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ADULT BURIALS OF NINEVITE 5 DATE ON TELL ARBID (2007-2008)

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Abstract: Five adult burials dated to the Ninevite 5 period, that is, the first half of the 3rd millennium BC, were discovered in Area W of the Polish excavations on Tell Arbid. An analysis of these graves, in terms of typology, body alignment and position and grave goods demonstrated substantial similarities to burials known from other sites of the Ninevite 5 culture in northern Mesopotamia. The location of the graves near the so-called Southern Temple raises the issue of intent in placing graves near a sacred enclosure, possibly to secure the protection of the deity worshiped in the temple.

Keywords: Tell Arbid, graves, Ninevite 5 culture, burial customs

INTRODUCTION

The site of Tell Arbid in northeastern Syria, in the upper Khabor River valley, has been excavated by a team of archaeologists from the University of Warsaw since 1996.¹ From 2003 work has concentrated, among others, in area W in the southern part of the site, at the foot of the mound. The most important discoveries in this area, including the so-called Southern Temple, have been dated to the Ninevite 5 period, that is, the first half of the 3rd millennium BC, a peak in the development of the town. At the time it comprised other shrines beside the temple mentioned above, as well

public and dwelling structures. Not the least, there were numerous graves.

The first grave, which could be dated to the Ninevite 5 period, was discovered in square 51/56, located in Area W, already in 2003. Fieldwork in the area in the 2007–2008 seasons, in two neighboring squares 52/56 and 52/57, situated directly to the north of the temple and the architecture adjoining to it from the east (Bieliński 2010: 539–556, Fig. 15; Bieliński 2012: 512 in this volume) [*Fig. 1*], led to the discovery of four other graves from the same period.

¹ The excavations of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw are directed by Prof. Piotr Bieliński. Fieldwork reports are published successively in the PCMA's journal *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*; they are currently available also online at www.tellarbid.uw.edu.pl/publications.

DESCRIPTION OF THE GRAVES

Owing to the preliminary character of this publication, which also calls for agreement with published interim reports, the graves are presented under their original field register numbers. The numbering system is in keeping with overall Tell Arbid fieldwork documentation standards, meaning that each grave is described also as a locus with a relevant number within a given square.

GRAVE 2 (LOCUS 8), SQ. 51/56

The grave, presumably a pit burial, was heavily damaged, most likely by a later pit.

The bones and equipment were left in place, albeit disturbed. The skull and other parts of the skeleton were found scattered among the pottery and fragments of bricks, and were registered at different levels (385.84–385.36 m a.s.l., possibly continued at 385.04 m a.s.l.). The original position of the body could not be determined. It is only clear that the burial belonged to an adult.² Reconstructing the grave furnishings is also debatable, but it seems that there was one vessel — a small low jar with simple incised decoration [Fig. 2].

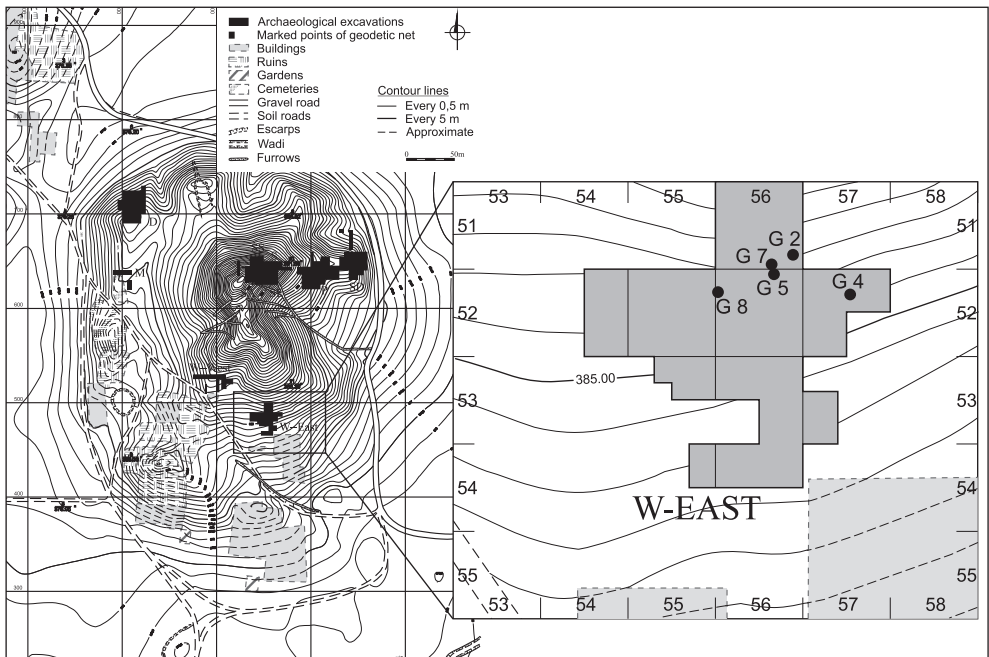


Fig. 1. Plan of Tell Arbid (after 2008); inset, close-up of the W-East area marking the location of Ninevite 5 graves (Plan update M. Wagner, PCMA archives; close-up M. Momot)

² All the anthropological data in this article are based on analyses by Dr. Arkadiusz Sołtysiak (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw).

GRAVE 5 (LOCUS 27), SQ. 52/56

A shaft tomb furnished with a burial chamber to the south of the shaft (Bieliński 2010: 555, Figs 21–22), the preserved depth being approximately 0.90 m [Fig. 3, inset at bottom left]. The original depth could not be determined owing to another grave (no. 7, see below Fig. 3, inset at bottom left]) having been

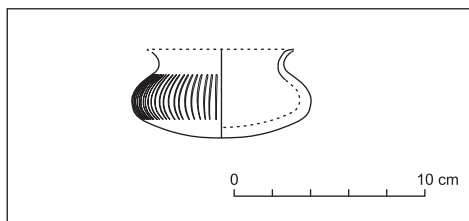


Fig. 2. Low jar with incised decoration, grave 2 (Drawing M. Momot)

