

# Piotr Bieliński

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## Preliminary Results of the Fifteenth Field Season of Joint Polish-Syrian Explorations on Tell Arbid (2010)

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# PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE FIFTEENTH FIELD SEASON OF JOINT POLISH–SYRIAN EXPLORATIONS ON TELL ARBID (2010)

Piotr Bieliński

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

**Abstract:** Excavations at Tell Arbid (Upper Khabur region) in the 2010 season focused on a previously discovered Ninevite 5 period temple (‘Southern Temple’) and its vicinity. A stepped terrace in front of the temple was investigated, leading to the discovery of a presumed ramp which apparently resolves the issue of access to the building. Another Ninevite 5 period building of possible religious function (‘Southwestern Shrine’) was discovered to the west. Further vestiges of this period in the form of architecture and an infant grave were found north and northeast of the temple. Investigations of a massive wall from the ED III period, pursued from the previous seasons, still failed to identify its function. In the course of work on this structure, an Akkadian house and street were excavated, and a Khabur Ware period chamber tomb was discovered.

**Keywords:** temple, terrace, ramp, burial, Ninevite 5 period, ED III period, Khabur Ware period, Akkadian period

The fifteenth season of joint Polish–Syrian excavations on Tell Arbid started with the laborious and time-consuming cleaning up of damages in the trenches, even in the relatively well protected areas, caused by heavy rainfall during the past winter. The exploration effort continued to be focused on the southern part of the main tell (sector W-East), especially a massive Ninevite 5 period mud-brick terrace situated in front of the so-called Southern Temple that was discovered in 2008 (Bieliński

2010; 2012). The surroundings of the temple to the west and southwest started to be investigated and the excavation of some small rooms bordering the shrine on the north was completed, concluding work on the immediate vicinity of the sanctuary on all four sides. Concurrently with this effort, the northeast extent of the so-called Great Wall, parts of which were cleared in 2008 and 2009 (Bieliński 2010; 2012), was traced in the hope of gaining a better understanding of its real function [*Fig. 1*].

## AREA TO THE WEST AND NORTH OF THE SOUTHERN TEMPLE

Exploration to the west of the temple was concentrated in the western part of square 53/55 and partly at the southwestern edge of square 52/55. The research started from two fragments of walls oriented in accordance with the cella walls, of a thickness and bonding similar to that uncovered in the previous seasons. One of these walls, running NE–SW, closed the ceremonial “L-shaped” courtyard belonging to an extensive complex situated to the northwest of the temple (see Bieliński 2012: 518–519). The other wall, which turned a corner from the preceding one, ran parallel to the west wall of the

cella, separated from it by a narrow gap filled with brick debris. Removal of the subsurface layer sufficed to show that the walls limited a large room 105-53/55, the interior of which measured approximately 4.80 m by 2.40 m. It is too early to tell whether this was part of a bigger complex developing westwards or a structure composed of a single unit, as the outer face of the west wall of this locus lies beyond the confines of the present trench [Fig. 3]. An analysis of the outer face of the north wall of this locus appears to indicate that it was a freestanding single-roomed structure [Fig. 2]. It was erected

### Team

*Dates of work:* 21 August–29 September 2010

*Co-Directors:* Prof. Piotr Bieliński, archaeologist (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw and PCMA UW), Dr. Abed Abdel Meshi Baghdo (Direction General of Antiquities and Museums)

*Archaeologists:* Polish team — Dorota Bielińska (Institute of Ancient and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences), Dr. Agnieszka Pieńkowska (PCMA UW), Mattia Raccidi (University of Naples), Andrzej Reiche (National Museum in Warsaw), Dr. Łukasz Rutkowski (PCMA UW), Dr. Anna Smogorzewska (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Dr. Dariusz Szelaż (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Agnieszka Szymczak (PCMA UW); Syrian team — Mr. Djovan Qassem, Mr. Rashad Kusa, Mr. Shiar Halaf (all Direction General of Antiquities and Museums)

*Anthropologist:* Dr. Arkadiusz Sołtysiak (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

*Documentalist:* Marta Momot (PCMA UW)

*Archaeology student-trainees:* Cezary Baka, Ewa Czyńska, Jacek Hamburg, Krzysztof Kiersnowski, Dominika Kossowska, Katarzyna Pawłowska (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

