

Piotr Bieliński

Tell Arbid: The Fourth Season

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 10, 273-284

1999

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

TELL ARBID

THE FOURTH SEASON

Piotr Bieliński

The fourth campaign of Syrian-Polish excavations on Tell Arbid, a large site situated between Hassake and Qamishli, took place in the fall of 1999. The season began on August 17 and lasted until October 11.¹⁾

¹⁾ The staff of the mission was more numerous than usual and counted 23 members: Dr. Dorota Ławecka, Dr. Rafał Koliński, Dr. Claudia Suter, Mr. Andrzej Reiche, Mr. David Gimbel, Ms Anna Smogorzewska, Mr. Łukasz Rutkowski, Mr. Paul Zimmerman, Ms Agata Kubala, Mrs. Dorota Bielińska, and Mr. Mirosław Olbryś, archaeologists; Prof. Dr. Gebhard Selz, epigraphist, as well as eight students of archaeology from the Warsaw and Vienna universities. I mention here with gratitude Mrs. Ingeborga Bykowska, who assisted the domestic side of our expedition. Finally, I should mention Mr. Ahmed Serriye, our Syrian expedition co-director, who was my closest associate and whose invaluable help contributed to the final success of this campaign.

The joint Syrian-Polish expedition continued to profit from the help of our Syrian colleagues and associates from the Direction General of Antiquities and Museums. Special thanks are owed to the Director General, Prof. Dr. Sultan Muhessen, for his friendly interest and encouragement, as well as to Mr. Abed Abdel Messih Bardo, Regional Director of Antiquities in Hassake, for his constant support and help in the organization. Neither can we forego mentioning the financial assistance offered this year to our mission by the Harvard Semitic Museum, as well as by Elektromontaż S.A. from Poland and its President, Mr. Jerzy Lewandowski.

