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## CONTENTS

- Horst Klengel	Syria c. 3000 - 300 B.C.: An Historical problem.	9
- Alfonso Archi	Polity Interaction in the Age of Ebla.	13
- Pelio Fronzaroli	Textes de chancellerie et textes Littéraires à Ebla .	19
- Albert F. Naccach	The Empire of the Amorites Revisited.	29
- Thomas L. McClellan	Irrigation in Dry-Farming Syria : Agricultural Intensification in the Bronze Age.	52
- Jesper Eidem	North Syrian Social Structure in the MB Period. New Evidence From Tell Leilan.	77
- Leila Badre	Tell kazel- Ancient Simyra ?.	87
- Hartmut Kühne	The History of the Lower Habur-Region in the Light of the Excavation of Tell Sheikh Hamad/ Dur- Katlimmu.	95
- Stefania Mazzoni	The Aramaean Period in Syria : Continuity and Development .	125
- William and Fidelity Lancaster,	Rowton's theses of Dimorphic Structure and Enclosed Nomadism: a reconsideration using recent archaeological and anthropological perspectives; with reference to the Badiat ash-Sham and the Arabian peninsula.	143

## **The History of the Lower Habur-Region in the Light of the Excavation of Tell Sheikh Hamad/ Dur-Katlimmu**

**Hartmut Kühne**  
Berlin

Modern Tell Sheikh Hamad (Fig.1) is situated in eastern Syria, about 550 km northeast of Damascus, 70 km northeast of the provincial center of Deir az-Zor, and only 40 km west of the Iraqi border on the east bank of the Habur, the largest perennial tributary to the Euphrates. This river is springing from chalky sources near the Syrian-Turkish border, near the town of Ras al- 'Ain. It is taking a southeastern course at first, and near the modern provincial center of Hasaka it is forced by the volcano Kaukab to change its course in a southern direction, crossing in a canyonlike depression the outskirts of the Jebel Abd al-Aziz and the Jebel Sinjar. The dry-farming-belt, usually associated with the 200 mm isohyet, is forming a parabolic curve with its peak just south of Hasaka so that geographic and climatic criteria are dividing the river in an upper and in a lower part. Thus, the modern geo-climatic situation sees Tell Sheikh Hamad well beyond the dry farming belt, almost 100 kilometers south of it.

Ancient Dur-Katlimmu was known to the historian almost ever since the initial days of Assyriology, when Rawlinson first published the third column of the so called 'broken obelisk', now in the British Museum. Better known is the first full translation of the text by L.W. King in 1902. GRAYSON has retranslated the text, which is reading (GRAYSON 1975:54 244= col. III, 20-22): " In the month of Kislev, eponym of Ili-iddina, he attacked a contingent of Arameans at the city Makrisu of the land Yaru. In that year, in the same month, he attacked a contingent of Arameans at the city of Dur-katlimmu".

The authorship of the text was long disputed but following the studies by R. Borger and J.A. Brinkman it can now be ascribed to the king Assur-bel-kala (1073-1055 BC) almost with certainty.

Until the end of the seventies of this century this inscription was the oldest mentioning of the city of Dur-Katlimmu. However, it did not provide any information about its geographical position. This was indicated by the second oldest mentioning of Dk in the annals of the Assyrian king Adadnirari II. " On this same campaign of mine I made my way along the banks of the river Habur. ... Moving on from the city (Qatnu I pitched camp (and) spent the night in the land Ebusu (which) is on the river Habur. Moving on from the land Ebusu I entered the city Dru-aduklimmu. I regarded the city Dur-aduklimmu

In this text Adad-nirari II is narrating his campaign to the land of Hanigalbat and, on his return, he is marching down the Habur (Fig. 2) As GRAYSON (1976:84) puts it, the expedition was a 'show of strength' "designed to collect tribute without military engagement". Besides mentioning the places where he stopped and collected tribute, he rarely adds any further information about their locations. nevertheless, the text is leaving no doubt that Dur-katlimmu was situated on the lower part of the Habur.

The annals of his successors, Tukulti-Ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II, are mentioning the city of Dur-katlimmu, too, in a similar context, confirming the position of Dur-katlimmu along the lower Habur, but were not allowing for a more specific localization either.

The alignment of place names and events in a limited marching distance (Fig. 2) in these annals led to several proposals concerning the reconstruction of the historical geography of this area based on various arguments in the twenties of this century. In these works, Durk-katlimmu was equated with modern Tall Saddada by R. Dussaud with modern Tall Fadgami by A. Musil, and with Tall Marqada or Tall husen by J. Seidmann. In lack of any new sources the discussion had stopped until it was revived by myself (KÜHNE 1980) and was continued by KESSLER 1980, NASHEF 1982, POSTGATE 1985, RUSSEL 1985, OATES 1985, LIVERANI 1988, ERGENZINGER et al. 1988.

The political situation (Fig. 1) emerging from these sources seems to indicate that Dur-katlimmu and the lower Habur had to be defended against the Aramaeans in the 11 th century BC. by Assurbel-kala, demonstrating that the Assyrian central power had been weakened. The whole area was reintegrated and put under firm Assyrian control in the 9th century BC. under the Assyrian kings Adad-nirari II, Tukulti-ninurta II and Assurnasirpal II. (Fig. 2). Thereafter no further information about this area emerges from official Assyrian sources. In lack of regional sources the historian was forced to conclude that the Habur-region had become a part of the Assyrian provinces and- considering the vast expansion of the empire- rather belonged to the Assyrian hinterland.

For the archaeologist the area of the Lower Habur was a terra incognita up to the mid seventies of this century. The only excavation along the lower Habur had been carried out in Tell Ajaja in the middle of the 19th century by A. H. Layard. Lasting only three weeks, he drove a number of tunnels into the eastern slope of the mound and luckily hit some orthostats. One of them carried an inscription which enabled S. Smith to identify the site with Assyrian city of Sadikanni. It was long believed that the orthostates were lost, but a chance find in 1982 lead to an emergency excavation, which demonstrated that the orthostates had never been removed (MAHMOUD et al. 1982).

After Layard, some travellers passed through the area, but only F. Sarre and E.

herschfeld published a useful report in 1911. In his search for an archaeological site, Max mallowan had travelled the Habur upstream, ending in Tell Brak. His diary remained unpublished but his wife, the well known Agatha Christie, reports on the bearings of this trip in her memoirs.

This was a rough sketch of the historical and archaeological knowledge of the area at the outset of the German research project on behalf of the 'Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients' in 1975. Within two seasons of fieldwork, 1975 and 1977, the whole lower Habur was surveyed, documenting 130 sites, 75% of which had not been known before (KÜHNE 1974-77. 1978-79; RÖLLIG / KÜHNE 1980. 1983).

