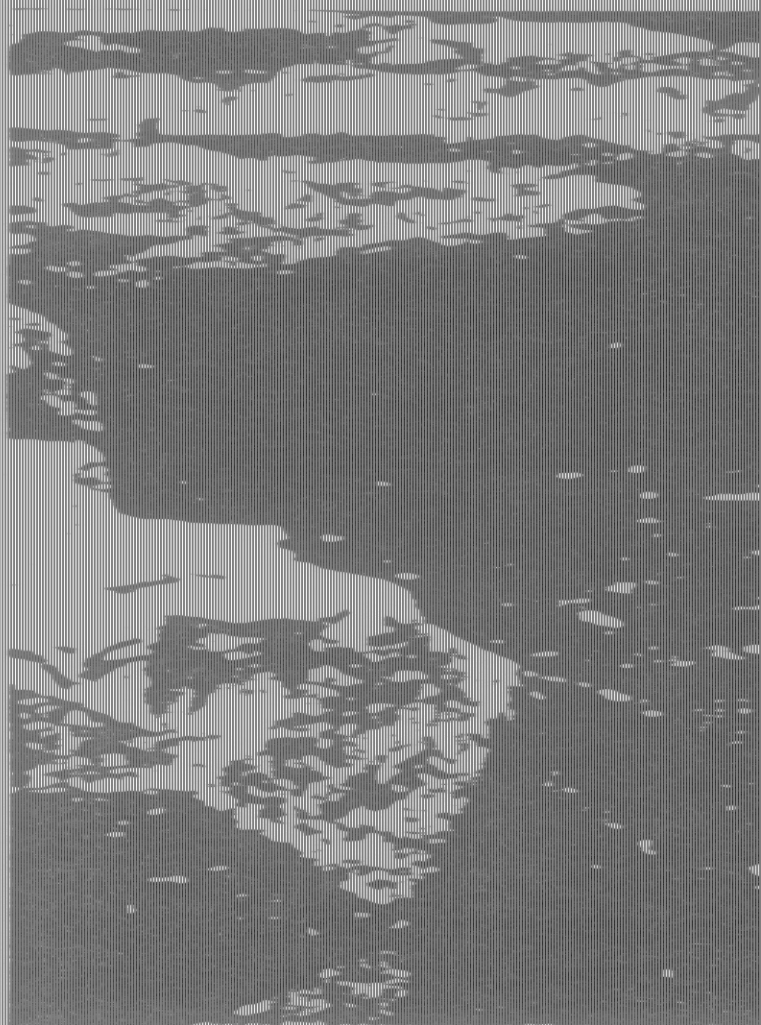


photo 4



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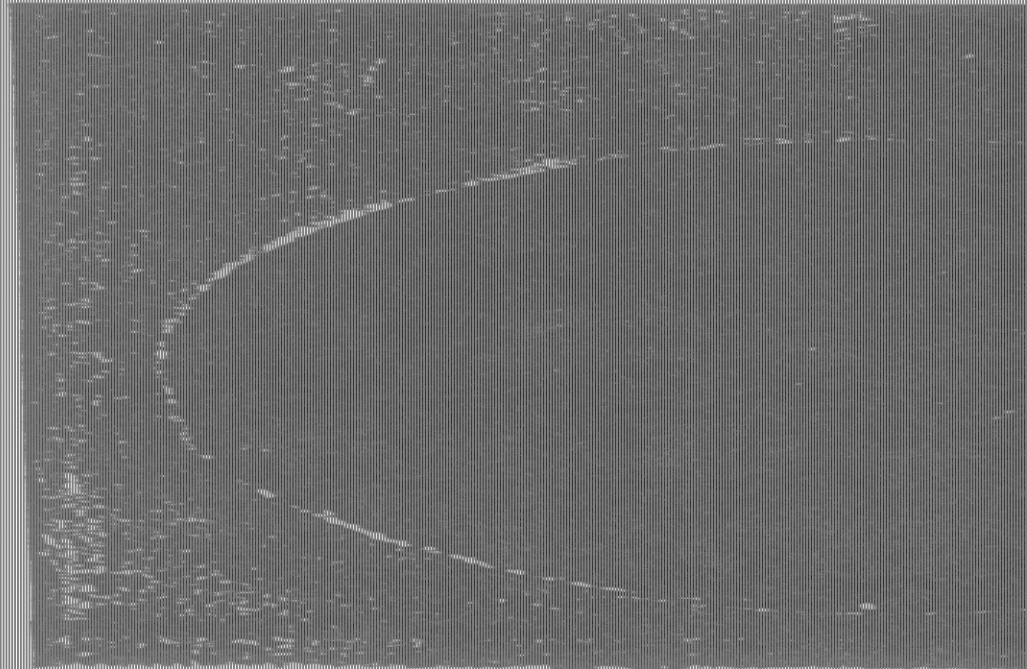


