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Jerusalem, the Garden Tomb

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Final Report

During August 2005 a trial excavation was conducted within the Garden Tomb compound, north of the Damascus Gate (Permit No. A-4549*). The excavation, on behalf of the Antiquities Authority and funded by two foundations from the United States—the Wyatt Archaeological Research (WAR) of Tennessee and the Biblical Archaeology Foundation (BAF) of Texas—was directed by Y. Zelinger, with the assistance of V. Pirsky (surveying), I. Berin (drafting), T. Sagiv (photography), N. Katznelson (glass finds), T. Ornan (cylinder seal), D.T. Ariel (numismatics), C. Hersch (glass and pottery drawings), as well as volunteers from around the world.

The excavation was conducted south of a natural bedrock outcrop that was identified by General C. Gordon in 1883 as Golgotha (Fig. 1). During the 1980s, R. Wyatt excavated several underground chambers at the site. The current excavation cleaned and documented the former chambers and additional chambers were excavated.

The underground complex was entered by way of a narrow natural shaft (L100; 1.0–1.2 m; Fig. 2), descending 5 m deep and opening into an irregular-shaped chamber (L101, 2 × 3 m, 2.8 m high). A narrow opening (0.65 × 1.00 m) was breached in the southern wall of the chamber, leading into a rock-hewn corridor, aligned east–west. The passage westward was blocked by the collapse of earth and stones; eastward, it led into a circular building (L102; diam. 3 m) whose walls were built of fieldstones (0.3–0.4 m wide) and were founded on the steps of an ancient quarry, which descended vertically c. 2.5 m southward. The building's function was not ascertained due to the limitations of the excavation. It was probably part of a residential structure or an industrial installation. The soil fill in L102 yielded an extremely worn coin that dated to the Umayyad period (697–750 CE; IAA 101943). Most of

the potsherds from the fill in L102 dated to the Hellenistic–Byzantine periods—a spindle bottle from the Hellenistic period (Fig. 3:7), a cooking pot, a jar and a lamp from the Roman period (Fig. 3:5, 6, 8) and a bowl from the Byzantine period (Fig. 3:4).

Other finds recovered from the fill included a krater dating to Iron Age II (Fig. 3:1), a jar of Iron Age I (Fig. 3:2) and a broken animal figurine (Fig. 3:3), which is well known in Iron Age II Jerusalem. A special find was a glass cylinder seal (diam. 0.75 cm, length 1.7 cm; the seal was identified as such by C. Hersch), dating to the eighth-seventh centuries BCE. The seal is in the local Neo-Assyrian style and portrays a worshipper in front of a crescent on a stick, representing the moon god, Sin of Haran.

The southern wall of the circular building was breached and led into another irregular-shaped chamber, which was not excavated due to safety issues. However, its curved western wall was probably the outer wall of a water cistern, revealed in a ground penetrating radar examination.

The finds that were disturbed by the previous excavation and the conditions of the current excavation made it difficult to understand the remains. The earliest phase at the site was a quarry, survived by severance channels of the masonry stones. It was part of the extensive quarry known from the nearby Zedekiah's Cave and Jeremiah's Pit. The ceramic finds and cylinder seal from the Iron Age were perhaps debris from an Iron Age cemetery in the nearby St. Etienne, which had apparently extended over the area of the Garden Tomb as well. The respective amounts of ceramic finds recovered from the building indicate it can be dated to the Roman period.

The Glass Finds

Natalya Katsnelson

A few fragments of glass vessels were found, including the unique cylinder seal from the eighth-seventh centuries BCE. The seal was made of transparent, colorless glass, which is quite rare in such an object; it bears a wheel-cut pattern, depicting a cultic scene. A wide perforation in the center of the cylinder may indicate its secondary use as a bead. The other finds consisted of three fragments of vessels on bases with a thick wound trail along the edge (Figs. 4:1–3; 5), which belong to a well-known type of conical beakers or lamps from the fourth century CE. However, variants of beakers/lamps with similar bases are rare in excavated assemblages in the country. Other fragments, also dating to the Roman period (second–fourth centuries CE), included a beaker (Fig. 4:4), a bowl (Fig. 4:5) and a jug with a ribbed handle.