At the end of the second season in 1977, a chance find of about 30 middle-Assyrian tablets was made in Tell Skeikh Hamad (KÜHNE 1983. 1984 a). They had been washed out by a modern irrigation canal. Half a year later, the first excavation season was launched, hitting at once a middle-Assyrian archive. The excavation of the archive was completed only five years later, in 1983 (KÜHNE 1984 b). The first examination of the tablets revealed two things: it covered the reign of the two middle-assyrian kings, of Salmanassar I and Tukulti Ninurta I of the 13th cent. BC; and tablets mentioned Dur-katlimmu in a way, that it had to be identified with the site of Tell Sheikh Hamad (RÖLLIG 1978). According to RÖLLIG (1978), the site name of Durkatlimmu may be derived from old-babylonian Dur-Igitlim, Dur- katlimmu being a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of this original name by the mittanians and taken over by the Assyrians.

The ancient occupation of this site (Fig. 4) covers an area of 120 hectare at maximum, thus being the largest settlement along the lower Habur. It is situated on a ridge of the river terrace, extending into the alluvium of the riverbed. The mound is rising to a height of about 22 m above the water level of the river. By topography (Fig. 3), it can be divided up into five sections: apart from the citadel mound in the southwest, there is the lower city I in the east, lower city II in the northeast, and two suburban areas in the north and in the east (KÜHNE 1991).

The history (KÜHNE 1990) of the settlement (Fig. 4) can be roughly sketched as follows: pottery from the surface of the citadel mound indicates an oldest settlement already in the late 4th millennium BC. Surface finds and finds from the excavation on the citadel are demonstrating an occupation during the Early Bronze Age in the third millennium BC. Surface finds are verifying a settlement during the Middle Bronze Age, extending over the citadel and the Lower City I, covering an area of about 15 hectares. No levels of these periods have been excavated so far.

Of the Late Bronze Age, the Mittanian period is indicated by surface pottery and seal impressions. The middle-Assyrian period has been explored by excavation on the western

slope of the tell. In a step trench 28 levels have been counted from top to bottom, the lowest - as far as excavated - being the middle- Assyrian one. Levels 27 to 16 belong to the neo-Assyrian period, levels 15 to 2 to the hellenistic, parthian, roman, and late roman / Byzantine period. The islamic evidence is limited to level one.

The middle- Assyrian archive was discovered in a small room A, measuring only 1.5 by 3 m, in building 'P'. In a black ashy layer about 500 tablets were excavated, fragmentary and complete ones, associated with a large number of jar sealings and animal bones (BECKER 1991). The find situation left no doubt that the contents of the room had broken down from an upper story on the occasion of the destruction of this part of the building. Remains of the floor of the upper story in connection with the ceiling of the lower story were detected. The function of the room in the lower story had been to store grain, large amounts of which were found charcoaled on the paved floor of the room (KÜHNE 1984 b).

Building 'P' (Fig. 5) apparently had been constructed polygonally along with the contours of the then fairly low mound. One wing was almost completely excavated. it consisted of two rows of rooms lined up along a corridor. The western row of rooms has been eroded almost completely; the walls of the eastern row of rooms have been preserved to a height of 4 m. The building was designated "P" because it seems to belong to the middle-Assyrian palace mentioned in the texts.

According to RÖLLIG (1984), the archive consists of about 35 letters, some 120 inventories and lists of rations, workmen and herds of cattle, 70 receipts of wares, 50 records of harvest-yields and distribution of seed-corn, and 27 loans and of other texts not yet identified. There are at least 45 eponyms mentioned in the texts, indicating that the archive has been in use for at least 50 years. The eponyms can be associated to the kings Salmanassar I and Tukulti Ninurta I. Among them are a few which have been unknown so far. They add to the "surplus" of eponyms during the reign of Salmanassar I and Tukulti-Ninurta I without offering a solution to the problem yet.

The historical importance of Dur-katlimmu is only slowly emerging from the texts, as the reading and translating of the tablets is progressing. In various papers and articles three points have been made so far:

- the reconstruction of the historical geography of the area is relying on a new basis after the identification of Tell Sheikh Hamad with Dur-katlimmu.
  - the tablets of Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu themselves are now the oldest sources now documenting the site name of Dur-katlimmu.
- Dur-katlimmu was the seat of a district- govenor, a 'bel pahete', and he was residing in a palace.

It is the last point which is providing some additional news for the historian, because the western and south western extension of the middle- Assyrian empire was unknown so far (Fig. 1). The geographical position of Dur-katlimmu and its administrative function are indicating that the whole Lower Habur and the steppe east and west of the river and south of the mountain chains of the jabal Abd al-Aziz and the Jabal Sinjar to the bent of the Euphrates may have been under middle-Assyrian control (Fig. 1). This geopolitical impression is strengthened by the investigation of the letters, recently dealt with in a Ph.d.-thesis by CANCIK (1994), university of Tübingen. Dur-katlimmu became the center of a three tier settlement pattern (Fig. 6; KÜHNE 1991).

The oldest middle- Assyrian archaeological and philological evidence can be dated to king Salmanassar I. It has been suggested elsewhere that the foundation of the district-center of Durkatlimmu may have been his initiative (KÜHNE 1990). It would at least fit to his policy of consolidating the empire (DONBAZ/FRAME 1983). Therefore it may not be accidental that the only known seal of this king (Fig. 7) was found as an impression on a fragmentary envelope in the archive of Dur-katlimmu (KÜHNE/RÖLLIG 1989). The seal contained an inscription which runs as follows: "Seal of... (PN missing) king of the entirety, son of Adad-nirari, son of Arik-den-ili, the elevated king of Assyria, carrier of a mighty scepter" The filiation offered does fit only to Salmanassar I, the missing personal name can be thus restored.

The pictorial representation (Fig. 7) is extraordinary, too. It depicts a worshipper in front of an object which can only be interpreted as a ziqqurat. The worshipper holds a club in his hand, thus reminding of the scene on the famous altar of Tukulti- Ninurta I from Assur. The combination, worshipper and ziqqurat, is well known from middle-Assyrian glyptic art; however, it has always been associated with Tukulti-Ninurta I or later but not earlier; Thus, the royal seal of Salmanassar from Dur-katlimmu represents the prototype of this group of seals.

On the inside of this envelope a negative impression of the tablet which it had covered was recognized. The impression was readable and it contained the date formular of the former tablet. This date formular reads, according to W. Röllig "month Abu sarri, day 6, PN ba-bu-SES-SUM-na".

The latter is the personal name Babu-aha-iddina, and it is apparently the eponym, the word limu being broken away. A person of this name is well known to historian, he is the wesir or 'sukkal rabu', of Salmanassar I. According to SAPPORETTI (1979) there is only one further evidence of the limu of Babu-aha-iddina, found in Tell Billa. The presence of this envelope of a royal tablet underlines the importance of the district-center of Dur-katlimmu already at the time of Salmanassar I.

The group of letters mentioned above is dated to the time of Tukulti Ninurta I. Among them there are 14 letters addressed to a person called Assur-iddin. One of them was sent by the king himself, the others by various persons. Assur-iddin is never addressed by a title, therefore the letters do not inform us about his official rank. But in economic texts from Dur-katlimmu he is designated as the "sukkal" or "sukkal rabu". This is meaning "wesir", the designation of the highest officer of the Assyrian empire. The context of the letters are describing Assur-iddin as an official equipped with far reaching authority. The sender of the letters are informants telling him about the situation in the western parts of the empire. Thus, he seems to have been in charge of the whole western province, west of Dur-katlimmu.

