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Tell Qaramel Excavations, 2003

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TELL QARAMEL

EXCAVATIONS, 2003

Ryszard F. Mazurowski

The fifth season of excavations at Tell Qaramel took place from September 1 to October 15, 2003.¹⁾ Exploration of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic A settlement located on the lowest part of the southern slope of the tell in squares J-8, K-7, K-6 a,c, L-4 a,c, L-3 a and K-3 b was continued (Fig. 1). The remnants of the eastern part of the PPNA circular tower and contemporary structures were investigated in square K-7. The so-called "grill-building", representing probably the middle horizon of PPNA occupation at Qaramel, continued to be explored in squares L-4 a,c, L-3 a, K-4 b,d and K-3 b, which made for practically one big trench (10 x 11 m). Finally, in square K-6 a,c, layers representing the oldest settlement on the site, connected with a very early horizon of El-Khiam or Proto-Khiam tradition (mid 9th millennium BC) were expected, as had been the case last season in square K-5 b,d.

1) The Syrian-Polish Archaeological Mission was a joint effort of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of Warsaw University and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria, financed in part by the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University. We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Tammam Fakouch, Director General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria, and Dr. Michael Al-Magdissi, DGAM Excavations Department Director, Damascus, for their continuous help and kindness. Words of thanks are also due the staff of the Regional Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Aleppo and its Director, Dr. Sakhr Oulabi, in particular.

The mission was co-directed by Prof. Dr. Ryszard F. Mazurowski and Dr. Joussef Kanjou. On the Polish side, the staff included Mr. Marcin Białowarczuk, Ms Małgorzata Chacińska, Ms Katarzyna Dejrowska, Ms Joanna Gawrońska, Mr. Artur Grabarek, Ms Małgorzata Grzegorzewska, Ms Ewa Hander, Ms Katarzyna Januszek, archaeologists and archaeology students. The Syrian team members included Mr. Adel Khalifa and Mr. Qasem Al-Mohammad of the DGAM.

SQUARE J-8

STRATUM V

The archaeological features included some destroyed stone walls, contemporary pits filled with ash and potsherds, the latter

dated to the Middle Bronze. These structures all belonged to the big architectural complex from the stratum in trench K-7.

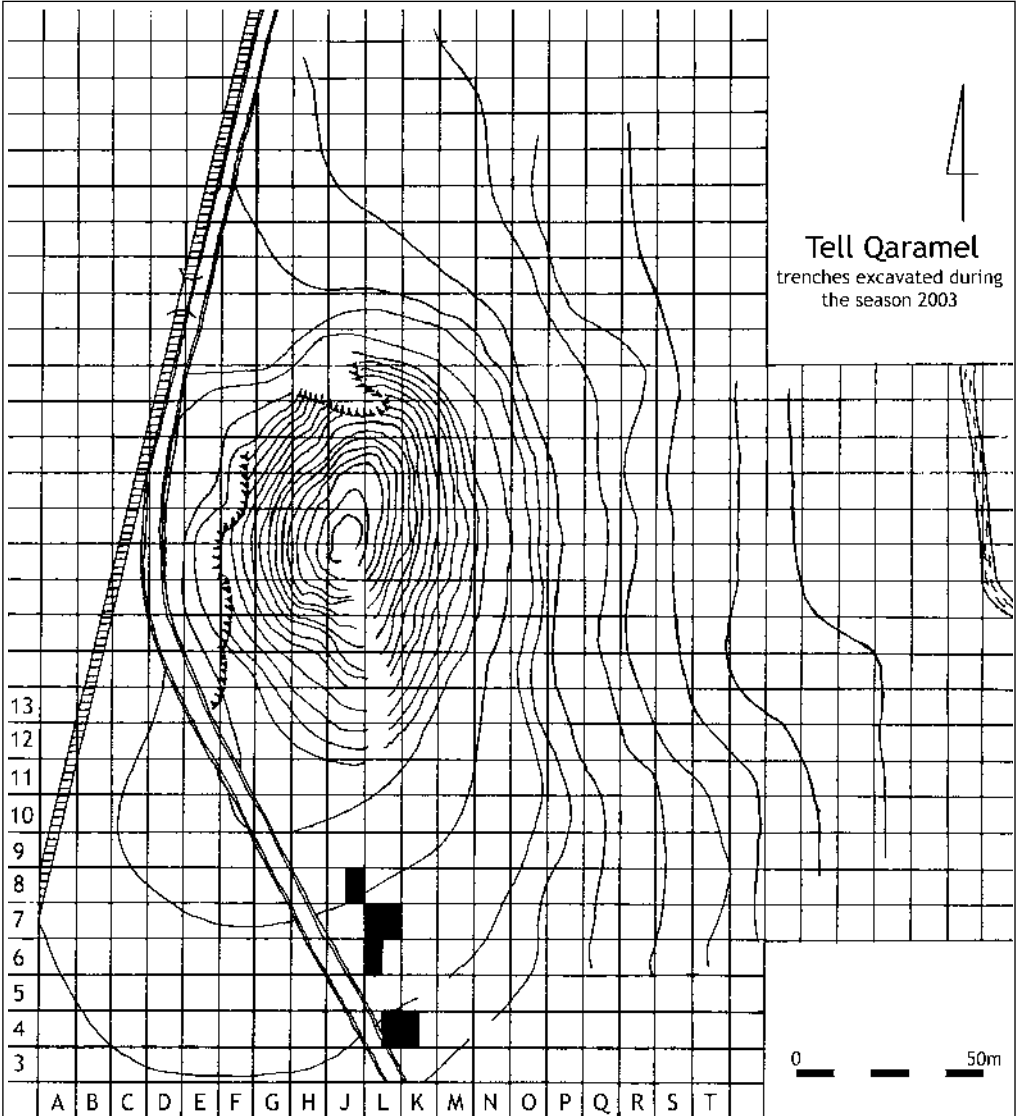


Fig. 1. Plan of the tell with trenches excavated in 2003
(Drawing after R. Maskowicz)