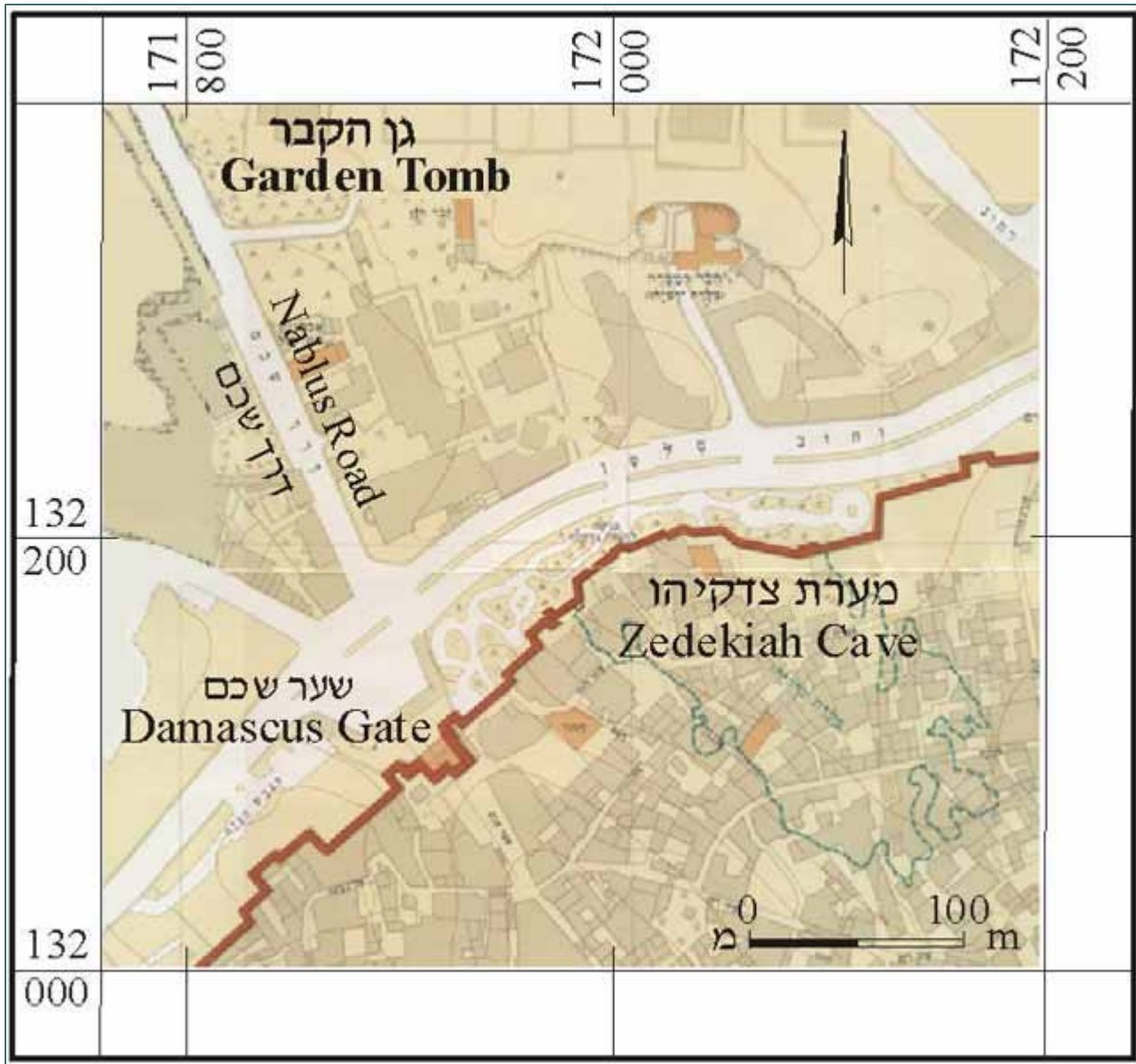
[1. Location map. \(Images//4549-1.jpg\)](#)