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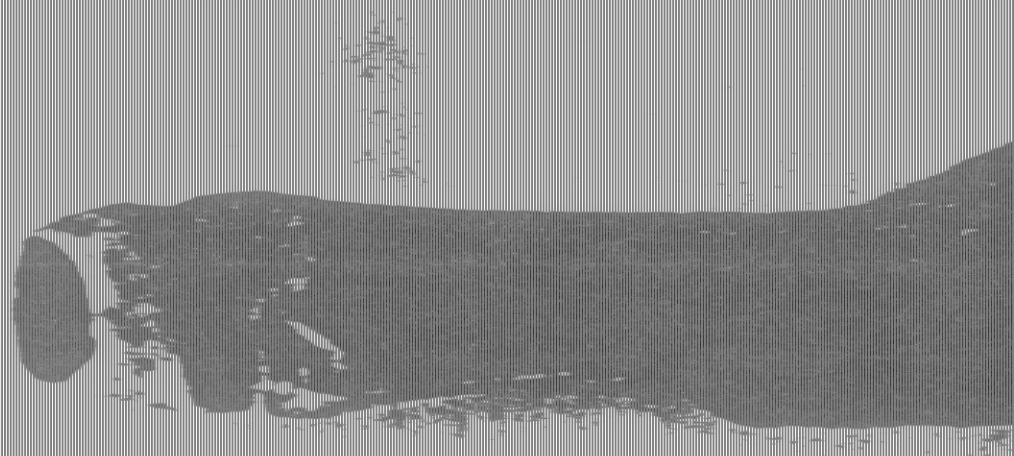