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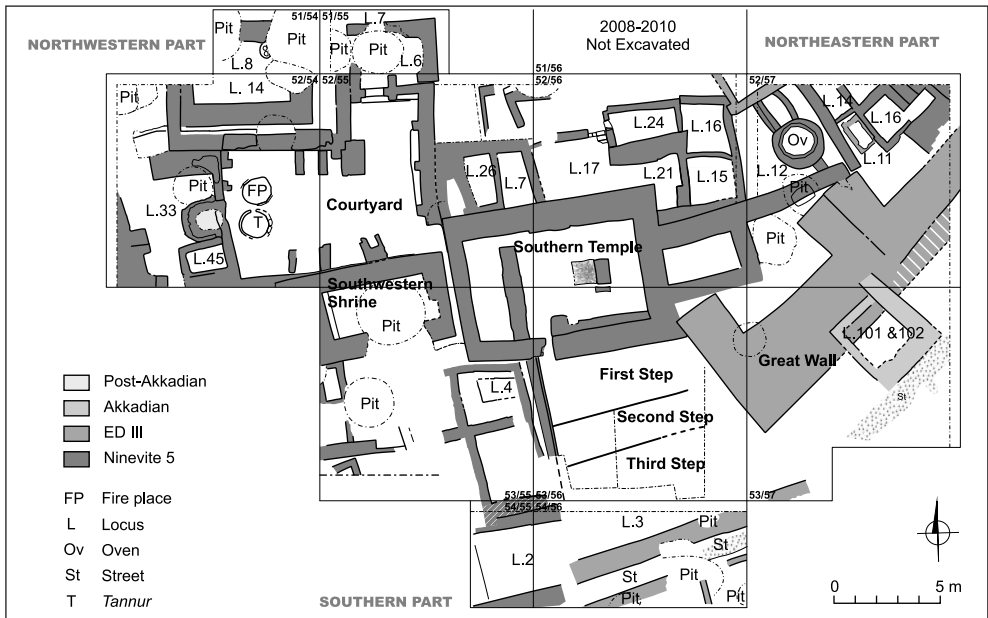


Fig. 1. General plan of the excavated sector in 2010  
(Drawing M. Momot)



Fig. 2. Cella of the Southwestern Shrine, view from the south  
(Photo A. Reiche)

of reddish mud bricks and the walls were quite wide (1.00 m to 1.20 m). Remains of this building, first of all of the floor level, were damaged severely by at least four intersecting large pits of much later date (Khabur Ware period), the largest of which (locus 103-53/55), measuring over 3 m in diameter, destroyed completely the central

part of the south wall of the room. As the entrance to the room evidently could not have been situated elsewhere, it should be assumed that it was located in the damaged segment of the wall.

Considering that the room was aligned with the same axis as the Southern Temple and that its east wall adjoined the temple,