[2. Plan and sections. \(Images//4549-2.jpg\)](#)

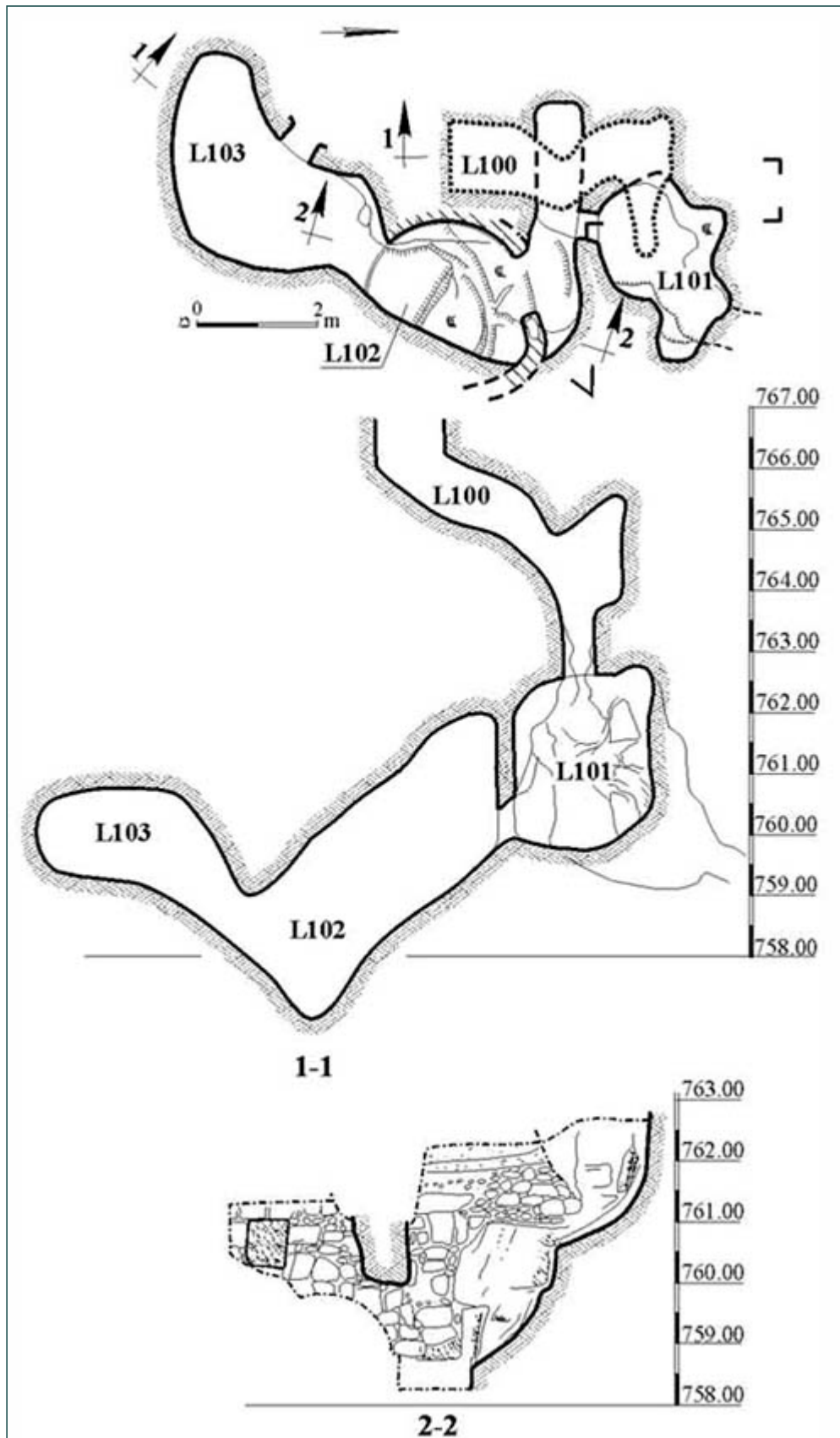
[3. Pottery. \(Images//4549-3.jpg\)](#)