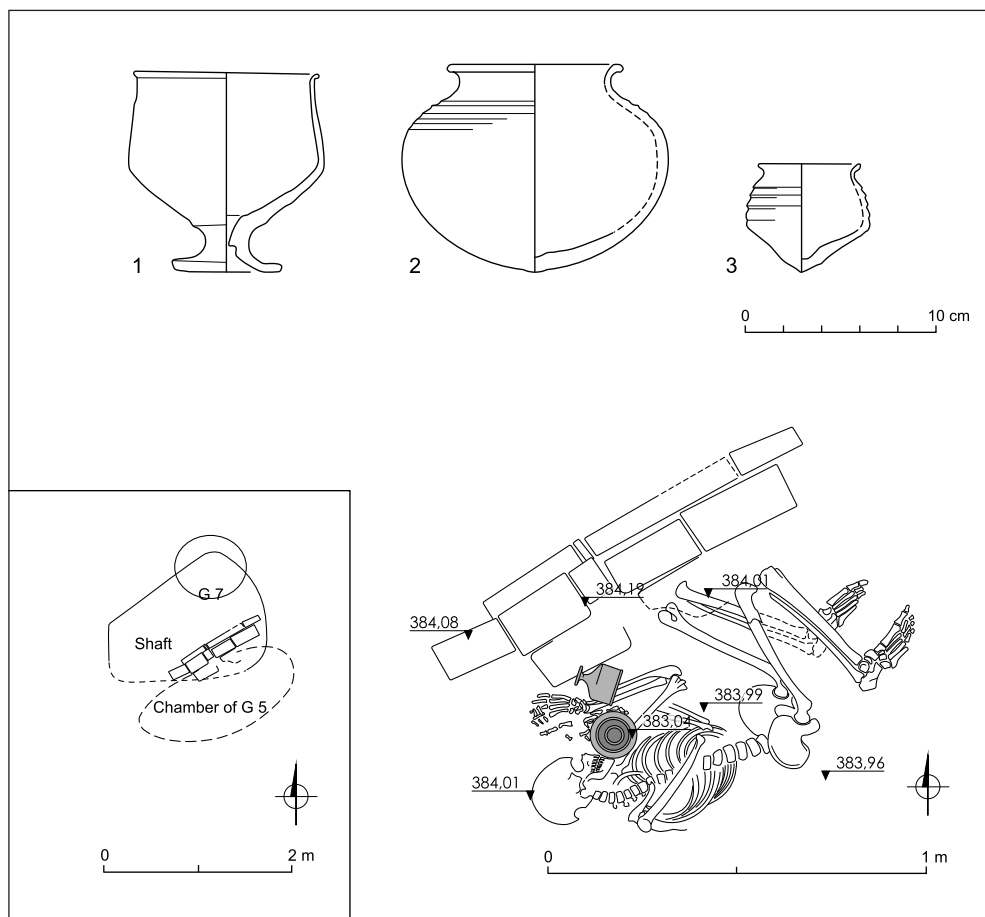


Fig. 3. Plan of grave 5 with the location of the grave goods (bottom right) and, top, the pottery set found with the burial; inset at bottom left, plan of grave 5 and of grave 7 located in the shaft of grave 5 (Drawing M. Momot, Ł. Wojnarowicz, digitizing M. Momot)

dug into it. The size is also reconstructed, because the southern side of the shaft was damaged (the shaft was situated in the baulk between squares 51/56 and 52/56): approximately 1.60 m at the widest point east–west and around 1 m north–south. The shaft had been excavated in layers of ashes intercalated with thin layers of clay, running more or less horizontally, and then backfilled with ashes mixed with particles of clay. It was clear from the section that the shaft had been dug at a slight angle toward the south where the burial chamber was situated.

The entrance to the burial chamber was partitioned off with a wall of mud bricks approximately 1.20 m long and about 0.30–0.35 m high. The extent of the grave pit was difficult to trace in the ashy accumulations in this part of square

52/56, but it is likely to have measured approximately 0.80 m north–south and approximately 1.40 east–west. Its bottom was leveled at 383.96–383.99 m a.s.l.

The body of an adult female was buried in strongly contracted position, aligned east–west, head to the west, facing north. A jar with ribbed decoration stood by the mouth. Inside it there was a small ribbed cup [Fig. 3:2–3]. The fingers of the right hand were placed under the vessel, suggesting that the dead woman had been buried holding the jar. An overturned footed goblet found slightly out to the north could have been “held” in the woman’s other hand [Fig. 3:1].

GRAVE 7 (LOCUS 30), SQ. 51/56

A pit grave [Fig. 4] in the southernmost part of square 51/56 (and partly already

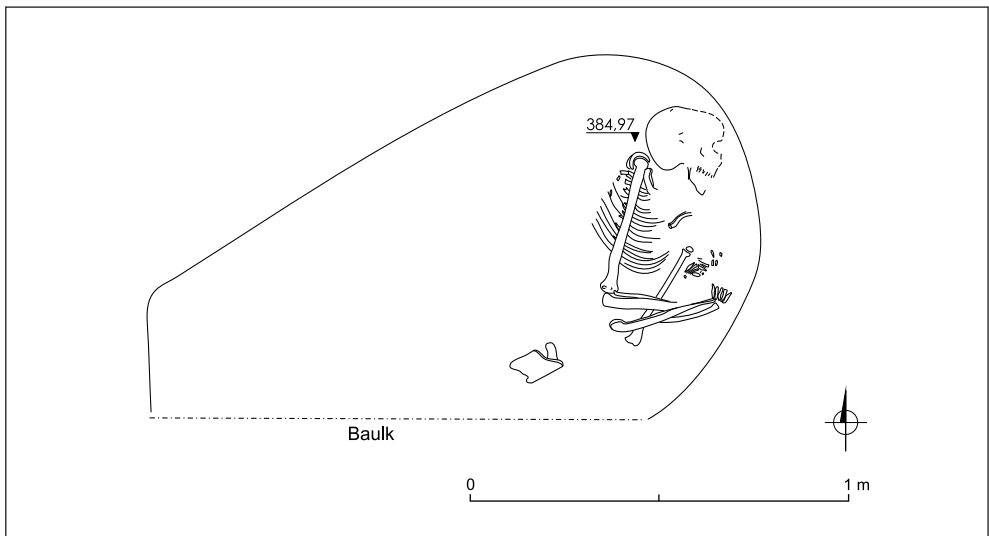


Fig. 4. Plan of grave 7
(Drawing Ł. Wojnarowicz, digitizing M. Momot)

in square 52/56), the bottom leveled at 384.97 m a.s.l. (top of grave at 385.13 m a.s.l.). The pit was approximately 1.60 m long and about 0.95 m wide at the widest preserved place. The discovery was accidental, the grave being revealed after the southern side of the baulk between squares 51/56 and 52/56 had collapsed following winter rains. The bones of this burial were observed sticking out horizontally from the trench wall, above the shaft of grave 5 (see above). The southern side of the burial pit of grave 7 was damaged in the collapse. The adult buried in this grave had been laid out on the left side with the head to the north and facing east, bent, the legs flexed. No grave goods were recorded. From the stratigraphic point of view the position of the grave is noteworthy. The pit turned out to be cut into the shaft of an earlier tomb and, moreover, it proved impossible to discern the outlines of the pit. This suggested that the burial followed shortly

after the digging of grave 5, especially as all the bones belonging to the burial in grave 7 were fitted nicely within the confines of the shaft of grave 5. It was impossible to determine the ground level from which grave 7 was dug in.

GRAVE 8 (LOCUS 31), SQ. 52/56

Poorly preserved burial of an adult, discovered during the removal of the baulk between squares 52/55 and 52/56 [Fig. 5, left]. The skeleton was not complete; parts of the leg bones are missing. Exposure in the baulk for several years is responsible to some degree for the condition of the burial, which however was also penetrated in antiquity by a pit dug later in the Khabur Ware period. The grave was dug into the remnants of earlier architecture and can be classified as a pit grave. The preserved size of the pit was approximately 0.55 m by 0.70 m, leveled at about 385.61 m a.s.l. (top)–385.49 m a.s.l.

