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Tell Arbid: Interim Report of the Fifth Season

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TELL ARBID

INTERIM REPORT OF THE FIFTH SEASON

Piotr Bieliński

The fifth season of joint Polish-Syrian explorations of Tell Arbid¹⁾ was focused on a substantial, externally buttressed structure of the 3rd millennium BC, discovered already in 1996 near the top of the so-called citadel, at the western end of the "S" trench. The chief goal of the campaign was to uncover as much as possible of this putative public building in areas "SS" (comprising originally parts of squares 36/54, 36/55, 36/56, 37/55, 37/56) and "SA" (squares 37/54 and 38/54). For practical purposes, the southern part of area "SS" (i.e., squares 37/55 and 37/54) was separated out as a new sector labeled SL. All three sectors cover the eastern part of the citadel top and the adjacent eastern slope (Fig. 1)

1) The campaign started on August 28 and lasted until October 2, 2000. The Polish team included archaeologists: Mrs. Dorota Bielińska, Dr. Agata Kubala, Ms. Katarzyna Meyza, Ms. Aleksandra Pęska, Mr. Andrzej Reiche, Mr. Łukasz Rutkowski, Ms. Zuzanna Sawicka, Dr. Franciszek M. Stepiński, and the present author. The team was assisted by archaeology students: Ms. Agnieszka Pieńkowska, Mr. Jerzy Wierzbicki. As Mr. Ahmed Serriye, who was the mission co-director for the past four years, is now completing his military service, the Syrian side in the project was represented by Mr. Mahmud Abdalla from the DGAM Department in Aleppo.

The Direction General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic and its Director of Excavations, Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi, to whom we wish to express here our deep gratitude, have remained continuously in support of our research, including a substantial financial contribution to cover the expenses of the 2000 season. We are also much in debt to Mr. Abdel Massih Bardo, Regional Director of Antiquities in Hassake, for his continuous interest and friendly advice.

