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SOMMAIRE

- 9 — Allocution de Monsieur le Président de la République Arabe Syrienne prononcée par Son Représentant Madame Dr. Najah ATTAR, Ministre de la Culture
- 13 — Allocution du Directeur Général des Antiquités et des Musées Dr. Afif BAHNASSI
- 19 — Allocution de Madame Marie-Louis GIROD - PARROT
- 21 — Allocution du Représentant des Participants, Prof. Dr. Giorgio BUCCELLATI
- 25 — H. Klengel : The middle Euphrates and International trade in the old Babylonian period.
- 33 — M. YON et A. Caubet : Ougarit, Mari et L'Euphrate.
- 43 — M. Van LOON : The Netherlands Excavations at BOUQARS
- 63 — R. H. Durnemann : The Syrien Euphrates valley as bronze Age Cultural Unit.
- 89 — A. Finet : Le habur dans les archives de Mari.
- 48 — J. Hannoyer : Remarques sur la Formation de la région de Deir Ez-Zor
- 107 — M. Liverani : The growth of the Assyrian empire in the Habur Middle Euphrates Area
- 117 — M. Trokay : Note Complémentaire à l'étude du Bas-Relief de l'Atalante
- 127 — P. E. Pecureila : The Italian Excavation at Tell Barri/Kahat
- 133 — M. Salvini : Le probleme des Hourrites en relation avec la ville de Kahat
- 149 — M. Kelly - Buccellati : Figurine and Plaques from Terqa
- 155 — Kervey Weiss : Tell Leilan and Mari in the second Millennium.
- 157 — J. Cauvin, D. Stordeur : Le Rôle de la Djezireh Neolithique dans les débuts de la culture D'Hassuna
- 158 — W. Rollig : Priliminary Remarks on the Middle-Assyrian Archives of Tell Schech Hamad.
- 159 — M. Kelly Buccellati : Terqa
- 160 — H. Kuhne : Tell Seh Hamad/Dur Katlimmo.
- 183 — P. Bordreuil : Des Serpents et des Dieux.
- 189 — W. Rollig : The Middle Assyrian Archive from Tell Schech Hamad/Dur Kattlimu.
- 195 — J. Margueron : Nouvelles Directions de recherches à Mari et Premiers Resultats.
- 211 — J. Margueron : Allocution du Représentant des participants.
- 215 — Q. Toueir : Travelling Settlements Along the Euphrates.

TELL SEH HAMAD / DÜR KATLIMMU

The Assyrian Provincial Capital in the Mohafazat Deir Az-Zor

HARTMUT KUHNE , BERLIN

Tell Séh Hamad (Fig. 1) is situated on the east bank of the Lower Habur about 90 km northnortheast of Déráz Zor . The district border between the Mohafazat Hassaka and Der az Zor is running across the ancient settlement ground . The site was known to the archaeologist ever since Hormuzd Rassam ⁽¹⁾ 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 ⁽²⁾ 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 airphotograph in 1934 , but he did not actually visit the site ⁽³⁾ (fig 1). Therefore , when the expedition of the « Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen orient » first surveyed the site in 1975 , nearly one hundred years after Rassam's first step on it , almost nothing was known about it ⁽⁴⁾.

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 beg-

inning of the 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 tribut from the cities there, including Dur - katlimmu ⁽⁵⁾ .

A number of scholars , mainly J. Seidmann, S. Horn, A. Musil and R. Dussaud, have debated the question of identification and localization of Dur - katlimmu and have made various suggestions, but no scholar had thought of Tell seh Hamad, mainly because of its unknown potentials and because of its « out of the way » situation ⁽⁶⁾ .

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 Tell seh Hamad (7) . The first study of the tablets by W. Röllig revealed that Tell seh Hamad was to be identified with great probability with Dur - katlimmu (8) . 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 assyrian 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 syrien Anttquities Department, Dr . Afif Bahnassi .

We took up excavation in the spring of 1978 . Ever since we have conducted 1 more campagnes in 1980, 1981, 1982, and 1983 (9) . At this point I would also like to thank all staff members, past and present (10) , for their cooperation .

A topographical survey of the ancient settlement ground of Tell 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 south-west 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 cover more than 110 hectar .