[4. Glass finds \(drawings\). \(Images//4549-4.jpg\)](#)

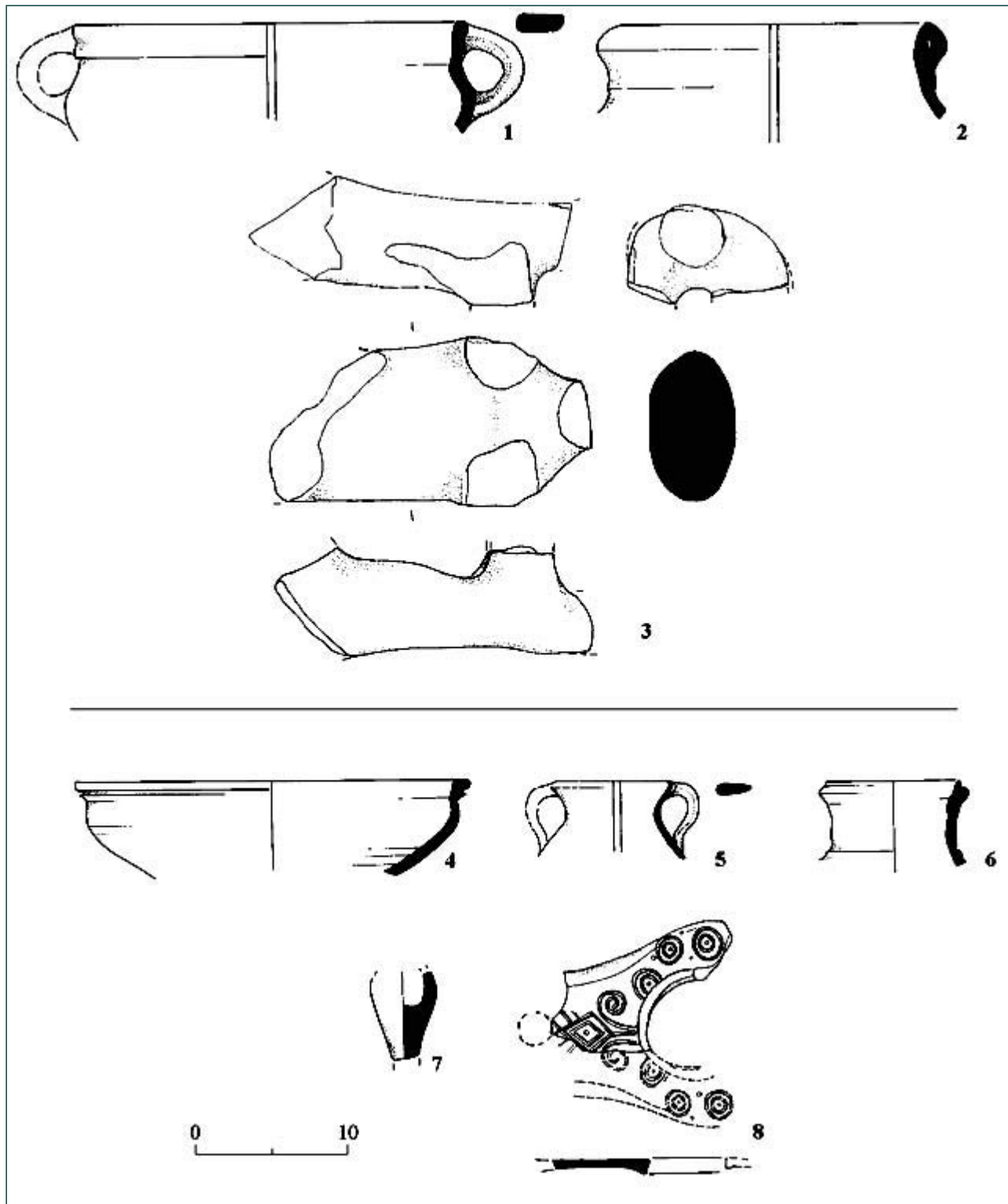
[5. Glass finds \(photograph\). \(Images//4549-5.jpg\)](#)