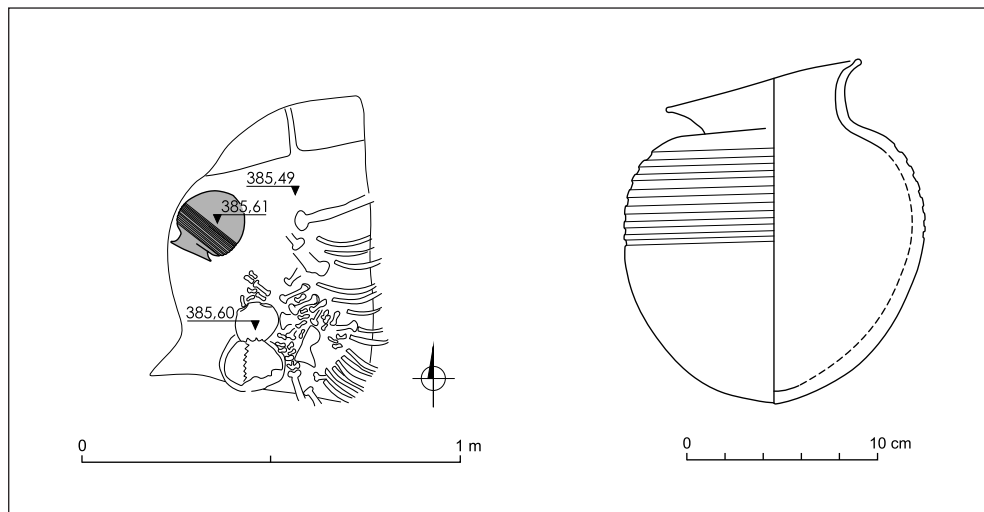


Fig. 5. Plan of grave 8 with marked location of the jar, left; ribbed jar from the grave (Drawing A.M. Kotarba, digitizing M. Momot)

(bottom). (The two bricks observed to the north of the body [see *Fig. 5*, left] belonged to a later wall that cut through the grave pit). The body rested on its left side, in contracted position, head to the south. The grave goods consisted of an overfired ribbed jar of coarse quality, with walls of uneven thickness and distorted rim [*Fig. 5*, right]. A small pit containing animal bones was discovered directly to the north of the grave. Its connection with the grave, however, will have to remain hypothetical.

GRAVE 4 (LOCUS 17), SQ. 52/57

This grave is a variant of the brick-lined tombs [*Fig. 6*, bottom left]. It was dug into a small room (locus 11) and had a single course of bricks, which were laid flat around the burial pit, creating a kind of roofing. The outside dimensions were approximately 1 m by 2 m; the roofing was leveled at 385.59 m a.s.l. It is likely that the walls of the room were still standing at the time that the grave was dug and were taken advantage of as a convenient “frame”.³ The bricks in this roofing structure were of different size and some were missing. The grave was bigger than the deposited body inside it, presumably because it was made to match the size of locus 11. Loose soil filled the pit. It contained bits of bricks and ashes, suggesting that the soil came from the fill in which the grave had been dug. The floor of the room was destroyed in the process, the sole evidence of its existence being a faint ashy streak observed

on the west wall of the room (leveled at 384.72 m a.s.l.).

The body lay aligned northwest–southeast, on the right side, head to the north and facing west. The left hand rested on the knee, the right was bent at the elbow and placed before the chest; the legs were crossed, the left on top of the right. The skeleton was well preserved with the exception of the skull and pelvis, which were found under the brick roofing. Anthropological examination of the bones determined the age of the buried individual as a *juvenis* (14–21 years).

The eight vessels, making up the grave goods were found in different places. A flat-bottomed cup with outturned rim lay in front of the face [*Fig. 6:7*] and a small funnel-necked jar stood by the fingers of the left hand [*Fig. 6:8*], while the remaining vessels were concentrated in two places. The first set consisted of three vessels located just above the pelvis, under the bricks of the superstructure. A large bowl with flattened bottom (smashed) contained a fairly large bowl with excised decoration and pointed bottom, which contained in turn a small cup with pointed bottom [*Fig. 6:1, 2–3*]. The other set comprised a small jar, a footed goblet with incised decoration and a jar with ribbed decoration, all found in the northeastern corner of the grave, also under the brick covering [*Fig. 6:4, 5–6*]. The only personal adornment discovered in this burial was a shell ring, which was found in the chest area [*Fig. 6:9*].

³ A similar instance of a grave “framed” by the walls of a ruined passage was recorded at Tell Knedij, see Martin 2005: 51 (grave 71).