The systematically collected surface sherds allow the statement that the largest extension of a settlement during any one period was reached in neoassyrian times. Considering this large settlement area and estimating the possible population with only 5000 persons (the calculating factors usually suggest at least 150 persons per hectar) one wonders what exactly the natural and agricultural resources of such a large community had been; especially if one considers the present geographic situation of Tell Seh Hamad which is clearly within the 200 mm rainfall zone. The border line of the agricultural usage zone can be distinguished quite clearly on a satellite photograph, crossing the Habur in the neighbourhood of the city of Saddada. South of this line the growing of crops on a large scale can only succeed with irrigation means; if they lack or if they cannot be established on a large enough scale a sedentary life is severely reduced while nomadic life, relying on pasture-economy, is favored . It has be asked therefore if , during the assyrian period, the natural or economic conditions could hav been different from today to provide the necessary subsistence for such a large settlement like Dur - Katlimmu.

During the campagne of 1983 two botanists and one geomorphologist dealt with these questions . Their results can be summarized as follows : there has been

no severe climatic change during the last four millenia which would support the supposition that there had been better natural conditions during the assyrian period . The natural vegetation has remained basically the same for the last four thousand years and the poor state of the present vegetation is the result of overgrazing . Therefore the agricultural conditions cannot have been different as well . In other words, it must have been possible for the assyrian city of Dur - Katlimmu to rely on her own, homemade agricultural products to the extent that at least 5000 people could be subsisted . The question therefore was first : is there sufficient cultivatable land and second could this land have been irrigated on a larger scale? In other words, are there traces of a complex irrigation system ?

The ancient settlement ground of Tell Seh Hamad is situated on a terrace of upper quaternary pebbles, loams and sandy loams which is traversed by old and modern wadis draining to the Habur . This is an ideal hinterland for farming, with the wadis providing humidity even in the summer ; if irrigated on a small scale like presently by small pumps and wells, the potential farming land amounts to about 2 square kilometers ; if irrigated on a large scale this area can easily be doubled . The reconnaissance of our geomorphologist resulted in the statement and in the verification of an old large scaled irrigation system which can be detected quite obviously on the airphoto as well. It consists of a large, ten meters wide irrigation canal which can be followed up north about 10 kilometers to at least

Marqada ; its date is uncertain so far (11) .

Returning to archaeology it may be useful, to summarize first briefly the evidence apart from the assyrian levels . 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 .

The medieveal islamic name of Tell Seh Hamad is not known . A. Musil has suggested to identify it with Makisin 12 but our present archaeological evidence does not justify this , because Makisin is known to have had a law school 13, and our islamic settlement can hardly have been more than a small village .

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 again 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. Fairly rich small finds prove the importance of this settlement. The completely preserved statuette of a Hercules (fig. 3) can be compared stylistically with parthian works from Hatra and should be dated to the 2nd century A. D. A number of aramaic inscriptions on pottery and another one on the base of a statuette belong to the same age. A parthian coin of the king Phraates IV (38-2 B. C.) was found unstratified in the excavation ; roman coins have been found in some quantity on the surface, like for instance a Tetra-Drachme of the roman Emperor Caracalla (215 - 217 A.D.) which was coined in palastinian Gaza¹⁴ .

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 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 the area of Tell 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 .

On the citadel mound the neoassyrian 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 (Fig. 4). A fragment of a neoassyrian cuneiform tablet was found among the mud brick debris of level 27 . It seems to be a contract but is too small to allow any further conclusions .

A more comprehensive impression of neoassyrian Dur - Katlimmu can be gained from the second main excavation area in the northeastern of Lower City II. The topography there indicated a large building of the character of a castellum but the surface sherds were to be dated clearly to the neoassyrian period . Right next to it the city wall was to be expected .

The so far unearthed building F (Fig. 5) 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 . In the walls of room D (Fig.6) and also in room C circular impressions could be observed which certainly served for holding ziqqati, the decorated well known tiles with a handle

which have been found numerous in Assur 15. In room D and also in room G traces of very badly preserved wall paintings have been found consisting in room G of a small band of paint above the floor.

The main entrance to the building has not yet been discovered. So far the southeastern corner of the building was unearthed, showing that a corridor or a defensive passage existed between the building and the city wall. The outside edge of the southern bordering wall of the building was reinforced in a second stage by an embankment (Fig. 7). It seems that the building extended to the north taking up the complete space in the northeastern corner of the city wall.

In the northwest of the building an interesting structure was excavated. It consists of two rooms both of which have been vaulted (Fig. 8). The technique used is known as the pitched brick method by which the bricks are put up diagonally to form an arch. Similar structure have been discovered in Tell Rimah (16), there dating back to the end of the 3rd mill. while room J clearly shows two construction phases indicated by two superimposed vaults, the vault of room K must have existed for a long time because the room seems to have been reused over and over. we have not yet reached the original floor level there so that no further conclusions can be offered. While room K could have served as an ordinary room, it seems almost certain that room J served a special purpose, most probably one dealing with water, a cistern or the like. So far the vaulted rooms show no connection with the remaining building but to judge

from topography again, they must have belonged to the same complex.