TELL ARBID
SYRIA

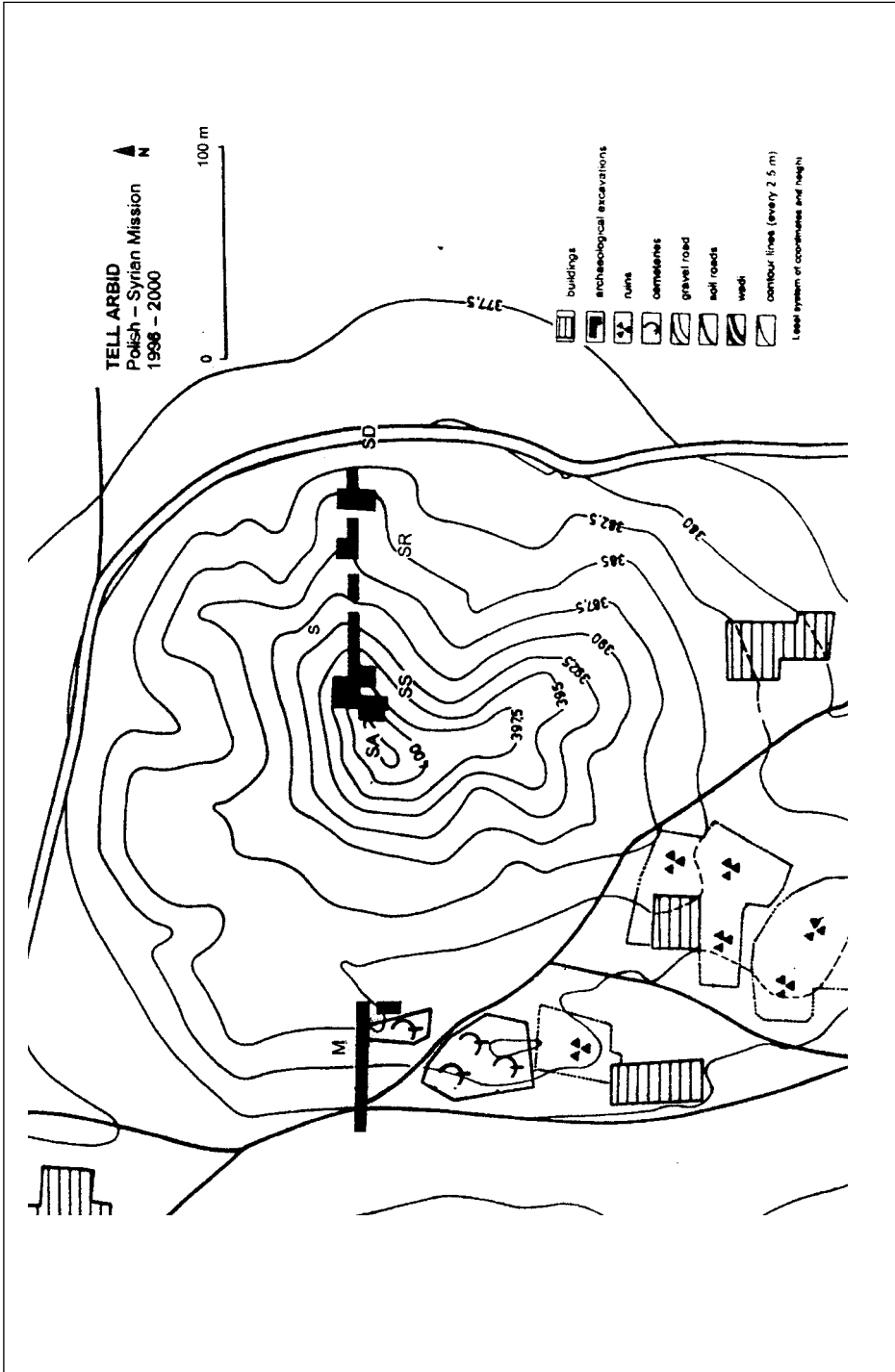


Fig. 1. Tell Arbid. Citadel plan
(Ink drawing M. Wagner)

AREA "SS"

In its present shape, area "SS" consists of two steps. The southern, higher one measures 6 x 11 m, the lower one is c. 7 x 7 m.

Investigations on the southern of the two steps started with the removal of a Khabour-period structure discovered there last year. This fairly irregular and poorly constructed structure was composed of at least four small rooms and occupied the southeastern corner of the trench. West of these remains is a space that had been used as an industrial dump at the turn of the 3rd and in the early 2nd millennium BC. Fragments of this area had already been exposed in past seasons in the old "S" trench and in sector "SA", so it looks like this area had occupied almost the entire eastern part of the tell summit. The layer accompanying the four rooms mentioned above contained mainly Khabour-ware sherds with an insignificant addition of some earlier pieces.

This year, explorations continued with the uncovering of stratum III, which is dated to the same period as the layer above it. The only architectural remains in this stratum were unearthed at the southern border of the trench. The upper part of this substantial *pisé* wall had been visible already in the upper stratum; adjacent to it there was a small cubicle, measuring c. 1 x 1.2 m, made of mudbricks, of which only the lowest course has survived. There do not seem to have been many more courses and no roofing, as the tiny room was filled with ashes. More than any kind of room, it looks like an enclosure used for cooling down some very hot industrial ashes.

In the next layer (IV), the remains of the *pisé* wall are still present at the southern border of the sector, among tightly packed levels of ashes. In the same stratum but further to the north, part of an industrial installation was uncovered. It

consists of a shallow basin of unbaked clay, measuring c. 0.6 m in diameter, and of a narrow clay channel running westwards. The walls of the basin were covered with small stones and potsherds. No evidence of heating excludes any kind of industrial activity demanding higher temperatures. It is more likely to presume some kind of use of liquids in the basin.

Still deeper (in stratum V), the southern *pisé* wall, which is still present, has two walls of the same material attached to it on the northern side, forming an irregular enclosure (c. 4 x 3 m) that opened to the east. In its northern part there were some shallow pits filled with ashes. This stratum, like the earlier one, appears to represent Khabour-ware period occupation.