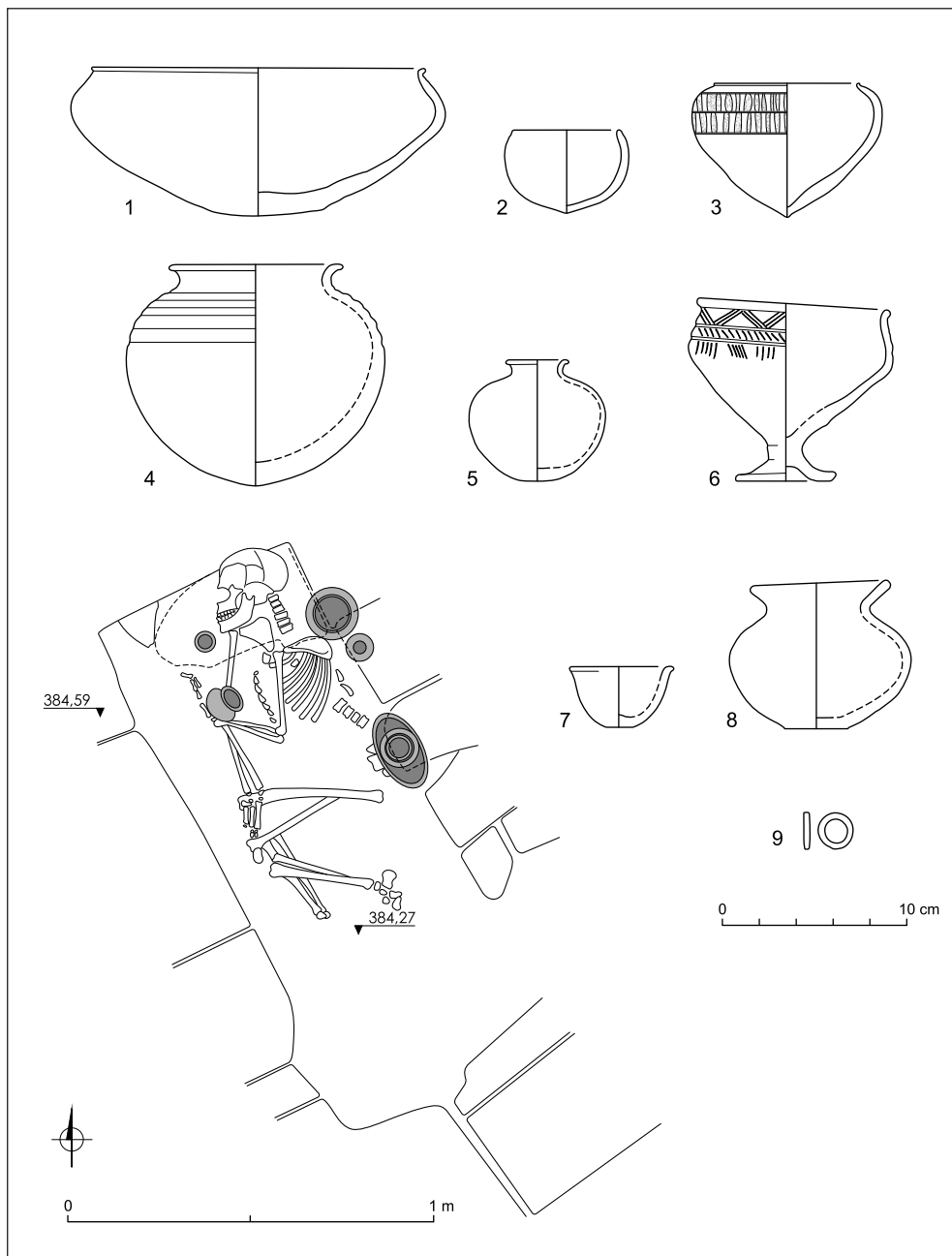


Fig. 6. Plan of grave 4 with marked location of the grave goods (bottom left) and set of pottery goods from the burial (Drawing M. Ostrowska, E. Wojnarowicz, digitizing M. Momot)

DISCUSSION

The five burials described here are hardly a statistically significant sample, but in terms of the finds from Tell Arbid they constitute an important and indeed the biggest concentration of Ninevite graves discovered to date.⁴ While this is not yet a cemetery,⁵ it is possible to speak of a certain concentration of graves in this area, especially if compared to other investigated areas of Tell Arbid dated to the same period. The burials occupy a restricted area about 16 m long from east to west and approximately 5 m from north to south [see *Fig. 1*].⁶ The distribution of the graves in time could point to a certain tradition of burying the dead in this place on Arbid. However, one should keep in mind the different ground levels, from which the graves were dug, as indicated by the recorded levels. This attests to possible time intervals between individual burials.

GRAVE LOCATION AND CONSTRUCTION

The graves were located within the settlement and it can be presumed from their context (excavated into rooms, layers of ash) that they had been dug in ruins, in

places already abandoned and uninhabited. The same custom was observed on other sites of Ninevite 5 culture (Valentini 2009: 64–65, 67).

The bodies buried in these graves were those of adults. The one *juvenis* individual (aged 14–21 years) in grave 4 can be considered practically an adult. Sex was determined in only one case, that is, the female burial in grave 5. A single child burial was recorded in square 51/56 (Z. Wygnańska, personal communication), but there is no evidence of infant burials in vessels (pot burials) of the kind known from other sites, such as Tell Knedij (Martin 2005: 50–51, two burials from EJ 0/I–II and two from EJ IIIa–b), Tell Abu Hafur (Koliński, Ławecka 1992: 201, three burials from the end of EJ II/beginning of EJ III), Tell Leilan, Tell Kutun, Tell Mohammad Arab, possibly also Tell Jessary (Bolt, Green 2003: 524, 528).⁷ The sample of graves from Tell Arbid is very small, hence it is surely a matter of chance or different burial customs in the case of infants and children, for instance, interred under house floors (Valentini 2009: 64–65). In fact, one burial of the latter type was found at Tell Arbid.

⁴ A single pit grave of an adult individual, dated to the Ninevite 5 period, has since been found in Sector SL at the top of the tell, dug into a brick platform (Bieliński 2004: 338).

⁵ Cemeteries from the Ninevite 5 period are known from Tell Rijim, Tell Chagar Bazar, Tell Mohammad Arab, see Bolt, Green 2003: 525. The concentration of graves on Tell Chazna should also be considered as a cemetery in view of the excavators' opinion that the majority (25 out of 27 graves) was located on the mound when the center was already abandoned, see Munčaeu *et alii* 2004: 337, 344.

⁶ A similar situation was observed on Tell Knedij: four pit graves of adult individuals were found close together in empty space between buildings IV and V of complex C and complex D, see Martin 2005: 49–50 (graves 80, 81, 87, 91).

⁷ Similar graves from Tell Melebiya, mentioned by D. Bolt and A. Green, were not included in M. Lebeau's publication, hence their dating to the Ninevite 5 period cannot be established. "Pot burials" from Tell Karrana 3, also mentioned in D. Bolt's and A. Green's study, were ultimately considered "Late Uruk", see D. Stein 1993: 203–204. Newborn and infant burials are said to come from Tell Chazna, see Munčaeu *et alii* 2004: 344, including three pot burials, but the Tell Chazna material was never examined by an anthropologist (Munčaeu *et alii* 2004: 346–347), therefore caution is advocated in considering these results. Generally on child pot burials, see Kulemann-Ossen, Novák 2000: 121–131.

The burial was made under a room floor; the body was buried in a basket placed in a pit lined with clay, which has preserved an impression of the basket (Bieliński 1999: 216, Fig. 6).⁸

Grave 4 has already been mentioned as resembling a child's tomb from Tell Knedij, which was dug into a passage. Two other Ninevite child graves from Tell Knedij (graves 101 and 102) were dug into the walls, so that the graves used the extant structures, adding only a brick covering (Martin 2005: 51). The burial chamber of grave 5 on Tell Arbid may have also taken advantage of a standing wall (wall 27), as its south wall or border on the south. Grave 5 appears to follow the type described by D. Bolt and A. Green as a "vertical rectangular shaft with burial chamber (chambers) dug-out on one or more sides near the floor and bricked-off by partition wall(s)" (Bolt, Green 2003: 527). Green emphasized the considerable variations of the type, but the presence of a partition wall separating the chamber from the shaft is a good distinguishing feature. Examples are known only from Tell Mohammed Arab (three graves, see Bolt, Green 2003: 527),⁹ Tell Thuwajj (Numoto 1996: 83, Fig. 6) and most probably Tell Leilan (one grave, see Schwartz 1988: 23–25, Figs 23–26).¹⁰ In these graves, however, only personal adornments were found with the dead in the chamber, whereas the other grave goods were in the shaft, while in grave 5 at Tell Arbid the grave goods, that is, pottery, had all been placed inside the burial chamber. More-

over, the graves from Tell Mohammad Arab were child burials or burials of an adult, possibly a parent, and child (in two cases there are two different individuals buried in two burial chambers).¹¹ In one such grave (50V: 28) the dead were buried one on top of the other. Considering the location of another grave (no. 7, see above) in the shaft of grave 5, one should consider the possibility of there being in this case one tomb with two burials in two separate chambers, to the north and south of the shaft respectively. In view of the oblique position of the shaft of grave 5, angled from north to south, the apparent damage to its upper part may have simply been the burial chamber of grave 7 dug-out on the northern side of the shaft proper, which would thus be narrower. Caution should be exercised, however, in accepting this idea as the parallel from Tell Mohammad Arab is isolated and the site itself, situated on the Tigris, quite distant from the Upper Khabur river basin. Moreover, grave 7 lacks the partition wall separating the chamber from the shaft, while the possible kinship of the buried individuals, which could explain a common grave, cannot be even a hypothesis. In this context one should also note S. Valentini's suggestion that shaft graves from the first half of the 3rd millennium BC were intended for adults as a rule and were constructed for a bigger number of dead (Valentini 2009: 64).