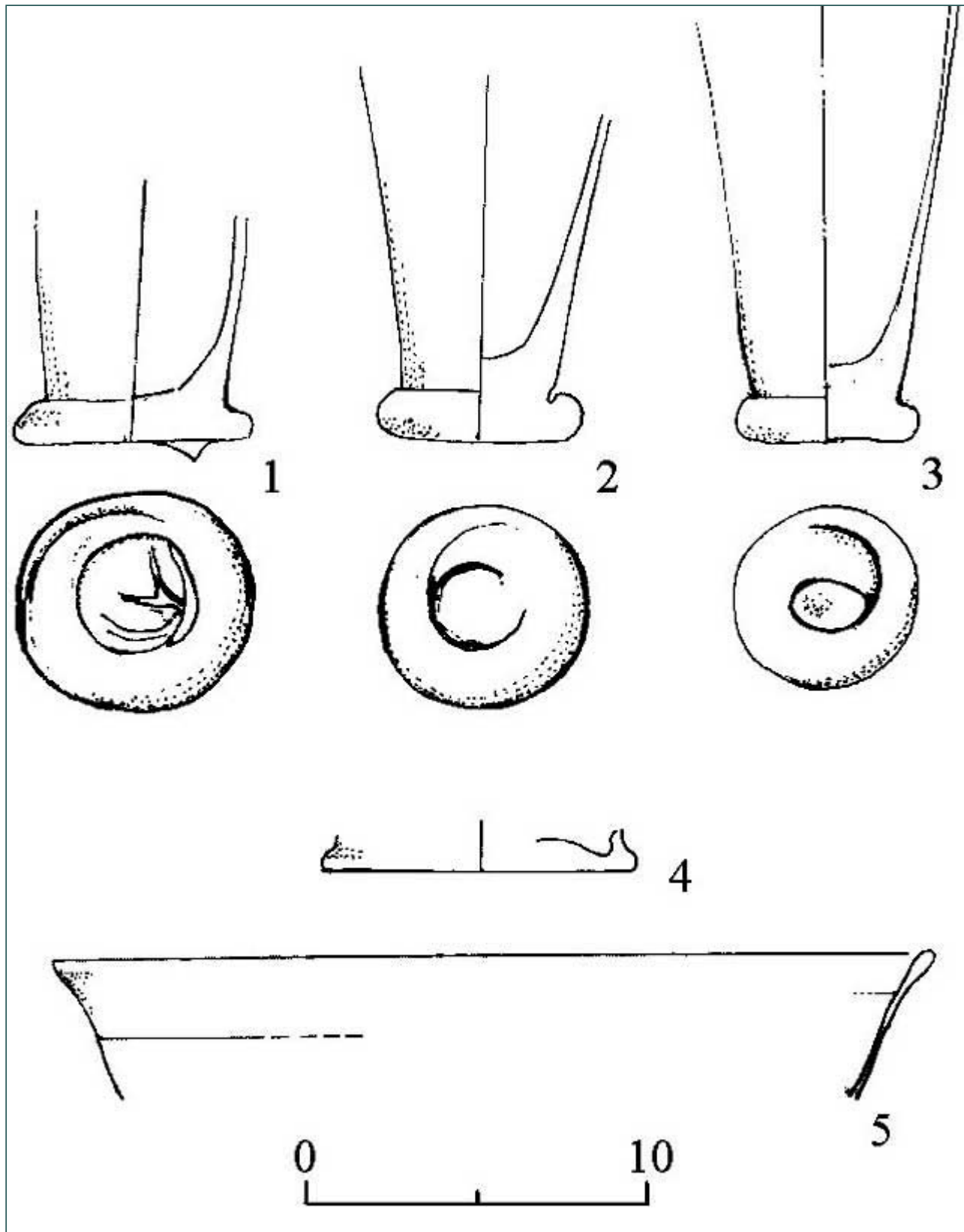
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2. Plan and sections.
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4. Glass finds (drawings).
(Images//4549-4.jpg)



5. Glass finds (photograph).
(Images//4549-5.jpg)