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TALL SEH HAMAD/DUR-KATLIMMU 1978-1983.

Hartmut Kühne

Tall Seh Hamad (Fig.1) is situated on the east bank of the Lower Habur about 90 km northnortheast of Der az Zor.

The site was known to the archaeologist ever since Hormuzd Rassam visited it in 1879; he found most probably that fragment of a stela of Adad-Nirari III, which was published only recently by A.R. Millard and H. Tadmor in Iraq 35, 1973. Because of its «out of the way» situation, as Rassam called it, the site was actually visited only by a few scholars ever since, two of them being Max Freiherr von Oppenheim in 1911 and Sir Max Mallowan in 1934, but no detailed description was ever published. Père A. Poidebard, on the occasion of tracking the roman limes in the Habur area, published a most valuable air-photograph in 1934, but he did not actually visit the site. Therefore, when the expedition of the «Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients» first surveyed the site in 1975, nearly one hundred years after Rassam's first step on it, almost nothing was known about it.

The assyrian city of Dur-Katlimmu on the other hand was known to the assyriologist ever since the first large scaled publications of the assyrian annals at the beginning of this century. The oldest assyrian document mentioning Dur-Katlimmu was the so called Broken Obelisk which is ascribed to the assyrian king Assur-bel-kala of the 11th century B.C. He is recording a campagne against the aramaens and against the city of Dur-Katlimmu which might have been under aramaen supremacy

then. Later on, in the 9th century B.C., the assyrian kings Adad-Nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II marched along the Lower Habur collecting tribute from the cities there, including Dur-Katlimmu.

When the TAVO-expedition visited the site a second time in 1977 we were shown some «decorated sherds» as the farmers called them, and we recognized at once that they consisted of cuneiform tablets. We were able to recover about 30 pieces, which-together with many more tablets-had been washed out by an irrigation canal from below the western slope of the citadel mound of Tall Seh Hamad. The first study of the tablets by W. Röllig revealed that Tell Seh Hamad was to be identified with great probability with Dur-Katlimmu. The tablets were datable to the 13th century B.C., to the middle assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I, on the grounds of so called eponyms; they now provided the oldest mentioning of that assyria city.

Half a year later we were granted the excavation license by the Syrian Antiquities Department. The joint expedition to Tell Seh Hamad is sponsored by the universities of West Berlin and Tübingen and by the Museum of Der az Zor. It is financed by the German Research Foundation and to a less extent by both universities. At this occasion we would like to express our deep gratitude to all persons and organizations involved, especially to the general director of the Syrian Antiquities Department, Dr. Afif Bahnassi.

We took up excavation in the spring of 1978. Ever since we have conducted 4 more campaigns in 1980, 1981, 1982 and 1983.

A topographical survey of the ancient settlement ground of Tall Seh Hamad was conducted in 1980 and 1981. It showed clearly a division into five parts: the Tell itself, or, as we call it, the citadel mound, in the southwest and at the river bank, the Lower City I to the east of it, clearly marked by its square appearance, and the vast Lower City II to the northeast of the citadel bound by a rampart which hides the ancient city wall; outside the city wall two suburban areas can be distinguished; one in the north, called Suburban Area I, and a second to the east of Lower City II, called Suburban Area II. The overall ancient settlement ground covers more than 110 hectar.

We started excavation in 1978 with a step trench down the western slope of the citadel mound (Fig. 2) to receive a stratigraphical sequence. We have distinguished 28 levels so far, counting from the top down to the middle assyrian level (28) in which the cuneiform tablets were found.

Only level 1 seems to be islamic dating from about the 8th to the 12th century A.D. The uppermost strata are largely destroyed by the pits of recent graves which may date back to the last three centuries.

Levels 2 to 16 can be dated to the parthian/roman period which should be dated between about 200 B.C. to 400 A.D. All archaeological evidence points to an important settlement during this time of which the name unfortunately is unknown. The levels on the citadel mound contain heavy constructions, the Lower City I was covered with a castellum and the area south of it with living quarters while the Lower City II seems to have been covered only by sporadic houses. The Suburban Area I was used as a necropolis, of which we have excavated one shaft grave.