Grave 8 (and presumably 7, but see above) was a simple pit grave, representing a type well attested among Ninevite 5

⁸ Grave discovered in one of the Ninevite houses in trench S, square 36/58. It should be noted that this particular type is not known from the Ninevite sites mentioned by D. Bolt and A. Green (2003). Another child burial from the period was found in area D (A. Smogorzewska, personal communication).

⁹ See the discussion concerning the attribution of grave 54V:23 to this type, Bolt, Green 2003: 527.

¹⁰ See also the discussion of the topic in Bolt, Green 2003: 527.

¹¹ See Bolt, Green 2003: 536 on the possible kinship of persons buried in these graves.

burials (Bolt, Green 2003: 526; see also Lebeau 1993: 229–230, three pit graves from Tell Melebiya; Martin 2005: 49–50, seven pit graves from Tell Knedij; Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 337–343, 12 graves from Tell Chazna).

Remains of a white substance, noted only in grave 4, could be interpreted as a mat used to wrap the body or cloth (robes?). Both mats and cloth were common enough on many sites from this period.¹² The absence of toggle pin(s) from the furnishings of grave 4 speaks against cloth. Since there was no laboratory analysis of the substance in the case of the grave from Tell Arbid, one cannot state with certainty that the substance was not a side effect of mineral precipitation in the specific circumstances of this particular grave.

CORPSE ALIGNMENT

No regularity has been noted in terms of corpse alignment, which would be risky in any case due to the small sample. Each grave practically represents a different custom. There are Ninevite 5 sites where almost exclusively one alignment of bodies in graves has been observed, e.g. Tell Mohammad Arab, Tell Chagar Bazar and Tell Karrana 3 (Bolt, Green 2003: 530). It is even possible to speak of a certain

tradition in the case of Tell Karrana 3, because children's corpses in pit graves from both the Late Uruk and Ninevite 5 times were aligned east–west (Stein 1993: 203–204).¹³ To the sites collected by D. Bolt and A. Green in their article one can add Tell Knedij, where adult corpses followed an east–west alignment,¹⁴ head to the west, the body resting on either the left or right side. At Tell Arbid the body could be aligned east–west: grave 5 [see *Fig. 3*, bottom right], north–south: grave 7, head to the north [see *Fig. 5*], grave 8, head to the south [see *Fig. 5*, left]) or northwest–southeast: grave 4 [see *Fig. 6*, bottom left].¹⁵ The head to the north/northwest may be facing west (grave 4) or east (grave 7). The position of the corpse on one side with arms bent at the elbows and more or less flexed legs is characteristic in Tell Arbid. The position of the body on the side with flexed legs is common in Ninevite graves, a fact already noted previously (Bolt, Green 2003: 530). The legs of bodies were similarly flexed also at Tell Knedij (Kulemnan-Ossen, Martin 2008: 237). At Tell Chazna there were 14 cases of bodies with flexed legs, mainly (nine burials) on the right side and most often with the head to the west. In three cases the excavators noted bodies in supine position (Munčaev *et alii*

¹² See Bolt, Green 2003: 529, remains of cloth at Tell Mohammad Arab, Tell Rijim; remains of mats at Tell Mohammad Arab, Tell Chagar Bazar, Tell Karrana 3, Tell Rijim. See also Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 346, evidence of mats(?) in graves 12, 31 from Tell Chazna, and Schwartz 1988: 23, Burial 1 from Tell Leilan (“white traces around the bones indicated the presence of a reed or cloth shroud or matting”).

¹³ The two other Ninevite 5 graves are the so-called stone tombs: in one the corpse lay aligned northwest–southeast, while the other was not explored.

¹⁴ With two exceptions: grave 115 with the corpse aligned northwest–southeast, head to the northwest facing southwest, and grave 23 with similar position of the corpse (skeleton heavily damaged) (Martin 2005: 50, 52). There is no such regularity in the children's mud-brick box graves from the site, although the prevailing position of the bodies is east–west or northwest–southeast, the head being to the west/northwest (Martin 2005: 51–52).

¹⁵ In grave 4 body position is dictated by the architecture where the grave was installed. See a similar observation in Bolt, Green 2003: 530. The original alignment of the body in grave 2 could not be determined.

2004: 346).¹⁶ At Tell Melebiya, in all cases where the position of the corpse could be established, the body had rested on its side (either left or right) and with flexed legs, but there was no rule with regard to the alignment regarding the cardinal points (Lebeau 1993: 233, Table 11, head to north, northeast, east or southeast).

At Tell Arbid the hands of the dead rested in front of the face (grave 5, most probably also grave 8) or, as in the case of grave 4, the left at chest level, the right on the left knee. Also in grave 7 it is likely, judging by the position of the damaged bones, that one or both hands rested on the knees. One or both hands opposite the face could also be observed in burials from other sites, e.g. Tell Mohammad Arab, Tell Leilan, Tell Karrana 3, Tell Rijim (Bolt, Green 2003: 530), Tell Melebiya (Lebeau 1993: 230–231),¹⁷ and Tell Chazna.¹⁸ In two graves of adults (nos 92 and 93) at Tell Knedij one hand was laid

under the head of the deceased (so-called *Schlafstellung*, see Martin 2005: 50).

GRAVE GOODS

Pottery is practically the sole preserved category of grave goods from Tell Arbid. The number of vessels ranges from one (grave 8, presumably grave 2) to eight (grave 4).¹⁹ Nothing in the way of grave goods was noted in grave 7, which is hardly exceptional in Ninevite 5 graves (Bolt, Green 2003: 531).²⁰

The location of vessels within a grave is quite diverse in Ninevite 5 burials. In Tell Karrana 3 ceramics were placed next to or below the feet (Stein 1993: 203), in Raqa'i near the head,²¹ at Tell Knedij usually by the head, but in one case near the pelvis and in another by the knees,²² finally, in Tell Mohammad Arab, by the chest (Bolt, Green 2003: 543, Fig. 14). Vessels by the head of the deceased were observed also in graves at Tell Mohammed Arab (Bolt,

¹⁶ Data difficult to verify. The supine position of a corpse is most often only surmised. In graves 4 and 6 the bodies lay on the side and originally were supposed to lie on the back. Hence grave 27 is the only one with a truly supine position of the body. Apart from these three examples one should recall the destroyed grave 28 where according to the excavators, the corpse could have been deposited either on the left side or on the back, see Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 337–343.

¹⁷ See also Lebeau 1993: 233, Table 11. In two cases (graves 2241, 2243) the deceased had one hand opposite the face and the other on the abdomen (so in the description of grave 2243, but see the description of grave 2241).