Another seal-impression (Fig. 8) may be mentioned at this point. On stylistic grounds, it is dated to the period of Tukulti-Nin.I. It is again impressed on an envelope of a tablet, the sender of which is a certain Sulmanumusabsi. The seal is picturing a classical theme of near eastern art, the fight of a hero or a god with wild animals. In this case, a four winged god is fighting a lion standing on his front feet, being supported by a griffin. The rendering is typical middle-Assyrian, as is the quality. Both are testifying the high quality of Assyrian craftsmanship.

So far, the personal name of Sulmanumusabsi does not occur in any other documents from Durkatlimmu. he is not documented anywhere else either so that his identity and his position remain obscure. But the use and the ownership of this outstanding seal must identify him as a man of a high ranked position.

The rooms of the palace of Dur-katlimmu where the archive had been stored, were destroyed by fire. This event is dated by the archive to the end of the 13th century BC, contemporary with the violent death of Tukulti-Ninurta I. Unlike other parts of the palace, these rooms were not reused. The upper using stages of the palace are documented in the southern rooms and can be dated on typological criteria of the pottery to the twelfth century BC (PFÄLZNER in preparation). Since the middle-Assyrian pottery from Tell Bderi (PFÄLZNER 1989-90; PFÄLZNER in preparation) is dated by associated texts to the time of Tiglat-pileser I of the 11th century BC and since it is differing typologically from the pottery from Dur-katlimmu the implication is that Dur-katlimmu ceased to serve as an administrative center.

Textual evidence about the end of middle-Assyrian Dur-katlimmu is missing. No mentioning of Dur-katlimmu is found in texts of Tiglat-pileser I, although new written material from Tell Bderi is available (MAUL 1992). Politically this material rather proves a weakening of the central Assyrian power and a strengthening of provincial centers in the area, provoking perhaps the Arameans to infiltrate (Fig. 1). This in turn may have caused Tiglat-Pileser I and Assur-bel-kala to campaign down the Habur to restore central Assyrian power. However, as is shown by history, this was only a short interlude at the end of the



middle-Assyrian empire and within the 'dark ages' and did not prevent the Aramaeans from establishing city states like Guzana /Tell Halaf.

Apart from the annals mentioned above, nothing is known about Dur-katlimmu in the early neo-Assyrian period, the ninth and eighth century BC. There is no written evidence that Durkatlimmu may have remained a district-center. On the contrary, KESSLER (1987) is suggesting that Dur-katlimmu became a provincial town of secondary importance in the district of Rasappa.

A chance find is filling at least some of the gap between the middle-assyrian levels of the 13th and 12th century BC on the citadel mound and the late assyrian levels of the 7th century in the lower city II. In 1988 a relieved stone was discovered on the southern slope of the citadel (KÜHNE 1988/89). It was incorporated in the recent fill of a former irrigation canal. Another stone fragment was discovered in a distance of about three meters, on the undisturbed slope proper, almost completely covered by the grass surface. As it turned out, the two fragments were fitting together, rendering a part of a relieved orthostate, about 60 by 65 cm in dimension (Fig. 9).

The pictorial representation is consisting of a male person, armed with a sword in his belt and a bow in his left hand. His right arm is raised, the hand is missing. But in his hand he seems to have hold an object the handle of which ended in a rams head beside his wrist. his upper right arm is decorated with an armring ending in gazelle's heads. His head and neck are missing but his upper body, shown en face, is dressed with a light blouse. Most of his lower body is missing again, but what is left renders a skirt of fluted fabric. His left wrist is decorated with an armring mounted by a rosette. The person is standing behind something, of which only a ledge is left.

The stilistic and antiquarian criteria relate this fragment of first glance with central neoassyrian orthostates. On a closer comparison the piece can be dated well and reconstructed to a very interesting scene. The fragment appears to have been cut out of a cultic ceremony of Assurnasirpal II of the Nimrud- orthostates of room G of the North-west Palace (ORTHMANN 1975: Abb. 199). it represents a part of the servant, standing behind the king, holding a fan in his lifted right hand, the handle of which is ending in a ram's head; he is armed with a bow and a sword and dressed almost exactly like the person on the fragment from Dur-katlimmu. Iconographically and stilistically this fragment clearly is related to the art of central Assyria, to the 'Reichskunst'.

The implications of this fragment are far reaching. It proves for the first time definitely that levels of the ninth cent. B.C. can be expected on the citadel mound of Tell Sheikh Hamad - due to the lack of a typology, the pottery cannot be used as a guide. But more important, a relieved orthostate picturing perhaps the king himself in a cultic action

in Dur-katlimmu must indicate that this site was of some importance to the central government and/or to the king personally.

Adding to this new evidence, is a well known fragment of a stele (Fig. 10), already discovered by Rassam in 1879, identified in the British Museum and published by MILLARD/TADMOR (1973). The fragmentary inscription of the stele is informing about a campaign of Adda-nirari III against Arpad and Hatti; Durkatlimmu is not mentioned. It has to be dated to the early 8th century BC (WEIPPERT 1992). But what a difference in style! In contrast to the fragmentary orthostate this stele is quite clearly the work of a provincial artist.

For the time being, these two pieces are the available material evidence of an occupation of the site of Tell Sheikh Hamad during the early neo-Assyrian period. The political significance of the Assyrian site of Durkatlimmu remains obscure at the moment; however, it seems to have been of greater importance than other historical sources are suggesting. The topography is indicating that the site had kept its settlement extension of former days of about 15 hectares.

This is changing radically in the following period, the late- Assyrian time of the late eighth and seventh century BC (Fig. 4). During this period the settlement ground intra muros is extended, it is more than trippled to about 55 ha. The town wall extends over about 4 kilometers. The suburban areas double the overall settlement ground to about 120 ha. The estimated population of the enlarged city of Dk must have amounted to 7.000 people at a minimum (KÜHNE 1991 : 32-3).

This increase of the settlement ground does not coincide with any historically known increase of significance or change of function of Durkatlimmu. Written official sources do not even mention Dur-katlimmu; regional sources had been missing so far. The excavation of Tell Sheikh Hamad has furnished about 50 neo- Assyrian, neo-Babylonian, and Aramaic written documents but none of the texts is mentioning Durkatlimmu yet. There is still only one private letter of an official of Assurbanipal, which was retranslated by KESSLER (1980, 227) in which Durkatlimmu is mentioned. The contents of this document is perhaps shedding some light on the somewhat enigmatic function of the city: Durkatlimmu is positioned at the end (?) of an offshot of the king's highway, the 'harran sarri'. To have been connected with this overland highway, implies that Durkatlimmu could have functioned as district-center again. In any case, it is the largest late neo-Assyrian settlement on the lower Habur.

The archaeological evidence has confirmed this impression. Two large areas in the Lower City II have been excavated during the last six years. First expectations to find the living quarters of the people were soon disappointed. In the middle part of the lower city II a "residence" of a high ranked official was excavated (Fig. 11). The ground plan is

comparable to the 'Große Haus' in Assur (HEINRICH 1984:168 Abb. 103). Only a few Assyrian tablets were found in this building. More important is a wall painting (Fig. 12) which was designated by inscription as the "garden house" (KÜHNE 1989/90).