On the citadel mound the neassyrian period is present with levels 17 to 27. Only level 27

has been excavated to some extent. Its remains are founded directly on the ruins of level 28, that is the middle assyrian level with the tablets; they consist of a large building in combination with a cistern.

A more comprehensive impression of neoassyrian Dur-Katlimmu can be gained from the second main excavation area in the northeastern corner of Lower City II.

The so far unearthed building F (Fig.3) consists of a large central room around which smaller rooms are grouped. The walls of the building are mostly 1,60 meter wide and have been plastered on the inside. Two main using stages can be distinguished, both to be dated between the 8th century B.C. and the end of the assyrian empire around 600 B.C. The arrangement of the rooms reminds to the groundplan of assyrian palaces. The main central room is about 20 meters long and nearly 6 meters wide. It certainly served some official purposes while in the rooms next to it signs of ordinary usage have been found. For instance in room B we discovered a hearth, and in room D was found an iron pick deposited in a case of mud brick on the original floor (Fig.4).

The main entrance to the building has not yet been discovered. So far the south-eastern corner of the building was unearthed, showing that a corridor or a defensive passage existed between the building and the city wall (Fig.5).

It seems that the building extended to the north taking up the complete space in the northeastern corner of the city wall.

The function of the whole building seems to be one similar to a fortress, comparable to the Fort Salmanassar in Nimrud, an assyrian «*ekal masarti*»; if this is correct, one would have to expect storage rooms or rooms of special device alongside with official rooms, as they have been unearthed in our building. The comparison with Fort Salmanassar of Nimrud corresponds to other aspects as well; there is a similar embankment of the inside bordering wall, and the building has a similar position in

a corner of the city wall of the Lower City.

By pottery and other small finds, like for instance the pick, a similar date is indicated.

The city wall (Fig. 5) itself was unearthed for some length, about 35 meter. It is three meters wide and buttressed with towers one of which was excavated.

The middle assyrian period is represented only by the building P (Lev. 28) on the western slope of the citadel mound (Fig. 2). The so far excavated groundplan reveals from west to east three rows of rooms (Fig. 6). The most western one is very badly preserved because of erosion and the effect of an irrigation canal. The second row from the west is remarkably well preserved, its mud brick walls standing up to a height of nearly five meters. The third row from the west is barely touched. While the western two rows are connected among each other through doors, there is no passage so far between the second and the eastern most row of rooms; instead the division is manifested by a double wall which undoubtedly belongs to the same building. With the two western rows of rooms we have unearthed a large building extending thirty meters now in north-south direction. Because of the double wall it seems possible that the whole building was terraced to the east; it is on the other hand quite certain that the western part of the whole building is completely eroded (Fig. 7).

The building consisted of at least two stories, of which we have excavated the basement so far. Traces of the ceiling construction have been found frequently; summarizing all indications it seems quite certain that the rooms of the basement had been vaulted. When the building was finally destroyed the ceiling broke down and with it the inventory of the rooms above it. Thus it is certain that the archive originally was stored in the upper story and fell into the basement room A at the final destruction together with other inventory.

The neighboring rooms C and D to the south are equally well preserved. Room D was

accessible from the west by another arched doorway completely preserved (Fig. 8).

The floor consisted again of a mudbrick pavement which contained three parallel running canals continuing through the threshold and room G.

The archive consists of 625 fragments and complete cuneiform tablets. It leaves no doubt that Tell Seh Hamad is to be identified with Dur-Katlimmu. The texts are dated to the reign of the two middle assyrian kings, Salmanassar I and Tukulti-Ninurta I, that is between 1275 and 1207 B.C. The archive is homogeneous and according to the eponyms it covers a time range of at least 45 years. This corresponds well with the archaeological observations according to which the building, in which the tablets have been found, must have existed for at least two generations. The texts mention a governor who has resided in a palace, and it is perfectly possible that the building under excavation is to be identified with that palace. The greater part of the archive consists of economic and administrative texts but there is a number of letters including some royal ones to the governor. In addition the only so far known middle assyrian itinerary has been found among the texts.

Although not excavated, older periods than the assyrian levels are existing and can be detected by pottery and small finds. Mitannian seal impressions for example are found quite frequently on the middle assyrian tablets; the Middle Bronze Age is present by pottery; belonging to the Early Bronze Age are sherds of metallic ware and incised ninivite -5- ware. The Late Chalcolithic is again present by pottery.

