

# Piotr Bieliński

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## Tell Arbid: The Sixth Campaign of Excavations Preliminary Report

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# TELL ARBID

## THE SIXTH CAMPAIGN OF EXCAVATIONS

### PRELIMINARY REPORT

Piotr Bieliński

*Planning the 2001 campaign, we had in mind the same chief goal as in 1999 and 2000, that is, to uncover more of a structure of the 3rd millennium BC, provisionally called the "Public Building", which had been identified already during the first season at Tell Arbid in 1996. "Secondary" objectives included a quarter of Ninevite 5 dwellings, cleared in the northwestern corner of the main tell in 1999 and now explored further, and some domestic structures dated to the Khabour-ware period, discovered on the eastern slope of the tell in 1998 and 1999, which we wanted to investigate more closely.*

*Altogether, the joint Polish-Syrian archaeological team, working from August 25 to October 5, excavated a total of over 850 sq. m in seven separate areas.*

1) The staff was numerous this year, on the Polish as well as Syrian sides. Mr. Ahmad Serriye, Mission Co-Director since 1996, was joined by Mr. Khaled Ahmo from the Regional Direction of Antiquities in Hassake. The present author, who is Co-Director, was assisted by archaeologists: Dr. Dorota Ławecka, Dr. Anna Smogorzewska, Ms Zuzanna Sawicka, Ms Agnieszka Pieńkowska, Dr. Dariusz Szeląg, Mr. Łukasz Rutkowski (all Warsaw University, Institute of Archaeology); Mr. Andrzej Reiche (National Museum in Warsaw); Dr. Rafał Koliński (Poznań University, Institute of Prehistory). Dr. Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, anthropologist (Warsaw University, Institute of Archaeology), joined us for over two weeks. Also working with us for three weeks was Mr. Lado Stančo from the Institute of Archaeology of Prague University. Participants included students of archaeology from Warsaw University – Ms Agnieszka Szymczak, Ms Marta Momot, Ms Renata Maskowicz and Ms Aneta Najgebauer; Poznań University – Mr. Michał Krueger, Mr. Łukasz Chubert; and Damascus University – Ms Zeinab Ahmad, Mr. Shadi Khatoum and Mr. Malek Awad.

The Direction General of Antiquities and Museums has supported our research (not the least financially) this year as in previous years. We are greatly indebted to its Director General, Dr. Abdel Razzaq Moaz, for his friendly interest and encouragement, as well as to Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi, Director of Excavations, whose assistance has again proved invaluable. Last but hardly least, we owe words of special thanks to Mr. Abd el Messih Bardo, Regional Director of Antiquities in Hassake, for his constant support and logistical help.

Our sincere gratitude is due all the sponsors of the 2001 season at Tell Arbid. I would like to thank especially our old friends from Elektromontaż-Export with its President, Mr. Jerzy Lewandowski, and from Panasonic Poland SA, for their support.

## NEW TEST PIT ON THE TELL SUMMIT (AREA "SS")

On the top of the main tell our effort was concentrated in its eastern part, the sectors labeled: "S", "SA", "SL" and "SS" (Fig. 1). A new trench was opened at the western end of the "SA-SS" areas. It was 12.5 m long on the N-S axis and 3 m wide, set on a steep slope, partly in square 37/53 and partly in 36/53. The objective was to check the westward extension of a large waste area, which covers a considerable part of the so-called "Public Building" and which accumulated during the Khabour-ware period.

Of this date are the latest architectural remains found in the new trench. The only exception is a fairly late inhumation burial containing glass bracelets, most probably

Parthian, found at the southern edge of the trench. There are at least three consecutive Khabour-period building levels with remnants of mud brick structures oriented more or less according to the cardinal points. As the trench was quite narrow, little could be said about the structures except that they were of a household nature. Their presence, however, indicated that the thick accumulation of ashes and other debris had not reached this far west. The waste zone obviously did not exceed 40 m from east to west.

In the northern part of the trench (sq. 36/53), underneath the lowest Khabour layer, there appeared a 3rd millennium stratum, which contained the corner of