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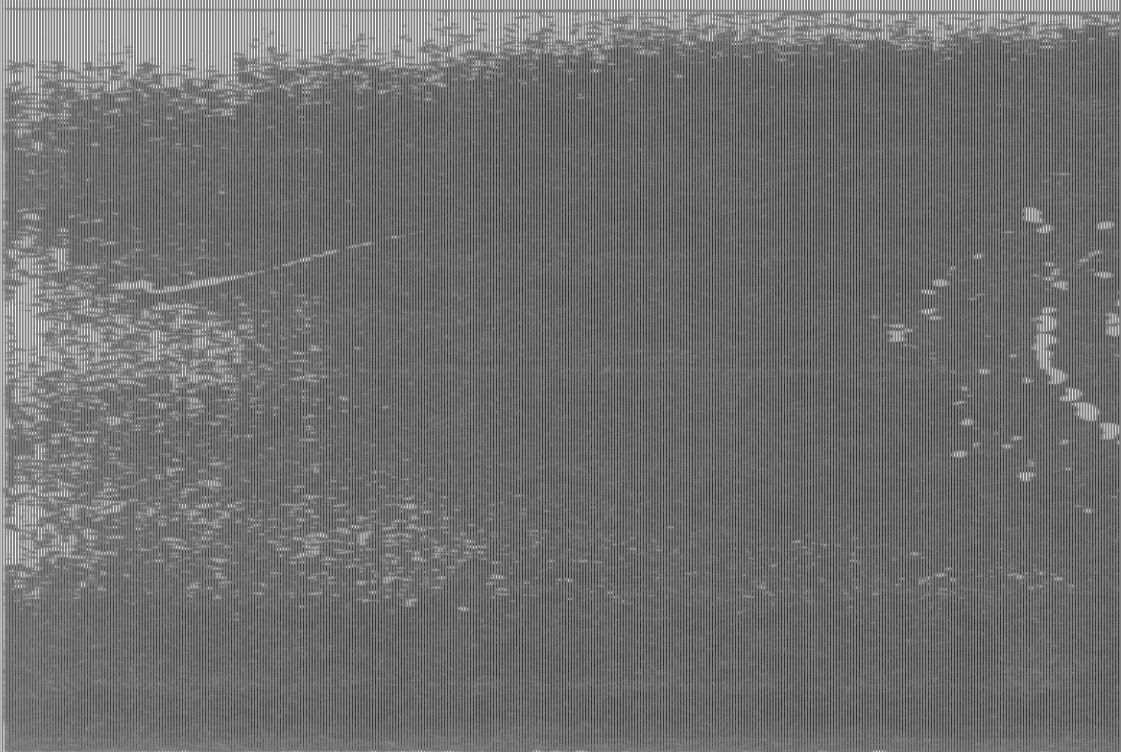
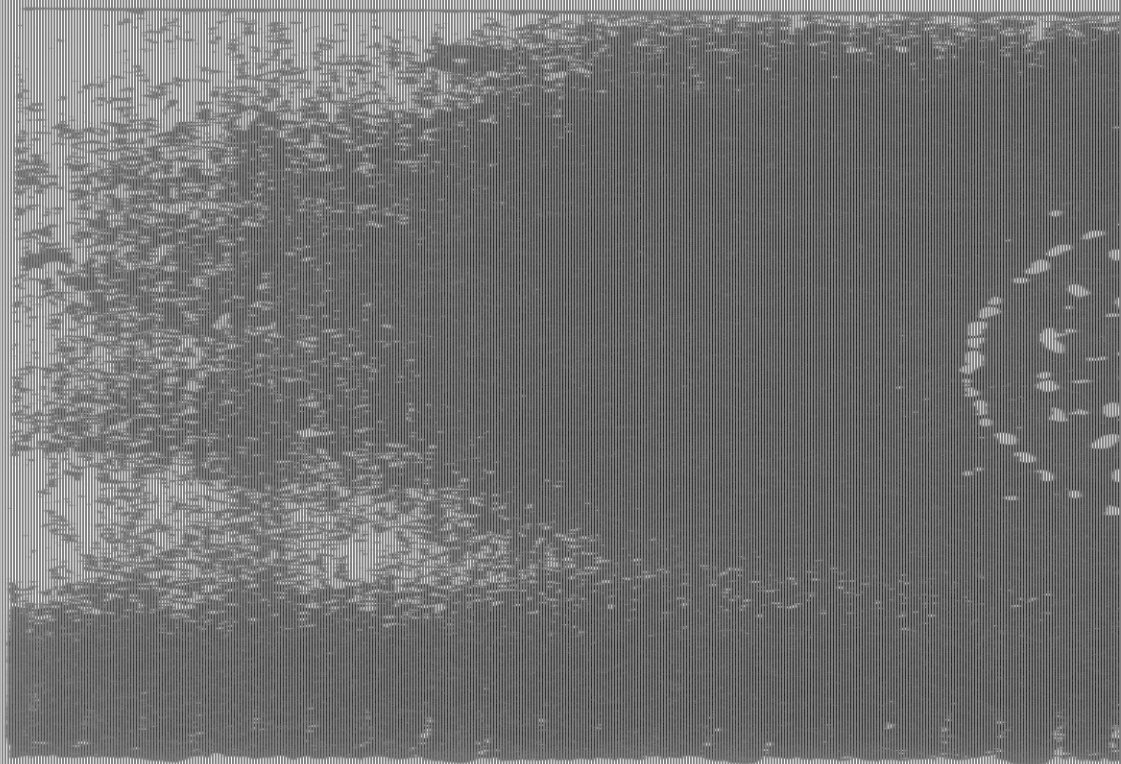