Much larger (12.000 sqm) is the excavation area in the northeast corner of the lower city II (Fig. 13). The main building must have had the function of a palace, the main typical neo-Assyrian feature being the combination of the largest room (throne room) with a staircase. Instead of a 'babanu' it is furnishing a 'bit hilani'. The geographical position in a corner of a lower town is reminding of Fort Shalmaneser in Nimrud/Kalhu. But the groundplan indicates a much closer relation to the palace of Arslan Tash and with the staircase situated at a right angle to the throne room of the "batiment aux ivoires" from Arslan Tash (HEINRICH 1984:133 Abb. 81).

Almost fifty texts were found in this building, written in three languages, Assyrian, Babylonian and Aramaic, and in cuneiform as well as Aramaic script. The oldest Assyrian tablet is dated to the limu bamba, 'sukallu sanu', who was eponym in the year 676 B.C. Twenty so called dockets are demonstrating the prevailing Aramaic influence during the 7th century.

The symbiosis of Assyrian and Aramaic culture (MILLARD 1983) which is illustrated by the texts is also present in the material culture. Apart from the pottery, a fragment of a small relief is combining antiquaria with the Aramaic bearing of the weather god (KÜHNE 1984:173 Abb. 66).

Another piece of art is extraordinary. It was found in 1989, in the throne room W, at the foot of the northern wall, on the floor of a secondary using stage. It is a bronze statuette of the demon 'pazuzu', 17 cm high (Fig. 14; KÜHNE in ROUAULT 1993:208/374) It can be compared with two pieces, one from the Louvre and the other one from a private collection in Chicago.

Summarizing, it seems that the archaeological evidence is suggesting a much higher significance of Dur-katlimmu as it is reflected in the present historical knowledge. The settlement extension and the coverage with large official buildings are suggesting a higher degree of administrative utilization. Durkatlimmu should have functioned as a district-center again, possibly as a consequence of the provincial reform by Tiglath-Pileser III.

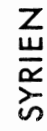
The downfall of the Assyrian empire did apparently not too heavily effect Durkatlimmu. The settlement lingered on. Pieces of absolute dating evidence are several ostraka; according to W. Röllig epigraphic criteria are dating them to the post-Assyrian period of the sixth century BC. However, the centers of power and the main routes had changed. This was causing a decline of the occupation, and ultimately a reduction to the

original size of the settlement consisting of the citadel and the lower city I, covering an area of about 15 hectares.

During hellenistic-roman times the settlement consisted of the same arrangement, the lower city I now being transformed into a castellum. The site must have functioned as a military station of the parthian-roman border and of the imperial roman limes. By then it had changed its name, too, but it remains to be discovered.

## LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 1: Syria in the 13th century BC
- Fig. 2: The reconstruction of the campaigns of Adad-Nirari II, Tukulti-Ninurta II, and Assurmasirpal II in the lower Habur region (KÜHNE 1980)
- Fig. 3: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Topographical plan with indication of excavation areas (operations' 1- 5)
- Fig. 4: Tell Sheikh Hamad. The development of the settlement (KÜHNE 1991)
- Fig. 5: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Schematic plan of the middle-Assyrian palace, building ' P ' (KÜHNE 1991)
- Fig. 6: The lower Habur- region. Three tier settlement pattern (KÜHNE 1991)
- Fig. 7: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Seal impression of the seal of Salmanassar I (KÜHNE : RÖLLIG 1989)
- Fig. 8: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Seal impression of the seal of Sulmanumusabsi
- Fig. 9: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Fragment of relieved orthostate, 9th century BC (KÜHNE 1988 - 89).
- Fig.10: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Fragment of Stele of Adad-Nirari III (MILLARD / TADMOR 1973)
- Fig.11: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Schematic plan of the central part of the lower city II, 'operation' 5 (KÜHNE 1989/90)
- Fig.12: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Wall painting in room B in the central part of the lower city II (KÜHNE 1989/90)
- Fig.13: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu. Schematic plan of the north east corner of the lower city II, ' operation ' 3 & 4
- Fig.14: Tell Sheikh Hamad / Dur-katlimmu Bronze figure of the demon 'pazuzu' (KÜHNE in ROUAULT 1993)



IM 13. JAHRHUNDERT V. CHR.

ENTWURF: H. KÜHNE  
ZEICHNUNG: K. KITT

A horizontal scale bar with markings at 0, 50, 100, and 150 km. The bar is divided into segments, with the first segment (0-50 km) containing a dashed line pattern.