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 the corner of the city wall of the Lower City of Nimrud. By pottery and other small finds, like for instance the pick, a similar date is indicated.

The city wall (Fig. 9) itself was unearthed for some length, about 35 meter. It is three meters wide and buttressed with towers one of which was excavated. It is interesting to note that the lower courses of the brick work consist of limestone while the upper wall is built of normal mud brick. The wall is founded on virgin soil but the inside edge reveals that it is overlying an older wall. We are not quite certain yet about the date of this older wall, but the indications point to an earlier iron age date.

Returnig to the citadel mound we finally have to consider the building « p » in which the middle assyrian cuneiform tablets have been found (fig. 2, 10). The so far excavated groundplan (fig. 11) reveals from west to east three rows of rooms. 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 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.

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 we feel 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 final situation within the « archive room » was as follows: After having removed heavy mud brick debris from the crumbled down walls we were able to trace the walls of room A; it turned out that it was only a chamber of 3 by 2 meters.

Underlying the mud brick debris was a layer of grey ash followed by layer of

black conflagration-debris. In this layer the first tablets were discovered together with numerous jar sealings, sherds and bones. The findspot made it absolutely clear that the room contents had been burnt inside the room. Therefore we were convinced at the beginning that this could be interpreted only as the original contents of the room. But it turned out, not to be the case. The black conflagration layer was about one meter thick and continued to contain those 600 cuneiform tablets of the archive, jar sealings, sherds and bones. Underneath it followed a layer of plaster debris lying on top of some heavy mudbrick. From the section it became clear that this could only be interpreted as the broken down ceiling of the room, most probably consisting of a vaulted construction on top of which the plastered floor of the room of the storey above had been situated.

Underneath that brick layer the assemblage of debris and finds changed completely. We found about 700 kg of charcoaled grain, some of it less carbonized to the extent that the original spelt was conserved (Fig. 12).

There were almost no sherds and not a single cuneiform tablet or jar sealing. The grain apparently had been contained in sacks leant against the walls.

The walls had been covered with panels of wood, and on the floor had been put planks. The yellow material discovered underneath the charcoaled grain has been analysed and attested to be wood. These planks in turn were lying on a mudbrick pavement (Fig. 13).

The total sequence was confirmed in a section through the room which was documented. After taking out the balk we

/s

discovered that the east wall of the room contained an arched passage.

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. 14). The floor consisted again of a mud-brick pavement which contained three parallel running canals (Fig. 15) continuing through the threshold and room G.

In room C it was discovered that underlying the youngest floor which also consisted of a mud brick pavement, there was an older pavement. These different levels are to be associated with at least two building phases, one of which was a locally limited destruction caused by an earthquake. This catastrophe caused the collapse of the originally arched door passage to room C from the west which was replaced then by a rectangular doorway (fig. 16). Very peculiar for the whole row of rooms is a ventilation system consisting of four square wholes in the longitudinal walls (Fig. 15). This system can be followed from room A through room E.

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 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(17).

Equally important are the seal impressions on these dated tablets and on the associated jar sealings and bullae.

The well known rendering of a galloping winged bull(18) is but unique for its combination with an oval festoon surrounding (Fig. 17). Stylistically it can be grouped with the only so far well known middle assyrian style, a naturalistic rendering in combination with a high relief and dynamic movement in the figures(19). The peak of this style is - according to A. Moortgat(20) - already reached in the 13th century B.C. In contrast to this style a second middle assyrian style begins to emerge from the seal impressions from Tell Seh Hamad/Dur Katlimmu. I will be calling this style the « middle assyrian cut style ».

This impression on a tablet (Fig. 18-19) shows a lion attacking an antelope; above the back of the antelope a lozenge is filled in. The rendering consists of simple lines abstracting the natural appearance of the animals. Such seals have been very rare in middle assyrian glyptik so far and may not have been classified correctly.

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 pro-

per, 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.



NOTES :

1 — Hormuzd Rassam, Asshur and the Land of Nimrud (1897) 311 - 313 .

2 — Iraq 3 , 1936 , 2 Fig . 1 .

3 — A. Poidebard, La Trace de Rome (1934) 135 Pl . 108 .

4 — H. Kühne, Zur historischen Geographie am Unteren Habur, in : Archiv für Orientforschung 25, 1974 - 1977 , 249 - 255 ; H. Kühne and W. Röllig , The Lower Habur, A preliminary Report on a survey Conducted by the Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients in 1975 , in : Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes syriennes 27/28, 1980 115 - 140 .