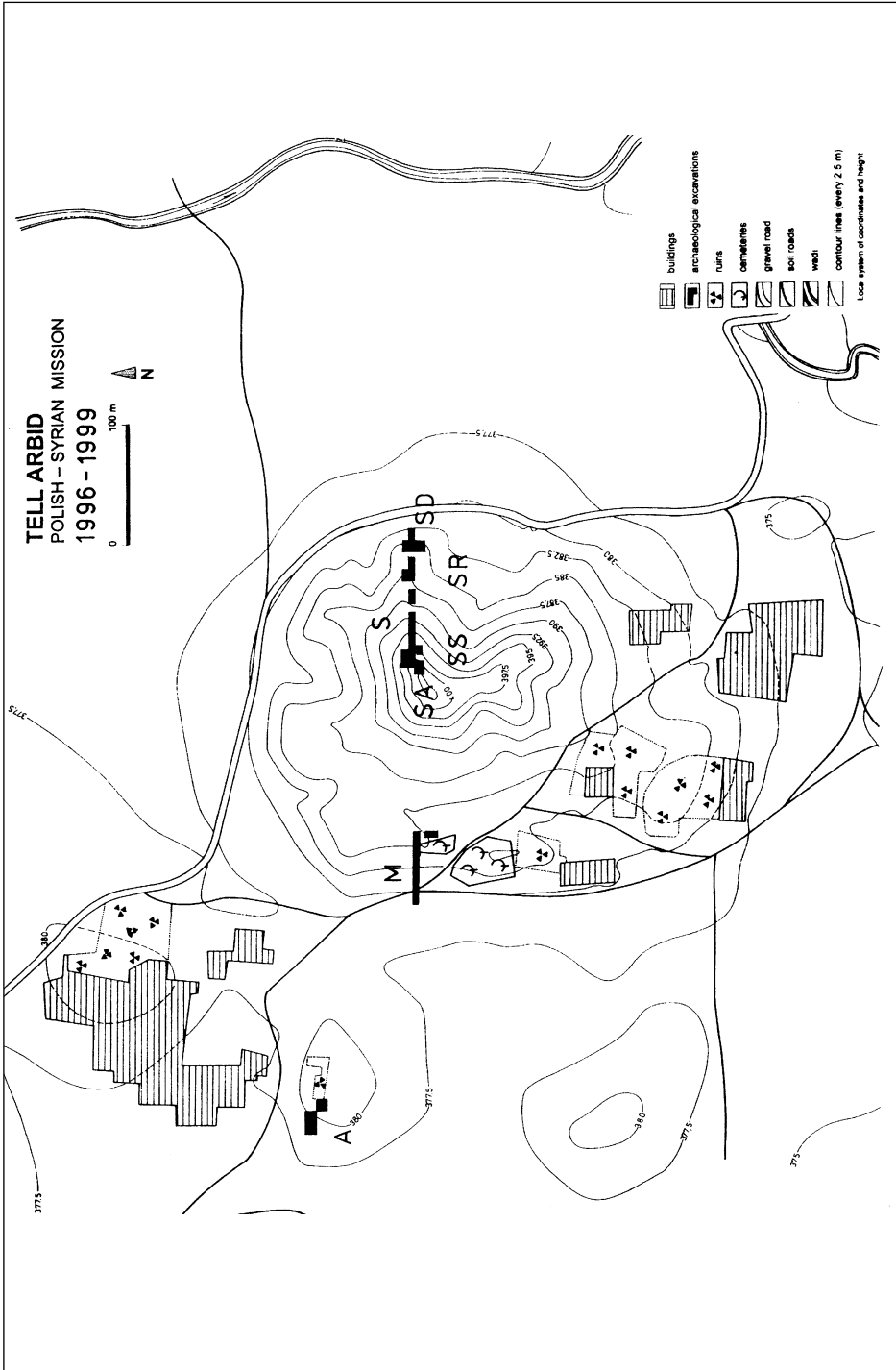


Fig. 1. Citadel of Tell Arbid with all trenches excavated in 1999 marked except for sector "D"
(Ink drawing M. Wagner)

THE RESEARCH

This year our attention was divided between five different sectors on the main tell. The first four were located on the eastern slope of the so-called citadel, that is, the main tell, in a sector designated as "S". A long step trench had been opened here in 1996, but since parts of the trench were to be enlarged, each was given a new label - "SA", "SS", "SR" and "SD", respectively. The fifth sector, "D", was opened in a completely new spot on the northwestern slope, at the foot of the citadel (*Fig. 1*).

Our primary objective was to clarify the stratigraphic relation between the oldest Khabour Ware period layers and those representing the latest 3rd millennium BC settlement on the citadel. In other words, we wanted to check what had been happening on Arbid after the end of the Early Dynastic III phase. The presence of Akkadian period layers had been suggested by ceramic material collected in various places inside the old step trench, but still there had been no well preserved strata found corresponding to these sherds. Moreover, there was also the possibility of a hiatus occurring in the occupation of Arbid after the Akkadian period. To resolve the matter we decided to reopen and extend the trenches on top of the citadel. This work was also designed to uncover a substantial 3rd millennium structure with external buttresses – a public building of some kind to judge by the

character of the five rooms partly uncovered so far – which had been brought to light in the western end of the original "S" trench already in 1996.

There were three secondary goals for the 1999 season. First, we wanted to explore further an Early Dynastic period dwelling area, which had begun to be unearthed last year in squares 36/65 and 36/66, situated at the foot of the eastern slope of the main mound. The focus was on clearing a larger part of this quarter in the best preserved stratum III. Next, we intended to complete the exploration of Khabour Ware period dwelling houses situated in the middle of the eastern slope of the citadel. Parts of these houses had been investigated in 1998 and the objective now was to collect more data, including at least one complete architectural plan. Finally, we planned to continue the investigation of the fairly flat area in the northwestern corner of the Upper City, where Mallowan had reported seeing large fortification works. The idea was to reach them from the inside uncovering in the process the adjacent Khabour ware period dwelling quarter.

Not all of these objectives have been addressed successfully this year. The following is an interim report on our investigations in particular sectors of the site, presented starting from the top of the citadel.

AREA "SA"

Area "SA" extends over the flat summit of the main tell (covering a large part of square 37/54), where a trench had been opened already last year. Now the eastern part of the old trench was extended northwards.

