

Stones in homes: The spatial distribution and use of ground stone objects at EB III

Tell es-Safi/Gath, Israel

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, awareness of the analytical potential of ground stone objects has grown significantly. Several studies have demonstrated that the typology and context in which these artifacts are discovered can shed light on the use of space, the organization of domestic activities, and the nature of recycling and discard within residential units (e.g. Adams 2008; Wright 2008). This report on the ground stone assemblage from the Early Bronze Age (hereafter EB) occupation levels from Area E at Tell es-Safi/Gath is a continuation of these efforts.



Fig. 1: Map of EB III southern Levant

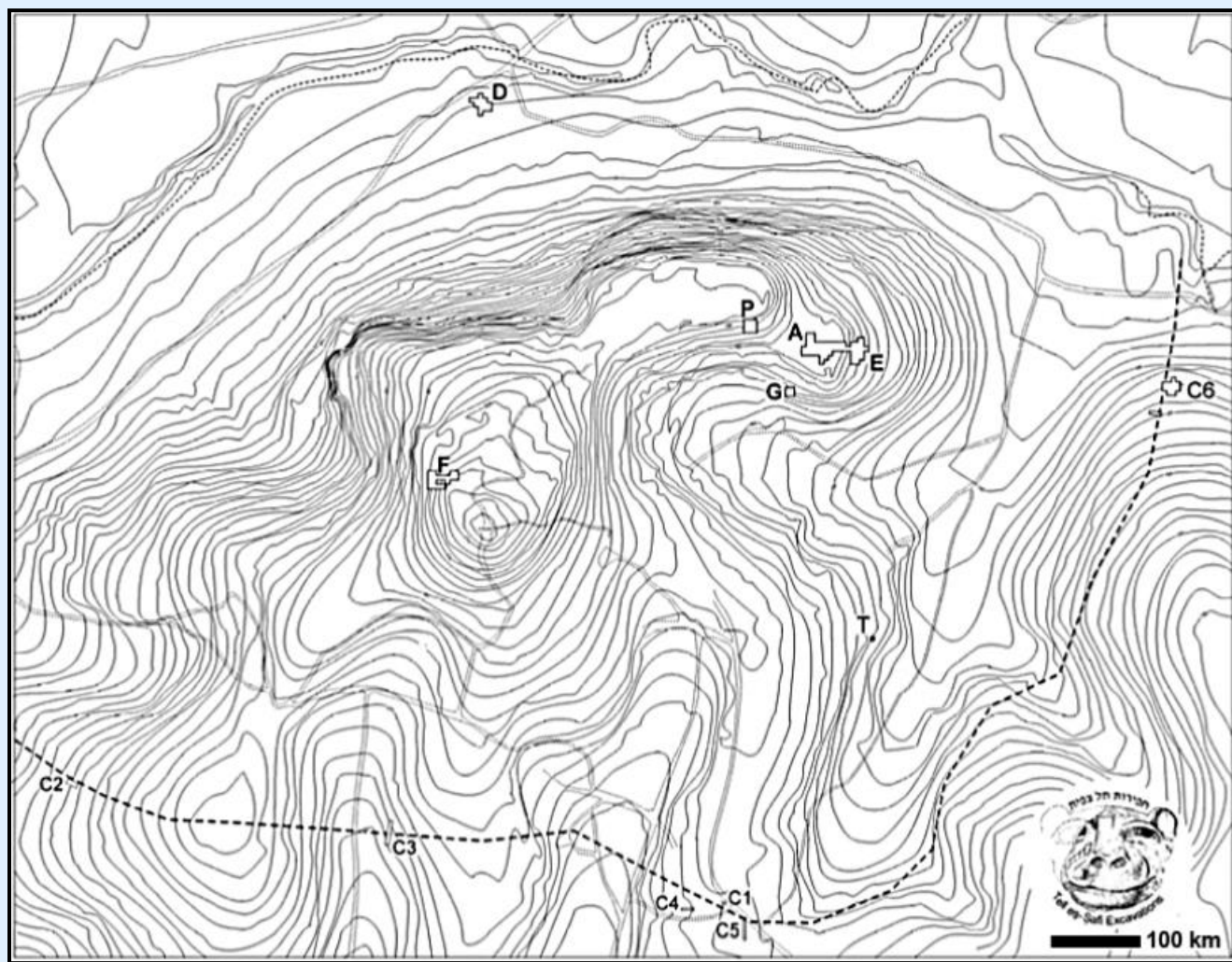


Fig. 2: Contour and elevation map of Tell es-Safi/Gath

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

Tell es-Safi/Gath is a large multi-period tell site with a long and rich cultural history. It sits atop a natural crescent shaped hill and is situated on the border of the Mediterranean coastal plain and *Shephelah* in Israel (Figures 1-2). Extensive EB III (2800-2500 BCE) remains, including fortifications, have been discovered across the extent of the tell (c. 24 ha). As such, Tell es-Safi/Gath is considered to be one of the largest urban polities in the southern Levant. Remains of an EB III residential neighbourhood have been exposed in Area E on the eastern spur of the tell (Figure 3). These remains are concentrated in three successive phases of occupation (E5c, E5b, and E5a) and are comprised of several buildings and an alleyway that transects the excavation area. The architectural organization of the neighbourhood alters slightly from one phase to another, as some walls and features are re-used in later phases.

Fig. 3: Location of Area E at Tell es-Safi/Gath



3. ASSEMBLAGE DESCRIPTION

A total of 118 objects comprise the EB ground stone assemblage at Tell es-Safi/Gath from the E5a-c phases. These artifacts were recovered during the 2004-2017 seasons and were typed according to the Wright's (1992) classification system (Figure 4). Figures 5.1-5.4 present the typology of in each phase of occupation in the Area E neighbourhood. By NISP, lower grinding stones are the most abundant type, followed by weights (spindle whorls and loom weights), upper grinding stones, and pounders. This general pattern is similar for each phase with minor deviations. The overall composition of the assemblage is reflective of tools traditionally utilized for food and craft production (Ebeling and Rowan 2004).

