Dorota Ławecka

Early Dynastic "Oval" Temples in Southern Mesopotamia

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Three sanctuaries surrounded by an oval perimeter wall and dating from the Early Dynastic Period are known from Southern Mesopotamia.[1] One (at Khafajah) is located in the Diyala Valley, the remaining two have been discovered at the southern sites of Al-Ubaid and Al-Hiba. Due to their general similarity, these structures are often seen and discussed as a single type or interpreted as the upshot of a common Mesopotamian tradition of religious architecture. In both case, emphasis is laid on the similarities they all share.[2] The present article's aim is to present an analysis and comparison of these temples' plans in order to establish what traits, if any, they had in common apart from the oval shape of their temenos.

Khafajah

In the 1930s, an American archaeological expedition from the Oriental Institute of Chicago worked at three sites in the Diyala region (Tell Asmar/Eshnunna, Khafajah/Tutub and Tell Agrab).[3] Excavations at Khafajah, concentrated on the Oval Temple area, proved particularly difficult because of the poor state of preservation of buildings affected by erosion, and due to problems with tracing the brick bonding of walls preserved just beneath the tell's surface.[4] Within the temple, three main building phases were distinguished, the first two of which are of an Early Dynastic Period date (**Fig. 1**).[5]

The spot, where the temple was erected, had been carefully prepared, with a large expenditure of work. The nearly oval temenos is enclosed with a double line of walls. A courtyard stretches between the two walls, near to the entrance into the sacred precinct; a house located there (called "House D") is interpreted by P. Delougaz as the dwelling of a priest. The surface of the courtyard raises ca. 0.7 m above the surrounding ground, so it is accessed via four stone steps. Still a bit higher (0.3 m) lies the surface of an inner courtyard, which is encircled with rooms on three sides.[6] Two wells and numerous installations were discovered in this courtyard (such as pools, podia and drains) that were probably used during rituals performed there. It may be surmised that the most important of the installations was a two-step altar abutting the face of a mud-brick platform which occupies the south-eastern part of the courtyard.

The platform, decorated with recesses, and accessible through a perpendicular stairway set against its north-eastern face, measured approx. 25 by 30 m across. Judging by its published sections and a photograph which also show the two-stepped altar, 0.75 m high, abutting it, it can be assumed that the platform was no higher than 1 m at the time of discovery.[7] In the second phase (Oval II) the platform was heightened and slightly enlarged. Only its northern part survived, with its best-preserved fragment just about 0.3 m high. Despite this, the two structures could be

[1] This article is based on an excerpt from the author's book (published in Polish) "Northern Babylonia in the Early Dynastic Period" (Ławecka 2010: 121–131).

[2] See e.g. Crawford 1977: 22, 25; 2004: 79–81; Delougaz 1940: 140–145; Forest 1999: 2 f.

[3] The results of their work became the basis for the periodization of the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia. However this periodization has recently come under criticism, as far as the validity of the Early Dynastic II Period is concerned, not only in the broad context of Southern Mesopotamia, but also in the Diyala Valley, see e.g. Evans 2007; Gibson 2011; Porada et al. 1992: 103, 107 f.

[4] As H. Frankfort put it: *I know of no other site which illustrates more strikingly the truth that excavation in Mesopotamia, in contrast with that in other countries, consist in the art not of finding things but of recognizing them when they are found* (Frankfort 1933: 58).

[5] In keeping with a periodization suggested by the discoverers (Delougaz, Lloyd 1942: end plate; Lloyd 1987: 36) Oval I was built in ED II; according to Porada et al. (1992: 105), where ED II is omitted, the construction of the temple should be dated to the end of the ED I Period; see: Evans 2007: 630. Oval II was erected in ED IIIa, while Oval III is dated to Early Akkadian Period (Gibson 1982: 537; Porada et al. 1992: 112 f.).

[6] Delougaz 1940: 21–25, 68. The north-western part of the courtyard could have been covered with a roof supported initially by mud-brick columns and, at a later stage, by pillars (Bardeschi 2008).

[7] Delougaz 1940: 41, fig. 37, pls. 8, 9; see also pls. VIII–IX: sect. 8-8'–13-13'.

distinguished from each other owing to a thin layer of pure sand which separated them and upon which some objects had been placed, most probably as foundation deposits for the reconstruction work (DELOUGAZ 1940: 65, 83–88).

At least a part of the city, including the Oval I temple, was destroyed in a conflagration that might have been caused by an armed raid. The resultant layer of ashes stretches under level X of the Sin Temple and under level 3 of houses in the area (DELOUGAZ 1940: 139; 1942: 123. pl. 8; 1967: 15). It is hard to tell how much time had elapsed before the Oval II temple was built, but it seems not to have been a long period. The floor levels of the two building phases were near to each other. The plan of the younger building repeats not only the general outline of the older temple but also copies many of its details and the new walls were built on leveled stumps of the old ones. P. Delougaz is even of the opinion that some of the older structures in the temenos continued to be in use, without any rebuilding (DELOUGAZ 1940: 75). Of an older phase of the stairs leading up the platform, just a single stone step was preserved. Based on its measurements and its distance from the edge of the platform P. Delougaz (1940: 69, fig. 39) calculated the assumed original height of the platform to be 4 meters; its much lesser height upon discovery was put down to erosion. I have certain reservations towards this reconstruction, which was often repeated in later publications. I do not think it possible that in a relatively short period of time erosion should be able to destroy a three-metres-thick upper structure of a sizeable mud-brick construction. I think it similarly unlikely that the massif had been leveled out prior to the reconstruction.[8] The estimation of J.D. Forest that the temple platform may have been ca. 10 m high is not founded on any concrete evidence and seems highly improbable.[9]

On top of the platform, no traces of any structures – not even foundations – were found. Yet, a temple probably had stood there, perhaps – as reconstructed by P. Delougaz – it was a rectangular building with a bent-axis entrance, typical of cellas in sanctuaries from the Diyala region (DELOUGAZ 1940: 65–67).