¹⁸ Descriptions of graves in Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 337–343, suggest the existence of eight such burials (graves 1, 3, 8, 12, 13, 21, 22, 31).

¹⁹ The number of vessels in Ninevite graves ranges on average from two to five, but could range from one to more than thirty, see Bolt, Green 2003: 531.

²⁰ See also, for example, Martin 2005: 49–52. Four out of eight adult burials and all the infant burials from Tell Knedij had no grave goods (while grave goods were noted in each of the seven child burials and one adult burial from EJ I–II); Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 337–343, nine (out of a total of 27) graves from Tell Chazna had no grave goods.

²¹ This concerns adult burials from layer 3: a jar in two instances, two pots in a third case. The location of pots in the child burial mentioned as coming from the same layer was not given, see Schwartz, Curvers 1992: 404. Neither is there any data concerning the child burials from layer 3 in an earlier report, see Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 13–14. The only available information concerns a grave, which the excavators ultimately assigned to the later layer 2, see Schwartz, Curvers 1992: 401, note 7. A ceramic pot was found in one of two adult burials from layer 4, but there is no information as to where it was positioned regarding the corpse, see Schwartz, Curvers 1993–1994: 253.

²² According to the excavators, determining a preferential place for grave goods was not possible, see Kulemann-Ossen, Martin 2008: 237.

Green 2003: 542, Fig. 13), Tell Thuwajj (Numoto 1996: 84, Fig. 6), Tell Rijim (Bieliński 2003: 499, Fig. 2), Tell Leilan (Schwartz 1988: 19, Fig. 18) and Tell Chazna (Munčaeŷ *et alii* 2004: 337–343, graves 1, 6, 13, 21, 22, 31).

In two of three graves containing ceramic goods at Tell Arbid, where the original location of the pottery could be reconstructed, some pots had been placed in the hand(s) of the deceased and/or near the face (graves 4 and 5). A ribbed jar stood by the head of the skeleton in grave 8.

In two instances, there were ceramic vessel sets. In grave 5 a small cup was found inside a jar [see *Fig. 3:2–3*]. Both vessels were ribbed and they were associated functionally, hence their obvious relation as a set: a liquid would have been poured from the jar into the cup for drinking. Unlike other sets of a similar character from Ninevite graves, the cup in this instance is too small (6.5 cm maximum diameter to approximately 10 cm diameter of the mouth of the jar) to serve as a lid (Bolt, Green 2003: 531). The cup and jar in grave 4 may have formed a similar set, albeit separated, the small jar being placed in the deceased's hand and the cup by the mouth [see *Fig. 6:7, 8*]. The positioning of the vessels confirms their different function in the set. In this case, the diameter of the two vessels indicates that the cup could have served as a lid for the jar. It does not seem to be an accident that drinking vessels were found usually in the vicinity of the face (graves 4, 5 and possibly also the jar from grave 8).

Another example of a set, this time composed of a bigger number of vessels,

came from grave 4: a large bowl contained a smaller bowl with excised decoration and a pointed bottom, and in it an even smaller cup [see *Fig. 6:1, 2–3*]. Sets of this kind are known also from other Ninevite graves (Bolt, Green 2003: 532). The grouping of three other vessels from this grave: small jar, footed goblet with incised decoration and ribbed jar, is not as obvious. They were found together, standing behind the back of the deceased [see *Fig. 6:4, 5–6*].

One issue that arises is whether ceramic sets should be distinguished as such. The jar-and-cup sets appear to be functionally justified, but in grave 5 there was another drinking vessel, a footed goblet, found nearby.²³ Could this be a suggestion of different liquids found in the jar and goblet? It is even more difficult to interpret the content of vessels from the other set in grave 4. The small cup in the bowl could have served a similar role as the cups related to the jars, but the logic of placing these two vessels in the larger bowl is not as evident, especially if one assumes that the vessels were filled with a liquid or food at the moment of their deposition in the grave.

The jar from grave 8, part of the vessels from grave 4 (large bowl, footed goblet, bowl with excised decoration), and even the goblet from grave 5 are not quality ceramics. In the case of grave 8, one possible explanation, which could be envisaged, is the relatively limited effort afforded the burial and the individual buried in it (one vessel only, no personal adornments, simple construction of the tomb), but in the case of graves 4 and 5 both tomb construction and grave goods were not so modest. The bulging in the lower part

²³ It seems that one of the graves from Tell Knedij (no. 92) contained a similar, although more elaborate set: two pots, one cup and a bowl, see Martin 2005: 50.

of the body of the vessel from grave 5, which did not affect its usefulness, may not have been treated as a flaw, but the small hole left in its bottom during production puts into doubt its utility. Also with regard to the pottery from the richest grave on Tell Arbid (grave 4), fine vessels are accompanied by ones of lesser quality, suggesting that quality was not an issue when choosing vessels for the grave goods. It is difficult to observe in the Tell Arbid burial ceramics the principle described by S. Valentini, regarding the richness of the grave furnishings, especially a substantial number of decorated vessels exceeding that of plain pots (in terms of both luxury and common wares), deposited in adult burials from the first half of the 3rd millennium BC in the Khabur region (Valentini 2009: 65, 67).

Pottery from burial contexts will be fully published with the rest of the ceramic assemblage from Ninevite layers on Tell Arbid. Here will be cited only selected parallels for the described pottery from other Ninevite 5 sites.

The jar with ribbed decoration on the upper body [see *Fig. 6:4*] from grave 4 finds parallels among the ceramics from Tell Leilan (Schwartz 1985: 63, *Fig. 1:2*, Leilan IIIc, layer 19, pit 1; the Arbid example has a slightly more pointed base). Grave 5 produced a similar jar [see *Fig. 3:2*], although the rim here is shaped differently; a closer parallel for this jar can be cited from grave 16 in Tell Chazna (Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 340, 367, Pl. 9:2).²⁴ Considering that the one vessel in grave

8 is also a jar with ribbed decoration, this form can be deemed a leading one in the case of pottery assemblages from the discussed graves. Despite its deformation, it is evident that it had a longer neck and differently shaped rim compared to other examples [see *Fig. 5*, right].

The small cup with straight rim and slightly inward leaning walls from grave 4 [see *Fig. 3*] is a simple and common form among Ninevite 5 wares, the sole difference being the fairly thick (up to 5 mm) walls of the Arbid example. Most parallels are thin-walled.²⁵

Small cup with S-shaped body profile and flaring rim, stands on a small flat bottom [see *Fig. 6:7*]. The best parallels came from Raqa'i (Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 18, *Fig. 20: 18*, level 3), Tell Chazna (Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 269, Pl. 6:9) and Chagar Bazar (Bolt, Green 2003: 540, *Fig. 8:2*). Again, the wall thickness of the Arbid cup is bigger than in the case of the parallels. A vessel from layer 2 at Tell Melebiya, dated to EJ III, is a chronologically later version of this pot (Lebeau 1993: 393, Pl. 159: 52).