The first task was to remove the large wash basin and drying-oven installations of the Khabour ware period, discovered in the previous season. Below these remains we found an uneven walking level also from the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC,

and two pits of the Mitannian period. In the ashy filling of the smaller pit no. 7, a terracotta cylinder seal with a simple geometric decoration of lines and dots was discovered. The other Mitannian pit (no. 14) was much larger and filled with decayed mudbrick, clay and potsherds. A small fragment of clay envelope with a cuneiform inscription was found near its western border (*Fig. 2*). Below the text composed of 17 cuneiform signs in four lines there was an incomplete impression of a cylinder seal with the image of a female Egyptian deity, most probably Isis. The dating of the envelope fragment, as well as of the text itself, requires further study.

The two Stratum I pits were cut quite deeply into the next two layers (Strata II and III), which are undoubtedly of Khabour Ware period date. Of the same date is Stratum IV, in which a small room in mudbrick (locus 15) with partly preserved doorway and a door socket *in situ* was partly investigated. Stratum V below represents the oldest Khabour Ware period occupation in the "SA" area. Finds of Khabour pottery in this layer are few compared to the upper strata representing the same culture. The top of another structure, the "public building" presumably, was noted some 0.25 m lower down.

AREA "SS"

The "SS" sector, which covers the eastern part of the citadel summit and the adjacent eastern slope, extended from the western part of the original "S" trench. In planning this new sector, we were guided by the remains of an Early Dynastic period "public building", which had started coming to light already in 1996. At the time, we had revealed under a thick accumulation of clay and ashes part of the outer wall of a sub-

stantial structure. This year two new trenches were opened in squares: 36/54, 37/55 and 37/56, and the old square 36/55 was extended westwards and northwards, bringing the total surface of the area explored in this sector to just under 100 m².

After removing a heavily eroded sub-surface layer from square 36/54, a mudbrick chamber (locus 2), measuring c. 2.8 by 2.2 m was found in the southern part of the square. Inside it there was a richly furnished Mitannian-period burial (*Fig. 3*). The grave chamber seems to be dug into an older Mitanni-period pit with some Nuzi sherds. The poorly preserved skeleton of a woman in contracted position with head pointing west lay along the southern wall of the chamber. Grave goods comprised 16 vessels of different types: three bowls, one plate, two jugs, two large jars, four small jars, one fenestrated potstand and three beakers. Other finds included a glass cup, bronze pin, and bronze earring fragment. There were also two Mitannian-style cylinder seals (one of hematite, the other of frit

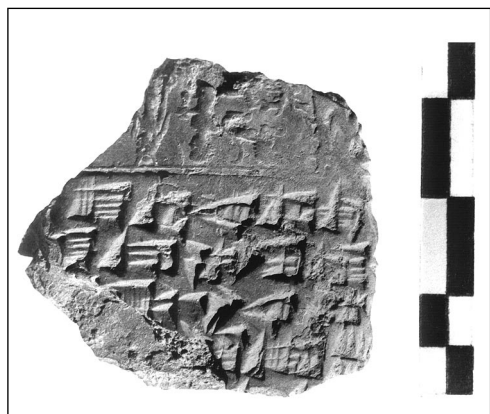


Fig. 2. Fragment of an inscribed clay envelope found in sector "SA" (Photo A. Reiche)

and fitted with gold caps), two scaraboids, and over 230 beads. The latter represented a variety of materials, such as carnelian, gold, faience, shell, lapis lazuli, frit, rock crystal and different semiprecious stones. Some of the beads took on the form of creatures: frogs and mice, bull's and ram's heads. The bones of a small animal were found near one of the large bowls. Prior to further cleaning and study in the future, this grave may be dated provisionally to the 15th-14th century BC.

To the east of locus 2 (square 36/55) and on more or less the same level, an

architectural complex was cleared. It comprises at least two medium-sized rooms (loci 4 and 15), which represent a younger phase of the Khabour ware period on the citadel of Arbid. Bordering these units on the north were two open areas paved with sherds. The older Khabour phase in this sector is represented by domestic structures, further sections of which were presently uncovered, including one room with a fireplace in one of its corners and another one with two nearly complete Khabour jars. As these structures are now situated on a very steep slope, their south-