TELL QARAMEL
SYRIA

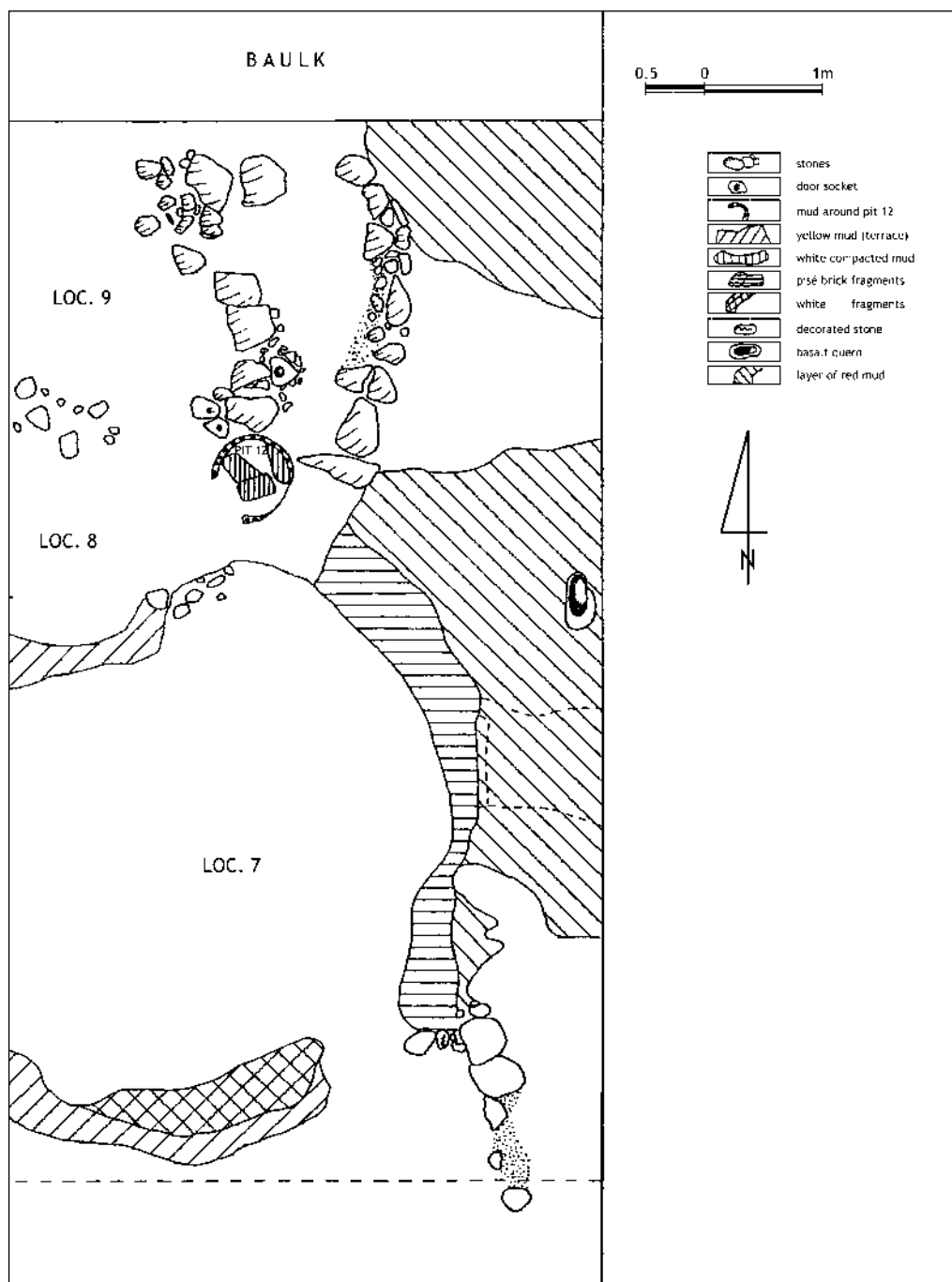


Fig. 2. Square J-8 b,d. Plan of features appearing in stratum VII, level 1,2
(Drawing M. Chacińska)

STRATUM VI

This level of occupation, identified as EB IV and characterized by markedly less pottery and more flint artifacts, was represented by nothing more than a single destroyed stone wall situated in the southeastern part of the trench. A grave located north of this wall revealed the skeleton of a young female lying in embryonic position and furnished with a bronze bracelet.

Some stone PPNA artifacts (among which there are shaft straighteners, quern and grinder) were discovered on the bottom of this layer.

STRATUM VII

The main structure of this level, identified as PPNA occupation, was an oval house oriented N-S (loc. 7; *Fig. 2*). The fill of this house contained flint artifacts, bones (including a complete animal skull) and a huge quantity of pottery from EB-layer debris. East of the dwelling was a terrace of mud mixed with lime. On its surface, a stone quern was found *in situ*, suggesting that the terrace had served domestic activities.

The northern part of the house was destroyed by a younger dwelling structure (loc. 9), which was destroyed in turn by an even younger house (loc. 8).

SQUARE K-7

STRATUM III

The main structure of level 4, which is dated by the pottery to the Middle Bronze Age, was a multi-room house, consisting of a big paved courtyard and a few rooms of different size concentrated around it (*Fig. 3*).² Parts of the house to the west and south had been excavated previously in squares J-7 and K-6, but even so the full plan and dimensions of this complex cannot be established as yet.

The courtyard (loc. 18) was the biggest part of the house. It was rectangular and measured approximately 4 m (E-W) by at least 5 m (N-S) (more likely 10 m as the northern end is still unexcavated). Underlying the pavement of small flat stones was a layer of small pebbles forming a sub-structure of sorts, c. 10-15 cm thick, which thickened toward the east in an effort to compensate for the sloping ground. A similar bedding was found under the floors of the rooms (see below).