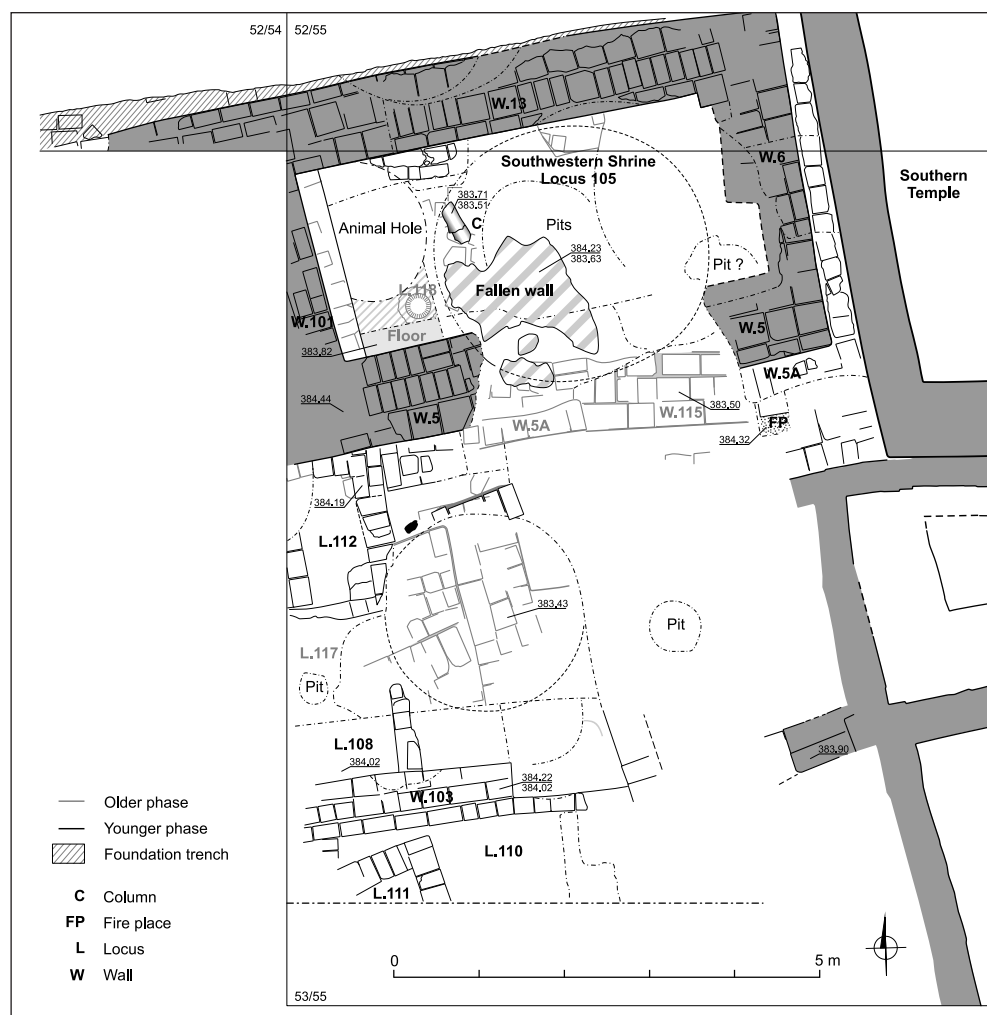


Fig. 3. Plan of the Southwestern Shrine with subsidiary units  
(Drawing M. Momot)

and moreover that it was entered from the same, southern side, it cannot be excluded that it was in fact another sanctuary. The interpretation is supported by a small column of unbaked clay found at the bottom of one of the pits. The column fragment, over 0.50 m long, was very similar to the incense burner discovered inside the Southern Temple in 2007 (Bieliński 2010: 549–550) [Fig. 4]. The Southwestern Shrine, as locus 105-53/55 has been called provisionally, preserved only restricted evidence of the original floor level (mostly near the north wall) and it may be supposed that any elements of internal installations would have disappeared owing to the later pit-digging activities [Fig. 5]. Modest ceramic evidence from outside the late pits pointed to a Late Ninevite 5 date for the structure. Moreover, the highest-lying preserved fragment of floor in locus

105-53/55 corresponded more or less with the floor level in the western part of the cella of the Southern Temple. The walls of the Southwestern Shrine were built over some older ones, seemingly of the same outline and probably same function. Little of this earlier building was actually uncovered this season.

To the south of this new possible shrine, beneath some layers containing modern remains (modern pit and foundations of a modern village house), scattered fragments of some ancient dwellings of the 3rd millennium BC were uncovered. They were preserved for the most part to the height of just one brick. In the southwestern corner of square 53/55, remains of a more substantial multi-roomed structure of Ninevite 5 period date were recorded within the same layer. The walls generally followed the same orientation as the two



Fig. 4. Small column of unbaked clay in the Southwestern Shrine  
(Photo A. Reiche)



*Fig. 5. Southwestern Shrine: view of a preserved patch of the original floor level  
(Photo A. Reiche)*



*Fig. 6. General view of Ninevite 5-period architecture to the south of the Southwestern Shrine  
(Photo A. Reiche)*

temples and were of similar width [Fig. 6], suggesting a building of greater importance than a simple dwelling. Pending further exploration, which is essential before anything more precise can be said about this structure, it appears to be joined to a group of three longitudinally aligned rooms, extending southward from the facade of the Southern Temple near its southwestern corner. Limited excavation in 2009 indicated that these repeatedly rebuilt units were in use from the Late Ninevite 5 period until the beginning of Early Dynastic III. During this time they witnessed only a slight change of wall alignment (see below).

North of the cella of the Southern Temple, in square 52/55, two small rooms (loci 7 and 26-52/55) adjoining the shrine continued to be explored, reaching now

the floor levels in both of them. They were undoubtedly an integral part of a bigger architectural complex occupying the area adjacent to the shrine on the north; on the grounds of the installations and the pottery assemblage discovered in locus 7, there is reason to believe that at least this unit was used as a kitchen at the time that the temple was in operation (for details of the exploration and interpretation, see Reiche, Smogorzewska 2013, in this volume).

Other units of the complex that were explored included locus 17-52/56 neighboring with the two small units described above, where the clearing of the outer wall of the cella of the Southern Temple brought to light the remains of a severely damaged infant burial (G9-52/56). The burial appears to have been pressed between two courses



*Fig. 7. Rooms to the north of the Southern Temple, general view from the west (Photo D. Szélag)*



of bricks. Grave goods included two toggle pins, a bone ring and beads made of diverse materials, carnelian included. A preliminary stratigraphic analysis has suggested a date for the burial in the very end of the Ninevite 5 period.