Summarizing this evidence we can state that the area of Tall Seh Hamad was settled as early as the late 4th Mill. B.C. and continued to be settled with minor gaps until the 12th century A.D. Of the various villages and cities existing during this long span of time only the name of the assyrian city is known, namely Dur-Katlimmu.

The assyrian city of Dur-Katlimmu was a stronghold for more than 700 years. During the middle assyrian empire it served as a frontier town, guarding the Lower Habur and the Middle Euphrates. The aramaen supremacy in the 11th and 10th century B.C. was apparently not a very incisive interlude. In the neoassyrian period it became a military camp or base proper, serving as an arsenal for military actions and being connected with the central part of the empire via a royal road, a «harran sarri». It fell with the assyrian empire at the end of the 7th century B.C.

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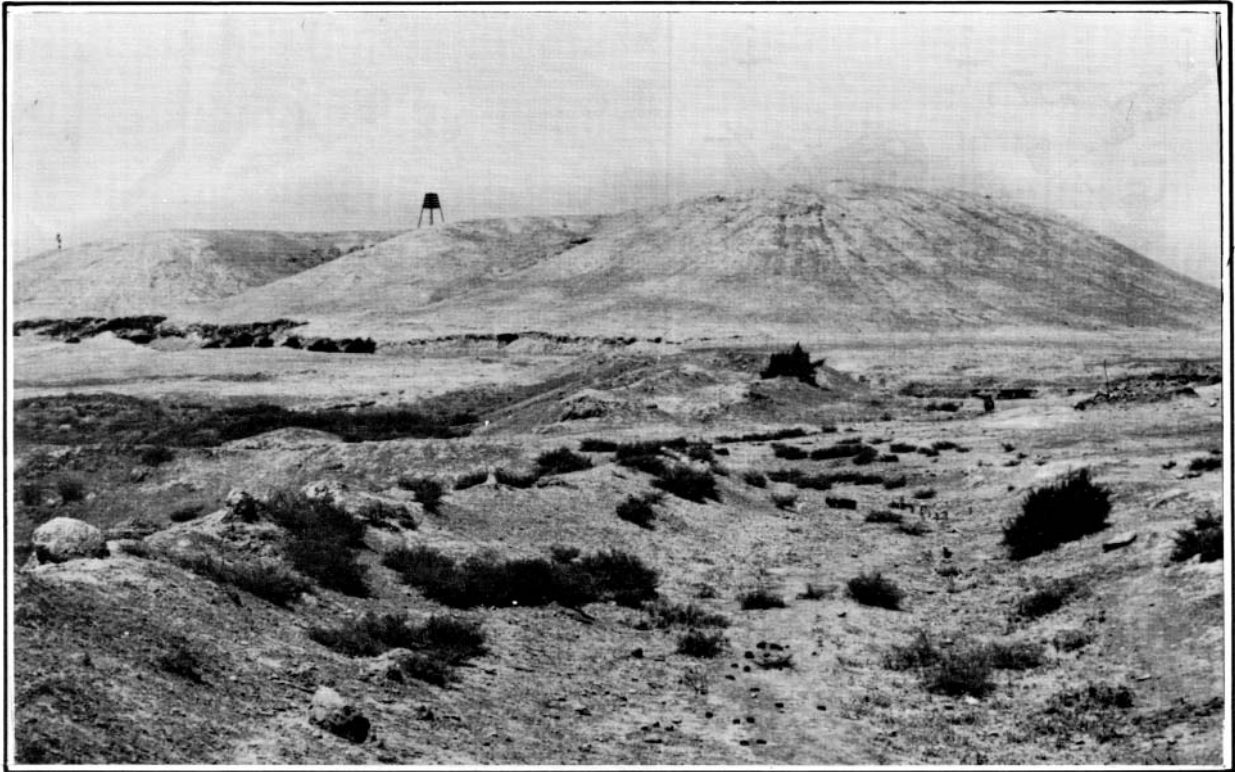


Fig. 1: Tall Seh Hamad, as seen from the Southeast, in the foreground Lower City I.

Photograph by: Norbert Grundmann.



Fig. 2: Tall Seh Hamad, west slope of the Citadel Mound, 1983; in the foreground building P.