Of the rooms surrounding the court on three sides (except for the north which remains as yet unexplored), locus 24 on the west was small and rectangular, c. 2.5 m wide (length to be established in further excavations), entered from the courtyard down a set of three steps made of flat limestone slabs. In the south wall of the room, another entrance led to locus 22, c. 2.2 by 3.6 m, situated southwest of the courtyard (only the southwestern corner was partly destroyed). Door sockets testifying to the existence of regular doors were discovered *in situ* in both these entrances. A mud oven stood by the east wall of the latter unit. The fill yielded quantities of typical cooking ware, indicating that the room could have served as a kitchen area. Locus 23 was a separate rectangular room of a size similar to locus 22, situated west of it and south of the courtyard. On the east, it and the neighboring locus 25 were destroyed by

2) Cf. previous report, *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 319 and *Fig. 5*.

younger, Iron-Age occupation. Of the latter room, which may have been another courtyard perhaps, only a small part of the floor made of flat stone slabs with a coating of lime plaster was discovered (the rest disappearing into the baulk). Locus 26 on the east of the courtyard was rectangular, about 2.2 m wide, and virtually totally destroyed by younger occupation (loc. 11). A small part of the floor and a door-socket were found near the north wall, but no evidence of an entrance. There may have been yet another room north of locus 24, but a later round house obliterated all trace of it.

Building techniques were fairly simple and typical. The walls had massive

foundations made of big stones and slabs partly sunk into the ground. The aboveground parts, from 0.6 to 1 m thick, were made in the same manner: faces of single rows of bigger stones and slabs, the core of small pebbles and cobbles. Remains of mud walls with white lime mortar found superimposed on walls of locus 26 suggest that the upper parts of some or perhaps even all walls could have been made of mud brick. Floor construction was much more varied with two other kinds of floors existing beside that of locus 25 already described above. The first kind, encountered in loci 24 and 26, was a single layer of mud plaster (c. 2 cm thick) laid

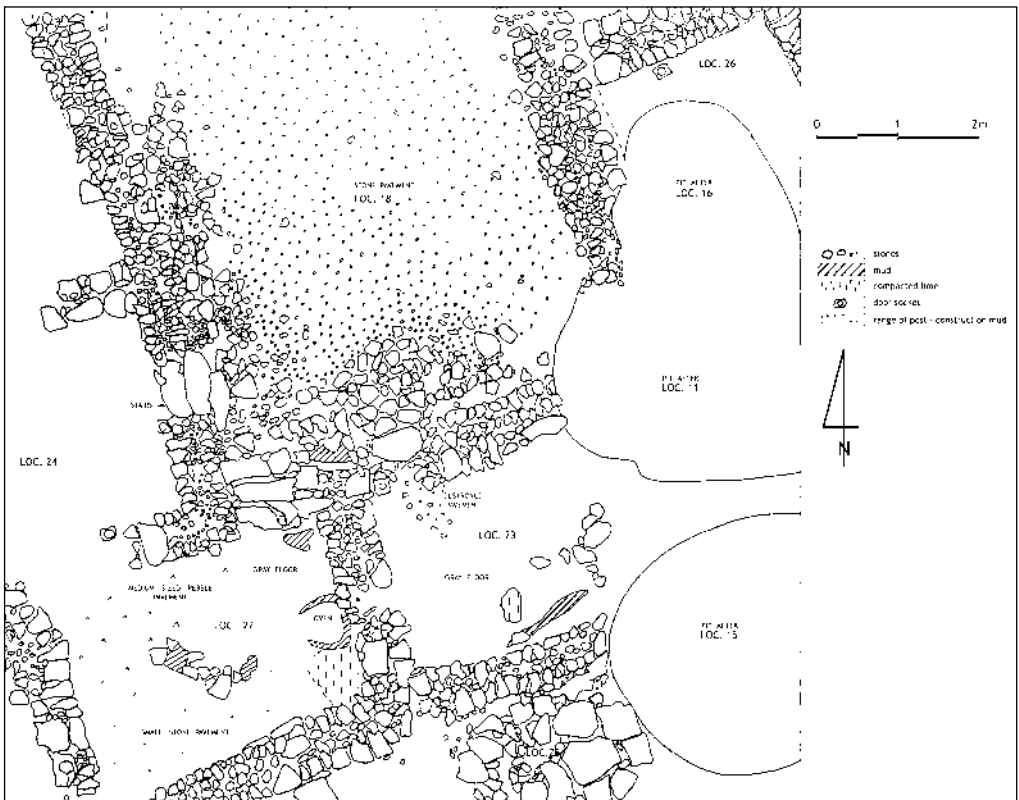


Fig. 3. Square K-7. Plan of features in stratum III, level 4 (Drawing M. Białowarczuk)

destroyed the tower wall to some extent. They were obviously built after the tower had been destroyed (the date of the destruction should be clarified by the results of radiocarbon dating of samples taken from these structures) and appear to have formed a single architectural unit – a house with terrace, three pits and a roasting pit.

The house was subrectangular, c. 2 by 4 m, divided into two rooms (loc. 29, 30). The external walls were made of mud with stones and their width was about 0.6 m. The internal walls were only 0.4 m wide and made of mud alone. The floor was of simple construction - a 1 cm thick layer of tamped mud set directly on the ground. Locus 29 was empty while locus 30 contained two hearths and a fragment of exterior wall. Hearth I was located in the southwestern corner of the unit and was markedly higher than hearth II, set in the northeastern part. A small internal wall made of mud appears to have subdivided the locus into two rooms. Interestingly, hearth I was located partly just above this wall. This would indicate two stages of rebuilding. In the older phase, the locus was divided up into smaller units and contained hearth II; later on, the partition wall was dismantled and hearth I probably introduced.