Exploration in other rooms of the complex, loci 16-52/56 and 33-52/56, reached floor levels corresponding to the level of floor uncovered the previous year in locus 15-52/56; also, the position of the entrance between locus 16 and the extensive locus 33-52/56 was located

further to the north [Fig. 7]. In the latter locus, where only the southern part was cleared, a fragment of the floor was recorded and on it, an accumulated deposit of ashes of considerable thickness. These layers produced more than 50 clay *bullae*, most of them bearing seal impressions [Fig. 8]. A large round kiln continued to be explored in this area; it had been discovered in 2008 in locus 12-52/57 (Bieliński 2012: 524–525). This kiln, as well as its immediate surroundings, have been presented in a separate study (Szeląg 2011).

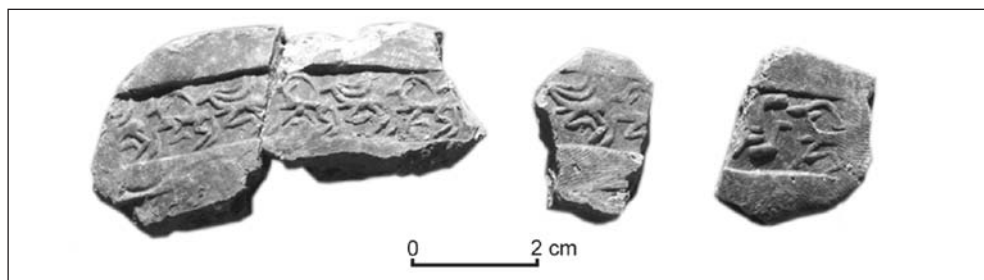


Fig. 8. *Bulla* from locus 33-52/56  
(Photo A. Reiche)

## SOUTHERN TEMPLE AND TERRACE

Testing inside the Southern Temple was designed to establish a full sequence of floor levels that could be connected with the latest sanctuary (the one with the altar *in situ* is considered as such). Two trial pits were opened inside the cella: one between the altar and the eastern wall of the temple and another one near the partition wall separating the cella from the sacristy; the third trench was excavated inside the sacristy, on the other side of the partition wall [Fig. 9].

The easternmost and at the same time the deepest trench supplied data of the greatest interest [Fig. 10]. The depth

reached was 2.05 m below the topmost floor of the “upper” cella and the east wall of the feature was found to go down all the way. Three consecutive main floor layers, separated one from the other by layers of ash and rubbish with clay and broken bricks about 20 cm thick, were identified in the trench sections beneath the top floor. Each of the main floor layers comprised a number of thin floor levels. The total thickness of all floors that can be considered as belonging to the Southern Temple is about 0.80 m. A thick layer of plaster of much better quality than the plaster on the walls of the cella appeared on

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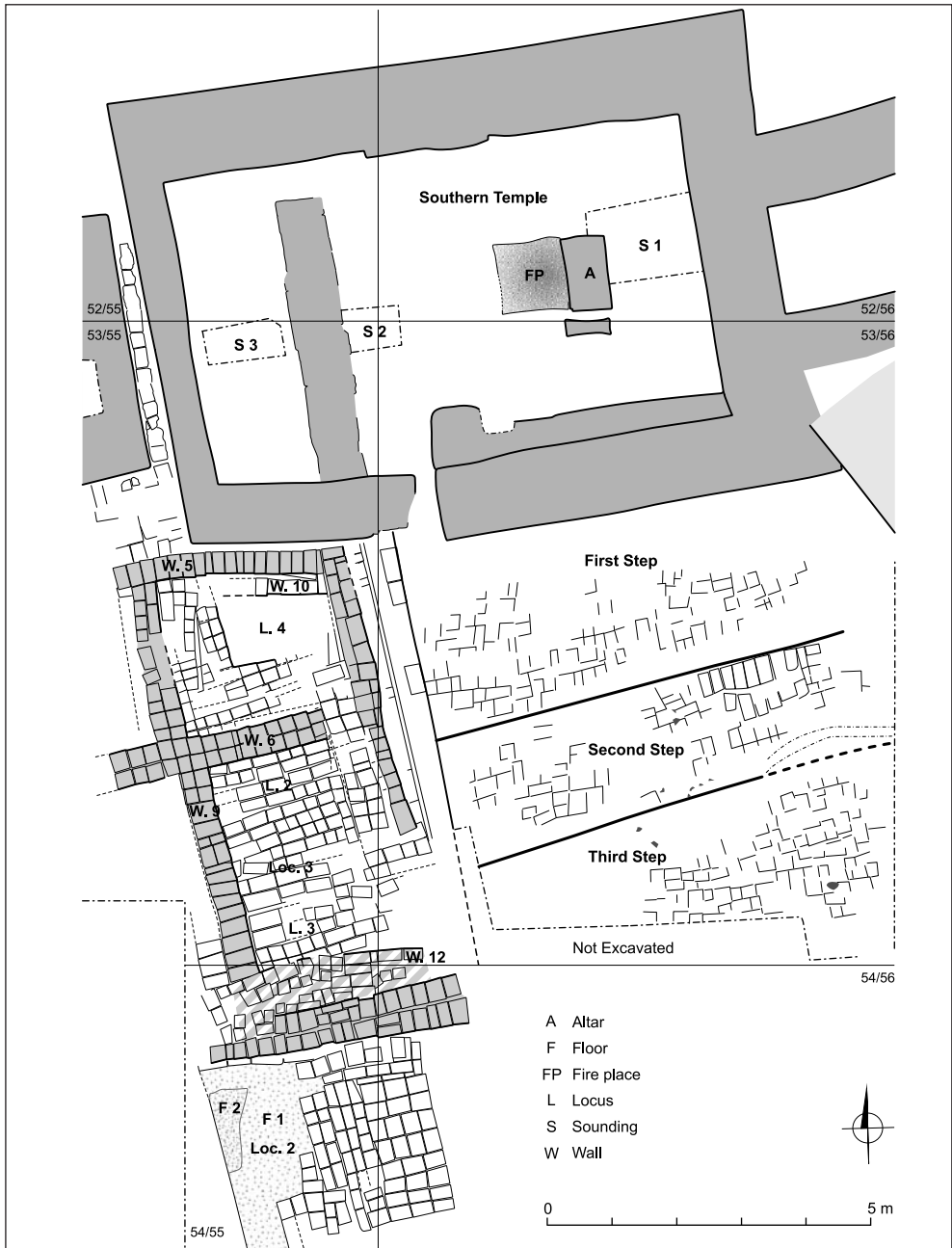