Al-Ubaid

The other two sanctuaries with oval temenos were discovered in southern Sumer. One is a temple in Al-Ubaid. The sanctuary consists of a massif platform made of red mud bricks, upon which the temple building was erected, and the courtyard of the temenos encircled with an oval wall (**Fig. 2**). However, these two components of the architectural complex seem not to be contemporaneous. The temple platform and its immediate vicinity were the object of research by H.R. Hall and C.L. Woolley; the outer wall was probed by P. Delougaz during an extremely short excavation campaign, lasting just four days.[10]

In the temple precinct, four building phases can be distinguished, the first two of which are of relevance here. The temple platform was erected in the second phase. Although the platform is often put forward as a parallel for the Oval Temple at Khafajah, it differs quite strongly from the latter. Both were constructed of plano-convex mud bricks, but only the Al-Ubaid platform was faced, at least at three sides, with a baked brick wall resting on a stone foundation. The Al-Ubaid platform's outline is less regular than the other's. Its main part is almost square, with a small protrusion of baked bricks in the north-west, housing a drainage outlet. Another drainage installation was located in the south-western corner of the building. Therefore, the platform had a system of drains that had no counterpart in the Khafajah building.

The platform could be entered from the south-east by a stairway of stone steps laid upon a mud brick ramp, which has been partly preserved (**Fig. 3:a**). From the south-west, the main part of the structure was abutted by a smaller, rectangular platform, made entirely of mudbricks. Between the two structures, in the platform massif, there was another stairway with stone steps. However, the differences between the two sanctuaries go further than the details of construction of the platforms and stairways. The platforms' localization within their respective temenos was also different: in Al-Ubaid the platform occupied its centre, whereas in Khafajah it was asymmetrically located in the far end of the courtyard.

[8] The examples from Kish (an Early Dynastic mud-brick massif surrounded with an Akkadian wall) and from Al-Ubaid (an eroded platform walled with grey mud bricks) point to a logical procedure of using the partly destroyed massifs as the cores of new structures rather than razing them to the ground.

[9] *...les terasses de Khafadje et de Tell el Obeid devaient atteindre quelque dix mètres de haut pour autant que l'on puisse en juger...* (FOREST 1999: 3).

[10] HALL, WOOLLEY 1927; DELOUGAZ 1938; 1940: 140–145; see also: WOOLLEY, MOOREY 1982: 104–111.

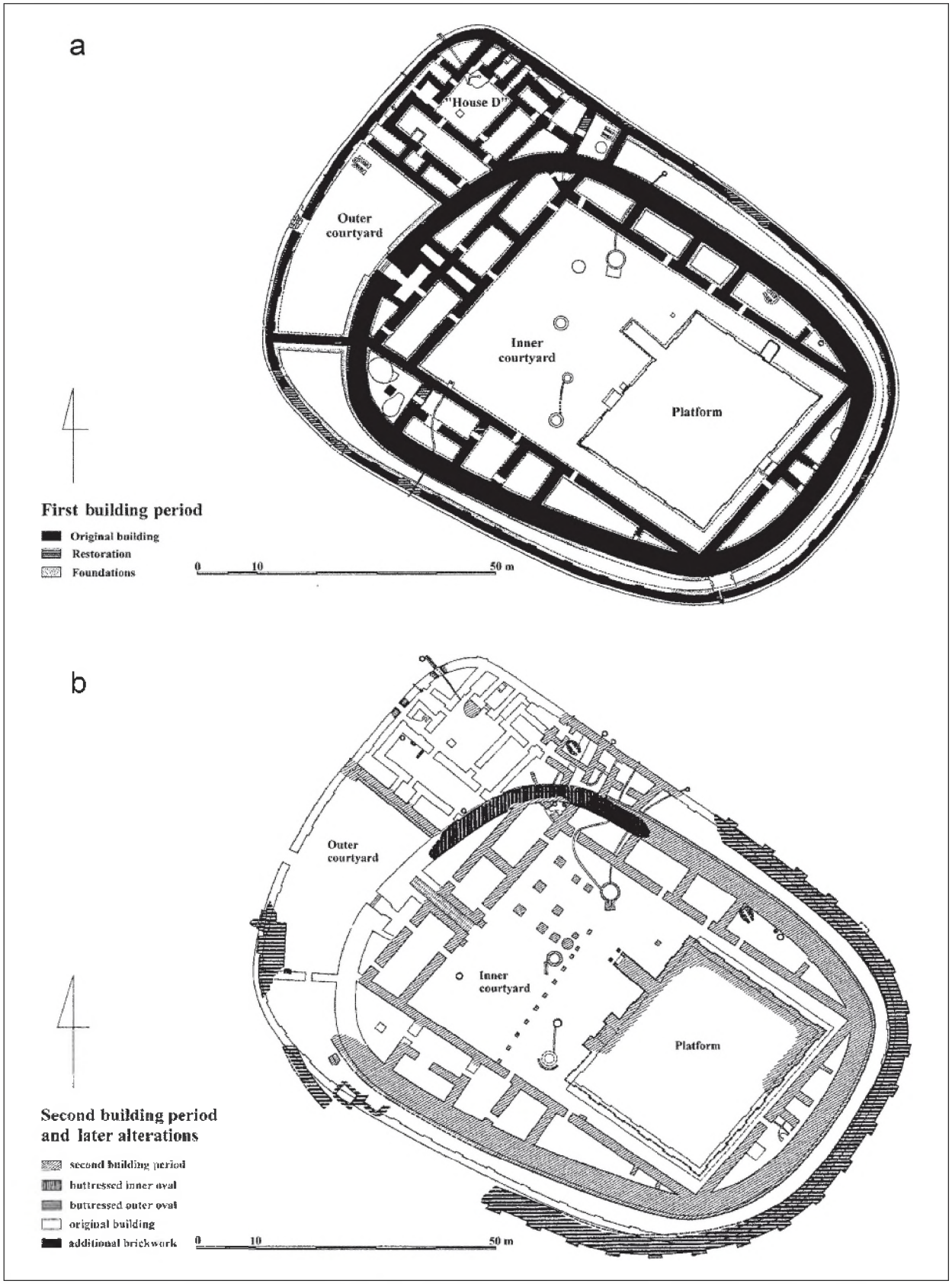


Fig. 1. Khafajah, plans of two building levels of the Oval Temple: a – Oval I, the oldest phase; b – Oval II (after Delougaz 1940: pls. III, VII).