Two pits discovered north of the house (pit 6/03 and loc. 27) were both sunk into the tower wall. Inside, they were lined with c. 2-cm thick mud plaster, which could suggest their storage character. A fragment of terrace found southeast of these structures was made of mud with lime. Of the two other structures discovered just east of locus 27, locus 28 is of particular interest. It is round, semi-subterranean, c. 0.6 m in diameter. Its bottom was covered by hard mud and it had a superstructure made of mud. The fill consisted of light gray ash. Pit 5/03 was located immediately next to loc. 28. Similar to loc. 27 and pit 6/03, it differed in that it had small, obviously matched pebbles in the lining. The latter two structures appear to have had some connection with cooking and the terrace where they had stood must have been used for a range of everyday domestic activities. The flint industry from this architectural unit (e.g. large number of Hellwan points) indicates that this level of occupation should be regarded as representing developed PPNA.

Further structures of PPNA date, including a round semi-subterranean house located on the tower's eastern flank, were identified as younger than the tower. They will continue to be investigated during the next season.

SQUARE K-6 A,C

All four excavated layers of occupation (XIV-XVII) belong to the early PPNA period related to the El-Khiam horizon. The oldest layer, XVII, directly on top of virgin soil at a depth of c. 3.5-3.6 m, represents the beginning of sedentary settlement in the Neolithic. The main structure of this phase was locus 33 just beside the western baulk (*Fig. 5*). It was an oval dwelling structure with walls made of *pisé* (partly destroyed

by the preceding loc. 30). It contained a roasting pit made of mud, filled with ash. More oval hearths sunk into virgin soil appeared to the west and northwest of the house. They were filled with charcoal and stones. There is no doubt that the hearths were contemporary with the house described above.

The next layer of occupation (XVI) was represented by locus 32 (*Fig. 6*). It was an

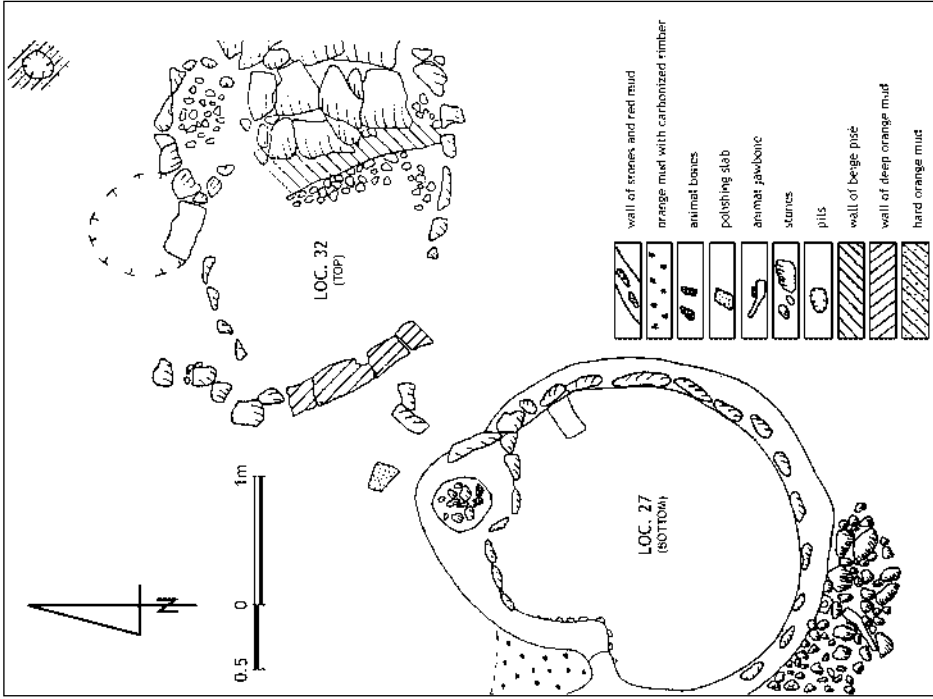


Fig. 6. Square K-6 a,c. Plan of features in layer XVI (Drawing K. Januszek)

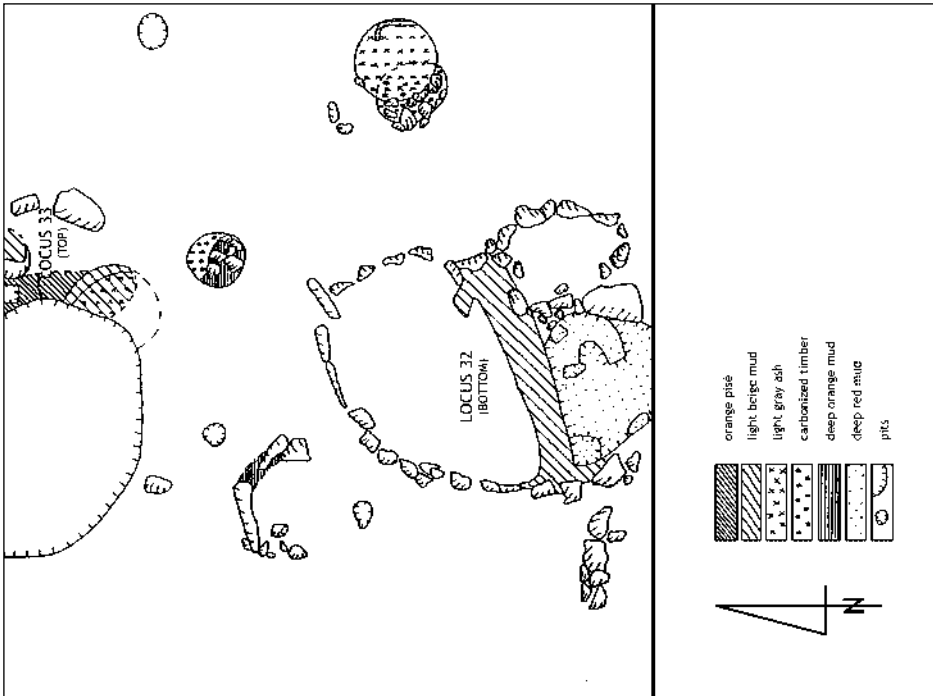


Fig. 5. Square K-6 a,c. Plan of features in the bottom of layer XVI and top of layer XVII (Drawing K. Januszek)