5 — H. Kühne, Zur Rekonstruktion der Feldzüge Adad - Nirari II, Tukulti - Ninurta II und Assurnasirpal II im Habur - Gebiet, in : Baghdader Mitteilungen 11, 1980, 44-70

6 — J. Seidmann . Die Inschriften Adad-niraris II, in : Mitteilungen der Alt-orientalischen Gesellschaft Bd. 9/3 , 1935; S. Horn, zur Geographie Mesopotamiens, in : Zeitschrift für Assyriologie 34, 1922, 123-156; A. Musil, The Middle Euphrates (1927) ; R. Dussaud, Topographie Historique de la Syrie Antique et Médiévale (1927) .

7 — H. Kühne, zur historischen Geographie am Unteren Habur, Zweiter Bericht über eine archäologische Geländebegehung, in : Archiv für orientforschung 26, 1978 - 79, 181 - 195; H. Kühne und W. Röllig, The lower Habur, second preliminary Report on a survey conducted by the Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen orient in 1977, in press in : Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes syriennes .

8 — W. Röllig, Dur - katlimmu, in : Orientalia 47, 1978, 419 - 430 .

9 — H. Kühne, Vorläufiger Bericht über die erste Grabungskampagne auf dem Tell schech Hamad am untern Habur; in Akkadica, 1978, 16 - 23; H. Kühne, A. Mahmoud, W. Röllig, H. Steuerwald, Tell schech Hamad / Dur - katlimmu, Vorläufiger Bericht über die erste Ausgrabungskampagne 1978; in press in : Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes syriennes; H. Kühne, A. Mahmoud, W. Röllig, Tell Schech Hamad / Dur Katlimmu. Vorläufiger bericht über die Ausgrabungen 1980 und 1981; in press in : Les Annales Archéologiques Arabes syriennes; H. Kühne, kurzberichte in : Archiv für orientforschung 26, 1978 - 79 , 166 - 168 und 28, 1981 - 1982 , 233 ; H. Kühne, Tell

Seh Hamad / Dur - katlimmu . Die wiederentdeckung einer mittellassyrischen stadt; in : Damaszener Mitteilungen 1 , 1983 , 149 - 163 .

10 — Staff members of the present campagne 1983 have been : Hartmut Kühne, director; Wolfgang Röllig, epigraphist; peter Ergenzinger , geomorphologist ; wolfgang frey, botanist; Harald Kürschner, botanist; Hans Hopfinger, geographer ; Gerwulf schneider, mineralogist ; Norbert Grundmann, Photographer; konstanze kitt, draughtswoman; Andreas Neuber, draughtsman; Achim krekel, architect; Jörg Fanelli, architect ; Gabriela Wüsten, restorer; Regina peters, restorer; Annabet Röllig, restorer-assistant; Dieter Martin, technical assistant; Renate Gut , student; Roger Leenders, student; peter pfälzner „ student ; Gerti preuss, student; Beate salje, student; Heike Dohmann, student; Reinhard Bernbeck, student .

11 — Nothing is known about any ancient canal - system along the lower Habur occasional traces have been observed for instance by E. sarre / E. Herzfeld, Archäo-

logische Reise im Euphrat-und Tigris-Gebiet I (1911) 188 .

12 — A. Musil, cf. note 6 , 137 note 74 .

13 — Tübinger Atlas des vorderen orient, karte B VIII 16, 1977 .

14 — Bestimmung der Münzen nach U. Pause - Dreyer .

15 — W. Andrae , farbige keramik aus Assur (1923) . Tf. 33, 35 .

16 — J. Curtis (Ed.) Fifty Years of Mesopotamian Discovery (1982) 94 .

17 — W. Röllig, Ein Itinerar aus Dur - katlimmu, in : Damaszener Mitteilungen 1 , 1983 , 279 ff .

18 — cf. D. J. Wiseman, Götter und Menschen im Rollsiegel westasiens, Prag 1958, Abb. 61 .

19 — The piece is already published in : H. kühne, Das Rollsiegel in syrien, Tübingen 1980 , Nr . 51 .

20 p A. Moortgat , Assyrische Glyptik des 13 . Jahrhunderts, in : zeitschrift für Assyriologie 47, 1942, 87 - 88 .