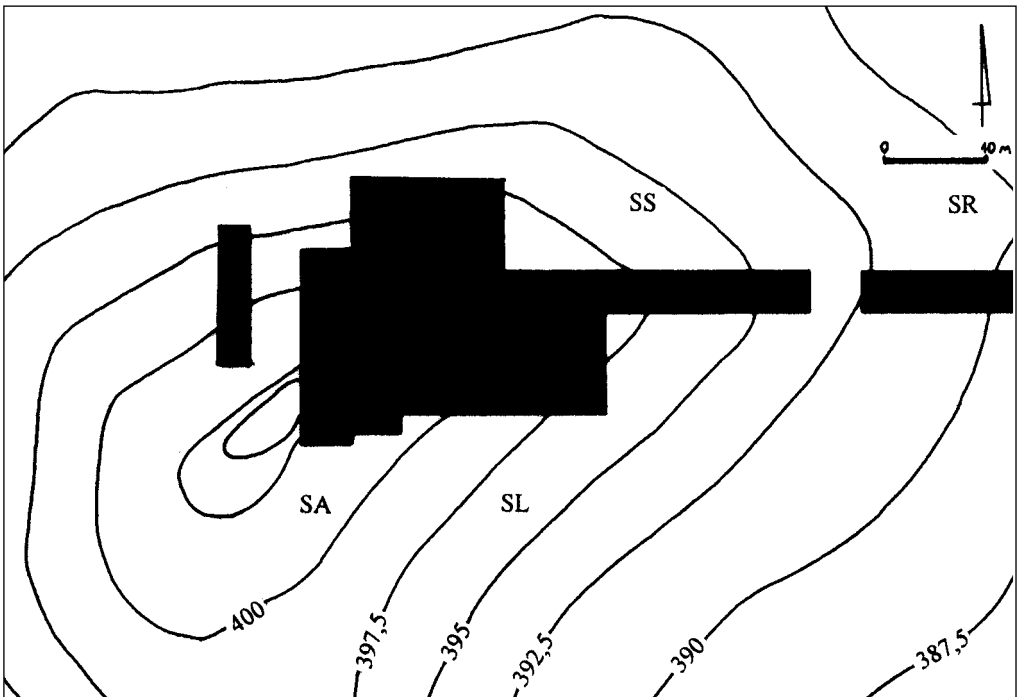


Fig. 1. Plan of trenches located on the top of the Tell Arbide citadel mound (1996-2001) (Drawing M. Wagner)

a mud brick house, apparently contemporary with the later phase of the so-called "Public Building", which is located further to the east. Below the level of these two

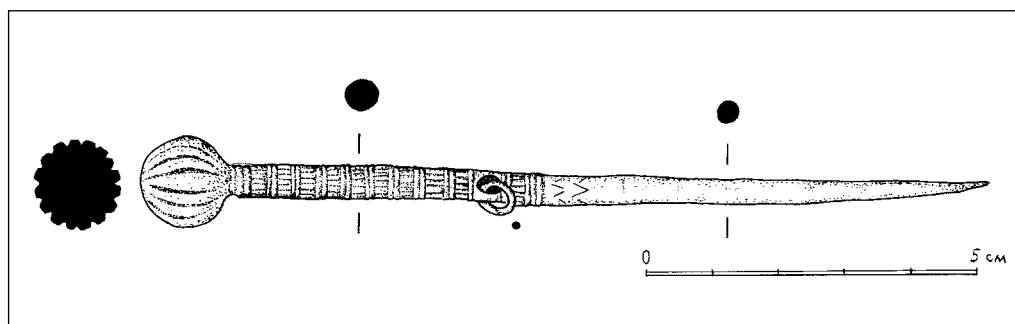
walls, at the northern edge of the trench, which slopes down to the north, the top of another 3rd millennium stratum was reached.

### MITANNIAN BURIAL (AREA "SA")

The most recent findings in the old trenches investigated again this year were two Mitannian pits with painted Nuzi ware sherds at their bottoms and a grave of the same date, all dug into Khabour-ware strata. The grave, labeled as locus 25/SA, was discovered at the western edge of area "SA", in square 37/54. The rectangular grave chamber measures 2.25 by 1.45 m and was erected on a NW-SE axis. Its mud brick walls were inclined inwards with each row of bricks advanced minimally toward the center of the chamber, like in a false vault. The ceiling and upper part of the chamber is missing. Inside, by the southern wall, lying on its left side in a contracted position with head to the west was the skeleton of a young woman (c. 25 years old). Her hands were placed in front of her face. The body was accompanied by the bones of an offering animal (probably a lamb) and 16 ceramic vessels disposed

mostly along the southern wall of the chamber (*Fig. 3*). These included: one painted Nuzi type goblet, a pot-stand, two boat-shaped oil lamps, two bottles with red-polished slip, as well as some jars and bowls. Two large silver pins were discovered near the woman's ribcage. The upper parts and heads of these pins were covered with gold leaf and decorated with incisions (*Fig. 2*). Over 35 beads made of different materials, such as frit, bone, gold, glass and carnelian, were also found – on the body and around it. There were, moreover, two cylinder seals, one made of glass and the other of frit. Both were decorated in typical Mitannian common style.

This grave is the second Mitannian burial known from the summit of Tell Arbid. The first (also of a woman) was discovered in the "SS" sector in 1999 and had a similarly rich set of grave goods.<sup>2)</sup>



*Fig. 2. One of the silver pins found in a Mitannian grave (locus 25/SA)  
(Drawing M. Momot and M. Wagner)*

2) See P. Bieliński, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 276-277, Fig. 3.