Fig. 4: Unifacial loaf upper grinding stone

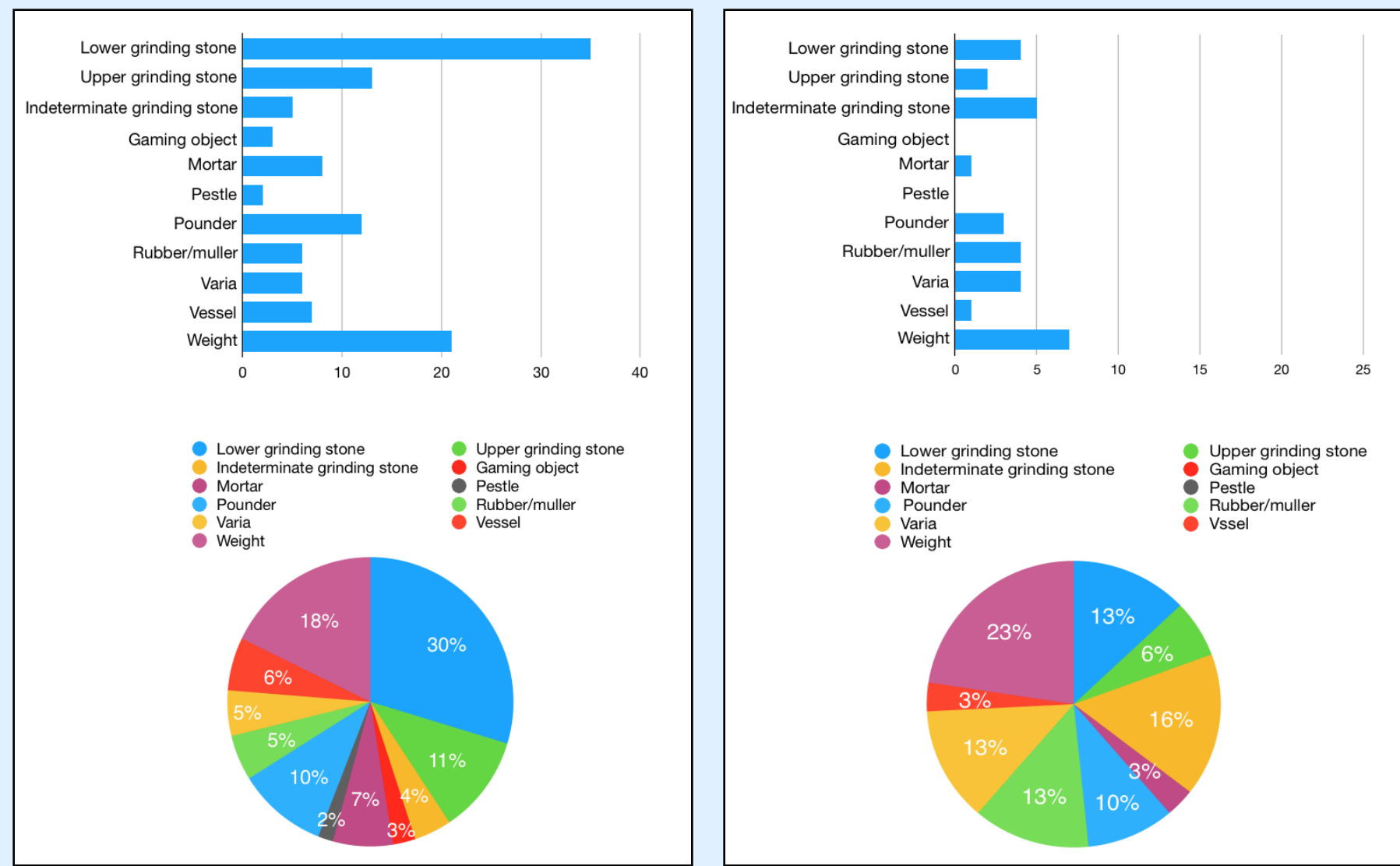
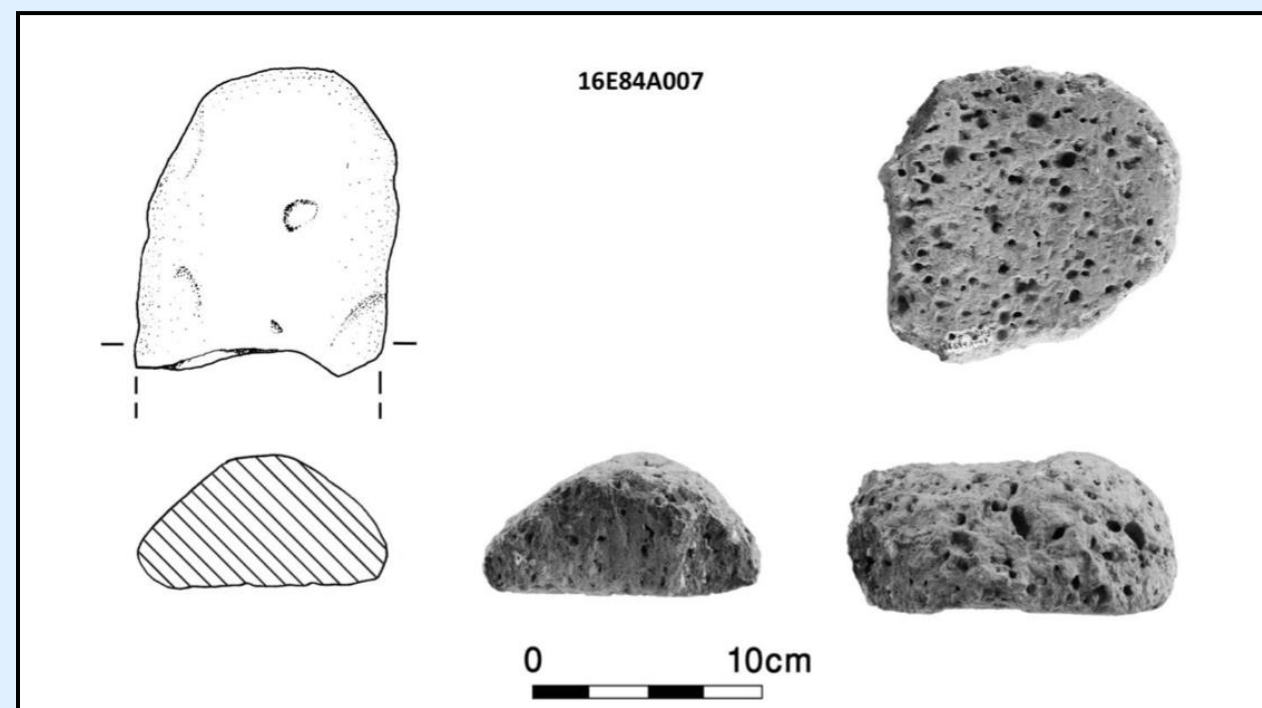