Fig.2

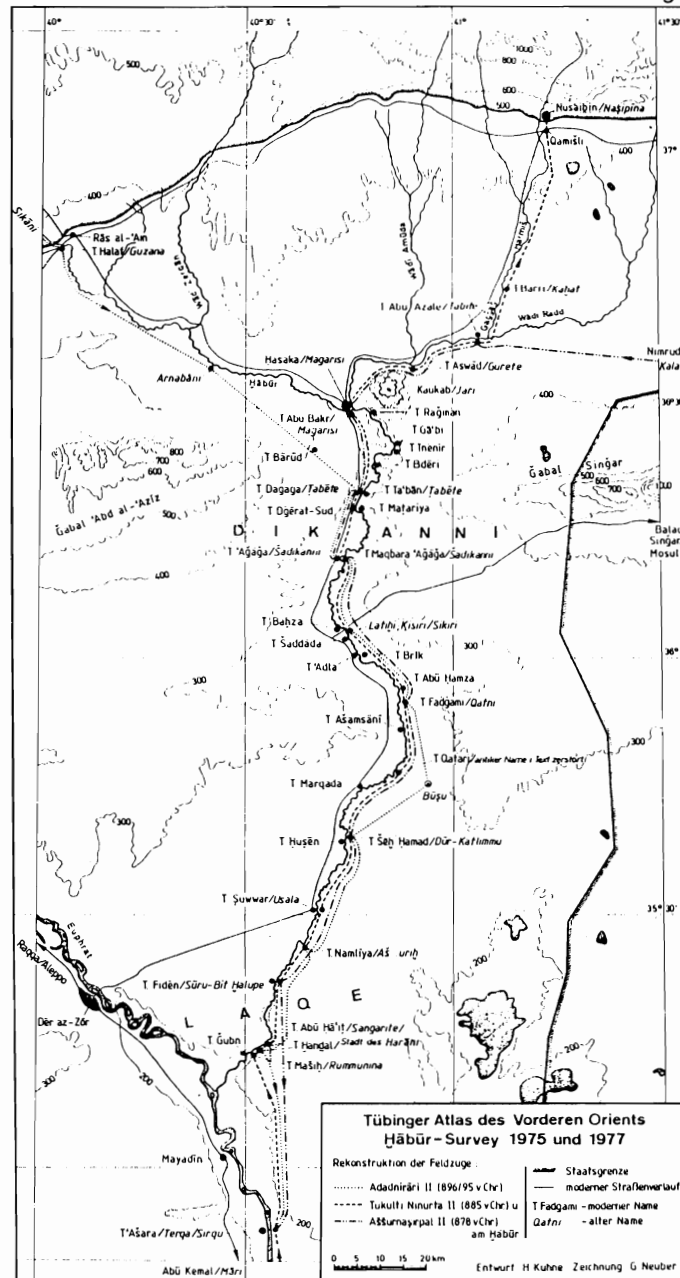


Fig. 3

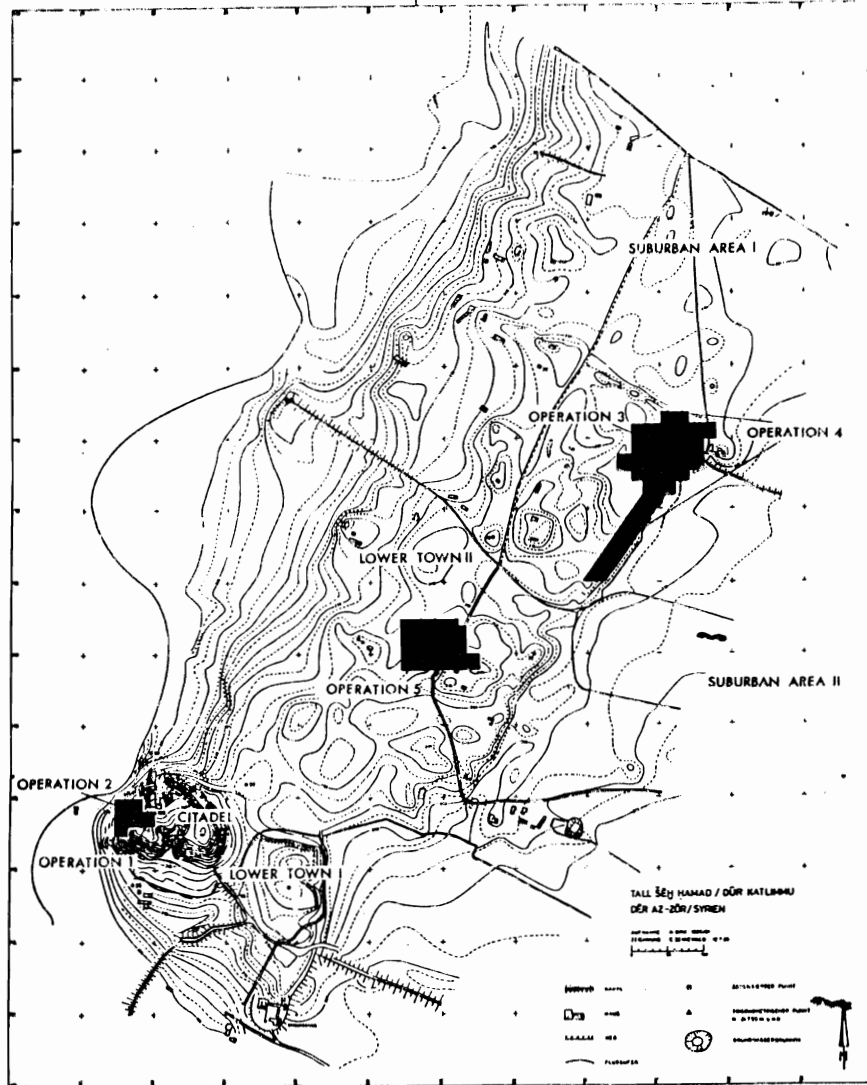
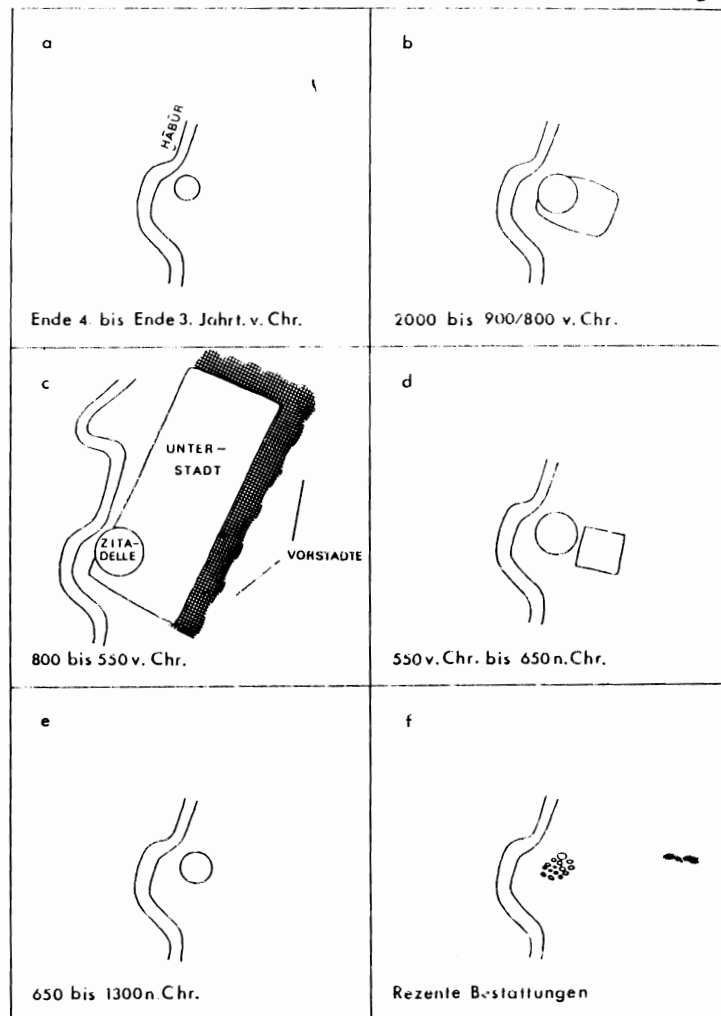




Fig.4

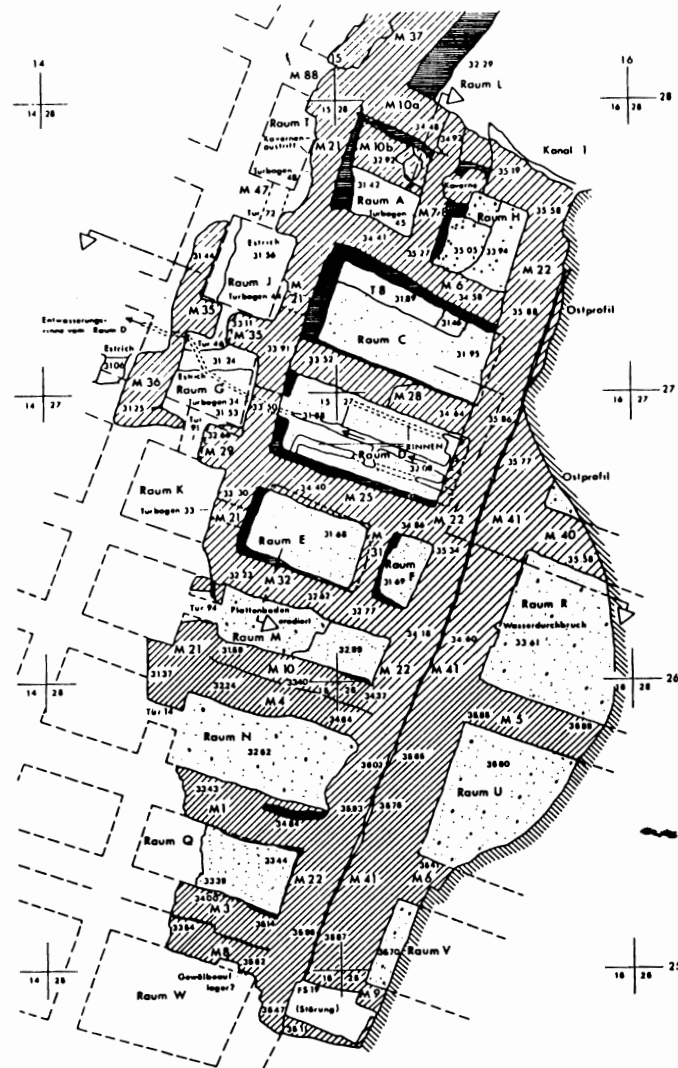


THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
SETTLEMENT AT T. Sĕh HAMAD