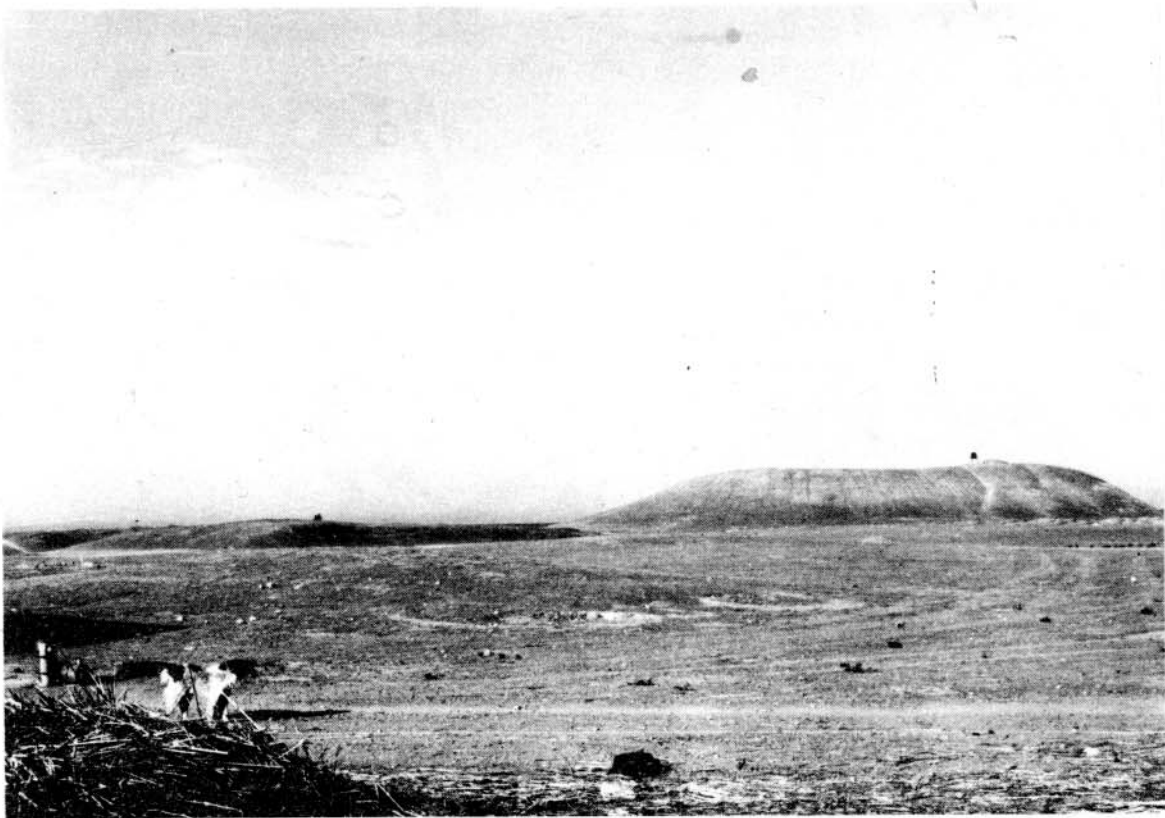


Fig. 1



Fig. 4



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 5