Large and gently carinated bowls were frequent in the pottery of the period. Suffice it to mention examples from Tell Leilan (Schwartz 1985: 63, *Fig. 1:5, 8*, sharper carination, Leilan IIIc, 67, *Fig. 5:13*, Leilan IIIc), Raqa'i (Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 18, *Fig. 20:21*, layer 3, different base), Tell Brak (Matthews 2003: *Fig. 5.64: 7*, HS4, level 4), Tell Arbid (Koliński 2007: *Fig. 7:F*, early EJ III) and Tell Chazna (Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 269, Pl. 6:1, 4–5). The bottoms

²⁴ The grave description indicates that the connection of the vessels with the grave is likely, but not certain.

²⁵ Among numerous parallels one should mention cups from Tell Leilan (Schwartz 1985: 67, *Fig. 5:1, 3–4*, the latter two with undercut inside rim, Leilan IIIc); Raqa'i (Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 18, *Fig. 20:4, 6*, level 3); Tell Karrana 3 (Rova 2003: 21, *Fig. 6:2*) and Tell Brak (Matthews 2003: *Fig. 5.65:13*, HS4, level 4).

of such bowls can be flat, flattened as in the case of the bowl from grave 4 at Tell Arbid [see *Fig. 6:11*], ring-shaped or rather concave, as at Raqa'i.

A fairly large bowl with excised decoration [*Fig. 6:3*],²⁶ has a counterpart in vessels from Tell Siyana (Ball, Wilkinson 2003: 356, *Fig. 12:7*) and a few pots from Tell Brak (Matthews 2003: *Fig. 5.63:20*, HS4, level 5, wider mouth, *Fig. 5.64:9* [form and decoration], 14–16 [decoration], HS4, level 5). Another analogy was found in a grave at Tell Thuwajj, although in this case the vessel was “blackish burnished” (Numoto 1996: 84–85). Moreover, a cup with pointed bottom just like the cup from grave 4 at Arbid [see *Fig. 6:2*] was found inside the bowl from Thuwajj (Numoto 1996: 85).²⁷

Forms resembling the footed goblet from grave 4 [see *Fig. 6:6*] can be found on many sites, for example, Tell Fisna (Numoto 2003: 97, *Fig. 6*, especially 6:13), Tell Thuwajj (Numoto 2003: 131, *Fig. 24:85–86*), but the Arbid vessel is different in some details. The carination is rather high up relative to the height of the vessel, making the goblet fairly deep; the body walls are not as heavily inclined as in most cases.²⁸ The nearest parallel to the form is a plain vessel from Tell Rijim (Bielinski 2003: 504, *Fig. 9:3*). The incised decoration resembles the ornament on the upper part of a vessel from Nineveh (Gut 1995: Pl. 93:1306).

The last two vessels from the grave 4 are jars. A small globular jar with straight funnel-shaped rim [see *Fig. 6:4*] is paralleled by vessels from Tell Chazna (Munčev *et alii* 2004: 279, Pl. 11:2–3, flatter or rounded bottom) and Tell Raqa'i (Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 16, *Fig. 18:8*, layer 3, bigger pot; Schwartz, Curvers 1992: 412, *Fig. 23:9*, layer 4). The other jar, a small vessel with narrow neck and flaring rim [see *Fig. 6:5*], has analogies in Tell Bderi (see Fortin 2007: 177, Pl. V:6, dated to ED II–III).

The ribbed cup from grave 5 [see *Fig. 3:3*] has a good counterpart among vessels from Nineveh (Gut 1995: Pl. 90:1272).²⁹ The best parallels for the footed goblet from the same grave [see *Fig. 3:1*] come from Tell Thuwajj (Numoto 2003: 127, *Fig. 22:44*). The single vessel from grave 2, a small jar with short neck, as if “flattened” on top [see *Fig. 2*], finds analogies among the vessels from Tell Raqa'i in layer 3 (Curvers, Schwartz 1990: 18, *Fig. 20:23*). A vase with similar decoration (but missing the rim and base) was discovered by Max Mallowan during his excavations on Tell Arbid in the 1930s (Koliński 2007: *Fig. 7:G*, early EJ III).

All things considered, i.e., the shapes, the decoration (early excised) and the parallels, especially from Leilan (IIIc), Tell Brak (HS4, levels 4–5)³⁰ and Raqa'i (level 3), the pottery from the graves, and consequently the graves themselves, can be

²⁶ Parallels for the decoration (the shape is different) have been recorded at Tell Leilan (Calderone, Weiss 2003: 207, *Fig. 5:1*).

²⁷ Here the decoration of the bowl is much more complicated than on the example from Tell Arbid: narrow bands between vertical grooves were decorated with a herring-bone pattern (Numoto 1996: 85; 2003: 139, *Fig. 28:120*).

²⁸ Compare examples from, e.g., Tell Fisna (Numoto 2003: 97, *Fig. 6:12–15*, 18–19, 21).

²⁹ Rim diameter 5.6 cm, height approximately 5.7 cm.

³⁰ Layer 5 in trench HS4 was dated to the “second quarter of the third millennium” (Matthews 2003: 113); layer 4 at EJ IIIa (Matthews 2003: 114).

dated to the middle and second half of the Ninevite 5 period.

In terms of the number of vessels grave 4 was distinctive. Also the only example of personal ornaments, a shell ring, came from this grave [see *Fig. 6:9*]. Shell rings and shells themselves are relatively rare in Ninevite graves. A ring (either of shell or bone) is known from Tell Beydar (Nonne 2008: 42, cat. no. 288), a bracelet of three such elements from Tell Melebiya (Lebeau 1993: 231, grave 2243, dated to EJ II, Pl. 138:6). Shells have been found in graves at Tell Leilan and Chagar Bazar (Bolt, Green 2003: 530), Tell Raqa'i (Schwartz, Curvers 1993–1994: 253, shell from a child burial in layer 3), Tell Karrana 3 (Stein 1993: 203, bracelet of shell among others) and Tell Chazna (Munčev *et alii* 2004: 376, Pl. 18:7, two shells from grave 22). Shells and shell ornaments occurred much more frequently in burial contexts in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Rings dated to this period similar to the example from Tell Arbid³¹ were discovered on a few sites in the Khabur basin, among others at Tell Beydar (Nonne 2008: 45–46),³² Tell Raqa'i³³ and Tell Rad Shaqrah (unpublished). Shell adornments from contexts other than sepulchral were also widespread in the EJ IIIa–b period.³⁴

The absence of personal adornments from the Arbid graves may be due to the fact that all the buried individuals were adults, who were usually not richly furnished, although there are exceptions. Grave 23 from Tell Knedij is the burial of an adult, the only one with a brick framing (the remaining adult burials were pit graves, the brick box graves belonging to children). The deceased wore a necklace and a bracelet; two toggle pins made of bronze were also present (Martin 2005: 52). The excavators believed that the adornments were meant to emphasize the higher status of the buried individual (Kulemann-Ossen, Martin 2008: 237).³⁵

It is difficult to be sure whether the absence of metal artifacts (pins and earrings etc.), which are known from other sites, like Chagar Bazar, Tell Mohammad Arab, Leilan, Karrana 3, Tell Jigan (Bolt, Green 2003: 530) and Tell Raqa'i (Schwartz, Curvers 1992: 404; Schwartz, Curvers 1993–1994: 253), is a matter of chance, a question of limited affluence of the individuals buried in area W on Tell Arbid or overall impoverishment of the Ninevite 5 settlement on Arbid. Ninevite layers on Arbid have yielded few metal artifacts so far, although the reasons for this may be different. Metal goods were

³¹ Generally on finds of this type, see Spycket 1996: 141–147.