0 1000m

PLAN : H. KUHNE EXECUTION : M. LEICHT 1994

Fig. 5



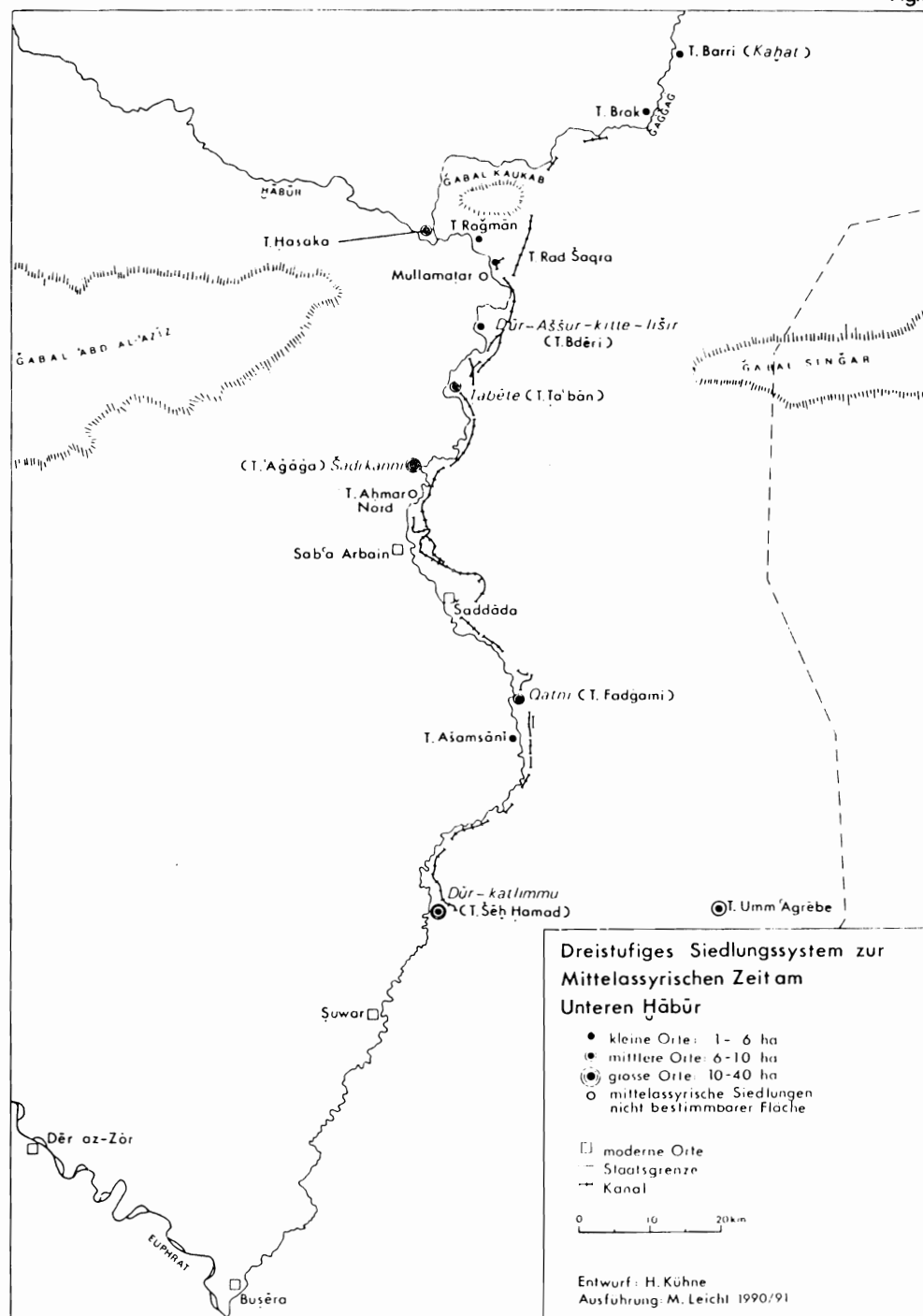
- GEWÖLBEREST
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- VERKIPPIE LEHMZIEGELMAUER
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- FULLMATERIAL

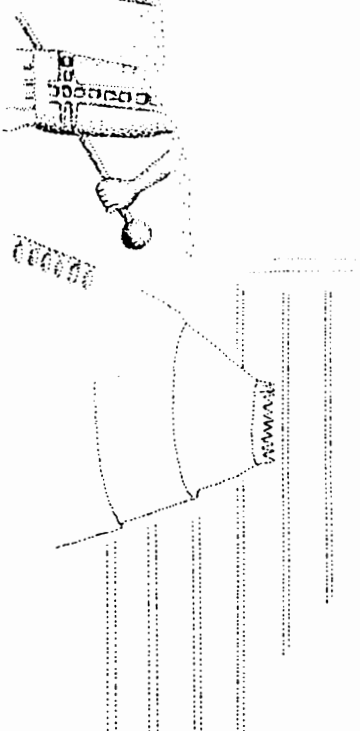
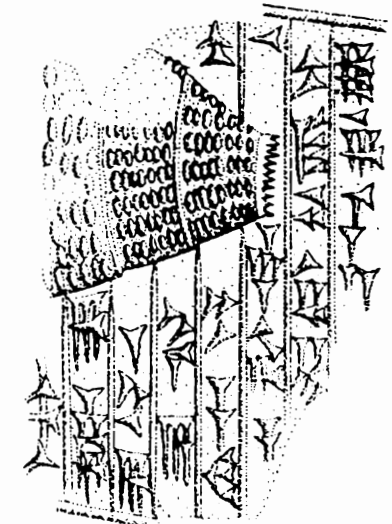
TALL ŠĒḤ ḤAMAD  
DŪR KATLIMMU  
GEBÄUDE P, SCHICHT 28  
AREALE 1529, 1527, 1525