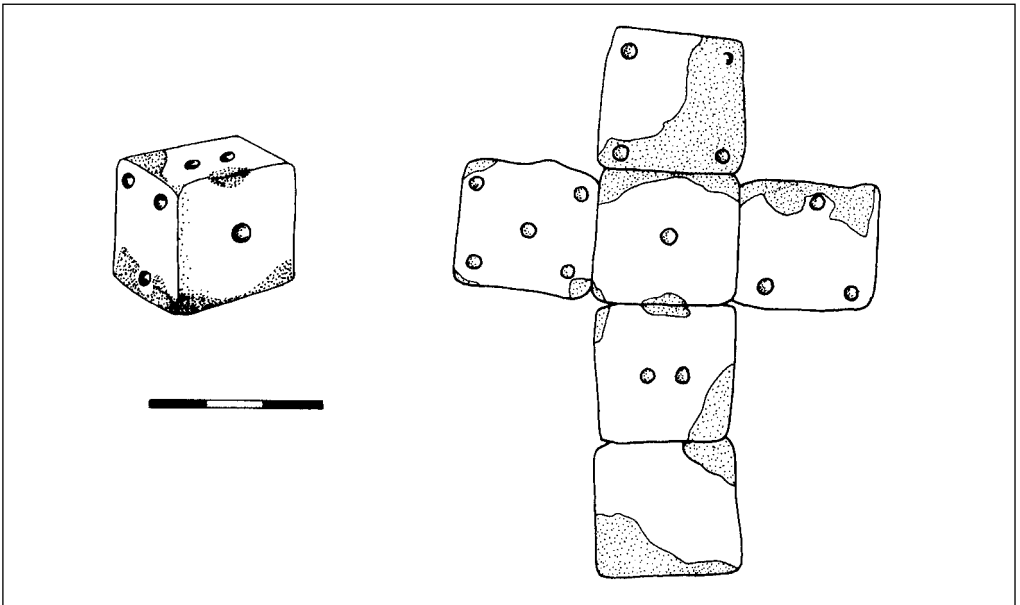
The continuity of use and space organization that is to be observed in the "SS" area from stratum III to V (with the *pisé* wall on the south serving as a reference point) is finally broken in layer VI, where this wall disappears definitively. There are instead the remains of some larger *pisé* structure, composed of two walls forming a big "T" and creating thus two separate rooms. One of the walls, aligned NW-SE, is about 5.5 m long; the other, running approximately SW-NE, is over 8 m long and c. 0.6 m thick. In the southwestern room, the *pisé* walls cut into an older mudbrick wall, itself aligned from east to west. This was presumably the same kind of structure as those intended to hold in place industrial ashes, excavated previously in the upper layers of the "SS" and "S" trenches. Obviously, the character and function of this part of the ancient settlement remained unaltered from layer III to VI, despite changes in the spatial organization of the *pisé* structures. Considering that the ceramics from stratum VI clearly predate

the Khabour-ware period and represent the very end of the 3rd millennium BC, layer VI can thus be considered as the oldest of a series of "industrial" strata in this part of the main tell.

Moreover, the proposed dating of this stratum is supported by the discovery, in a shallow pit, of an infant burial (Grave 4, square 36/54), which can be dated to the post-Akkadian period. The skeleton of a child, the bones in very good condition, was found deposited in a big jar, which was accompanied by a medium-sized vessel. Inside the jar there were two small bronze bracelets, four earrings (one pair made of bronze, while the other possibly of silver), as well as five beads of shell and stone. It seems that the opening of the jar had been blocked with a mudbrick. Near the rim and bottom of the jar some scattered animal bones were found, including the skull of a sheep or goat. Among the small

finds from the ash fill in this layer one should mention a stone die more than twice the size of modern ones. Five of its six sides are marked with engraved dots, the sixth is plain (*Fig. 2*). It is noteworthy that on the five-point and three-point sides the dots are arranged in different fashion than on modern dice.

Stratum VII contains stumps of mudbrick walls from the southeastern part of sector "SS". The "patchwork" appearance of these walls, constructed of red bricks with interspersed grayish ones, is characteristic in this part of the tell of the Akkadian and post-Akkadian periods. They were erected directly on top of the poorly preserved remains of the "public building", which belongs to the eighth layer identified in the described area. The walls of the "public building" unearthed this year in the southern part of area "SS" are aligned EW and obviously constitute a continuation of



*Fig. 2. Tell Arbid. Stone die from stratum VI
(Drawing D. Bielińska, inking M. Wagner)*

walls exposed in the “S” trench already in 1996. Indeed, the inner southeastern corner of one of the rooms discovered five years ago was now revealed.