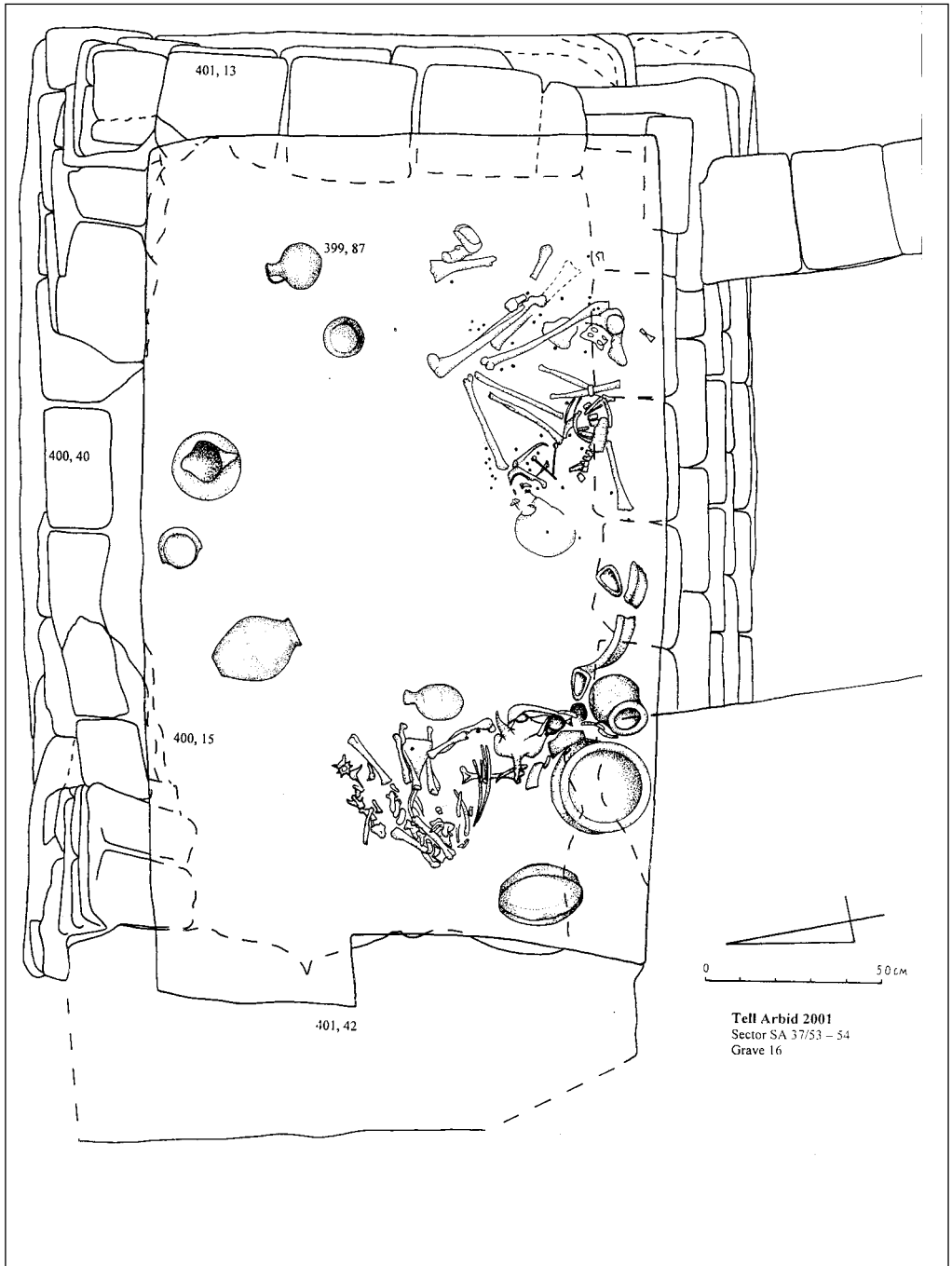


Fig. 3. Plan of a Mitannian grave in area "SA" (locus 25/SA)  
(Drawing M. Momot and M. Wagner)

## KHABOUR-WARE PERIOD LAYERS (AREA "SA")

Khabour-ware period layers were investigated in one old trench on the top of the tell (area "SA": square 37/54) and another new one, located in the western half of square 37/55, directly east of area "SA".

The stratigraphic sequence in the new trench was much the same as before.<sup>3)</sup> Except for some very recent pre-Islamic burials in the uppermost layer, the poorly preserved remains discovered in the central

and northern part of pit 37/55 were of the Khabour-ware period, closely corresponding to what was found in square 37/54 in 1998.

Two adjoining Khabour-ware period graves, found in the southern part of trench 37/55 and dug into the lower Khabour layer, presumably belonged to the same stratum. They were oriented NE-SW (Fig. 4). Of the two, grave G8 was in better shape. Its chamber measures c. 1.8 by



Fig. 4. Graves G8 and G9 in square 37/55  
(Photo A. Reiche)

3) See id., *PAM X, Reports 1998* (1999), 206-208; id., *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 320-322.

1.3 m and the original height was about 1.2 m. Scattered along the eastern wall of the chamber were human bones belonging to the skeletons of four different persons: two women, one young man and a child. There were also some animal bones. The fact that the human bones revealed no anatomical order and some parts of the skeletons were missing or broken may suggest that the burial in this grave was not so much of bodies, as of loose bones brought from elsewhere.<sup>4)</sup> The grave goods found in G8 consisted of four large jars and some beads made of carnelian, turquoise and other raw materials. The neighboring grave G9, which was much smaller, contained the skeleton of a young woman deposited in a strongly contracted position by the southern wall of the grave. Two painted Khabour jars stood beside the body.

The construction of the two graves led to the demolishing of parts of some older

Khabour-ware period structures occupying the central and southern part of the trench in square 37/55. These remains consisted of fragments of two wide mud brick walls with two adjoining rooms separated by a narrow wall, apparently belonging to the same architectural complex as locus 14/SA, found in 2000 in the southeastern corner of area "SA". Underlying them were three consecutive building levels of the Khabour period, which have now been explored along the southern and western borders of square 37/54. Fragments of houses or rather rooms with corresponding floors found within these lower layers had walls preserved as high as 0.3 m and showed signs of repeated rebuilding and repair. At the same time, these architectural remains prove the continuity of Khabour occupation in this part of the site at the southern limit of the waste zone of ashes and debris.

### “PUBLIC BUILDING” (AREAS “SL”-“SS”)

As stated at the beginning of this report, the main effort was focused this year on exploring the so-called “Public Building”. Investigations were carried out inside the eastern wing of this structure, in an area situated immediately to the west of the row of rooms forming the eastern edge – loci: 11/SS-36/55 and 13/SS-36/55 (*Fig. 5*). The layer corresponding to the “Public Building” turned out to be nearly completely destroyed by later pits and the bottom of the waste and ashes accumulation. To judge by the character of the destruction, an open space, possibly a large courtyard, could have been located here at the time that the “Public Building” remained in use.