Ryc. 1. Chafadża, plany Świątyni Owalnej: a – „Oval I", najstarsza faza; b – „Oval II".

If my suppositions concerning the Khafajah platform are right, the two structures would also differ considerably in height. C.L. Woolley remarked that the red brick massif was preserved up to the height of 3.5 m, whereas in the drawing of the platform's section he published the massif is approximately 4 m high (**Fig. 4**).[11] The top of the platform was heavily eroded, which attests to its long period of exposure to the elements prior to the subsequent building phase.[12] Judging by the angle of ascent of the platform stairs and of its drain, C.L. Wooley concluded that the platform may have been up to 6 m high (Woolley 1927c: 105 f.). Even presuming the platform to have been approx. 4 m high, it will still have been noticeably higher than the platform in the Oval Temple at Khafajah.

Although no traces of any structure have been found at the top of the platform, its existence is strongly hinted at by features unearthed at the base of the platform, on both sides of the stairway ramp. They are both structural remains (columns, over 3 m long, and what may have been the remains of roof beams) and elements of architectural decoration (such as copper reliefs and a frieze with mosaic decoration). The temple on top of the platform must have been pulled down or destroyed. Some of its equipment may have been gathered at the bottom of the platform, then the walls were demolished and the debris pushed down. During excavations, many fragments of brick blocks were unearthed, still held together with mortar; fragments of the frieze were still clinging to some of them (Hall 1927: 28–41; Woolley 1927a: 65; 1927b). Among the small finds, the most important were inscribed artifacts: a foundation tablet of A-Ane-pada as well as two fragments of stone vessels and a gold bead with inscriptions mentioning the same ruler's name. The inscription at the foundation tablet states that A-Ane-pada, the king of Ur, built a temple dedicated to the goddess Ninhursang. The same text had been engraved upon a copper figurine of a bull, which was found in the same area (Woolley 1927b: 77–80; Gadd 1927: 126 f.; Frayne 2008: 296–398). These finds allow for a reasonably firm attribution of the structure, as far as both its patron goddess and its builder are concerned. If we surmise, as seems probable, that the platform upon which this temple stood, had also been built in the times of A-Ane-pada, it would make the platform much younger than the first building level of the Oval Temple at Khafajah.

In the vicinity of the main stairway, beneath the level of the white-plastered floor dated to A-Ane-pada's reign, C.L. Wooley discovered a mud brick ramp (**Fig. 3:b**). Upon discovery, the structure, which consisted of several layers of bricks and a limestone foundation, was of irregular shape (being 3.3 m long and from 1.4 to 2.5 m wide) and it was clearly slanting eastwards. Woolley interpreted the structure as a ramp used by the platform's builders and therefore no longer needed after the construction had been completed, which would explain why it was found beneath the floor level (Woolley 1927a: 73 f.).

The short excavations of P. Delougaz concentrated upon the temenos surrounding the platform (Delougaz 1938). The research was facilitated by a line distinguishable on the surface due to a contrast between the color of bricks in the oval wall and the surrounding fill. Its outer face was probed in test trenches, which allowed for a convincing reconstruction of the perimeter wall's outline. The structure's shape was almost circular and much more regular than in the other two "oval" temples. The wall's inner face and it's thickness was not localized for lack of time, and in the report it was stated that the oval structure was most probably the outer limit of an artificial mud brick terrace similar to the one supporting the Oval Temple at Khafajah (Delougaz 1938: 4; 1940: 140). In my opinion, this conclusion can be challenged.

P. Delougaz cleared two test trenches dug by earlier excavators near the south-eastern corner of the main platform's massif (**Fig. 2**). In a sounding south-east of the façade, under the level which yielded the elements of temple paraphernalia (a layer of stamped clay covered with white plaster) floors from at least three earlier phases of occupation were encountered. Under the oldest one, there was a layer of sand (of unspecified thickness) which contained

[11] Upon comparing Woolley's and Delougaz's sections (**Figs. 4, 5**), an important difference becomes clear. In Woolley's section, Shulgi's wall stands directly upon the red massif, whereas in Delougaz's drawing, the two structures are separated by a layer of grey mud bricks, connected with a later reconstruction of the platform. Woolley (1927a: 63) writes that Shulgi's building was in part erected upon a structure made of grey mud bricks. At the same time, he keeps repeating the information of the earliest platform measuring up to 3.5 m upon discovery (1927c: 105, 107), a statement, which is in my view the most plausible option.

[12] Woolley 1927a: 61; 1927c: 105. The third building phase involved heightening and widening of the platform with grey mud bricks, contrasting from the earlier red bricks. A precise dating of this phase is not possible, yet it surely fits between the reign of A-Ane-pada, who probably erected the "red temple", and Shulgi's reign, since (as we know from inscriptions on bricks) the fourth phase was related to that king's building activities. In the site's publication, the numbering of building levels did not encompass the earliest vestiges (see below), the earliest temple having been incorporated into period I, and the later structures to periods II and III (Woolley 1927a: 61–65).