Fig. 9. Plan of the Southern Temple with location of stratigraphic cuts excavated in the cella (Drawing P. Bieliński, A. Pieńkowska, Ł. Rutkowski; digitizing M. Momot, Ł. Rutkowski)



*Fig. 10. View of the easternmost trial pit in the temple cella (Photo A. Reiche)*

the east wall of the shrine below the level of the lowest floor. This led to the supposition that this wall represented an older building that was at least partly of the same outline and it is only logical to assume that this earlier structure was also a shrine.

Meticulous cleaning of the partition wall dividing the temple interior into a cella and a sacristy revealed a regular arrangement of niches apparent in the bonding of this wall on the cella side [Fig. 11]. At first there were at least three large and deep niches, replaced over time with a series of smaller and shallower niches. During the final phase of the functioning of the cella, all the niches were filled with clay or bricks to give a flat facade.

The curious structure resembling a mud-brick platform in front of the Southern Temple has been under investigation since



*Fig. 11. Partition wall seen from the cella (Photo M. Momot)*

2008 (Bieliński 2010; 2012). An analysis of results from the 2008 and 2009 seasons suggested that the platform was not so much a base for the sanctuary as a separate structure built against the outer wall of the shrine. It also became apparent that the structure was present only in front of the shrine and that the density of diverse buildings around the temple excluded the possibility of a similar “platform” existing on all sides of the temple. The idea was formed — and confirmed by the present excavation — that the platform was a kind of terrace instead, fronting the sanctuary and conceived to make it look as if it had been erected higher than it really was.

Extending the trench in square 53/56 was aimed at establishing the eastern and western edges of the terrace, as it has now

come to be referred to, and its height. Not all of these goals could be achieved as the structure extended, both horizontally and vertically, beyond the limits of the extended trench (now measuring 4 m by 5 m). The stratigraphy and content of the 3 m-thick accumulation of deposits removed from the top of the steps of the terrace did not depart on the whole from what was reported in the previous season (Bieliński 2012) and no remains of any later structures were discovered. The excavation succeeded to confirm the presence of a third step of the terrace and ensured a better understanding of the bonding. The position of the western edge of the terrace was traced, but the eastern edge remains unclear [Fig. 12]. For now, it can be said that the terrace was at least



*Fig. 12. The terrace and Southern Temple, general view from above, from the southeast (Photo A. Szymczak)*