Inside the “Public Building” we continued to excavate the southern wing (area “SL”, including the eastern half of square 37/55 and all of square 37/56). Locus 1/SL, which we finished exploring, turned out to be a large room (at least 5.5 by 3.23 m) with an entrance from the street. Due to strong erosion of the southern citadel slope, the position of the southern wall could not be established. In the southern part of locus 1/SL-37/55, two large, regularly spaced *tannours* were found. The doorway in the eastern wall, about 0.8 m wide, was later blocked. Originally, it had led to a neighboring room, locus 6/SL-37/56 (*cf. Fig. 5*). This was slightly wider (c. 3.4 m) and much the same in length as

4) I am indebted to Dr. Sotysiak for this interpretation, as well as for all the anthropological information on the graves found this year.

the adjacent room, although the latter fact can only be assumed as the southern wall has been eroded away, too. Another doorway, set in the northern wall of the

room, connected it with the same street. The entrance was about a meter wide and had a high threshold made of mud bricks and an outer rounded step. Outside, just in

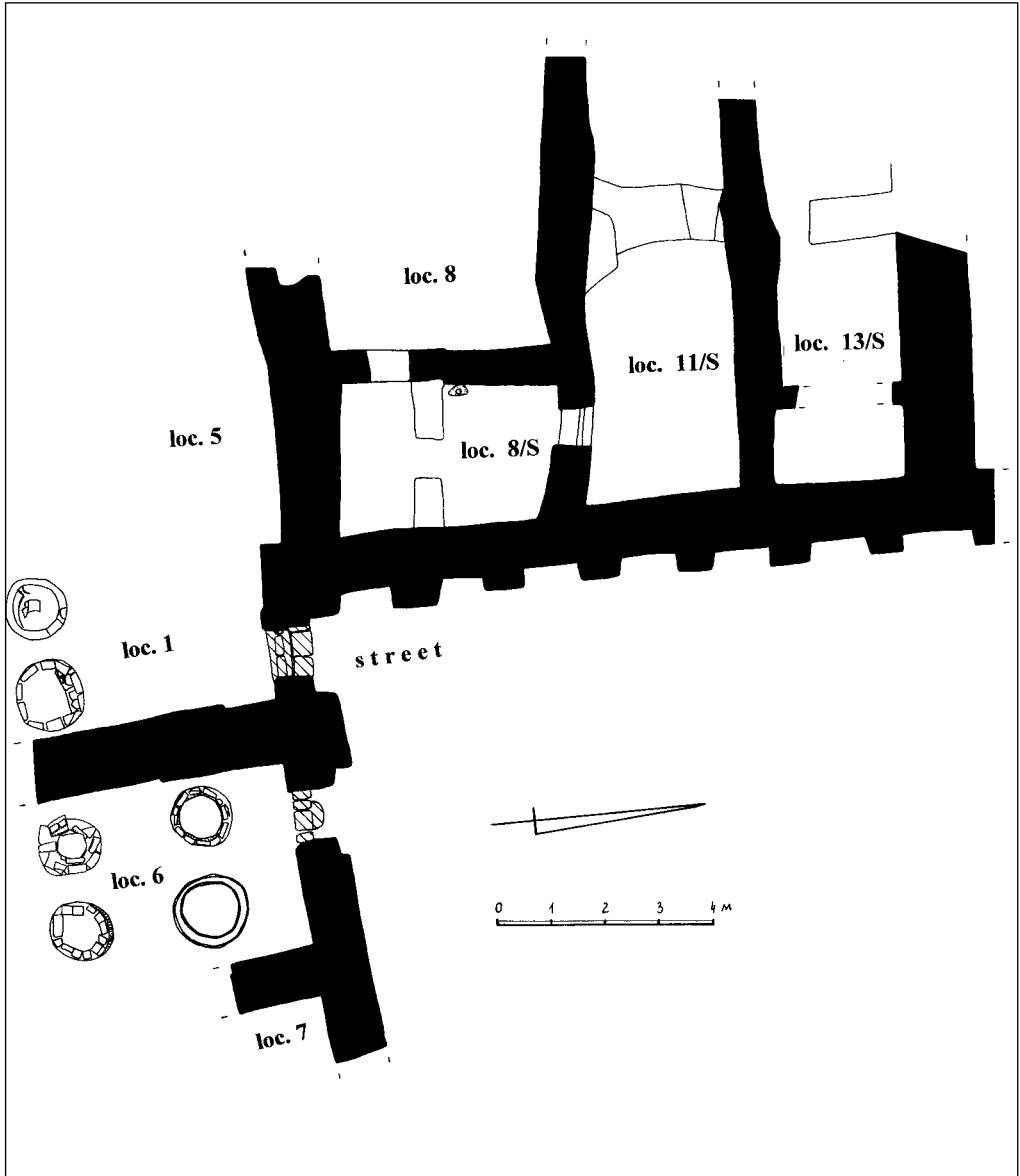
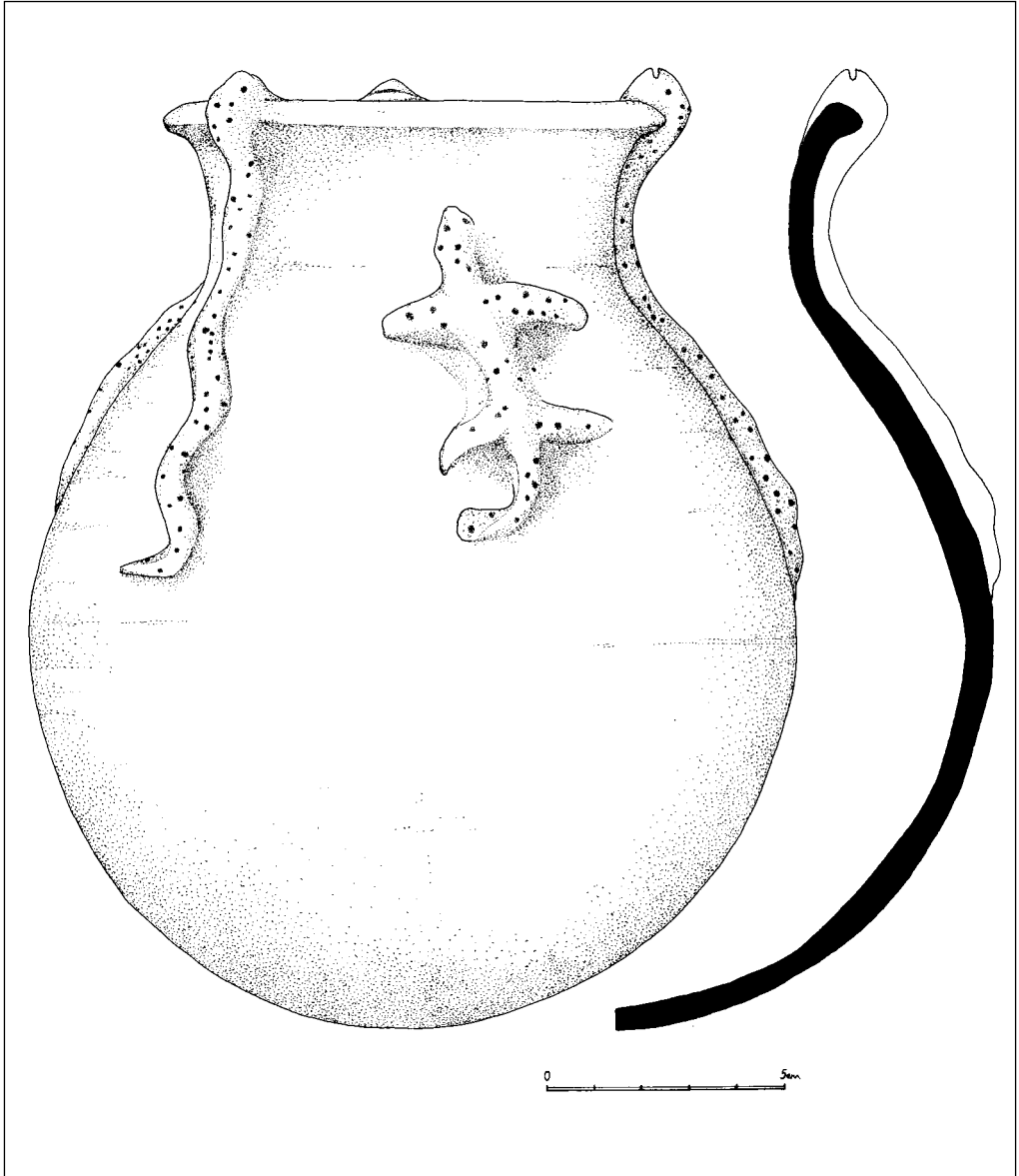