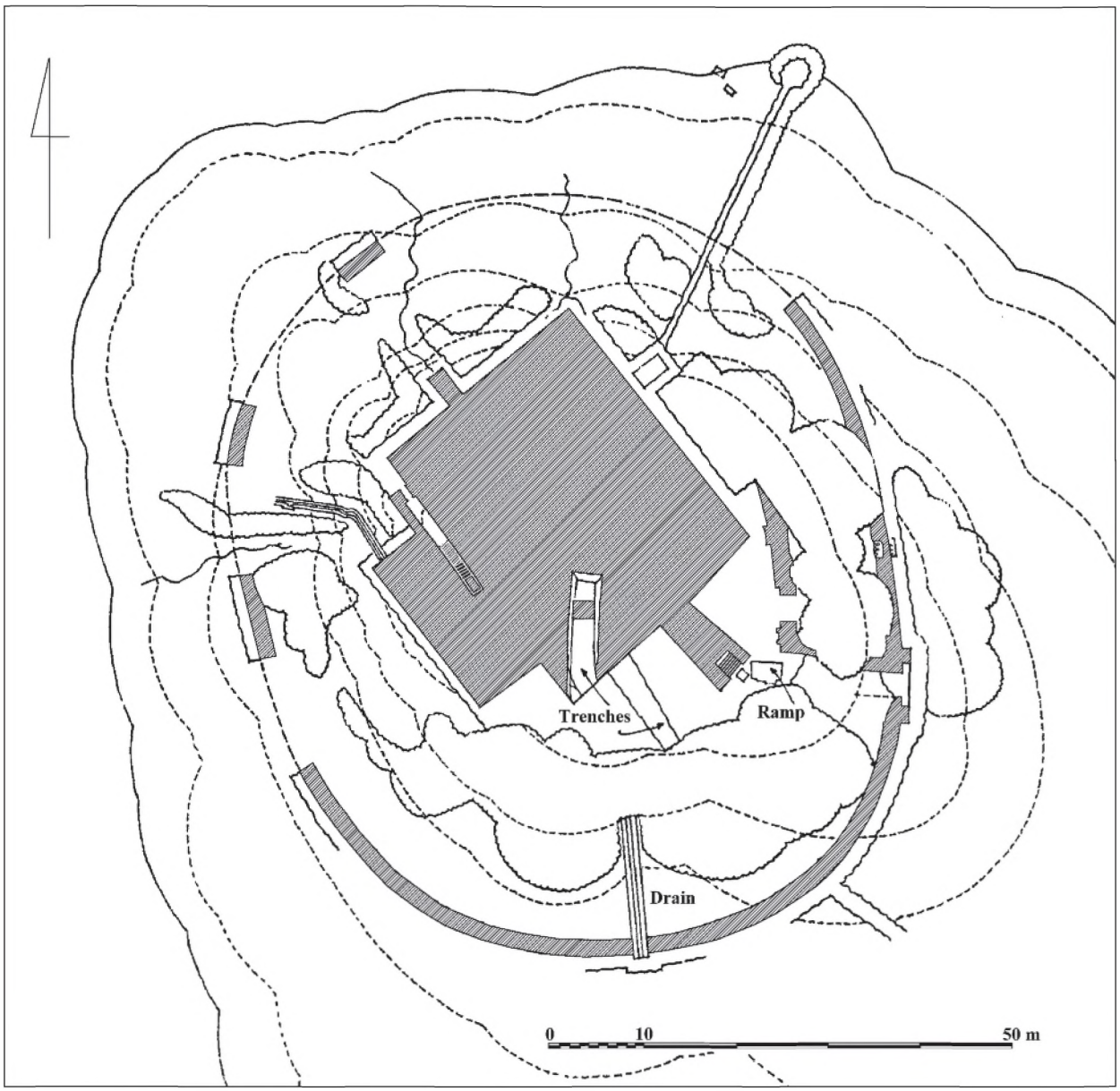
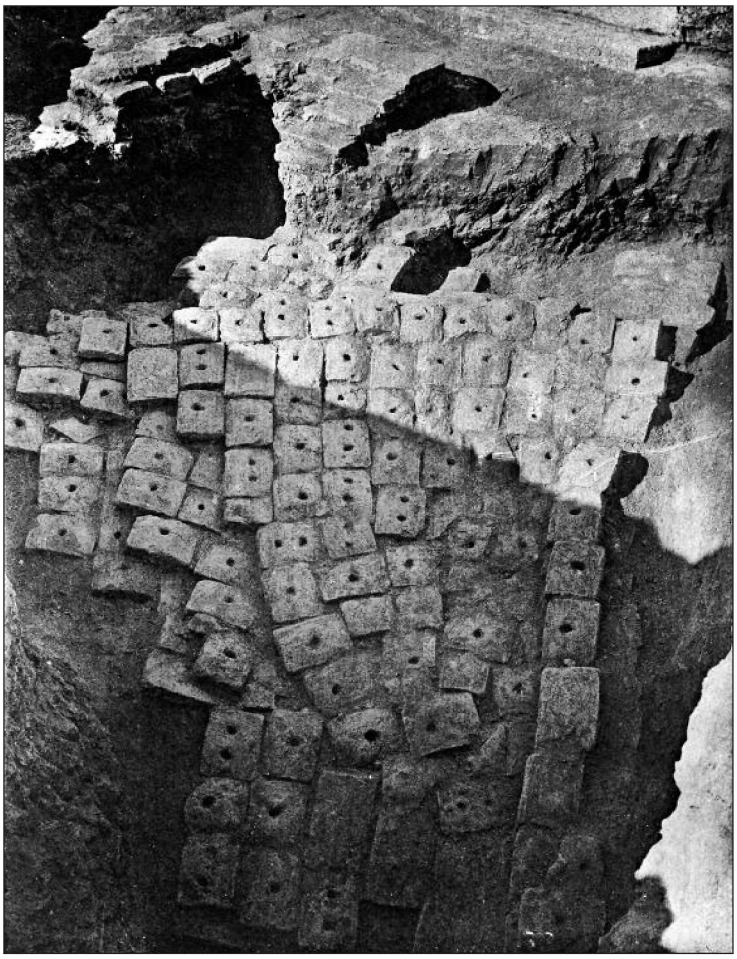


Fig. 2. Al-Ubaid, plan of the temple platform in an oval enclosure (after Delougaz 1940: fig. 125).
Ryc. 2. Al-Ubajd, plan platformy świątynnej otoczonej owalnym murem.

fragments of painted potsherds. In a published photo, the oldest floor can be seen about 1.5 m under the floor related to the deposit of temple artifacts. These levels were at a depth upon which the terrace (if it existed) should have been (Delougaz 1938: 5, pl. III:2). No terrace was found in the other old test trench under the bottom of the platform. However, P. Delougaz encountered there a fragment of a stone foundation of an earlier building, which differed from the platform in orientation. Another structure from an earlier phase of the building is the mud-brick ramp, mentioned above; unlike the stairway leading to the top of the platform, the ramp is located in axis with an entrance to the temenos discovered by P. Delougaz.