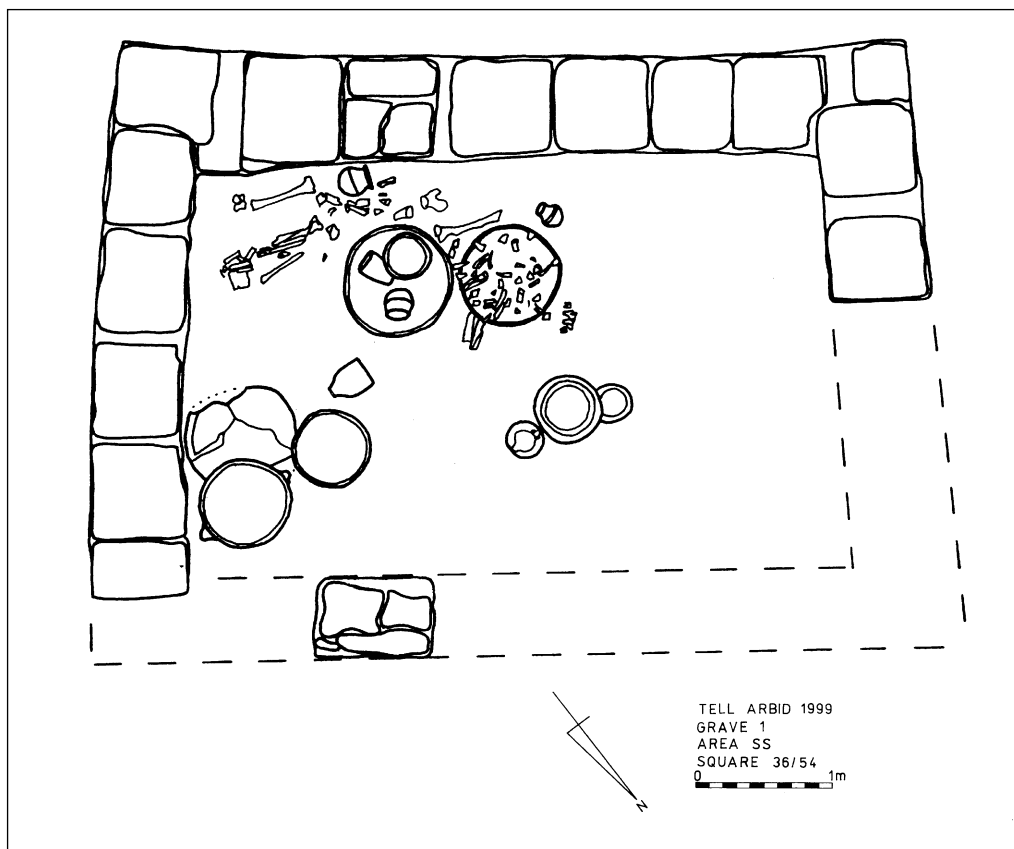


Fig. 3. Plan of the Mitannian grave chamber from sector "SS" with position of the pottery finds (Drawing D. Bielińska and M. Wagner)

ern walls are preserved much higher than their northern counterparts. The footing of these walls is still some 1.5 m above the tops of the walls belonging to the 3rd millennium BC "public building", which was our objective this year. Further to the north, we reached the top of the next Khabour-period layer (Stratum III) in this area. It contained some scanty remains of walls and a Khabour-period burial with a jar and bronze pin. Deeper still there was a stratum (IV) composed of tightly packed gray soil with Khabour-ware sherds mixed with 3rd millennium ceramics, including some fragments of Metallic ware and Ninevite 5 vessels.

The northeastern corner of the "public building" and remains of the northern outer wall were uncovered in squares 36/55 and 36/56, in the northern part of the sector, although due to heavy erosion in this area, this architecture was quite poorly preserved. Below a massive buttress reinforcing the north side of this corner the remains of a yet more massive older building were observed, similarly as in other parts of the "public building". The even more poorly preserved northern outer wall appears to be discontinued at the edge of square 35/56; it was destroyed here apparently not only by slope erosion, but also by later pits and structures. The pottery assemblage from the ash-filled pits, presumably Akkadian and post-Akkadian, dates to the very end of the 3rd millennium BC. While more research is needed, it is probable that these rubbish dumps cor-

respond to occupation of the Arbid citadel that has not been evidenced as yet in the archaeological record.