oval house with walls made of big flat stones plastered with mud, partitioned by a mud wall into two interiors. The western room, c. 1.2 m in diameter, had a floor of tamped mud laid on a layer of pebbles. The eastern room was a kind of small cellar c. 0.5 m deep, covered with flat stone slabs. North of the cellar, there was a small oval structure with walls made of upright pebbles. Also connected with the house was an oval subterranean hearth found to the northwest of it, about 0.6 m in diameter; an older hearth seems to have preceded it on practically the same spot (slightly further to the north and partly damaged by the later facility).

Belonging in layer XV were two oval structures unearthed in the northern part of the trench (loc. 29, 30) and a section of another one in the southeastern corner (loc. 31; *Fig. 7*). Locus 29 was an oval house, c. 4 m in diameter (only the western part has been explored), surrounded with a bench made of tamped mud (c. 0.6 m wide; c. 0.2-0.3 m high). Big pebbles were used in the construction, the inside of the house being further covered with a mud-and-lime plaster. The floor was rather typical, consisting of a layer of tamped mud on a pebble bedding. In the northern part of the house, there were oval mud bases, each c. 0.6 m in diameter.

A terrace of tamped mud extended east and south of locus 29, reaching locus 30,

which was an oval semi-subterranean building of c. 2.8 m diameter. The interior consisted of an oval pit, c. 0.5 m deep and 2 m in diameter, filled with big pebbles. The fill was covered with hard mud. A hearth surrounded with a thin mud wall was located centrally. A mud bench ran around it, on a level c. 0.2 m higher up.

Locus 31, of which a small section was unearthed in the southeastern corner of the trench, is presumed to have been yet another oval house with mud walls. Its fill (c. 65 cm deep) contained layers of ash mixed with red mud and bits of lime and charcoal. The bottom of the locus consisted of big pebbles and a layer, c. 0.2 m thick, of white ash with charcoal.

The youngest excavated layer this season, XIV, is represented by locus 27 (*Fig. 8*). *Pisé* walls (0.2-0.5 m thick) were raised on stone foundations and both floors found inside this locus consisted of a layer of mud, apparently laid before the walls were constructed. Inside the locus, there was a distinct round structure, c. 0.8 m in diameter. Its foundation had been sunk into the ground, partly destroying the older locus 30. A hearth lay to the north and a paved terrace to the south. A big animal jawbone found in the pebble pavement may have been a sacrificial offering. Near the house, there were some storage pits, hearths and roasting pits, indicating that the area was used chiefly for food preparation.

SQUARES K-3 B, K-4 B,D, L-3 A, L-4 A,C

The area of the said squares, situated on the lowest part of the southern slope of the tell, south and southeast of square K-5 b,d, has been the object of exploration for the past two seasons.⁴⁾ Layer IV with the unique "grill house" (loc. 10) of PPNA date

continued to be explored this year (*Fig. 9*). The house consisted of two parts: the eastern one measuring c. 5.5 m by 4.5 m with the inner grill construction and an oval central room some 5 m across at the longest. The walls, preserved to a height of

4) Cf. PAM XIII, op. cit., 301, 303; PAM XIV, op. cit., 323-325 and Fig. 10.

about 1 m, were made of big stones, reused broken querns and mortars bonded in mud. A Jericho-type flint celt was discovered inside the northeastern wall. The fill contained large quantities of various stone beads (primarily types XVIA1, XVIA2, XVIA3a in Mazurowski's typology, see note 5 below). The hearth in the central part of the "grill house" had a stone superstructure. The fill contained charcoal,

ashes and animal bones. A stone footpath led to it. Two symmetrical semicircular benches of mud mixed with lime lined the south and north walls of the oval part. The floor of the building was made of small-size stones (pebbles) set in mud.

The "grill house" is presumably to be identified as a community house and temple. The latter function appears to be evidenced by a small niche containing