A similar stratigraphic sequence was followed in the northern (lower) step of the “SS” trench. This step, dubbed as “S2”, was enlarged during the present season to measure 7.5 x 7 m. In the light of new evidence, the mudbrick structure, the top of which had been reached in 1999, is no longer so evidently part of the “public building” uncovered on the southern step of area “SS”. Its walls seem to be founded about 2 m deeper. Furthermore, remains of structures and installations clearly younger than the “public building” but founded

well below the level of its walls, as observed on the higher southern step, have now been recorded on the western side of the northern step. For the time being, the best explanation of this stratigraphic “mess” is the assumption that the shape of the ancient slope determined the difference in foundation levels between the two parts of the “public building”. Originally, the northern part of the structure may have been erected on some sort of terrace on the citadel summit, while the southern “wing” was added (possibly later) on a lower-lying part of the slope.

Another fragment of the northern outer wall of the “public building” was now uncovered on the lower step, following the removal of a huge *pisé* platform of Khabour-period date unearthed in 1999. Still, the floor level connected with this structure has not been reached. Instead, excavations in the central and western part of the step have revealed some scattered remains of structures representing Akkadian and post-Akkadian settlement. An irregular mudbrick cubicle about 2.2 m long and with a narrow entrance on the west was built against what is believed to be the northern exterior wall of the “public building”. The contents of its fill – sherds (and some complete vessels, too) of the



Fig 3. Tell Arbid. Area “SS”. Platform of tightly packed sherds
(Photo J. Wierzbicki)

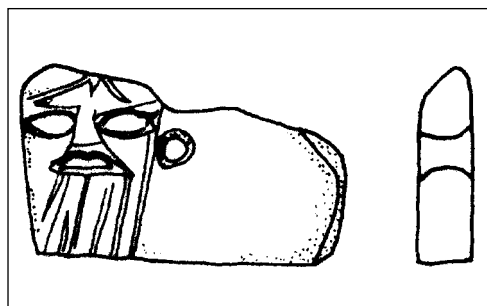


Fig. 4. Reposing-bull plaque of lapis-lazuli from an infant burial in area “SS”
(Drawing D. Bielińska, inking M. Wagner)

Akkadian period, as well as numerous whole and fragmentary shells – leave the impression of some kind of workshop or storeroom connected with the production of shell ornaments. The other architectural remains discovered here are certainly younger than the cubicle from the Akkadian period, but it is difficult for the moment to assign them a more precise date. They consist of badly preserved stumps of walls forming no coherent plan, two ovens of the *tannur* type, as well as some shallow pits, one of them oblong in shape and filled with dark ashes. The walls were aligned differently than the earlier structures (“public building”). A curious rounded platform at least 2 m long was revealed among these stumps of walls at the western edge of the trench. It was composed of very tightly packed sherds set vertically in a sort of plaster made of clay (*Fig. 3*). As the platform continues

westwards beyond the present limits of the trench, its shape and precise dimensions remain unknown.

The most recent feature unearthed this year on the lower step of the “SS” sector is a child burial in a jar found in the southern part of this trench (Grave 1, S2). Two small vessels accompanied the skeleton, as well as some beads and a pendant made of lapis lazuli, representing a reposing bull with bearded human face (*Fig. 4*). The decoration is clearly Akkadian in style. Its presence in this burial is quite bizarre, considering that the ceramic grave goods provide a date sometime in the early Khabour-ware period. As stratigraphic disturbance should be ruled out in this case, the only other reasonable explanation is that the ancient amulet was a prized family possession that was inherited down a number of generations.

AREA “SA”

This sector, traced in 1999, occupies the eastern part of the flattened top of the citadel. In the past two seasons, layers just below the surface, representing Mitannian and Khabour-ware settlement, had been exposed here. Work now progressed from a wall with entrance that had been uncovered at the southern limit of the trench in 1998.²⁾ It belonged to a mudbrick structure, which had then been presumed as fitting well into the first stratum identified in this area and dated to the Mitannian period.