ZEICHNUNG: A. KREKELER, HANNOVER 1984  
J. WEIXER, BERLIN 1984

Fig.6





M 2:1

TONTAFELHÜLLE

Aufnahme: K. Kitt

Zeichnung: S. Bachem

SH 82 / 1527 I / 742

+ SH 82 / 1527 I / 81

+ SH 81 / 1527 I / 227

+ SH 83 / 1527 IV / 227

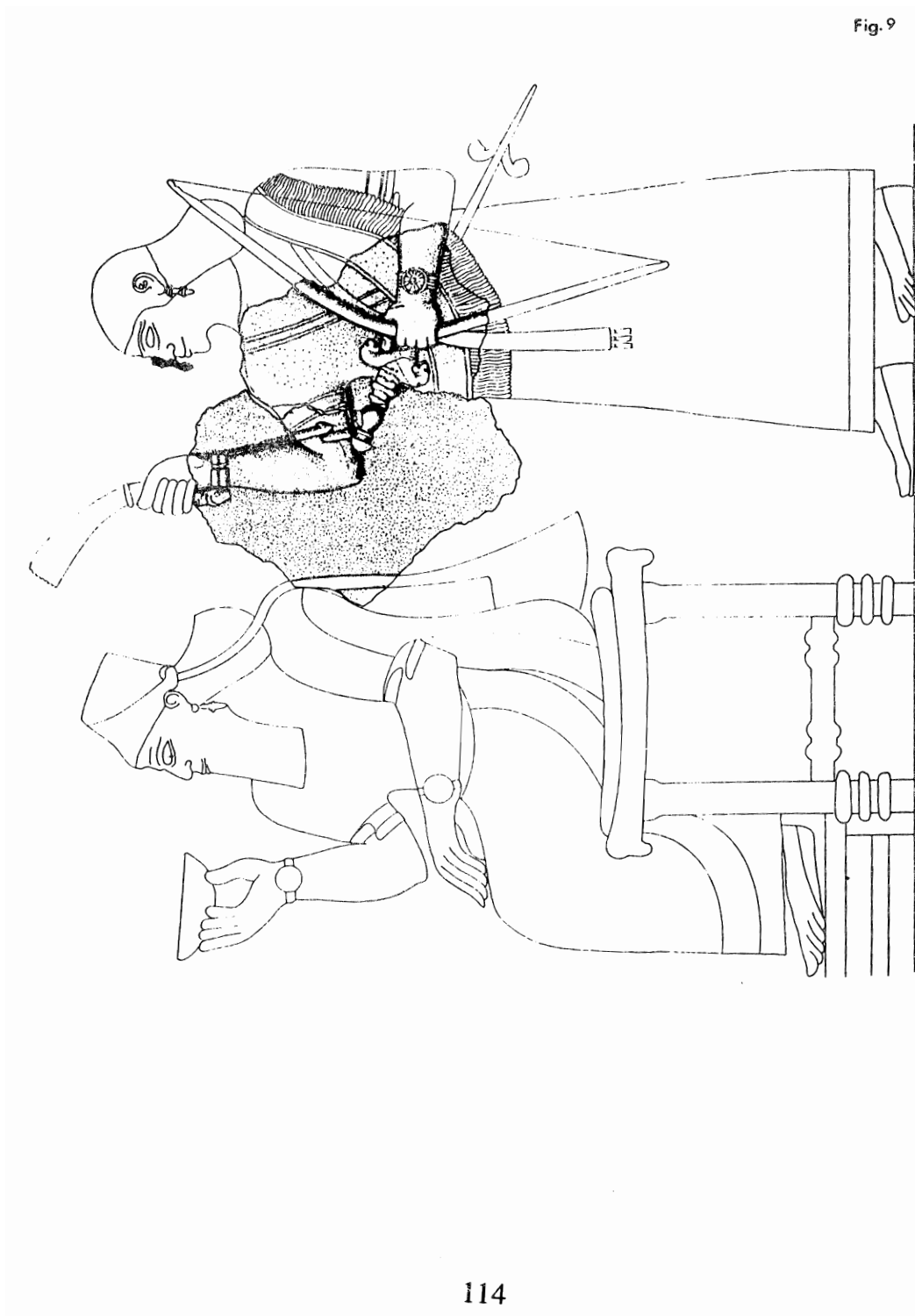
Fig. 7

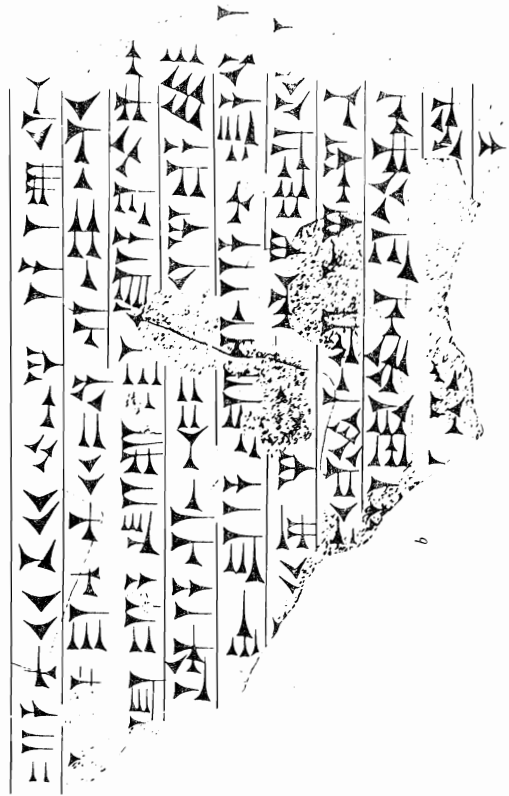
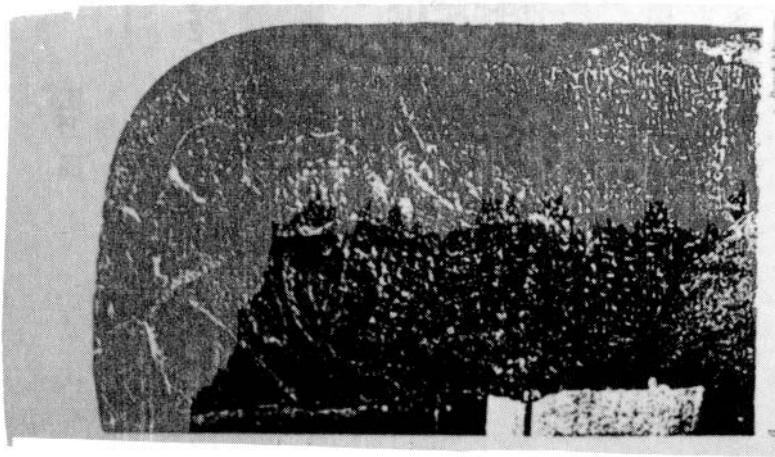