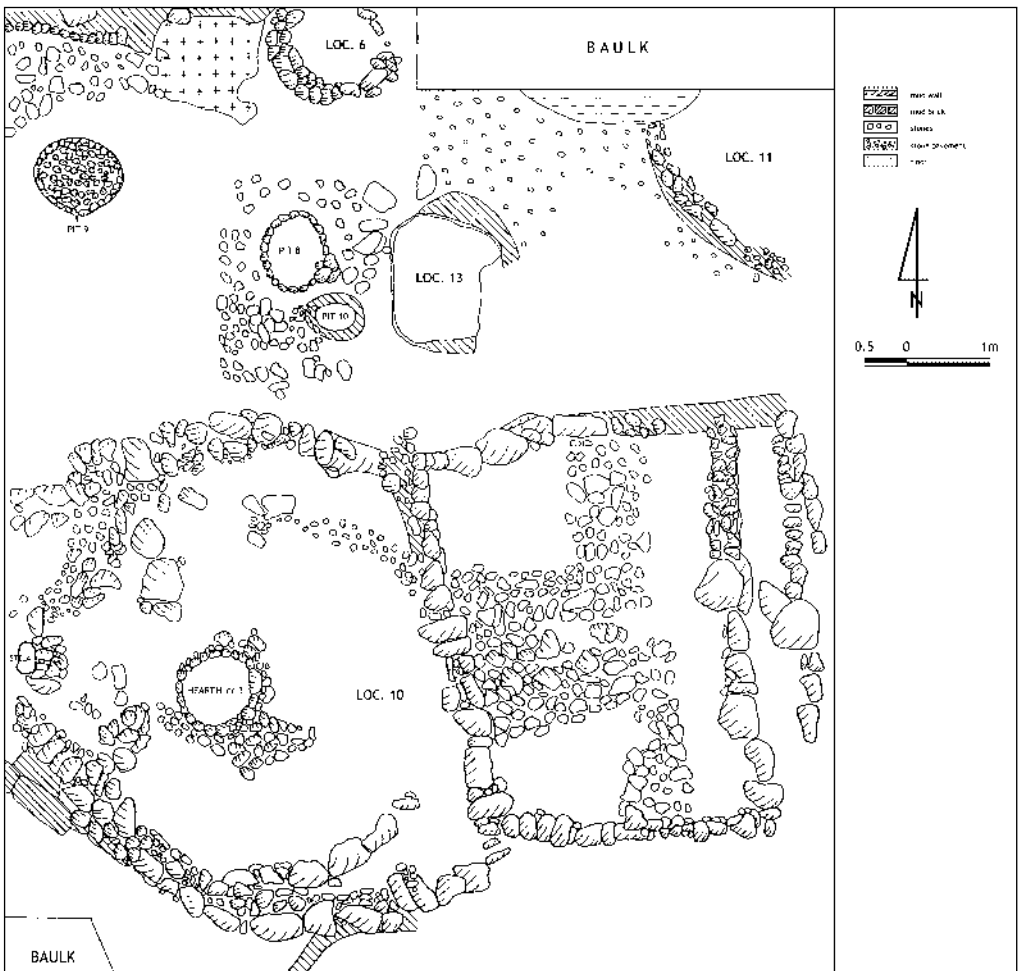


Fig. 9. Square K-3 b, K-4 b,d, L-3 a, L-4 a,c. Plan of features in stratum III, level 4 (Drawing J. Gawrońska)

a stone marker (stela), c. 0.5 m wide, which had four symmetrically arranged depressions in the center. A stone footpath led up to it. The public and religious character of the building was further confirmed by three graves set under the floor in a fashion typical of the PPNA. The skeletons were in an embryonic position, buried vertically. There was no burial inventory apart from animal bones. One of

the skeletons was missing the skull; the body must have been beheaded before burial and the head buried elsewhere.

An earlier phase of the "grill house" was identified below the bench remains, as well as the remains of an earlier occupational level, which contained fragments of oval houses with walls of mud and mud blocks (*pisé*) and surrounding terrace courtyards with pits for storage purposes.

FLINT INDUSTRY

An examination of the flint industry (Fig. 10) revealed three techno-chronological horizons. The oldest one, identified in the lowest layers of occupation in trench K6 a,c (layers XV-XVII), was connected with an early El-Khiam phase. It is characterized by the use of brown ('chocolate') flint among others. Flakes and blades were made of single polar cores as a rule. Characteristic tools included sickle-blades made of broken blades, end-scrapers or scrapers made of massive flakes. El-Khiam points from this horizon are mostly big and irregular. A few massive El-Khiam points with recesses were also found, representing a transition to Hellwan points. Also, two chopping tools and one pseudo-Levallois point were discovered (but not of 'chocolate' flint).

The next horizon, observed in the upper layer of trench K6 (layer XIV), demonstrated a change in the flint material used. 'Chocolate' flint predominated over other kinds of flint in a ratio of 3:1. New tool forms included Gilgal truncations and Jordan Valley points. El-Khiam points in this phase were made of 'chocolate' flint, very often from re-used sickle-blades. There was a growing number of perforators, borers and sickle-blades of various types.

The mature PPNA flint industry is represented by finds from trench K4/L4 containing the "grill house". 'Chocolate' flint makes for about 90% of the assemblage, the remaining part making use of other flint material and obsidian. The diversification of points is also characteristic of the phase. The category includes, among others, small El-Khiam points and forms transitional to the Hellwan type, as well as typical Hellwan and Qaramel points. Nevalla Çori points appear only sporadically. All of the above mentioned forms were made of blades struck from single polar cores. Also connected with this horizon is a double-sided flint celt of the Jericho type, found inside one of the walls of the "grill house" (loc. 10).

Another techno-chronological horizon, also connected with the mature PPNA phase, was observed in trench K7 (stratum V, level 6). Again, 'chocolate' flint characteristically predominates. Flakes and blades were made of single polar cores. Typical points of this phase include: El-Khiam, Qaramel and Qaramel II, and Hellwan. There is also one proto-Ermiinette point made of a very massive flint flake.