Photograph by: Norbert Grundmann.

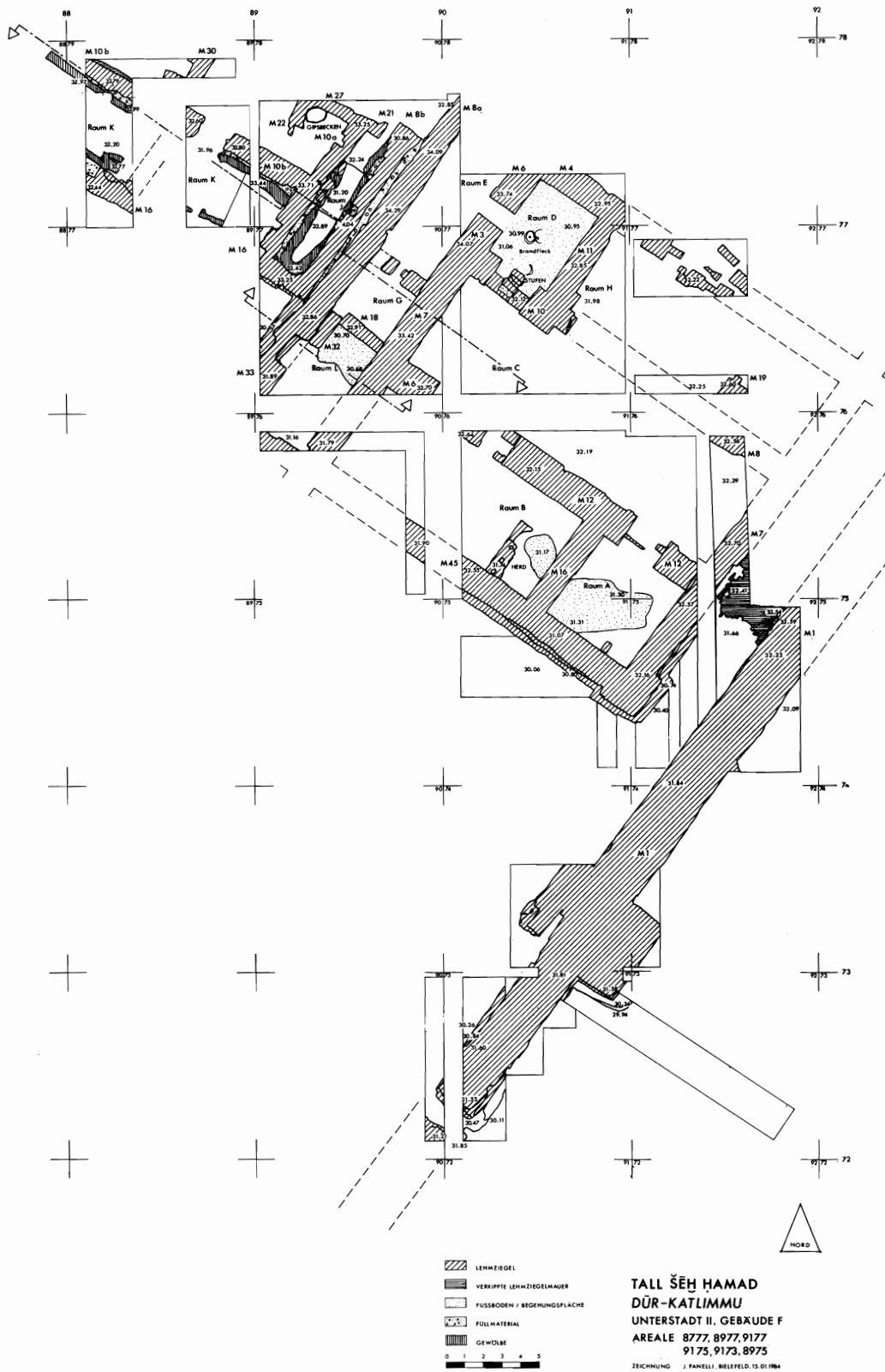


Fig. 3: Tall Seh Hamad, Lower City II, building F and city wall, 1983, schematic plan, drawn by: Jörg Fanelli.