In an attempt to locate the hypothetical southeastern corner of the "public building", a new trench (7 x 4 m) was opened immediately to the south of the old "S" trench, partly in square 37/55 and partly in 37/56. Cutting through the thick accumulation of ashes that we knew had covered the already exposed southern part of this structure, we discovered, in the top-most layer, a well preserved Khabour ware period kiln surrounded by thick deposits of ashes of the same sort as those overlying the "public building". The kiln had been rebuilt at least once. Underneath it we finally reached the tops of the walls of the "public building", although massive damages caused by an extensive round pit filled with brick debris preclude for the present any identification of the remains, that is, whether it is the searched-for outer corner of the building or simply the place where an inner wall running west joins the outer eastern wall. It may even have been the eastern entrance to the building to judge by the thick layer of plaster observed on the buttress projecting to the south. In any case, it is now known that the eastern outer wall of the so-called "public building" was at least 12 m long.

At the southern edge of this trench, the layer superimposed on the "public building" architecture yielded some remains of brick structures with partly preserved floors. No dating elements are in evidence as yet.

AREA "SR"

As indicated above, some of the old trenches located at mid-slope, more precisely in squares: 36/60, 36/61 and 36/62 (where last year some fragments of Khabour ware period structures had been uncovered) were

enlarged and a new square 35/62 was opened (*Fig. 4*). The total explored surface in this sector, labeled "SR", has reached 250 m². In square 36/60, last year's trench was extended eastward with the purpose of

reaching the western border of the so-called "House 1" that had been uncovered previously in squares 36/61 and 36/62. We were also interested in clarifying the relation between the *pisé* retaining walls found last year in square 36/60 and the Khabour ware period structures found east of them. Following the 1999 campaign, we now have a complete plan of "House 1", which is in fact much narrower northwards than we had expected at the end of the previous season. The inhabitants of "House 1" originally had three rooms (loci 1, 13, and 14) at their disposal and some open space that they also used to the north and west of the building. This space, of a size as yet undetermined, contained a *tannur* and installations intended most probably for draining

waste water. Initially, the biggest unit in this building was locus 13 measuring c. 7.7 x 3.5 m. The only preserved furnishing in this room is a small platform with a clay hearth. One doorway led to locus 1, which measured 3.1 x 2.7 m, the other to locus 14, which also contained the entrance to the house. The latter room, c. 2.8 x 3.6 m, had a low bench in one of the corners. In the second phase, which was also the last occupational phase of the building, some significant changes were introduced in its plan. The open space to the west of locus 14 was closed with a thick wall running at an angle to the house axis and much thicker than the house walls. The area which was thus cut off does not form a regular courtyard.



Fig. 4. General view of area "SR" at the beginning of the 1999 campaign
(Photo A. Reiche)



*Fig. 5. Clay bench in locus 6 of House 1 with objects of unbaked clay found on it
(Photo A. Reiche)*



*Fig. 6. Some of the clay models of furniture found in locus 6
(Photo A. Reiche)*

Indeed, one has the impression that it was erected mainly to protect the area from the numerous nearby rubbish and ash heaps spilling into it. In the house itself, the late phase is represented by new floors in loci 1 and 13, new bigger benches and two partition walls dividing locus 13 into three smaller units: loci 2, 6 and 21. The last of the three is hardly a room in the ordinary sense, as it is less than half a meter wide. It is more likely in this particular case that the purpose was to reinforce one of the older walls.

A discovery of considerable interest was made in the new locus 6. More than 30 objects of unbaked clay were found on a wide low bench by the west wall (*Fig. 5*). Apart from a fairly primitive, presumably female clay figurine, the set included three models of stools, several models of vessels (some ornamented with incisions), three models of tables (including a round table and one on three legs) and a few objects that are difficult to identify (*Fig. 6*). A model of a bed and some miniature vessels of unbaked clay were found in this room in 1998.²⁾ Many

of these objects are not very well preserved and further cleaning and restoration may give us some more full examples. It is noteworthy that the furniture models, as well as the miniature vessels are decorated with notching and pricking. However, these are not models of a religious significance, but rather a set of toys that a child had played with in House 1 already after the house had been abandoned. The fact that the floors in the other units were found cleared of everything speaks in favor of the models finding their way into locus 6 already after the abandonment of the building. Beside the toys, only two Khabour ware vessels were found in all of the structure, both of them dating to the phase when the ruins of the abandoned building started filling up.