In the course of this work, a fragment of another wall parallel to the perimeter wall of the temenos was discovered; it was approximately 1.5 m thick, pierced with a doorway and had a buttress facing the platform. Because of the abundance of finds at the white surface related to the building of A-Ane-pada, the surface was cleared as far as over a dozen meters away from the building's façade, but no wall enclosing the space was encountered (Woolley 1927a: 59). P. Delougaz (1938: 5) writes implicitly that the fragment of the inner wall with the buttress was located below the white-plastered surface. This raises a question about the relationship between the oval walls and the platform. It is clear that – at least in the last phase of A-Ane-pada's temple

a



b

Fig. 3. Al-Ubaid: a – platform with a partly preserved stairway, view from the south-east; b – slanting mud-brick ramp under the floor level corresponding to the stairway (Hall, Woolley 1927: pls. 22: bottom, 23: top).

Ryc. 3. Al-Ubajd, a – platforma z częściowo zachowanymi schodami, widok od południowego wschodu; b – pochyła rampa pod poziomem podłogowym, współczesnym schodom.

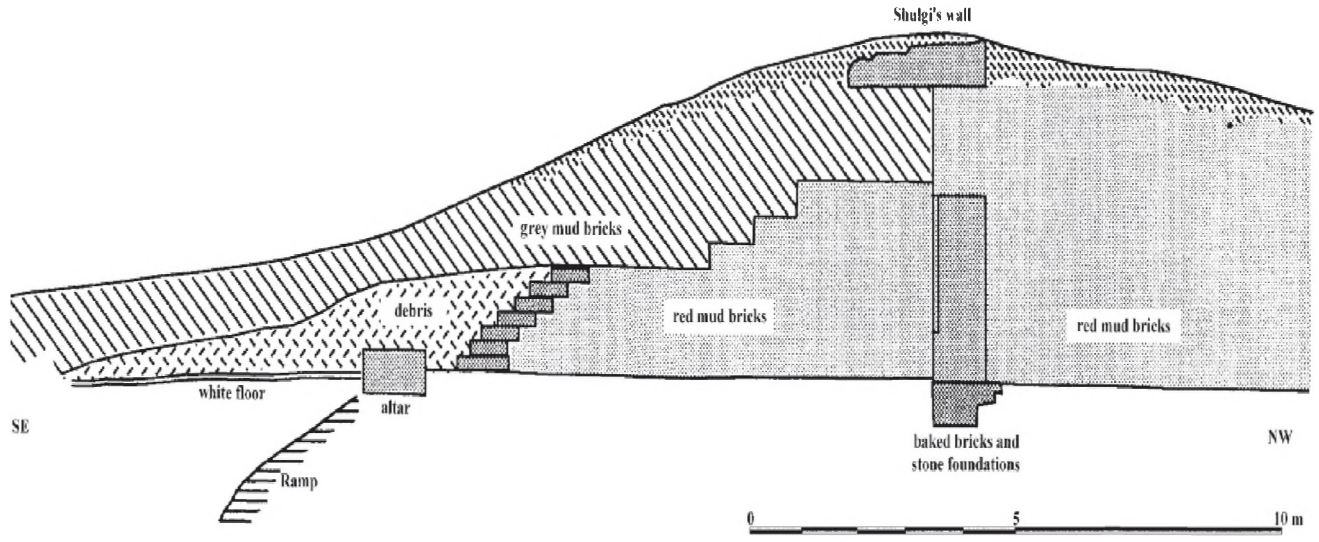


Fig. 4. Al-Ubaid, a schematic section of the temple platform (after Forest 1999: 114, fig. 18; a clarified illustration from Hall, Woolley 1927: pl. II).

Ryc. 4. Al-Ubajd, schematyczny przekrój przez platformę świątyni.

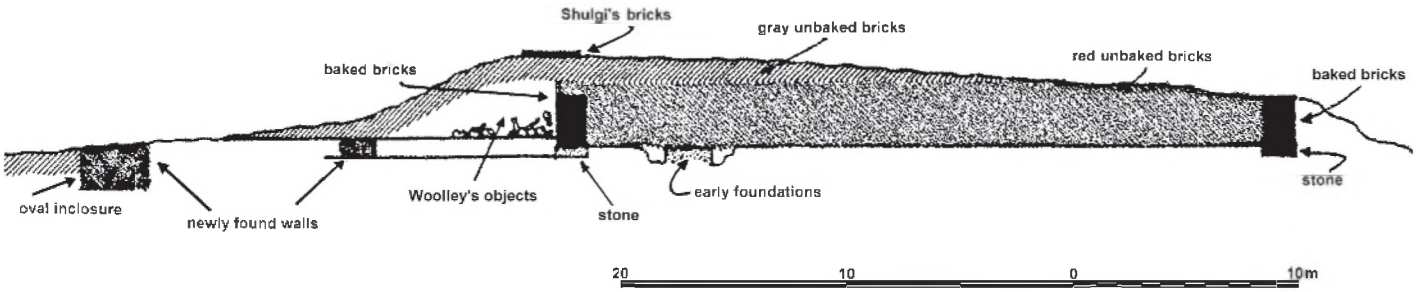


Fig. 5. Al-Ubaid, schematic section of the temple platform and the temenos (after Delougaz 1940: 141, fig. 125).

Ryc. 5. Al-Ubajd, schematyczny przekrój przez platformę świątyni i otaczający ją temenos.

– the inner wall did not exist any more, as it lay below the level connected with the temple's usage. A section published by P. Delougaz (**Fig. 5**) shows that both walls were preserved to a similar height, below the level of the white floor on which temple furnishings had been found. Since the southern face of the outer wall is in line with mud brick ramp and a stone foundation of a building below the temple platform, it would thus seem likely that also this wall belonged to an earlier phase of the sanctuary. Based upon the available information, it is impossible to establish if it endured at all till the latest phase, but the roughly symmetrical location of the platform in the central part of the temenos speaks for the existence of a perimeter wall. Therefore, the sanctuary of A-Ane-pada (at least by the end of its existence) most probably consisted of a temple resting on a platform surrounded with a single oval enclosure wall.