The “SA” trench was now extended to the south. In an area of c. 11 by 8 m, the remains of two rooms belonging to two separate housing units were unearthed. Both were badly eroded and disturbed by

some modern grave pits. Locus SA 13 was identified beyond the just mentioned wall of the 1998 season. It was about 4 m wide and at least 4 m long, and it formed the northeastern corner of a larger unit aligned more or less longitudinally (*Fig. 5*). Inside, east of the entrance, there was a stone door socket *in situ*, while to the west, against the northern wall of locus 13, there was a low bench made of mudbricks. In the center of the room, which had no good floor level, there was a shallow pit with a diameter not exceeding 40 cm. The borders of the pit were reinforced in places with clay and broken sherds. It is not to be excluded that the pit served in fact as a base for a wooden beam, perhaps a roof support.

2) Cf. P. Bieliński, *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 206-208.



Fig. 5. Tell Arbid. Locus 13 in area "SA"
(Photo J. Wierzbicki)



Fig. 6. Tell Arbid. Locus 14 in area "SA"
(Photo J. Wierzbicki)

The second of the rooms explored this season, locus SA 14, was situated east of locus 13 and formed the northwestern corner of another structure spreading further to the south and to the east (*Fig. 6*). Its alignment was slightly different from that of its western neighbor and its northern wall, partly exposed already in 1998, runs from northeast to southwest. Locus 14 measured about 2.7 by 2.0 m and the doorway leading to it was located in its western wall, near the southern corner. The room contained a rectangular fireplace located in the middle of the southern wall and an internal buttress. Several phases of rebuilding are in evidence, suggesting that the room (if not the entire house) had been in use for a long period of time.

A study of the ceramic finds has provided a date in the Khabour period for both of these structures. The western one (locus 13), considered before as Mitannian, turned out to be erected in a deep pit, which was apparently dug especially for it and which destroyed remains of an older Khabour-period structure existing in this place (locus 16). These structures of

Khabour-ware date were probably connected one way or another with some indeterminate industrial activities that have left the considerable amounts of ashes described above.

Probing to the north of these housing units had brought to light the top of pre-Khabour layers.³⁾ Below some Khabour-ware period pits that were now explored, explorations revealed mudbrick walls representing the post-Akkadian settlement on Tell Arbid. The bricks used in these structures are of different dimensions and colors; together with lumps of grayish clay they lend to the walls a "patchwork" appearance, already observed in sector "SS". This fragmentarily preserved unit, dubbed locus SA 17, may form part of a larger structure. Cleared to the north of it is a fragment of lane or square of the same period, paved with potsherds and pebbles. The top of a large wall, about 2 m thick and aligned more or less EW, was discovered under locus 17. Its construction should be attributed to the Akkadian or even Early Dynastic III period. Quite possibly, it was part of the "public building" complex.

AREA "SL"

Exploration of the "public building" was continued this year also in the southeastern part of area "SS", which now became a separate sector dubbed "SL". Last year, below several layers of ashes and clay belonging to the same refuse heap of the 2nd millennium BC that covers the entire eastern part of the citadel summit, more of the outer wall of the "public building" had been exposed.⁴⁾ With the purpose of linking together the various fragments of the

structure that have been uncovered in 1996 and in 1999 the sector was enlarged to the present dimensions of 11 by 10 m.

In the northern part of the "SL" area, where more of the ashy refuse accumulation had to be removed, some huge fragments of *pisé* walls were uncovered, corresponding to similar walls recorded in the neighboring sector of the old "S" trench in 1996. It seems that these walls belonged to two quite large *pisé* enclosures, which had been

3) Cf. P. Bieliński, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 275-276.

4) Cf. *ibid.*, 278.

erected in the dump area during the Khabour-ware period and which were related to the industrial activities mentioned above. There were also some modern graves and ancient child burials dug into the rubbish layers. Bordering the

ash deposits at the southern end of the trench were some rather modest Khabour-period structures aligned more or less like contemporaneous houses from the southern part of area "SA". These structures were heavily damaged by slope erosion.