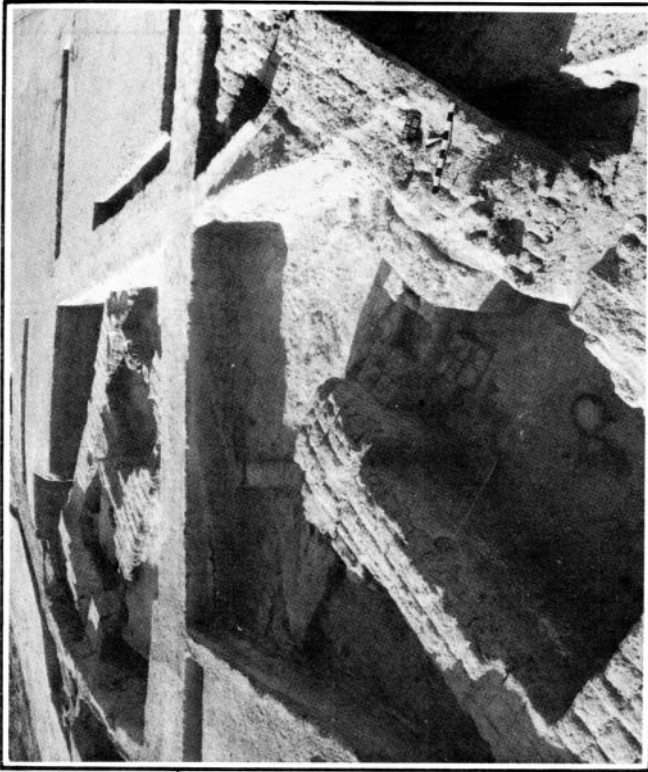


Fig. 4: Tall Seh Hamad, Lower City II, building F, rooms D, C, B, and A.

Photograph by: Norbert Grundmann.