Of the earlier structures very little is known and the few vestiges that have been discovered cannot be soundly connected within a single framework, nor can they be dated. Judging by the very schematic section drawing, the inner oval wall is founded at a similar depth as the stone foundations discovered under the platform. The perimeter wall, probably massif, and – as it seems – built on a slope, may have been founded lower, or its foundations were laid in a trench. As mentioned above, the mud brick ramp is located opposite the entrance discovered by Delougaz. The stone foundations follow the same orientation as the ramp (east-west). Thus, it may be hypothesized that an earlier enclosure consisted of two parallel, oval walls and probably at least one building inside. Nothing of the very scarce information at our disposal points to the existence of a platform in its courtyard at that time. Even if it existed, what might be proved or disproved only by the resumption of the excavations, it is clear from the trench dug into a brick massif, that it would not follow the outline of the A-Ane-pada structure.

Al-Hiba

Another example of a temple with an oval temenos is the Ibgal, a temple of Inanna in the sacred precinct of E-anna in Al-Hiba (Lagash). Three levels were explored there, none of which was sufficiently well preserved to allow for a reconstruction of the entire complex or even of its main structure (**Fig. 6**). The southern part has been completely lost to erosion. The two older levels were additionally damaged by later building activities, while of the third phase nothing but the foundations has survived. Numerous foundation deposits with En-anatum's I inscriptions found in that level enabled a firm identification of the structure, which was erected by Ur-Nanshe, En-anatum's I grandfather.[13] On the outside, east of the oval wall, a test trench was dug in order to look for a hypothetical parallel oval wall (similar to that at Khafajah). No such structure was encountered (HANSEN 1970: 246).

The remains that have been preserved provide proof that, apart from the oval outline of the complex, its inner arrangement was quite different from that of the temples at Khafajah and Al-Ubaid. In the oldest level III, the temple was probably erected on a ground level.[14] In level II, a building of an irregular plan stood upon a low (comparing with the level of the inner courtyard) platform. In the site's publications, its precise height is not given, apart from a general remark that it was low (HANSEN 1970: 248). In the youngest level I, En-anatum builders used the stumps of older walls; they were filled up with earth to create a surface upon which the foundations of a new structure were laid out (**Fig. 6:c**). The spaces between the older walls were packed with sand and lumps of clay and covered with a layer of bricks, forming a uniform surface. According to a published section, the platform was approximately 1.5 m high.[15] Yet, it must have been much lower, when measured from the level of the courtyard, as the latter's top surface had also been considerably raised.[16] In layer I, on the courtyard side, two clay steps with a rounded corner were partly preserved by the eastern part of the platform (HANSEN 1970: 245 f., fig. 7). Judging by their appearance, there was no perpendicular ramp leading to the top, but rather such low and wide steps round the whole circumference of the platform.

Another important difference is that – unlike at Khafajaf and Al-Ubaid – the platform supporting the temple building was not a freestanding structure but it abutted at least the western part of the oval wall. The cleared wall fragments have similar outlines throughout all layers, so the multi-chamber buildings must have had similar plans. In layer III, the entrance part was preserved, complete with three doorways (**Fig. 6:a**) and a part of a wall screening the entrance (an exceptional feature) which was decorated with two-step niches. Therefore, visitors to the sanctuary entered the building standing on the platform directly, and passing through it they could step down into the northern courtyard. In the courtyard's southern part, in a "recess" between the buildings' walls in layer II, there was a freestanding podium of baked bricks with traces of numerous coats of plaster and in its northern part, there were some ovens (the podium, the top part of which has not survived, and the ovens are marked on the plan of layer II in **Fig. 6:b**).

In the same layer the south-western wall of the building is decorated with recesses, which suggests this is an outer face of the wall. If this also means that it faced another, southern courtyard, remains unclear; it is also plausible that it is a wall of an inner courtyard, or that the platform supported more than one structure. As mentioned above, the structure consisted of many chambers, however its entire plan cannot be reconstructed in any of its phases and the location and character of the temple cella is unknown. Of layer III only the entrance part was preserved; in layer II no passageways between different compounds (rooms A–F, G–J) or doors leading to the outside have been noticed. If it were not for the preserved traces of wall plaster and floors, one might think that these were the remains of the buildings' foundations, as was the case with the earliest layer I.

At Al-Hiba the tradition of surrounding buildings with oval walls goes back at least to the beginnings of the Early Dynastic Period. In an area between the Ibgal and

[13] HANSEN 1992: 206 f.; COOPER 1986: 49, La 4.4 (En-anatum I). The construction of Ibgal was mentioned in several inscriptions of Ur-Nanshe (ibid., 24–30). Two earlier layers (II and III) also probably date from the second half of the ED III Period (HANSEN 1980–1983: 425) but it remains unclear which of them should be linked with Ur-Nanshe's building activity.

[14] The author did not mention any traces of a platform or a substructure in the sounding below the floor of level III (HANSEN 1973: 67).

[15] HANSEN 1970: 245, fig. 4. The technique of building the foundations is, in my view, the only relevant similarity between the Ibgal and the Oval Temple at Khafajah. However, one needs to bear in mind that an identical technique was used also for the terrace of the Sin Temple IV (ED I) which is much earlier (just as is the case with the Oval I Temple at Khafajah) than the Ibgal (DELOUGAZ 1942: 21).

[16] HANSEN 1973: 65, fig. 4. I am not quite certain, if the entire thick upper stratum of earth visible in the picture over the floor of Temple II courtyard, which – judging by the scale – reaches 1 m in thickness, represents a levelling layer beneath the upper courtyard (I).