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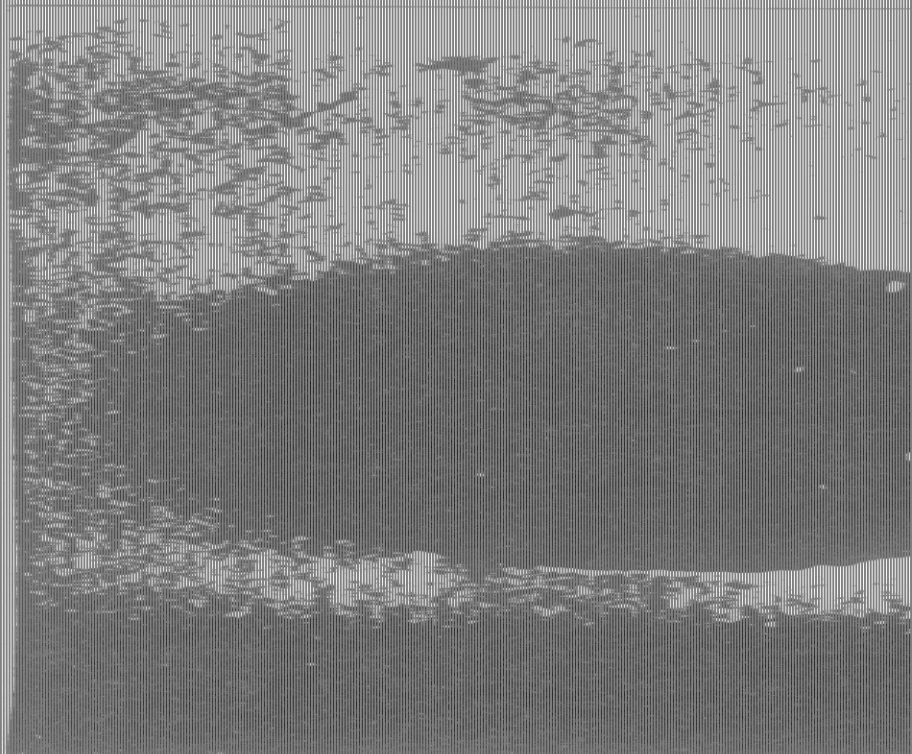


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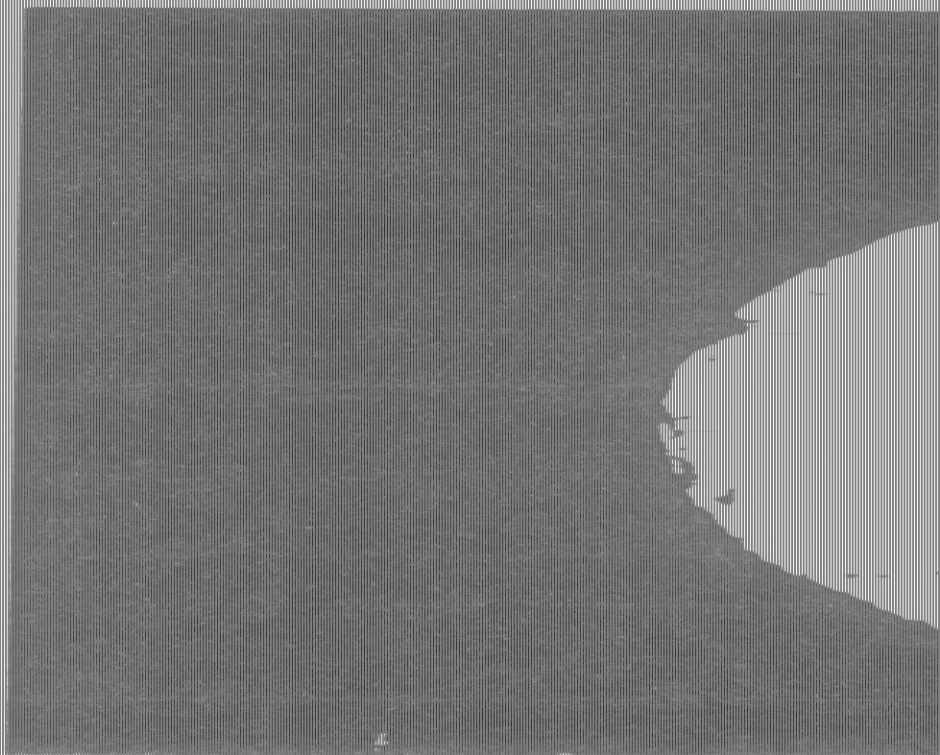