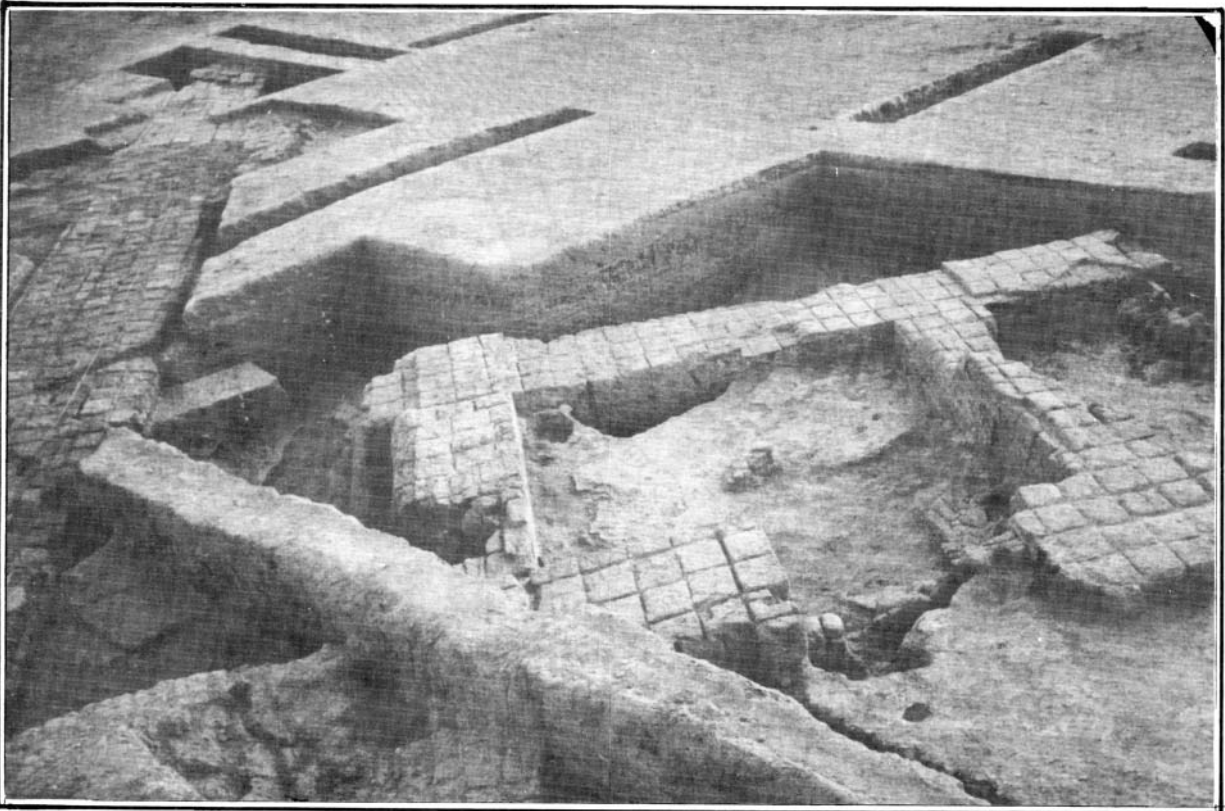


Fig. 5: Tall Seh Hamad, Lower City II, building F, room A and southeast corner of the building, and city wall.