Fig. 5. Plan of the southeastern part of the "Public Building" after the 2001 season (Drawing L. Rutkowski and M. Wagner)



front of the entrance, in a layer corresponding to the last phase of the "Public Building", a ceramic jar decorated with applied snake images was found (*Fig. 6*).

In the eastern wall of room 6/SL-37-56, there was a third doorway or passage, approximately 0.8 m wide and only partly preserved, which led into the next room on



*Fig. 6. Ceramic jar with snake images found in square 37/56  
(Drawing L. Rutkowski and M. Wagner)*

the east labeled as locus 7/SL-37/56. Only its northwestern corner was cleared, but the lay of the land in this part of the citadel suggests that not much more of it could have survived anyway. Room 6/SL 37/56 must have been used as a kitchen, if the two very large tannours (nearer the northern entrance) and two fireplaces, regularly disposed in pairs, are anything to go by (Fig. 7). In one of the *tannours* (diameter c. 1.3 m) a clay sealing was found, bearing

several impressions of the same cylinder (Fig. 8). The fireplaces seem to follow approximately the same line as the *tannours* discovered in above-mentioned room 1/SL-37/55. Both rooms appear to have served the same purpose, that is, preparing meals. Two fairly large, interconnected kitchens have sense functionally only if they form part of a large building complex, where it is necessary to serve food for special occasions or feed numerous inhabitants or



Fig. 7. General view of kitchen 6/SL-35/56 in the southern wing of the "Public Building" (Photo A. Reiche)

guests. All this points to the special function of the kitchens and, consequently, of the entire building.

Architectural remains belonging most probably to the same layer, although not necessarily to the same building complex were excavated further to the west of both kitchens, in squares 37/55 and 37/54 (area "SA"). There was a fragment of wall over 7 m long, following an E-W line, as well

as parts of two walls at right angles, a fragment of adjacent floor and of a stone-paved courtyard, which measured at least 3.6 by 2.5 m. The walls have the same orientation and width (around 1 m) as the walls of the "Public Building". As all these remnants are considerably disturbed by later pits and the accumulation of ashes, their relation to the "Public Building" needs to be clarified.