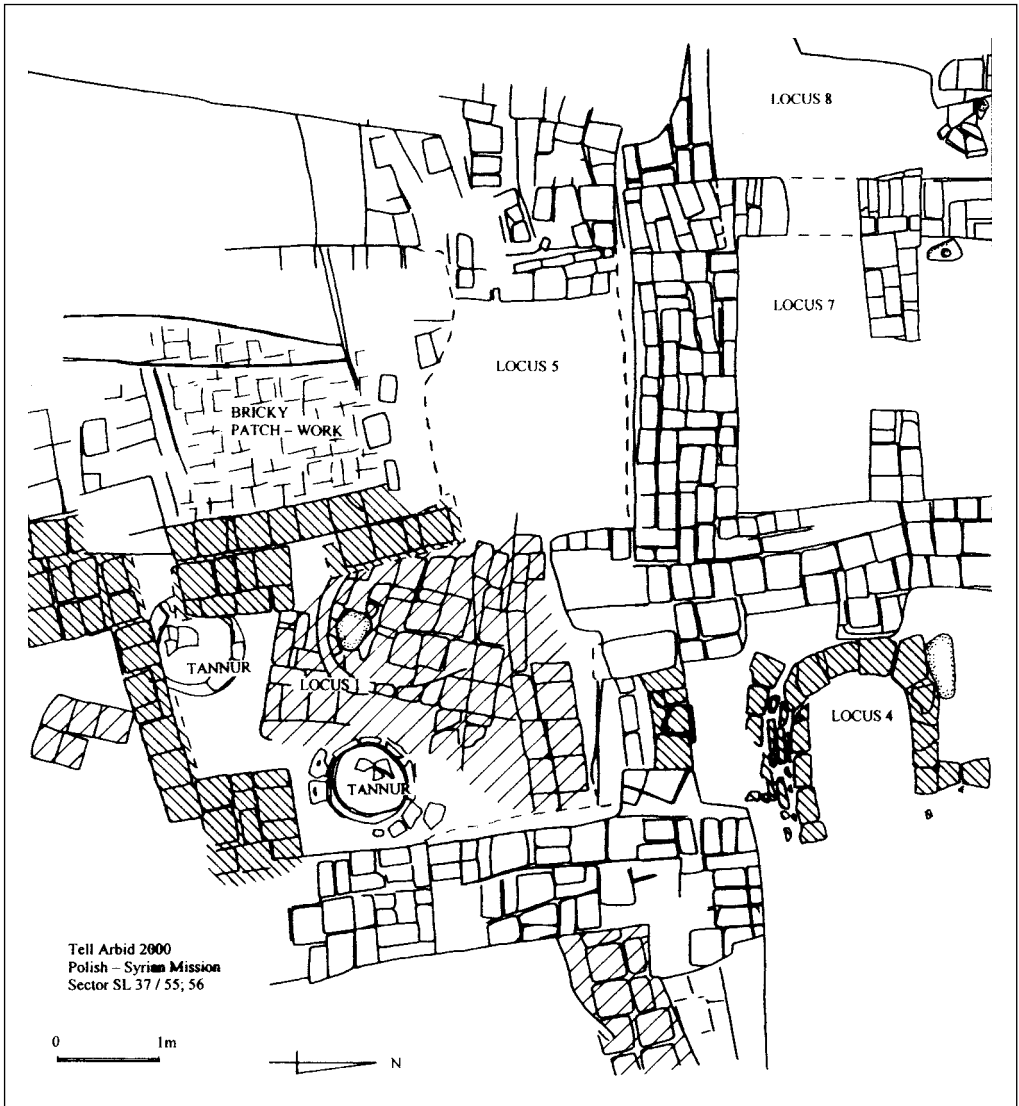


Fig. 7. Tell Arbid. Plan of sector "SL" after excavations in 2000
(Drawing L. Rutkowski, inking M. Wagner)

Mudbrick walls of the “patchwork” style, already well known from the “SS” and “SA” sectors, appeared below the 2nd-millennium strata in this trench. These walls, which should be dated to the Akkadian or rather post-Akkadian period, were erected directly on the ruins of the “public building”, quite often repeating the layout of the older structure. The poorly preserved “patchwork” remains are accompanied by several *tannurs* and some pits, like the one found in 1999, dug into the “public building” stratum.