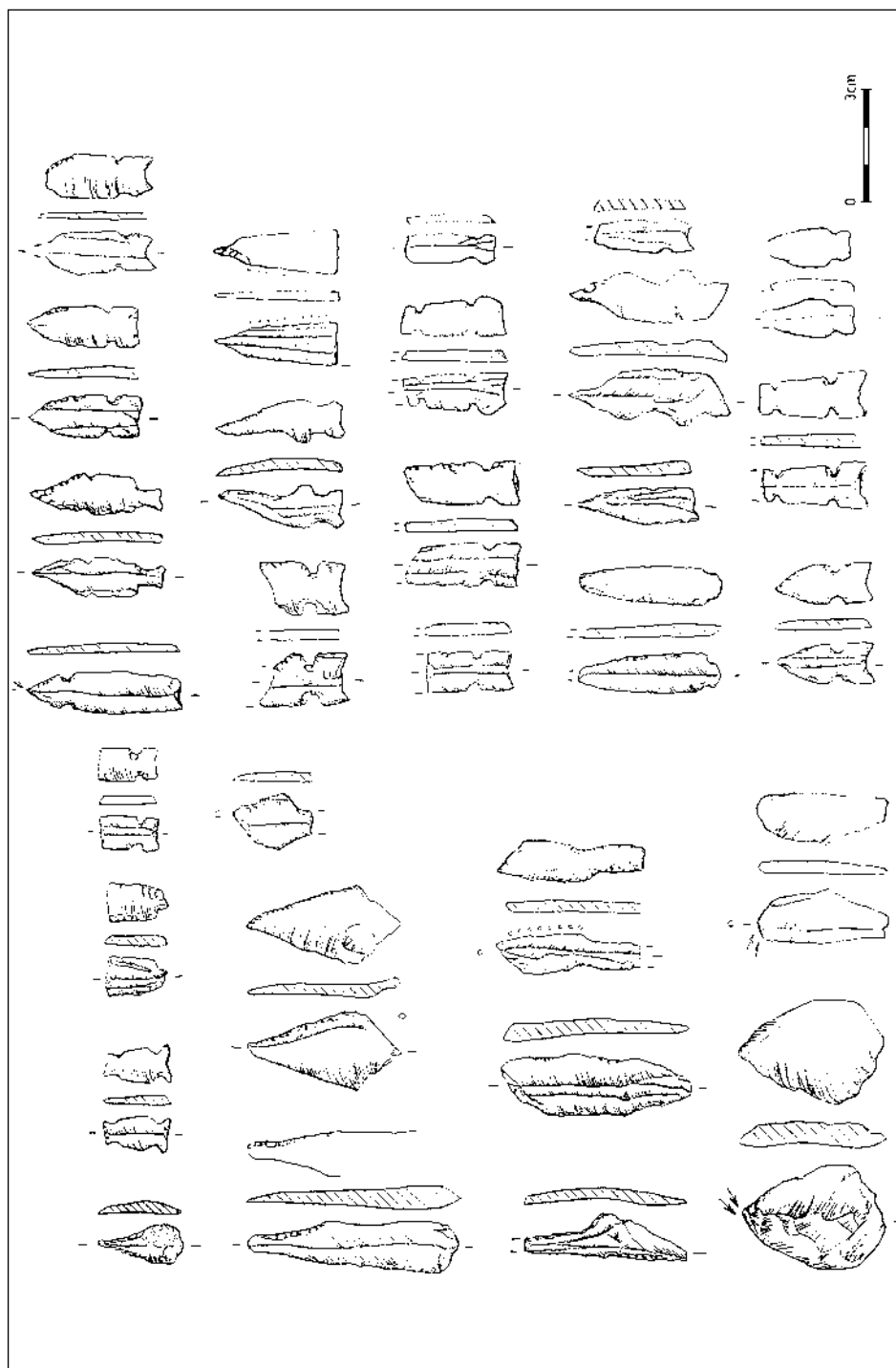


Fig. 10. Flint artifacts from aceramic layers excavated in 2003
(Drawing E. Handor)