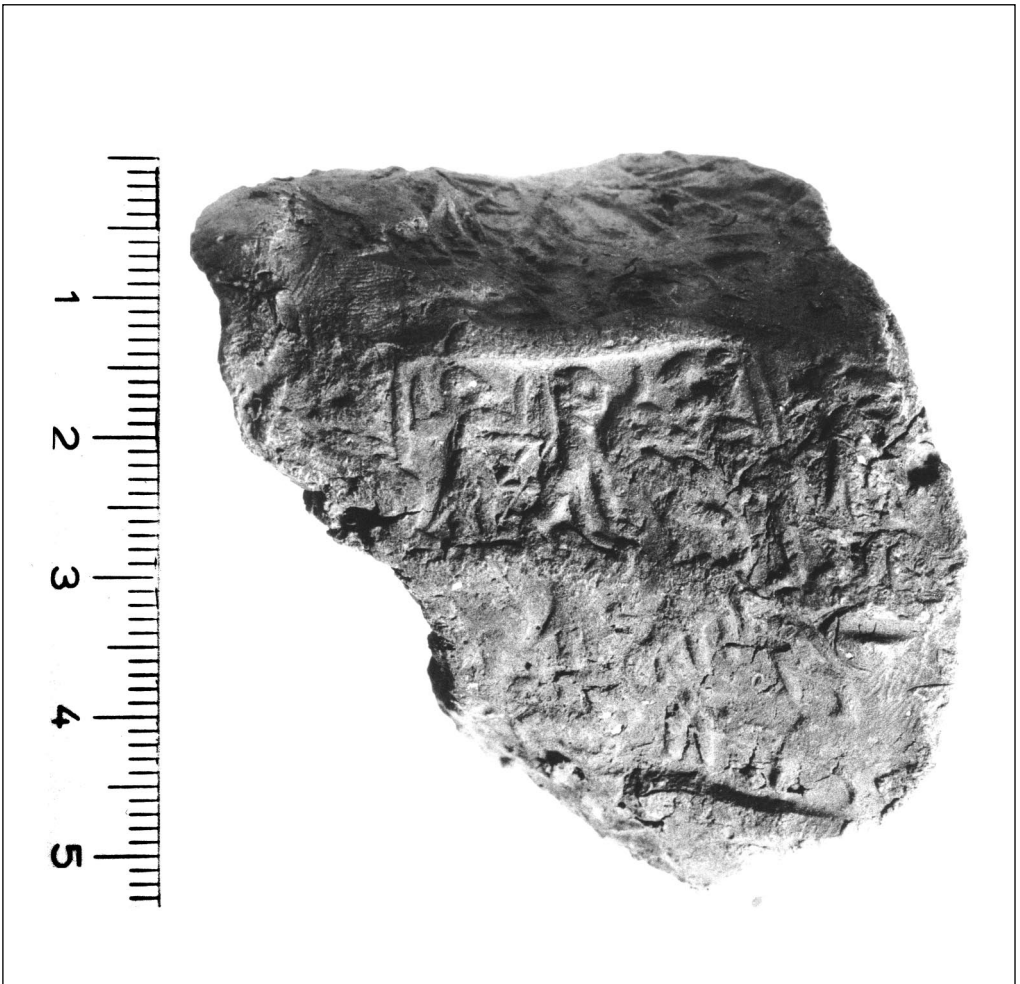


Fig. 8. The 3rd millennium BC clay bulla with impressions of a cylinder seal, found in room 6/SL-37/56 (Photo A. Reiche)

## “OLDER BUILDING” (AREA “SL”-“SS”)

Already in 1997 it was established that the walls of the alleged “Public Building” were erected on top of some older mud brick walls.<sup>5)</sup> These older walls seemed to be slightly wider than those constructed on top of them and in one of the rooms of the “Public Building” (locus 11/SS-36/55) they undoubtedly followed the same orientation as those of the younger structure.

This year a trench was opened in room 11/SS-36/55. The room below turned out to be of nearly exactly the same dimensions, that is, c. 4.2 by 2.6 m. Its well plastered

walls are preserved at least as high as 2.3 m, and the original floor level is still to be reached. In the southeastern corner of the room, a level paved with sherds and other broken ceramic objects was uncovered. Unfortunately, none of the pottery material was sufficiently diagnostic to help with the dating, but it is more than certain that the earlier structure was erected in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Four consoles, each about 1 m high, mounted on the longer walls supported the ceiling of this room. At their highest point, they were about 1.1 m wide and they projected 0.4 m