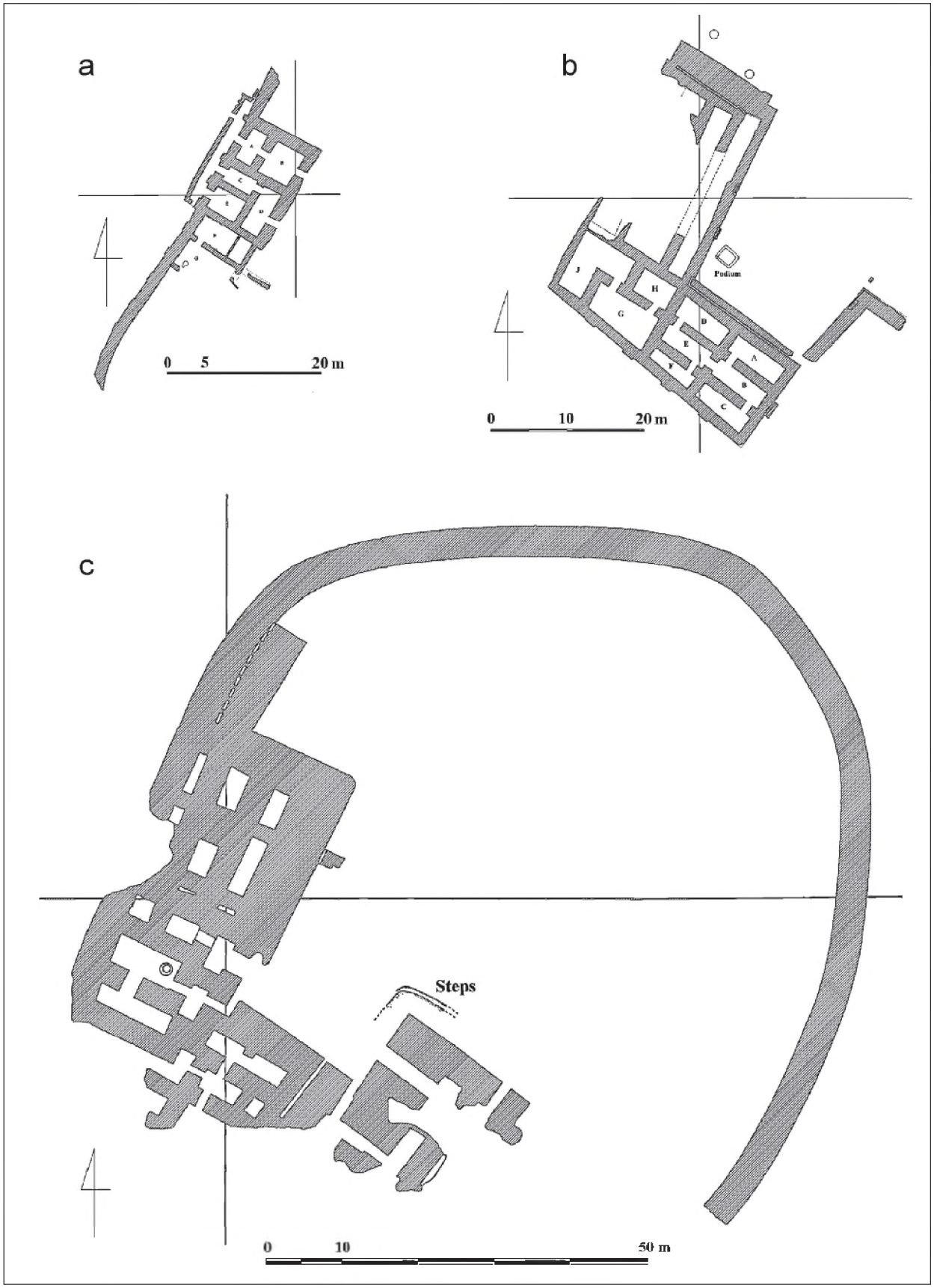


Fig. 6. Al-Hiba, plan of the Ibgal, layers: III (a), II (b), I (c) (after Hansen 1973: figs. 1–3).
Ryc. 6. Al-Hiba, plan Ibgal, warstwy: III (a), II (b), I (c).

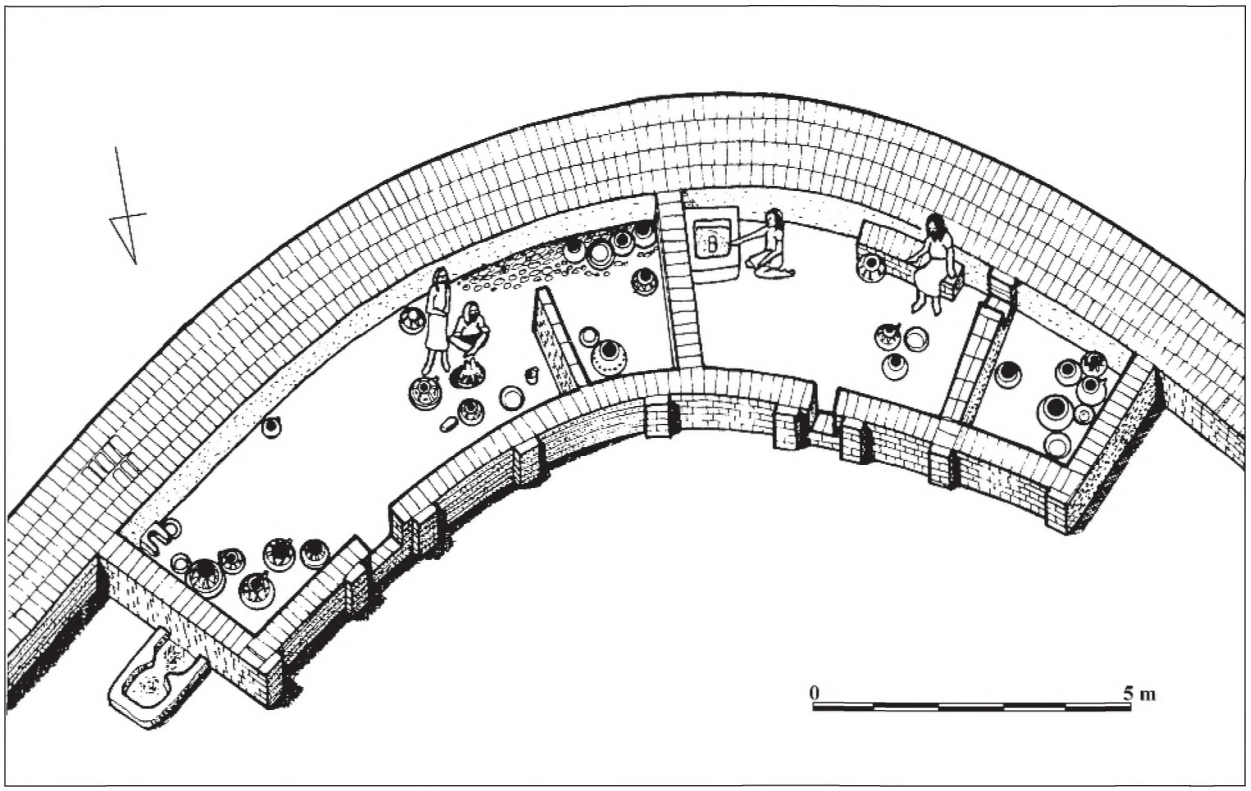


Fig. 7. Plan of a part of an oval building at Tell Madhhur, ED I Period (Roaf 1982: fig. 32).
Ryc. 7. Plan części owalnego budynku z Tell Madhhur, okres wczesnodynastyczny I.