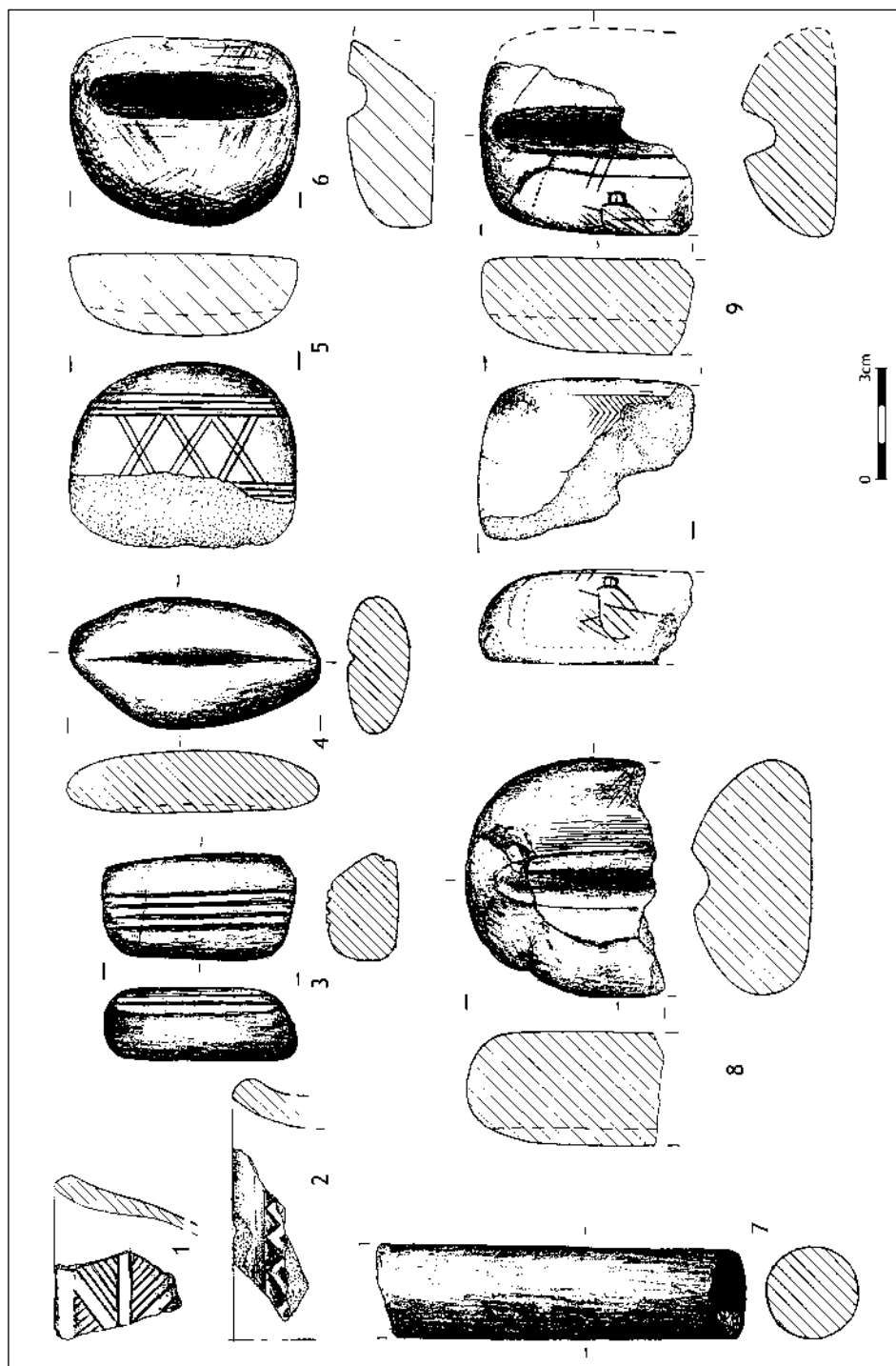


Fig. 11. Stone objects from aceramic layers excavated in 2003
(Drawing E. Hander)

GROUND AND PECKED STONE INDUSTRY

The ground and pecked stone industry from the PPNA layers is represented by 198 artifacts, including *bolas* balls (IA1),⁵⁾ pebble grinders (IIIA1 or IIIA2; Fig. 11:3,7), mostly basalt unilateral or bilateral oval grinders with traces of work on the lateral edge (IIIE1a-b, IIIE2a-b), mortars (IVA1-2), mortar pounders (VB1 or 2), celts most often made of chlorite or greenstone (VIIA), a polishing plate made of a flat pebble (IXB1), mace-heads (XA2, XD1), five grooved pebbles with one pointed end and the other broad end used as a grinder (XIB), three awls (XIC2), a chisel (XID) and flakes (XIID), a conical bowl with everted rim (XIVA1), hemispherical bowls with incurved or almost straight rim

(XIVA2), two of the three bearing Jerf el-Ahmar style decoration (Fig. 11:1,2), six shallow bowls/querns (XIVB1), 22 shaft straighteners (Fig. 11:4-6,8,9) including 18 decorated specimens (Fig. 12), all of chlorite (XVA-C). The 22 pieces of ornament included variously shaped beads (XVIA), two pendants of natural pebbles (XVIB1), a decorated plaque (XVIK), a crescent-shaped ornament separator (XVIL). Last but not least, there was an intact female anthropomorphic figurine made of soft white chalk (XVIII A). Of the assemblage, 25 specimens (12.7%) were decorated with geometrical motifs consisting of parallel lines of incisions, grooves, zigzags or zoomorphic images.

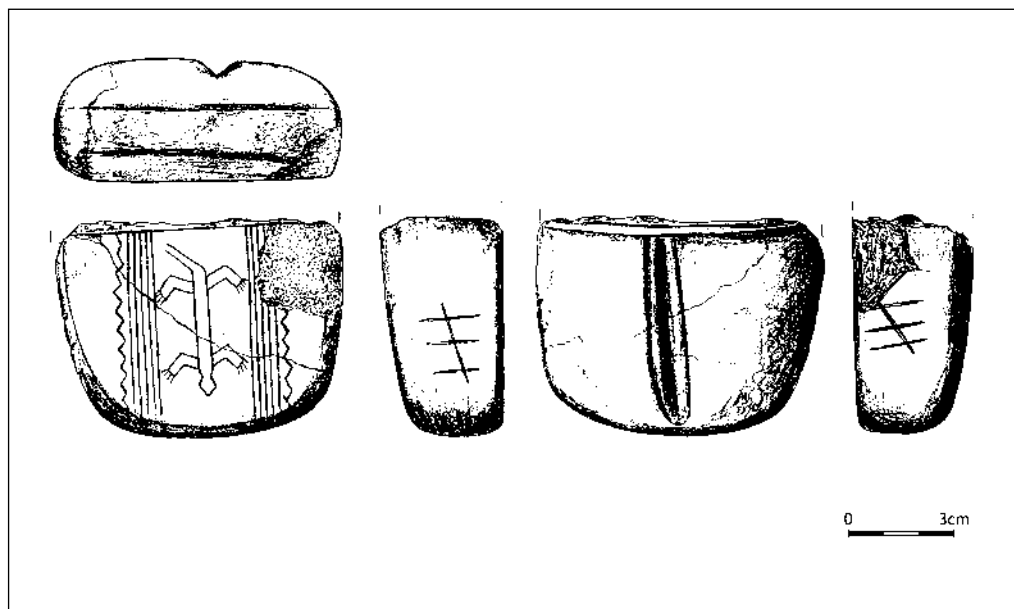


Fig. 12. Half of a stone shaft straightener with a panther image and geometrical motifs (Drawing E. Hander)

5) Classification after R.F. Mazuroski, *Ground and Pecked Stone Industry in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of Northern Iraq* (Warsaw 1997).

The predominant raw material for heavy tools was basalt, followed by calcareous mudstone and limestone. Pestles, celts ornaments and shaft straighteners nearly all were made of chlorite pebbles. Mortars and

pounders remained rare. Many of the described stone relics were found reused in walls and floors. The beads and pendants were discovered mostly in the fill of the "grill house" and its vicinity.

CONCLUSIONS

In the past three seasons, no less than 35 circular, ovoid or rectangular (two) houses attributed to the PPNA horizon were discovered. The chipped-stone and ground-and pecked-stone industries represent the full sequence of development in a period when the domestication of plants and animals had started and architecture began to be an important feature.

In the light of 23 radiocarbon dates (noncalibrated), the settlement at Qaramel can be said to have existed uninterruptedly from about the middle of the 9th to the middle of the 8th millennium BC. It was established in a very early El-Khiam horizon and was not abandoned until a developed phase of the PPNA period.