Of the “public building” itself, fragments of at least three rooms (loci 5, 7, 8)

and of what seems to be a small courtyard were uncovered in the sector this year (Fig. 7). Together with a locus S8/96 from the first season of excavations in 1996, locus 7 makes up one entire room that is now known (Fig. 8). It was built against the outer wall and measured 4 by 2.8 m. There were two doorways provided with thresholds. One doorway with a stone door socket led westwards, while another opened to the north. Later a partition wall was built dividing the room into two units linked by a doorway. What after the 1999 season was believed to be the southeastern outer corner of the “public building” now proved to be

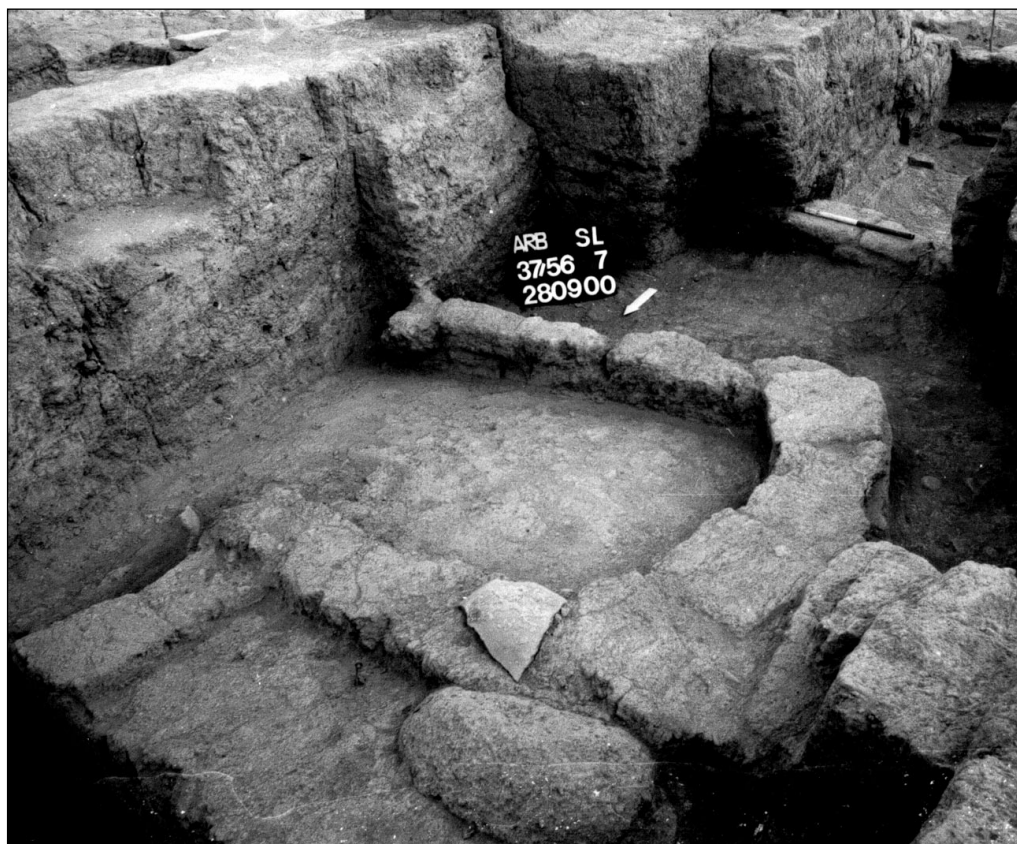


Fig. 8. Tell Arbid. Area “SL”. General view of the sector from the west (Photo J. Wierzbicki)

the end of the main outer wall, but not the corner of the complex. Near the end and parallel to the outer wall there was an entrance c. 1 m wide (*Fig. 9*). Due to damages caused by Kahbour-period pits dug into this stratum, it is still not clear whether this doorway led to the “public building” complex or to a neighboring house. But even were it an entrance to the “public building”, it appears to have been of a secondary nature, added at a later stage. For the same reason, it was still impossible to establish the southern border of the “public building”.