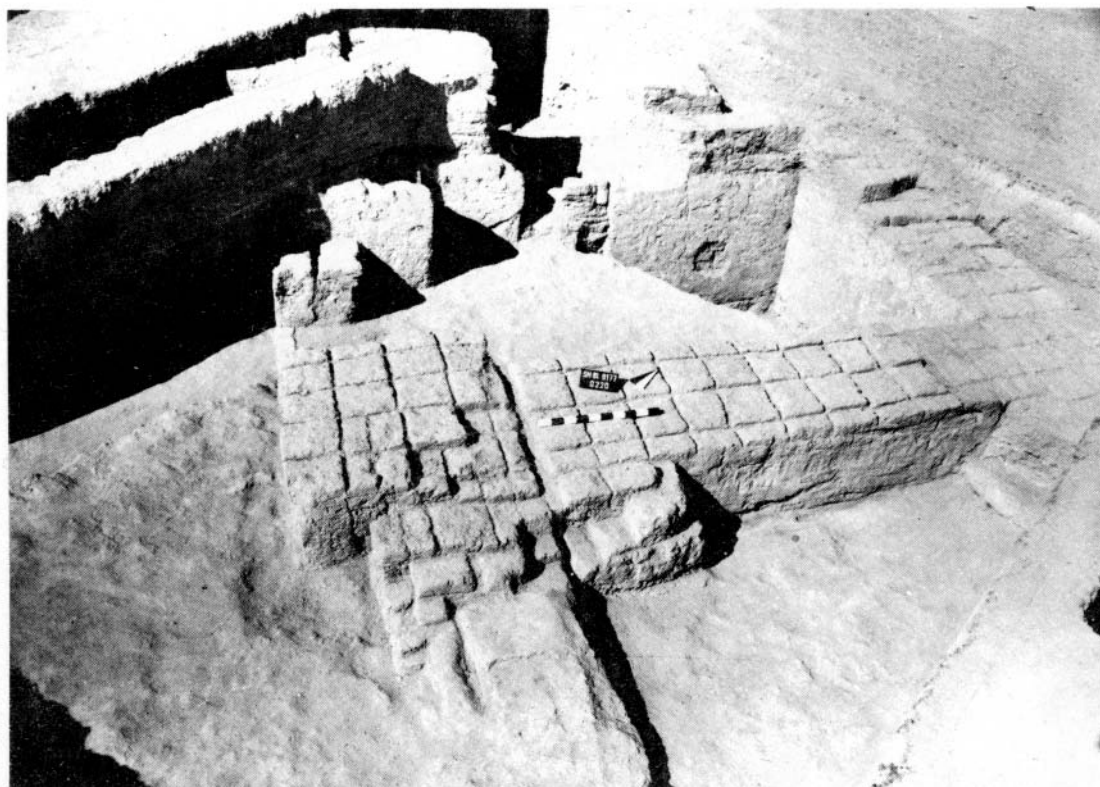


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