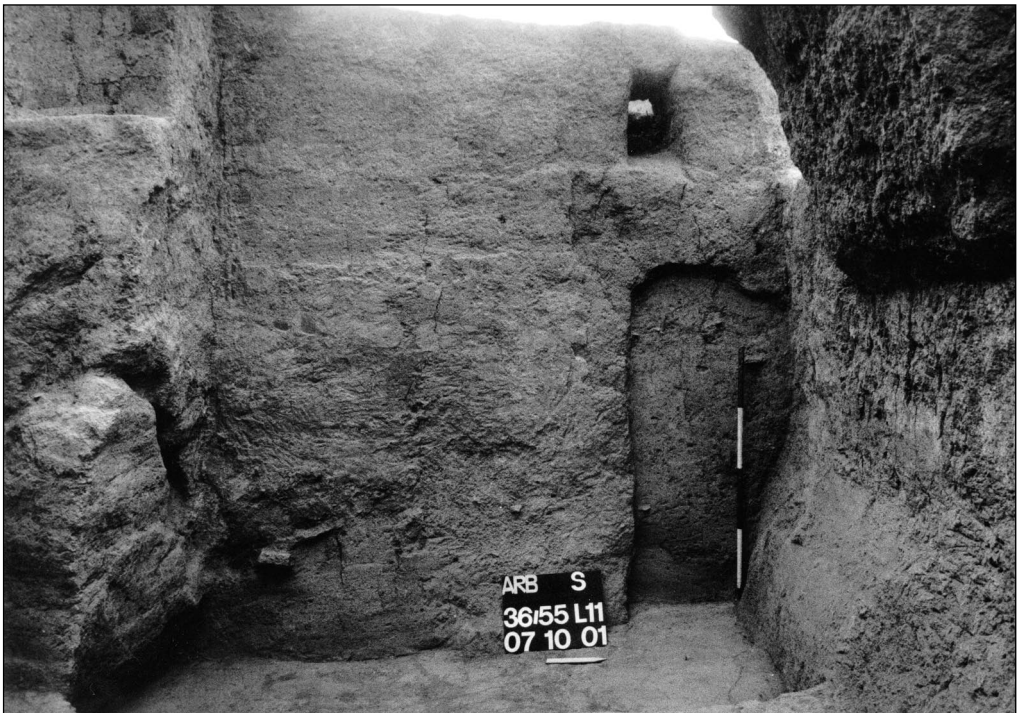


Fig. 9. Western wall of room sub-11/SS-36/55 in the “Older Building”  
(Photo A. Reiche)

5) See P. Bieliński, *PAM IX, Reports 1997* (1998), 219-221.

into the space. In the western wall of the room, near its northwestern corner, there was a very narrow doorway, only about 0.5 m wide and 1.4 m high (*Fig. 9*). In the wall over the entrance there was a nearly triangular small window. Another one, slightly larger and of similar shape, was situated in the opposite wall and, somewhat below it, an oblong niche. The only internal installation found to date is a low plastered bench situated near the southern wall.

Judging by the state of preservation of room sub-11/SS-36/55, the rest of the structure reposing under the “Public Building” could have survived in equally good condition. Whether and to what extent the younger building repeated the older one cannot be determined at present. Quite possibly, builders simply reused the tops of earlier walls as foundations for their own structure. If, however, we assume – purely hypothetically for the time being – that the “Public Building” repeats, at least in general outline, the plan of the older complex, then there is every reason to believe that the role played by the two structures was much the same as well.

A long wall, of which only the top has been cleared, could have belonged to the same layer, if not the same architectural

complex of the “Older Building”. This wall was traced in three rooms of the southern wing of the “Public Building”, that is, in kitchens 1 and 6, and in room 7 (square 37/56). It runs inside the rooms, along the outer wall of this part of the “Public Building”, only about a meter further to the south than the wall of the later structure.

In the same area “SL”, below the level of the kitchens, we reached this year the oldest architectural feature discovered to date in this part of the Tell Arbid citadel – a huge wall or possibly a platform constructed of reddish mud brick. Its orientation was different from that of the walls of the “Public Building” complex and its predecessor. While its northern face could be traced without problem, its southern face has disappeared along with the southern slope of the citadel, which has eroded away. Nevertheless, it is clear that this wall or platform was at least 6 m wide and 9.5 m long. Its stratigraphic position, expressed by the relation to other architectural remains found in square 37/56, shows that it must predate the construction of the so-called “Older Building”. Its dating, exact dimensions and, finally, its function remain to be established.

## KHABOUR-WARE PERIOD DWELLINGS (AREA “SR”)

In 1998 and 1999, a Khabour ware-period dwelling quarter started being cleared in sector “SR”, on the eastern slope of the citadel.<sup>6)</sup> In 2001, the excavated area was extended southwards (three new trenches in squares: 37/60, 37/61 and 37/62). In the westernmost of the new trenches (eastern half of square 37/60), remains representing four consecutive strata were found. Due to

the relatively restricted dimensions of the trench, only fragments of structures could be exposed. Those in the upper layer were made of *pisé* and seem to be the foundations of two separate rooms or even houses of the Khabour-ware period. They were quite wide (over 1 m) and oriented according to the cardinal points. Those found in the three lower strata were made of mud bricks

6) Id., *PAM X*, op. cit., 211-212; id., *PAM XI*, op. cit., 284.

and were much narrower, following a slightly different orientation than the foundations discovered in the uppermost layer. A large *tannour* (c. 0.8 m in diameter) occupied the corner of a room uncovered in the second stratum of this trench. Vertically mounted bricks surrounded the walls of this installation on the outside. Inside the *tannour* a mortar made of basalt was found, together with a complete ceramic vessel and fragments of two others, as well as two big ceramic pot stands. It seems that the two lowermost strata may correspond to the Third Dynasty of Ur, predating the Khabour-ware period.

In the neighboring trench, comprising the entire square 37/61, the remains that have been unearthed are chiefly of

Khabour-ware period date. In the northern and western sections of this trench, in the uppermost stratum, wide mud brick walls were cleared; they form the southern ends of rooms already identified in the old "SR" sector in 1998 and 1999. Brick benches have been preserved in some of the rooms. In the central and southern parts of square 37/61, in the same layer, there appeared huge *pisé* foundations of a similar orientation as the aforementioned mud brick walls (Fig. 10). These foundations apparently belong to another Khabour-period building, the mud brick superstructure of which has been swept away by erosion. Beneath the *pisé* walls, the top of mud brick walls following a completely different orientation were discovered.