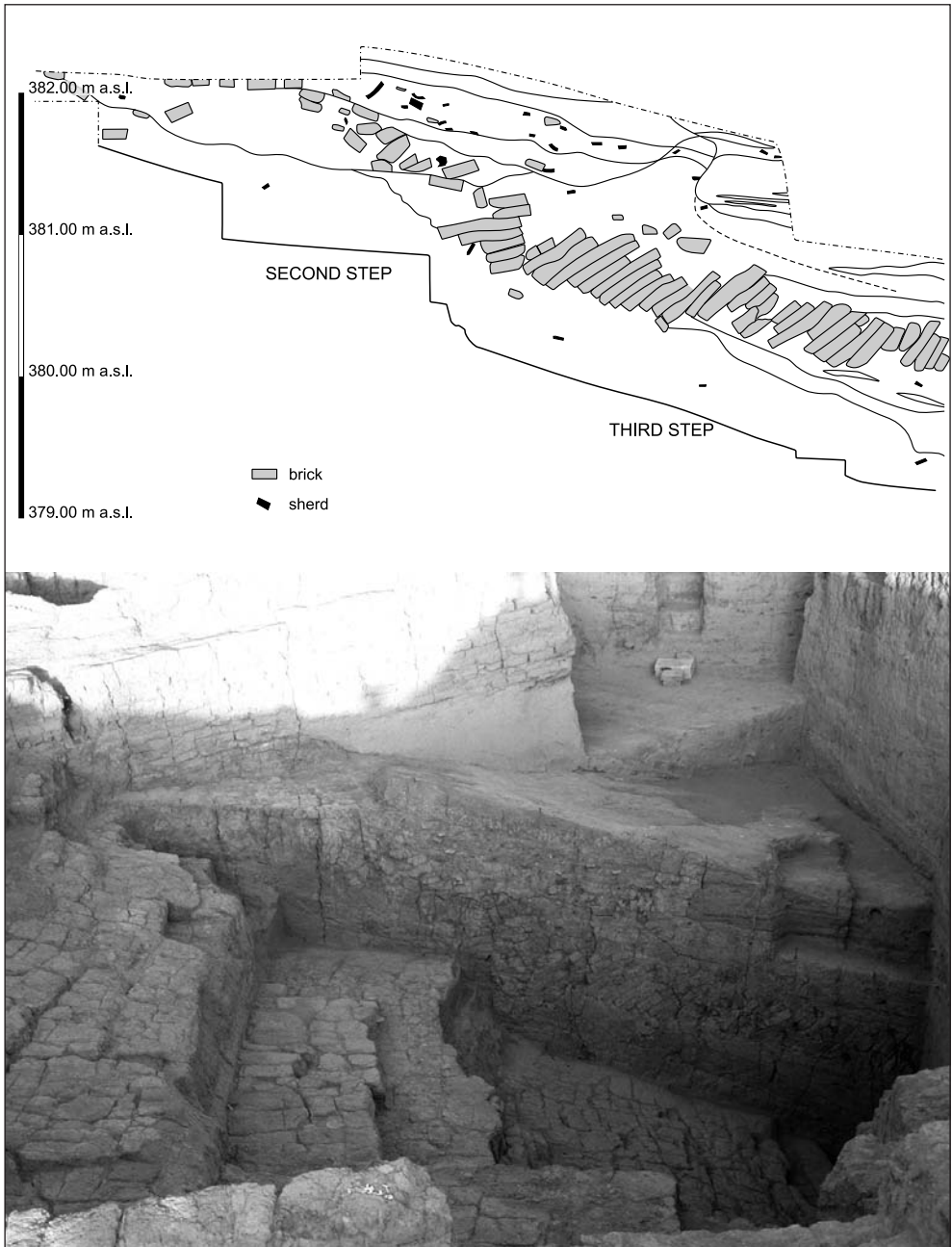


Fig. 13. Steps of the terrace: general view from the west and corresponding section drawing (Drawing E. Rutkowski, digitizing M. Momot; photo E. Rutkowski)

7 m wide and at least 3.50 m high. It was composed of three steps, of which the upper one had a more or less flat surface, while the third one had a slope that resembled a kind of glacis. The uppermost step was about 2.60 m wide and the second one, which dropped approximately 1 m below the surface of the upper one, was about 2 m wide. The width of the third one was 2.50 m and its top started just over 1 m below the surface of the second step [Fig. 13]. What the height of the third step was and whether it was actually the lowest one cannot be resolved without further excavations.