Investigations in the western part of the "SR" sector confirmed that the *pisé* platforms in square 36/60, discovered in the previous season, had as one of their purposes the task of protecting the Khaburian dwelling quarter at their feet from the soil sliding down the citadel slopes.

AREA "SD"

The new sector, labeled "SD", lies at the foot of the eastern slope of the Arbid citadel. A new square (37/65) was opened south of 36/65, enlarging a trench investigated there last year. The work here was a continuation of last year's, which had revealed a sequence of 3rd millennium BC domestic structures. As before, so in square 36/65 the upper layers from the 3rd millennium BC could be traced only in the western part of the trench due to slope erosion. These layers were poorly preserved anyway and yielded, beside pottery and

remains of floors, some sections of mud-brick walls.

The first layer to be preserved in better condition all over square 36/65, including architecture, was our stratum IV (*Fig. 7*). It had been designated as Stratum III in this sector after the previous campaign, but a careful study of the stratigraphy in longer sections of trench walls indicated that it was in fact the fourth layer and should be dated to the very end of the Early Dynastic or the early Akkadian period. Further sections of the

²⁾ Cf. *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 212.

TELL ARBID
 SYRIA

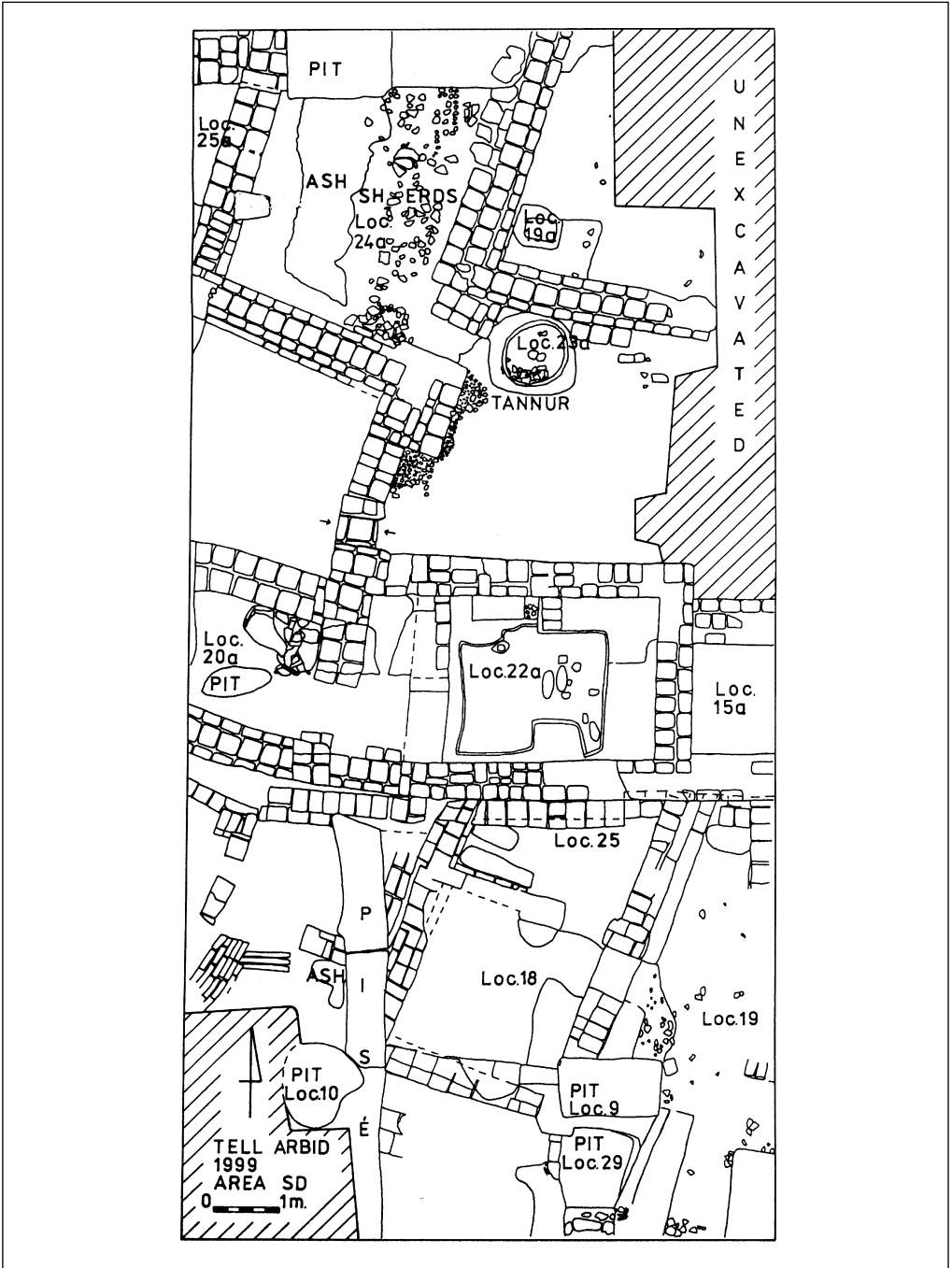


Fig. 7. General plan of Stratum IV in sector "SD". Loci situated in square 36/65 marked with an "a" (Drawing P. Bieliński, D. Ławecka, C. Suter; ink drawing M. Wagner)

dwelling quarter here were uncovered in the present season.³⁾

Beside the large courtyard and adjoining room revealed last year, the structure comprised at least another six units (Fig. 8), including one more sherd-paved courtyard (locus 24a), store rooms with two big storage vessels (locus 20a), rooms with some platforms and benches (locus 22a) and presumably one more domestic courtyard with a *tannur* (locus 23 a). This complex is much bigger than anticipated with a 12-meter north-south span at least. Only its southern limit was identified – here the building joined another dwelling

complex, already in square 37/65, which it has been assumed comprised fragments of a few smaller structures (Fig. 8). The biggest of these was a house of the Akkadian period uncovered in Stratum III in this square; it was composed of at least four rooms (loci 18, 19, 25, 29). It looks as if had been erected against the still standing southern wall of the vast house in square 36/65. Of the units comprising the Akkadian house, locus 19 was most probably a courtyard. An interesting assemblage of Akkadian vessels and fragments of vessels was found on the floor of locus 18.