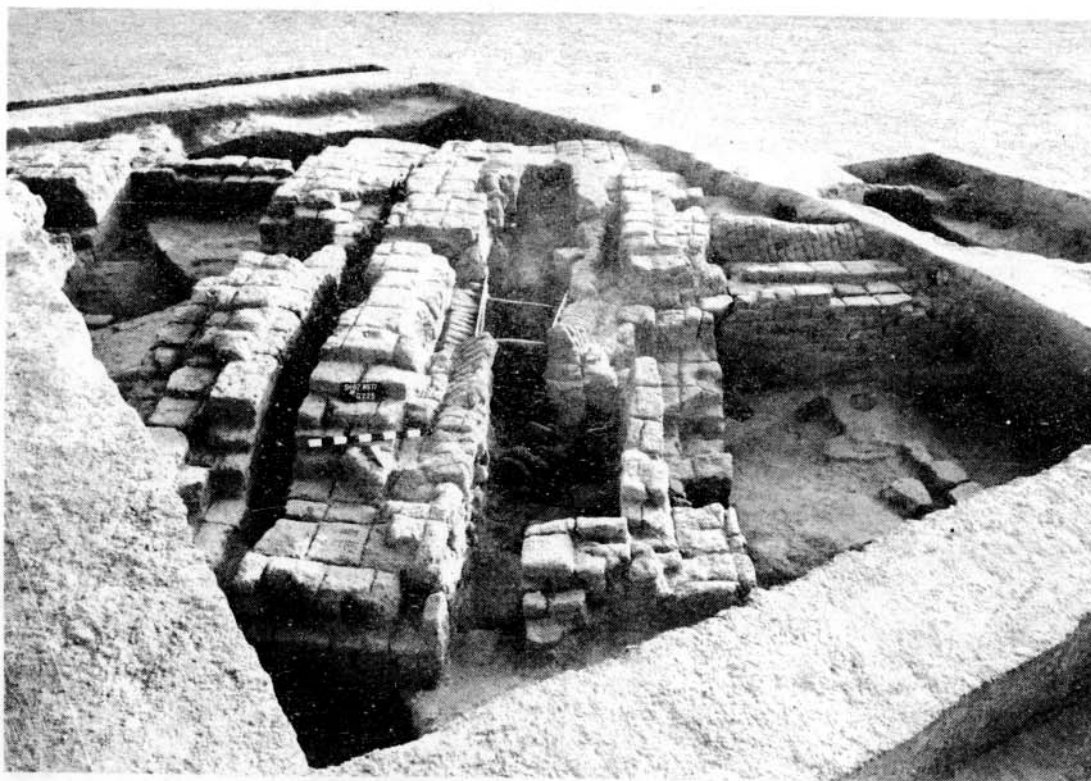


Fig. 8

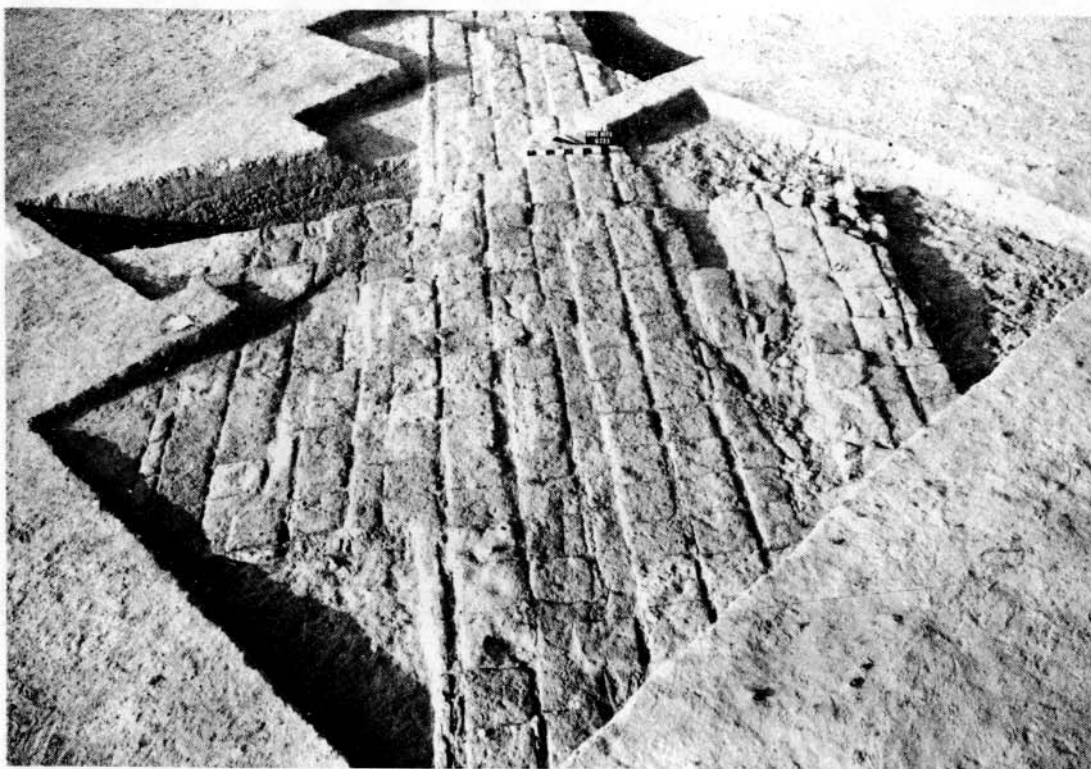
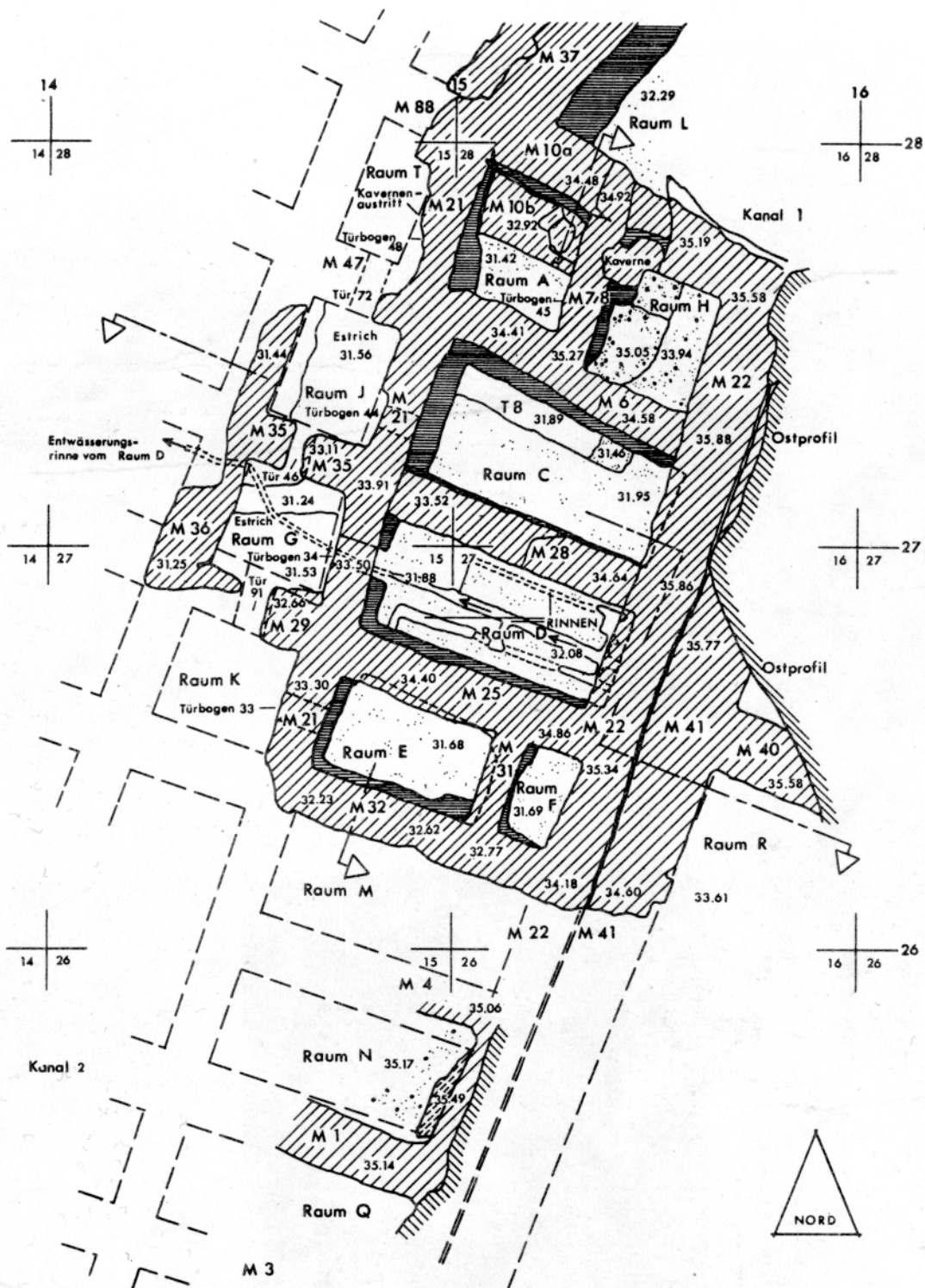