On the eastern side, the terrace did not end in line with the southwestern corner of the Southern Temple facade, which would seem to be a logical solution, but earlier than that, about half a meter to the west of the sanctuary entrance. It means

that, for reasons unknown, the terrace was present only along part of the facade of the shrine. On the west, it was framed by a brick wall running at right angle to the temple wall, averaging three bricks in thickness (1.20 m in width) [Fig. 15]. This wall (W20- 53/55) extended at least a meter above the steps of the terrace and was recorded over a distance of more than 4 m. It had three rooms adjoining it on the western side, their presence signaled already above [Fig. 16]. The northernmost of them (locus 4-53/55) was built against the south wall of the Southern Temple as an independent structure and measured approximately 3.25 m by 2.00 m, while two others seem to have formed a separate structure divided by a meager partition wall. These three rooms appeared to be contemporary with the latest phase of temple use. An Early Dynastic III child

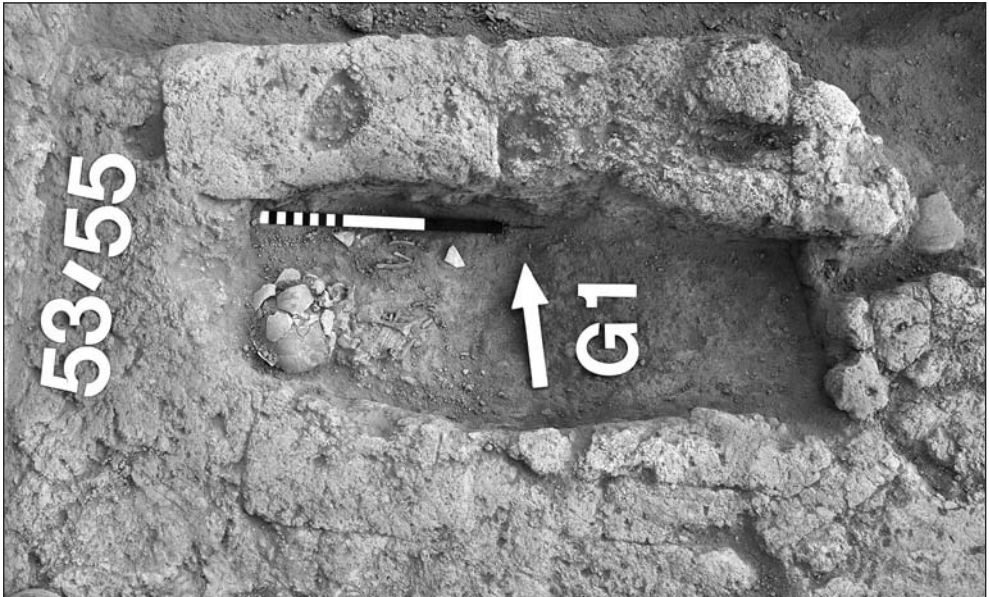


Fig. 14 Grave from locus 3-53/55  
(Photo D. Szélag)