Fig. 8. General view of square 36/65 (sector "SD") at the close of the 1999 season (Photo A. Reiche)

³⁾ Cf. PAM X, Reports 1998 (1999), 213.

A number of child burials of the 3rd millennium BC was discovered in this sector over the course of the season. Some of these were buried in simple pits, others in brick boxes, one in a cooking pot. The

condition of the 3rd millennium BC dwelling quarter uncovered in the sector is such that it inclines us to continue explorations in this part of the citadel in the future.

AREA "D"

As stated above, a new area ("D") was opened in the northwestern part of the main tell, in what is referred to as the upper city. Three trenches were traced in squares 32/44, 32/45 and 33/46, covering like on a chessboard quite a large part of ground at the foot of the citadel. The objective of our work, carried out mostly by our American and Austrian colleagues, was to observe the principles of space organization in the lower city of Tell Arbid in the 2nd and 3rd millennium BC. Unfortunately, the area under exploration revealed no architectural remains, but only layers of tightly packed clay with little ceramics. Consequently, we focused on an area further northwest, where an obvious gap in the lower-city terrace suggested the possibility of a city gate being located there.

As a result, a set of trenches was opened in squares 28/42, 28/43, 29/42, 29/43 and 30/43, bringing to light a fairly compact district of 3rd millennium BC architec-

ture. Erosion and much later burials of Hellenistic date had largely destroyed these structures in the northwestern corner of the sector. In one of the best preserved of these burials remnants of a silver coin were found, along with a clay wine jar and a brown bowl together with a fine bronze scoop. Layers in the southern end of these trenches come from the end of the Early Dynastic period, while in the northern end fragments of structures from the Ninivite 5 period were uncovered. The relatively small units appear to have belonged to separate houses. It is noteworthy that industrial installations of various kinds, such as for milling, have been discovered in these strata.

Investigations in this sector have raised new issues, like, for instance, the localization of the Arbid fortifications of the 2nd millennium BC, indicating at the same time the considerable extent of the 3rd millennium BC town on Tell Arbid.