Fig. 5.1: Typology of all phases

Fig. 5.2: Typology of E5c

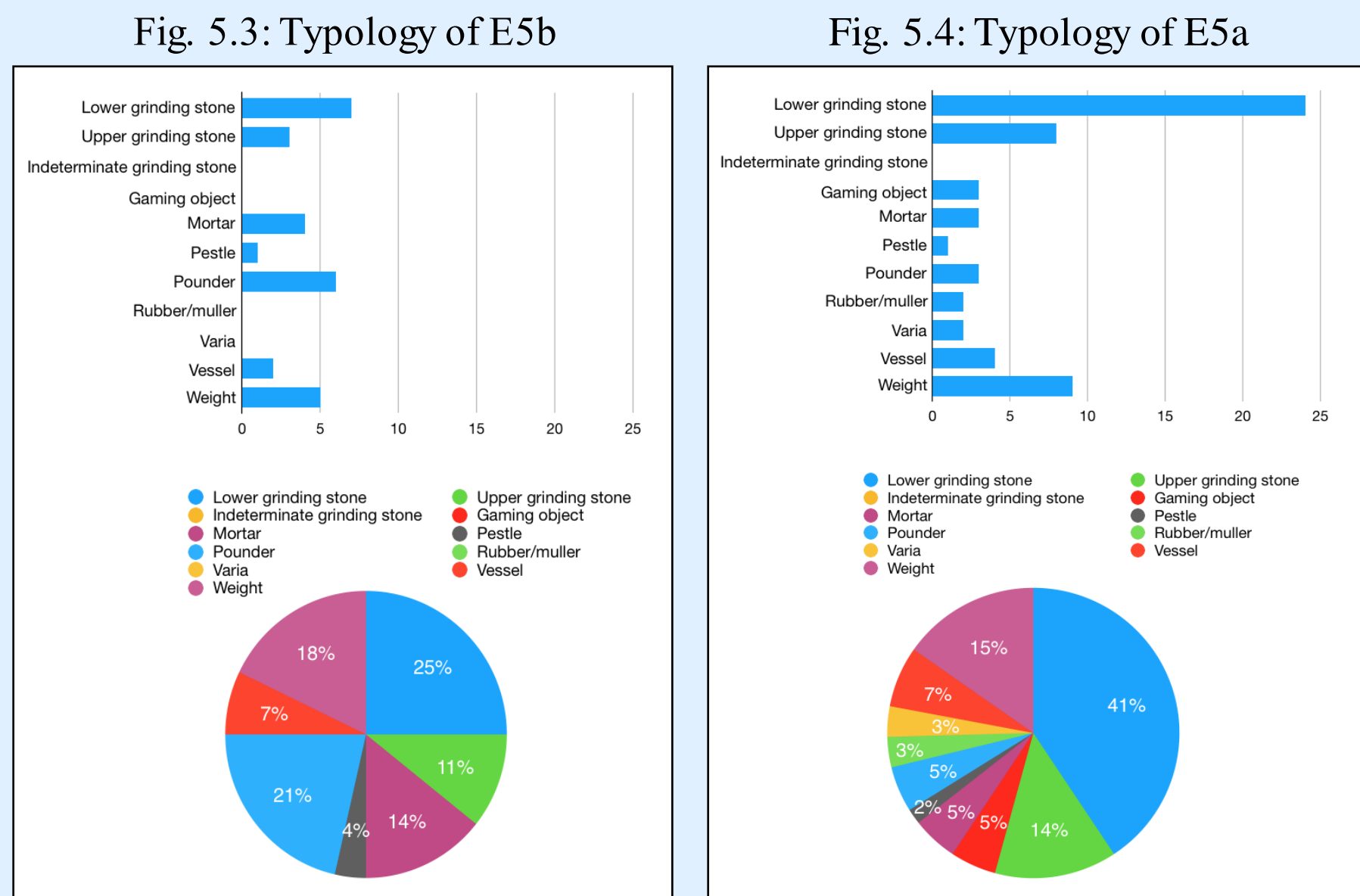
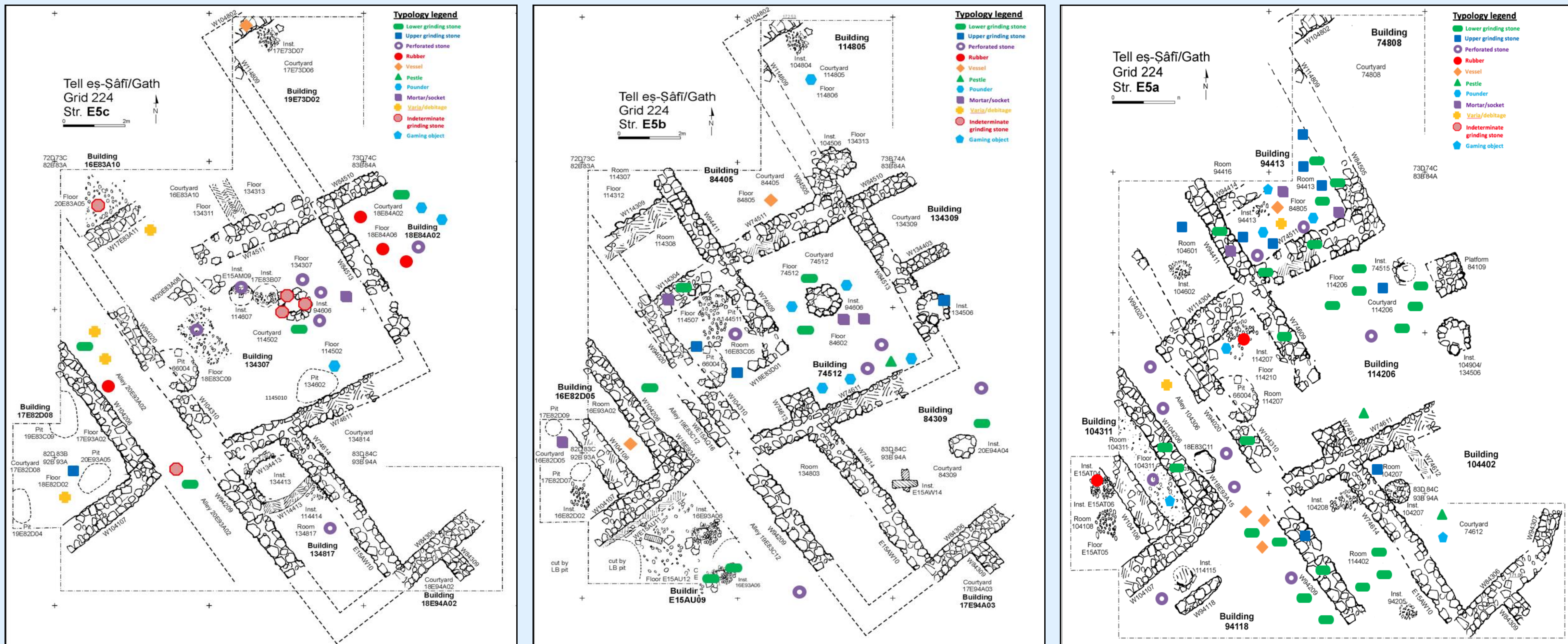