Fig. 10. Remains of Khabour ware-period structures in square 37/61  
(Photo A. Reiche)



## AREA "D" – NINEVITE 5 HOUSES

The last of the areas explored in this campaign was "D" in the northwestern corner of the main tell. Some fragments of Ninevite 5 period domestic structures had been exposed here in 1999.<sup>7)</sup> Two new trenches were opened, extending the previously excavated area (square 30/42: 9.5 by 9.5 and square 29/42: 9.5 by 4.5 m). Both trenches were situated on ground that sloped gently northward (Fig. 11). The most recent archaeological feature to be discovered was a large Hellenistic pit, cylindrical in shape and exceeding 2.2 m in diameter. It was cut through Khabour-ware and Akkadian layers into strata of

Ninevite 5 times. The Khabour-ware period stratum, albeit heavily eroded, yielded some scattered remains of *pisé* foundations and narrow mud brick walls, belonging most probably to at least two separate structures. They were preserved in the southwestern part of the area. There were also fragments of three fairly large *tannours* and the lower part of a badly destroyed Khabour-period grave chamber measuring c. 2.8 by 1.7 m.

The next layer, which should be dated to the Akkadian period, is in even worse condition due to erosion. Apparently, the gap in occupation between the city of the

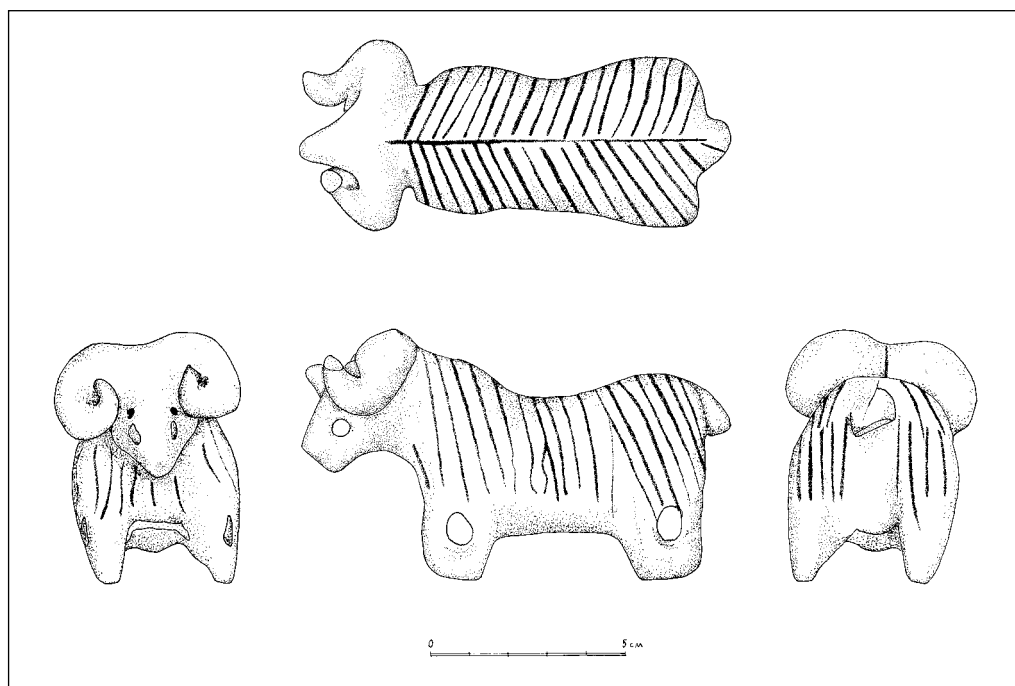


Fig. 12. Terracotta figurine of a ram found in the Akkadian layer in square 30/42 (Drawing M. Momot and M. Wagner)

7) See id., PAMXI, op. cit., 284. The work begun by Austrian and American colleagues was now continued by the Syrian side of our joint team supervised by A. Serriye.



3rd millennium BC and that of the 2nd in this part of the site was longer than elsewhere. Only some discarded fragments of walls and floors, some of them sherd-paved, have survived. It is still too early to try to reconstruct the plans of houses, which these walls could have been part of. From this stratum comes a complete terracotta figurine of a ram, which may have been used as a toy (*Fig. 12*).

The top of a Ninevite 5 period stratum was reached in the north end of area "D",

below the Akkadian remains. It contained fragments of a large (at least 7 m wide) mud brick house, bordered on the north by a narrow sherd-paved alley. The structure was composed of at least four rooms. In none of the rooms was a well preserved floor level reached. The walls of yet another Ninevite 5 dwelling, a larger part of which had been unearthed in square 30/43 already in 1999, were exposed in the same stratum, but in the northeastern part of the area in question.

## SUMMARY

The sixth campaign of joint Polish-Syrian excavations on the mound of Tell Arbid has thrown new light on the history of the site, especially during the second half of the 3rd millennium BC and in the Mitannian period. This season brought several interesting discoveries, such as the second richly furnished Mitannian grave. Our hypothesis about

the special role of the huge architectural complex provisionally called the "Public Building" has also found confirmation in newly uncovered evidence. Of equal importance are the results of explorations in the Khabour-ware period domestic quarter in area "SR", where the beginnings of Khabour-period settlement on Arbid can now be studied.