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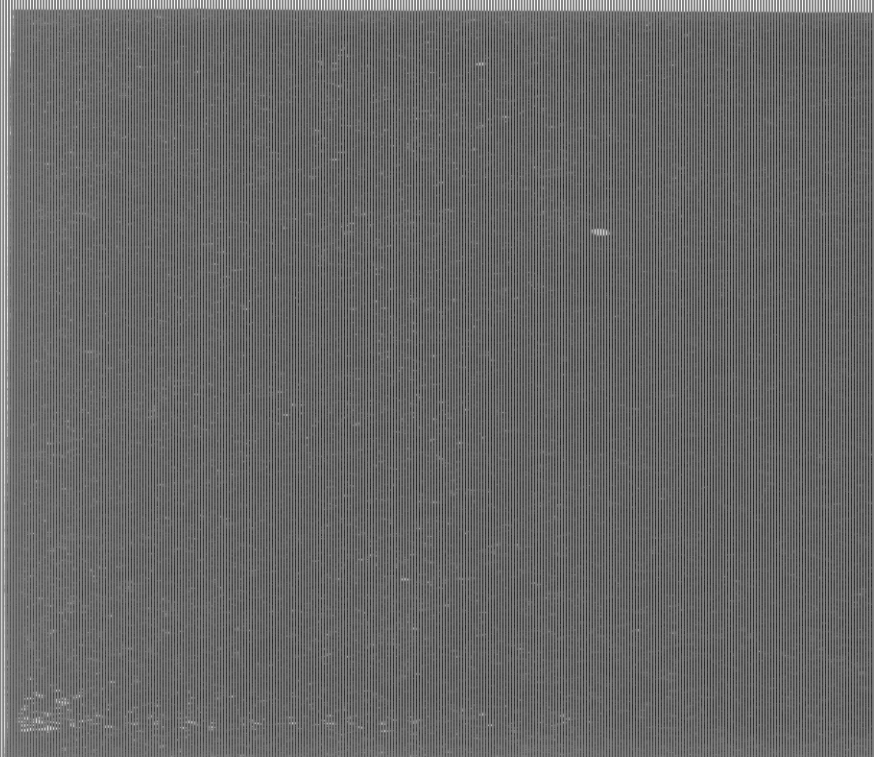


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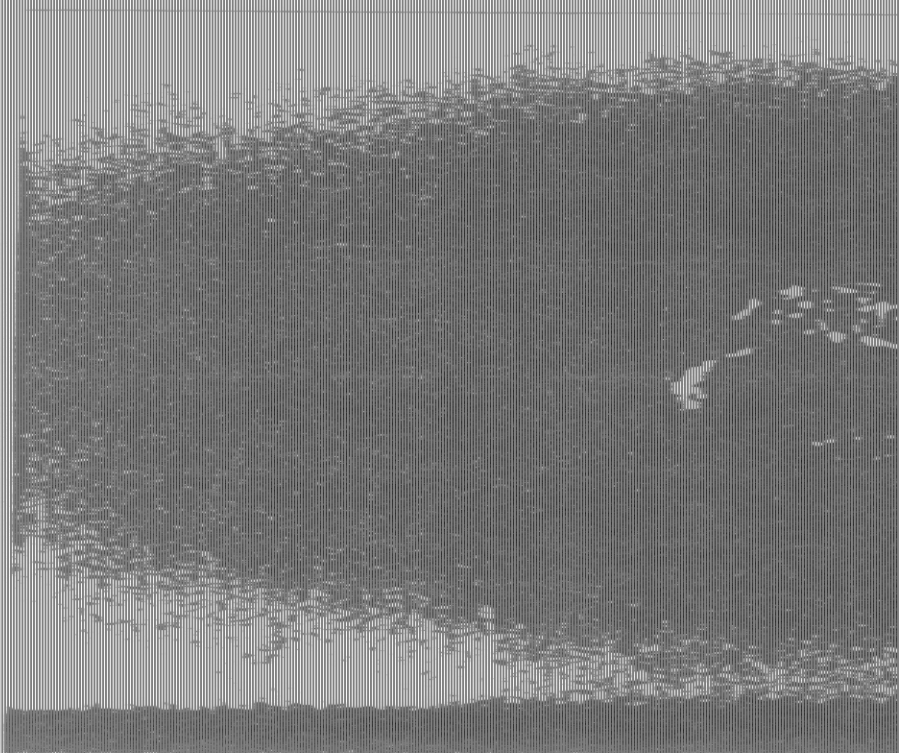