Fig. 5.3: Typology of E5b

Fig. 5.4: Typology of E5a

4. DISTRIBUTION WITHIN NEIGHBORHOOD



*If the artifact picture occurs over a feature, it was part of the make-up of that feature.

5. KEY OBSERVATIONS

- Activity areas associated with intact ground stone objects are concentrated within the central area of open-air courtyards in each phase (e.g. 18E84A02, 114502, 74512, 114206). The use of courtyards for food preparation and craft maintenance is also evident at Tel Bet Yerah (Paz 2012), another notable EB urban polity. The high number of ground stone objects indicates that multiple individuals could participate in such tasks at one time.
- A dense concentration of ground stone objects was found in Room 94413, where it is proposed these are embedded in an extensive food storage locale given the high frequency of pottery vessels discovered among them.
- The alleyway served as a focal spot of discard for ground stone objects that were fractured or were deemed exhausted of utility. This is evident throughout all phases.
- By contrast, other fractured ground stone artifacts were utilized as structural materials in stone installations, pebble floors, and walls. In this regard, their secondary use is dependent upon their size and shape. For example, the smaller fragments of grinding stones were placed with their smooth use-face exposed upwards on floors and on the interior of hearth installations. Larger artifacts, such as fractured mortars or lower grinding stones, were often found as part of the foundation structure of walls.
- The intentional discard and active recycling exhibited by the residents of the neighborhood suggests an opportunistic maintenance of their domestic space.

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