Photograph by: Norbert Grundmann

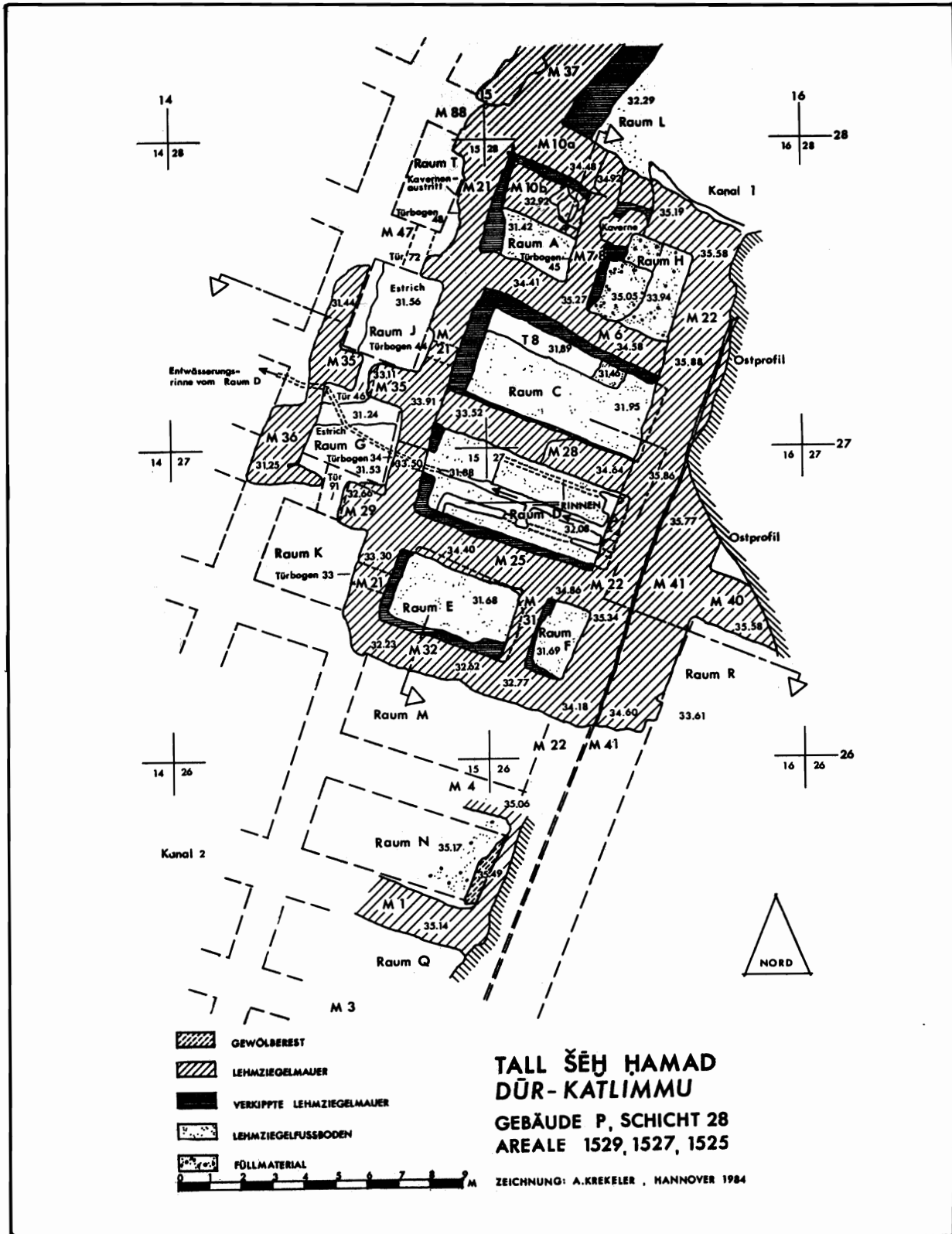
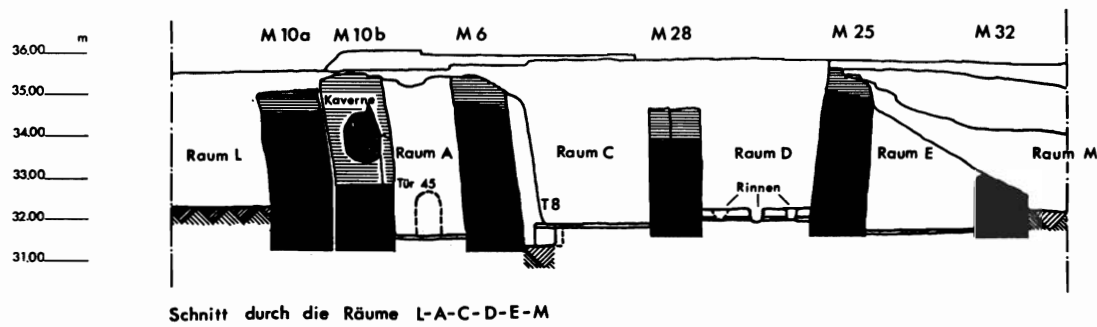
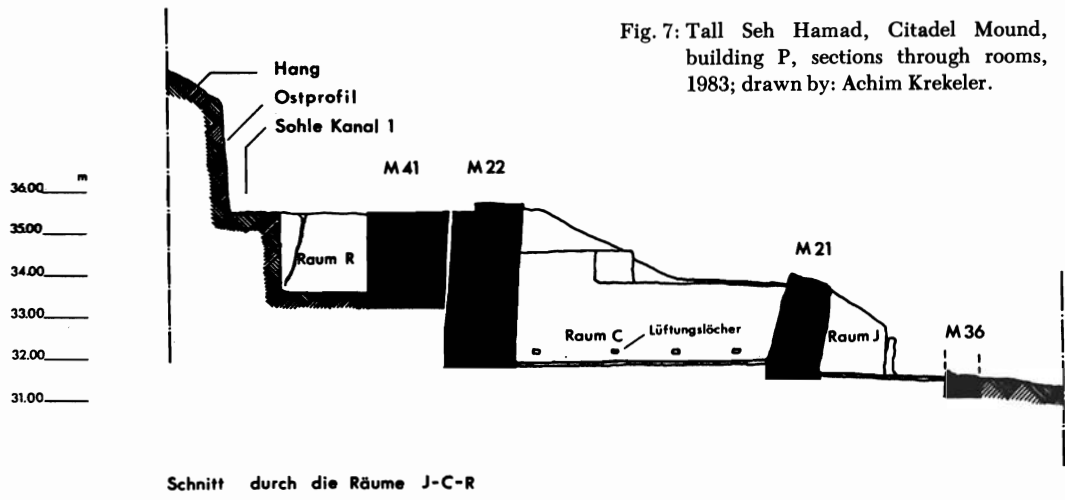
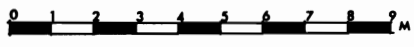


Fig. 6: Tall Seh Hamad, Citadel Mound, building P, schematic plan, 1983, drawn by: Achim Krekeler.



- FUSSBODEN
- LEHMZIEGELMAUER GESCHNITTEN
- HÖCHSTER ERHALTUNGS-ZUSTAND DER LEHMZIEGELMAUER
- ▨ PROFILGRENZE



**TALL ŠĚH HAMAD
DÜR-KATLIMMU
GEBÄUDE P, SCHICHT 28
AREALE 1529, 1527, 1525**

ZEICHNUNG: A. KREKELER, HANNOVER 1984



Fig. 8: Tall Seh Hamad, Citadel Mound, building p, arched entrance to room D.

Photograph: Norbert Grundmann.