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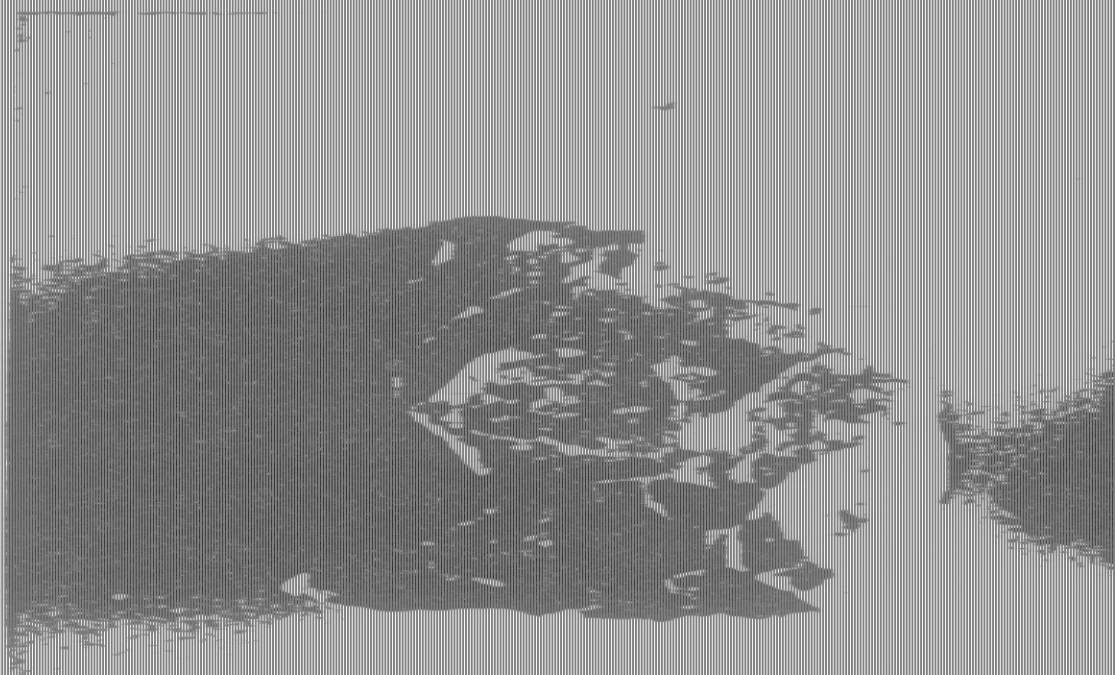


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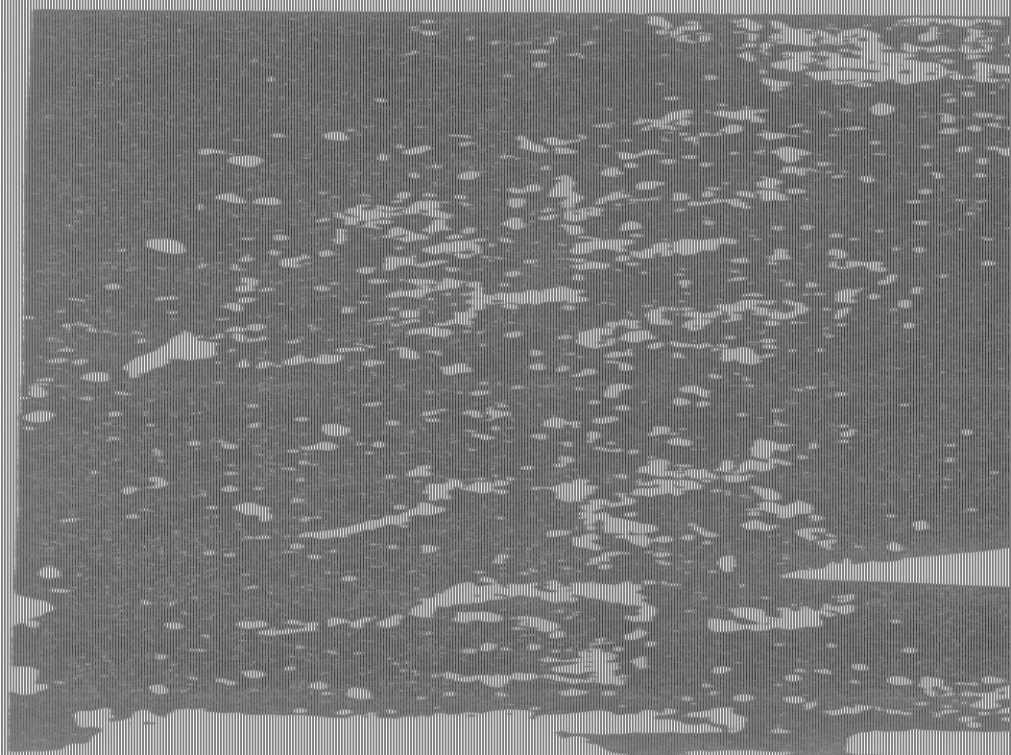


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