In the southeastern part of the sector, at the bottom of the trench, remains of some

solid mudbrick walls were reached. They seem to represent either an older part of the “public building” or a fragment of another structure once bordering the “public building”. Whatever the case may be, the architecture was later removed to make place for some internal rearrangements within the “public building” complex. The current season also proved that the 3rd millennium BC architectural complex called the “public building” had been used for a long time and was rebuilt or restored repeatedly. The most recent stage of its operation fell in the Akkadian period or slightly later.



*Fig. 9. Tell Arbid. Entrance to the “public building” in area “SL”
(Photo J. Wierzbicki)*

PROBE IN AREA "SD"

A small probe was dug on the eastern slope of the tell or, to be more precise, at the western border of sector "SD", in square 36/64, where the outer wall of a Khabour-ware period grave had appeared in the western balk wall at the end of the 1999 campaign. It was a vaulted grave chamber, built of mudbrick, nearly square

in shape (*Fig. 10*). It was about 1.7 m wide and over 1.1 m high. The top of the chamber was virtually on the tell surface and had already been damaged by erosion. Inside, a bronze spearhead and two painted Khabour jars were found alongside some longer bones in very poor condition.

SUMMARY

The most important result of the season is the establishment of a more detailed stratigraphy of the tell summit in the late

3rd and early 2nd millennium BC, and the determination of settlement chronology in this part of the ancient city.

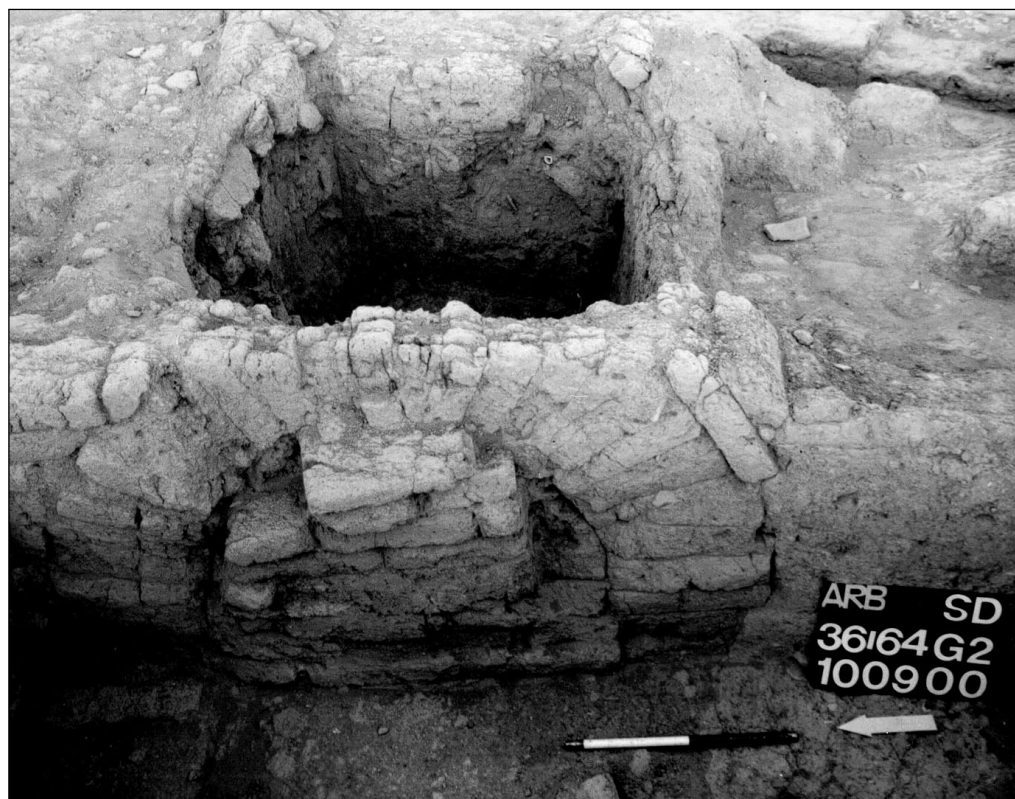


Fig. 10. Tell Arbid. Khabour-ware period grave in area "SD", view of the west wall (Photo J. Wierzbicki)