³² These are flat disks made of shell (cat. nos 304, 334, 340, 341) or nacre (cat. nos 316, 333), see also Nonne 2008: 10, on the growing number of shell/nacre artifacts (not only in burial contexts) in the ED III period compared to the preceding period, see also 8, Pl. 6, 9, Pl. 8.

³³ One shell ring among the numerous personal adornments from grave 29/132-12, see Dunham 1993: 256.

³⁴ On the role of shell adornments in Mesopotamia, see, e.g., Gensheimer 1984: 65–73, especially 67–69. In northern Mesopotamia, rings made of shell have been recorded at, among others, Tell Abu Hafir (Koliński, Ławecka 1992: Fig. 24:14), Tell Beydar (Nonne 2008: 42–50, numerous examples in the catalogue of objects); Tell Chuera (Orthmann *et alii* 1995: 43, two shell rings, Fig. 22: 61e,f [Steinbau 1, Verfall der Schicht 2]), Tell Bi'a (Strommenger, Kohlmeyer 1998: Pl. 146:4), Tell Tawi (Kampschulte, Orthmann 1984: Pls 2a:10–11, 16a:19, 17:19, 29b:13). Shell rings have occurred also in the south of Mesopotamia, e.g. Uruk. See Lindemeyer, Martin 1993: 291–292, see also sites mentioned in Gensheimer 1984: 67.

³⁵ A marble spindle whorl was found in another grave of an adult individual, see Martin 2005: 50 (grave 115).

not so rare on other sites, being recorded in: five, that is, more or less half the graves at Chagar Bazar,³⁶ five out of 14 burials at Tell Mohammad Arab,³⁷ three out of eight graves on Tell Melebiya³⁸ and seven of 18 tombs with any kinds of grave goods in Tell Chazna.³⁹ Other sites cannot be compared here, having produced only single graves, but there were no metal goods, for instance, found in the graves on Tell Rijim, Tell Thuwajj and Tell Billa.

A general conclusion to be drawn from an analysis of the grave goods is a certain degree of observable differentiation which could be a reflection of diverse social status of the buried individuals.⁴⁰ Caution should be exercised, however, in interpreting the importance of differences

in grave goods, especially in view of the small sample of graves from Tell Arbid.⁴¹ Moreover, despite intensive excavations in recent years little is known as yet of the surroundings of the graves, that is, of the inhabitants contemporary with the buried individuals, their affluence, social stratification etc., all which could have been reflected in the degree of elaboration and effort put in the construction of the graves and preparation of the grave furnishings. Even taking into consideration the distribution over time of the graves on Tell Arbid, it is important that the area was in no way used only for graves of similar form or wealth of furnishings, which shows how cautious one should be in drawing conclusions of this kind.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The graves of Tell Arbid have contributed to the body of data on tombs and burial customs of adult inhabitants of this part of the Jezirah in the first half of the 3rd millennium BC. The studied set has not only added to the number of Ninevite 5 adult graves known from Tell Arbid, but also to the range of practices recorded (grave form, furnishings). From the point of

view of Tell Arbid history, their importance lies in what they can tell us about the area (or part of the area) directly to the north of the so-called Southern Temple. It can be deduced from their concentrated presence in this spot that the area was deserted for some time, during which it was used as a burial ground for the inhabitants of the town.

³⁶ On the difficulties in attributing some of the graves at Tell Chagar Bazar to Ninevite 5 culture, see the discussion in Bolt, Green 2003: 522. Assuming Mallowan's count, the number of graves would rise to 18; metal artifacts were discovered in five of them.

³⁷ Burials were counted separately here; two burials each in two graves, see listing in Bolt, Green 2003: 522–523.

³⁸ Graves 2209, 2232, 2243 (two pins), see Lebeau 1993: 230–231, 233, Table 11. Presumably all graves in Melebiya were child graves, except perhaps grave 1000, see Lebeau 1993: 229.

³⁹ Munčev *et alii* 2004: 351. Apart from pins from graves 1, 19, 21, 22, 31 (two pins each in the last three mentioned graves), there is also a chisel (grave 3), axe (grave 3), knife (grave 6), needle (grave 21).

⁴⁰ Observation contained already in an article by G.M. Schwartz (1987: 94), but see also Schwartz 1986: 56. For more on this topic, see Green 2003: 536–537.

⁴¹ Of the extensive literature on grave (and grave goods) interpretation suffice it to mention a summary of older theories on the subject in R. Bernbeck's study (1997: 251–270, especially 262–264) and, recently, a study of graves at Ashur by D. Hockmann (2010: 4–10).

Why was the area deserted? And does it mean that Ninevite settlement in this part of the site or the site as a whole had lessened for a time? These questions find no ready answers as yet. It also remains an open issue whether the place was chosen for a burial ground because it was abandoned or because the neighborhood of the Southern Temple or its reminiscence was somehow of importance. The excavators of the cult complex on Tell Chazna interpreted the cemetery as having been established after the sanctuary had gone out of use as a conscious reference to and remembrance of the shrine's function (Munčaev *et alii* 2004: 344–345, with reference to the case of Tepe Gawra). A similar suggestion was formulated by S. Valentini in discussing the site of Tell Barri, where two adult graves from the EJ IIIa period were discovered dug into the enclosure of a temple, which had existed on the spot. Judging by the grave goods (basalt mace head, bronze and copper pins, adornments, pottery, including the so-called Jezirah Bichrome Ware, Grey Burnished Ware and Metallic Ware) (Pecorella, Pierobon Benoit 2005: 18–20), the individuals buried in the two graves belonged to a local elite. According to Valentini, it was an attempt by this particular elite to

sustain a “ritual memory” (Valentini 2009: 69, note 13).

Considering the question of intent in burying the dead near sacred places one should keep in mind the risk of error latent in a simple transferring of spatial relations between temples or cult places and burials from other cultures (e.g. Europe from the Middle Ages to the 18th century) to the grounds of Ninevite 5 culture. One should note that at Tell Arbid graves were observed only in the area to the north of the temple. If the neighborhood of the temple (or the memory of it) was so important, one should expect to find graves in the area to the east or south of it. Neither can one exclude the possibility of family or clan relations between the buried individuals, determining the relative density of graves in this fairly restricted area.

In any case, there is little doubt that the set of graves from the Ninevite 5 period will be augmented by new finds. The extent of the area with identified graves [see *Fig. 1*] corresponds largely to the sides of the trenches and there is no reason why more graves should not be found when excavations begin in neighboring squares. And a growing sample of graves for analysis will contribute to the reliability of determinations made on these grounds.

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