Fig. 9



**TALL ŠEH ḤAMAD
DÜR-KATLIMMU
GEBÄUDE P, SCHICHT 28
AREALE 1529, 1527, 1525**

ZEICHNUNG: A. KREKELER, HANNOVER 1984

Fig. 11



Fig. 10

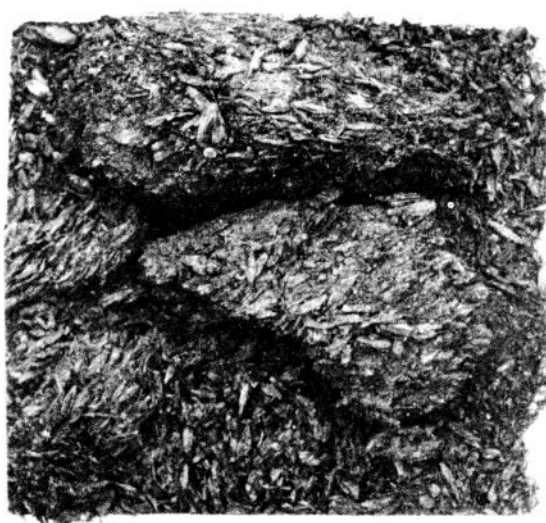


Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

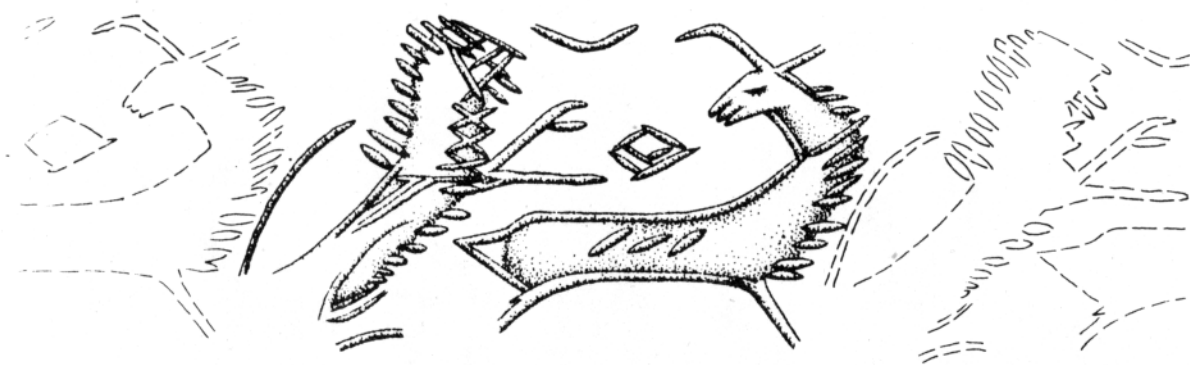


Fig. 18

SH97/1527I/397



Fig. 19