SH 78/15271/190  
SH 80/15271/124+135  
SH 82/15271/233

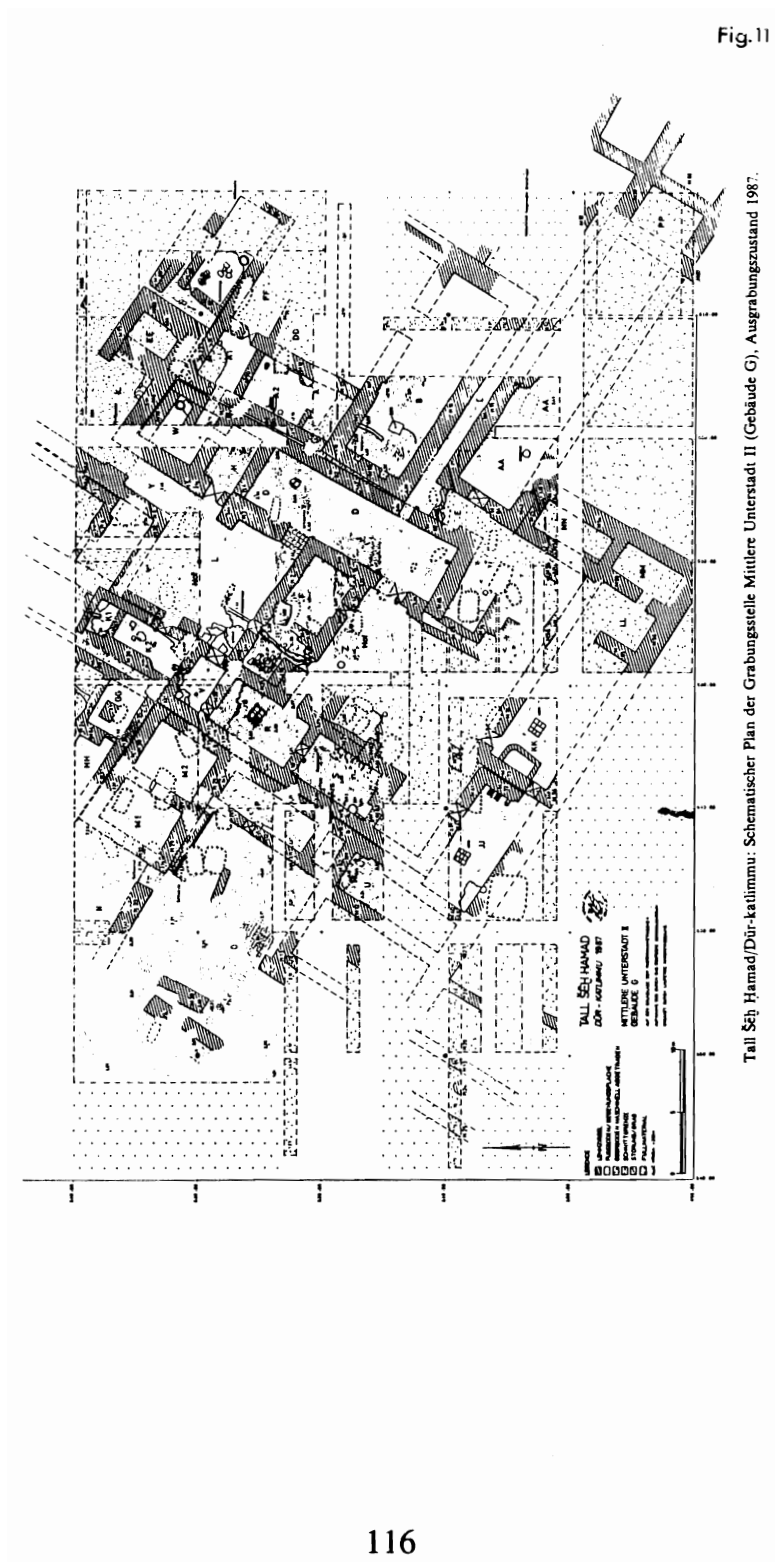
Fig. 8

Fig. 9





The Sheikh Hamad Stele of Adad-nirari III (BM 131124) and text.  
Height: 2 feet 8½ inches; width: 1 foot 7 inches.)





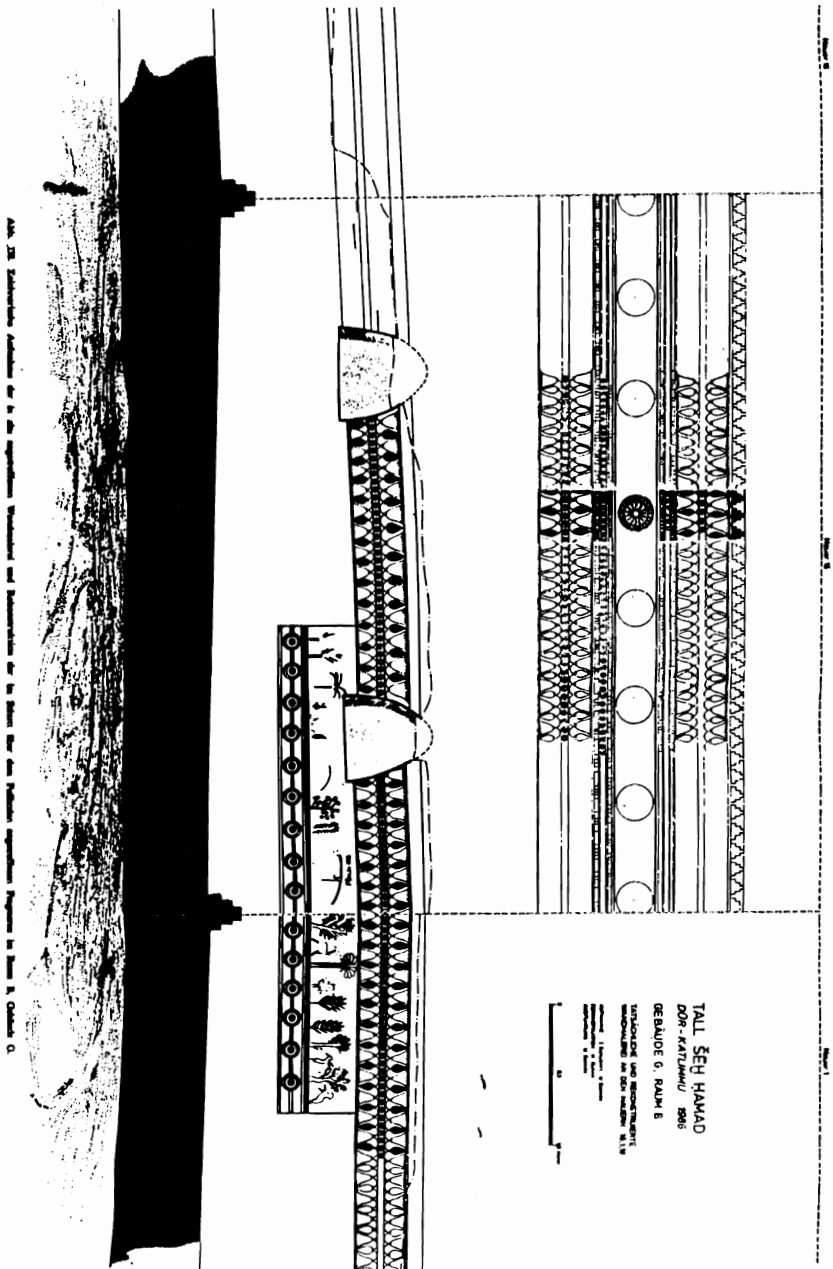


Fig. 12





Fig. 14



Fig. 14

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