Bagara (the sanctuary of Ningirsu) a massif, curved wall was encountered, dating from the Early Dynastic I Period. According to D.P. Hansen (1992: 210 f.), it may have been the perimeter wall of another sacred precinct, of which, so far, one building has been discovered that served some administrative and household purposes.

Round or oval building plans are also known from the north, especially from numerous sites in the Jebel Hamrin region and from sites in the lower Adhajm river region. However, the analogies do not stretch to the functions of the buildings or to their internal organization.[17] Closest to the conception used at Kahafajah, and perhaps also to that from Al-Ubaid, is a partly preserved complex from Tell Madhhur (the Jebel Hamrin region, ED I), where an oval perimeter wall is abutted on the inside by rooms accessible from an inner courtyard (Roaf 1982: 44 f.; Heil 2011: 37–39) (**Fig.** 7). At present, it is hard to tell if this northern tradition is in any way connected with the plans of the oval temples discussed above. The oldest of these is the temple at Kahafajah, being slightly later than the above-mentioned oval wall from Al-Hiba and the structure from Tell Madhhur.[18]

Even assuming that the builders of the Oval Temple at Khafajah had been inspired by the shape of the southern structures, it does not mean that the similarities needed to go further than the general outline of the temenos.

[17] For a concise summary on structures with circular plans see: Crawford 2004: 92–96; Heil 2011; Miglus 2006–2008.

[18] Porada et al. 1992: 106. "Oval" temples in Early Dynastic period are not restricted to the southern Mesopotamia, as proved by recent outstanding discoveries at Tell Mozan in the upper Khabur area. The general idea – the temple erected on the high terrace surrounded by an oval perimeter wall – is similar to Al-Ubaid sanctuary, but again the layout of the enclosure is disparate (Pfälzner 2008; 2012: 173 f., 181–183). According to the results of the magnetic survey at Tell Chuera situated still further to the west, the temple in the centre of the city ("Steinbau VI") was also encircled by the round or oval temenos wall (Meyer 2007: 137). In this case the temple itself, built on the low stone platform, is a typical example of the western temple *in antis* (Pfälzner 2008: 180).

The examples presented above demonstrate that in each case the organization of the ovals' inner space was dif-ferent, and that in none of the complexes the main temple building with a cella was preserved. Upon a closer study, I am inclined to think that the analogies are superficial and limited chiefly to the shape of the perimeter wall, which indeed in all cases follows a more or less oval outline. Nonetheless, the idea of a single, common plan for erecting such structures is not supported by the evidence, as each of the structures is distinguished by a separate set of important features, which are absent in the other structures; consequently, the hypothesis of the existence of a standard model or architectural canon throughout the region is unfounded. There is hardly any basis to talk of a characteristic type of a "Sumerian" sanctuary and of a coherent tradition spanning all of southern Mesopotamia.

Dr hab. Dorota Ławecka
Institute of Archaeology
University of Warsaw
dorotalawecka@uw.edu.pl

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Dorota Ławecka

Wczesnodynastyczne świątynie „owalne" w południowej Mezopotamii

Z terenu południowej Mezopotamii znane są trzy wczesnodynastyczne sanktuaria otoczone owalnym murem obwodowym. Jedno z nich (Chafadża) znajduje się w północnej Babilonii, dwa pozostałe odkryto na południu (Al-Ubajd i Al-Hiba). Budowle te, ze względu na ogólne podobieństwo, są często wydzielane i omawiane jako jeden typ lub interpretowane jako przejaw wspólnej mezopotamskiej tradycji budownictwa sakralnego, a nacisk kładzie się na łączące je podobieństwa. W artykule autorka podjęła się weryfikacji tych poglądów poprzez analizę i porównanie planów tych założeń architektonicznych, w celu uzyskania odpowiedzi na pytanie, jakie cechy, poza kształtem temenosu zbliżonym do owalu, rzeczywiście łączą (lub różnią) wymienione powyżej okręgi świątynne.

W każdym przypadku rozplanowanie przestrzeni wewnątrz owalu było inne, w żadnym zaś nie zachował się budynek świątyni. O ile odkryte w Al-Ubajd fragmenty konstrukcyjne (kolumny, belki stropowe) i elementy wystroju architektonicznego zdeponowane na terenie temenosu wskazują na istnienie budynku świątynnego, o tyle w Chafadży nie zachowały się żadne pozostałości zabudowy na platformie. Porównanie wyglądu platform, na których zapewne stały świątynie, pokazuje, że różnią się one zarówno wysokością, kształtem, jak i sposobem konstrukcji. Jedynie w przypadku platformy w Al-Ubajd zastosowano system drenów odprowadzających wodę, nieobecny w innych założeniach. Inne jest usytuowanie platform w relacji do muru obwodowego, a w najstarszej fazie funkcjonowania owalu w Al-Hiba, znajdujący się wewnątrz budynek został wzniesiony na poziomie gruntu, bez żadnego podwyższenia. Inaczej zaplanowano także wejście na teren temenosu – w Chafadży i Al-Ubajd prowadziło ono na dziedziniec, w Al-Hiba – bezpośrednio do budynku.

Bliższa analiza tych założeń skłania do wniosku, że analogie są powierzchowne i sprowadzają się przede wszystkim do kształtu otaczającego muru, który istotnie jest mniej lub bardziej zbliżony do owalu. Nie można jednak mówić o jednym, standardowym planie tego rodzaju budowli, ponieważ każda z nich wyróżnia się istotnymi elementami, nieobecnymi w pozostałych. Nie ma podstaw, by zakładać istnienie jednolitego wzorca czy też kanonu, obowiązującego na tym terenie. Trudno więc twierdzić, że mamy do czynienia z charakterystycznym typem „sumeryjskiego" sanktuarium i spójną tradycją obejmującą obszar całej Babilonii.