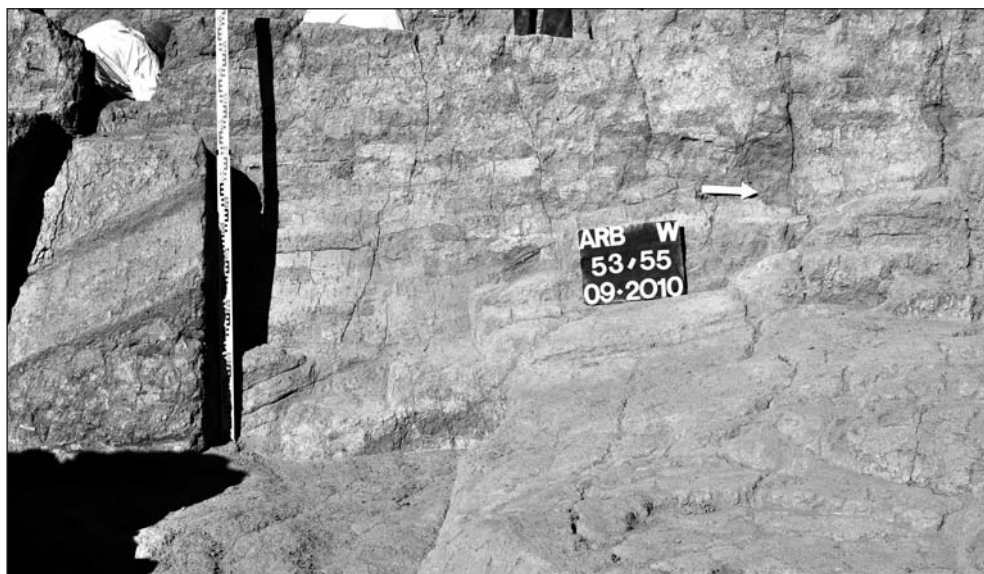


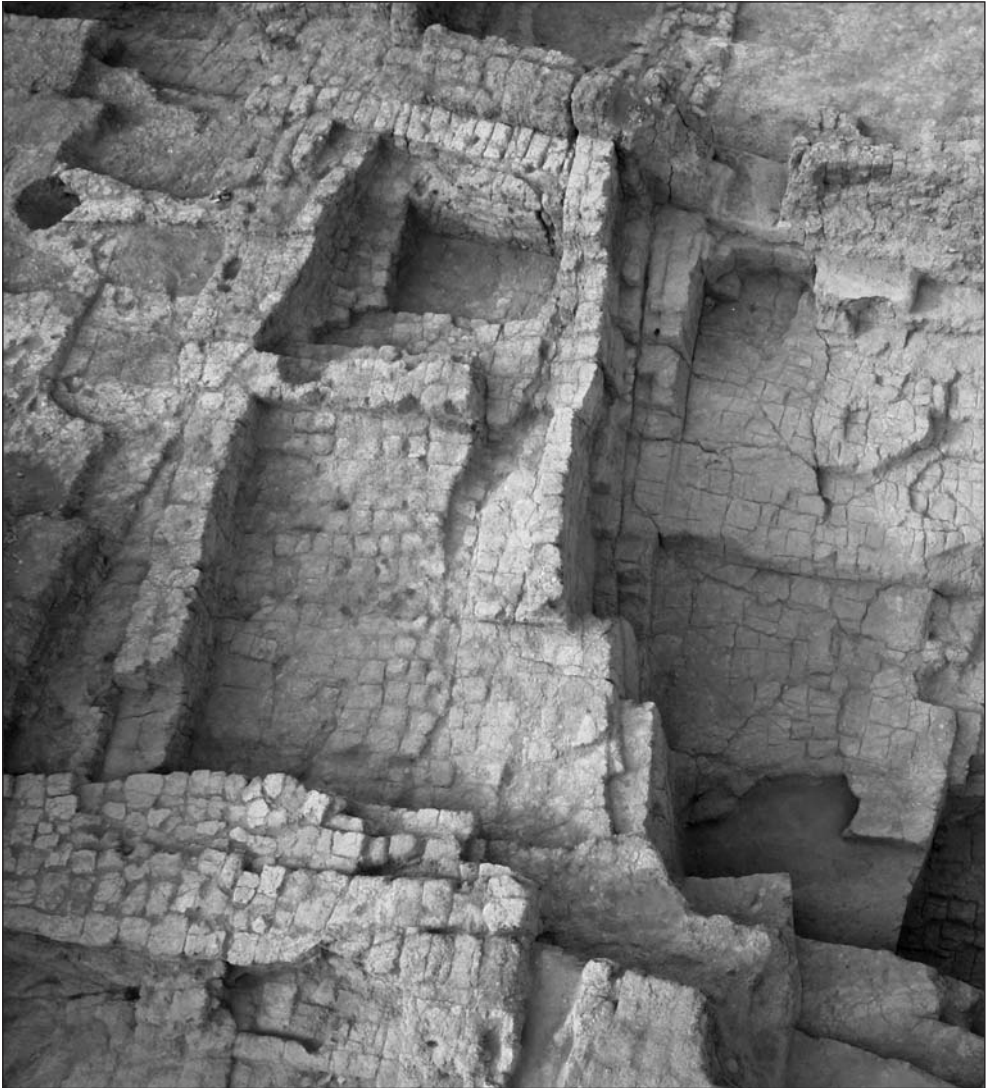
Fig. 15. Wall closing the ramp leading to the temple from the east, view from the east  
(Photo A. Reiche)



Fig. 16. Three units on the ramp, general view from the west  
(Photo A. Pieńkowska)

burial was found in a casing of mud brick beneath the floor level in locus 3-53/55 [Fig. 14]. The door openings leading to them were obviously placed on the south side, but no traces of these have been found. Below the lowest floor levels of both

the southern rooms a fairly homogenous mud-brick pavement was discovered, sloping down to the south at an angle of approximately 12 degrees (as measured on a short stretch of the pavement). This well-laid pavement, about 2.25 m wide, gave the



*Fig. 17. General view of the ramp  
(Photo A. Soltysiak)*



impression of being a kind of ramp leading up from some lower level toward one or both temples [Fig. 17]. Two patches of the pavement, totaling in length more than 6 m, were exposed by the end of the season. It should be emphasized that in no other place on Tell Arbid, shrines included, have there been any remains of this kind of brick pavements in layers of Ninevite 5 date.

Among the numerous problems concerning the terrace of the Southern Temple there is the issue of how people entered the shrine, considering how high the terrace steps were. The present hypothesis is that the “ramp” mentioned above may have served as the main access way to the Southern Temple during the latest stage of its functioning. The ramp would have been obsolete by the time that accumulating

ashes and clay formed a veritable slope on the terrace (Bieliński 2012: 530–531), creating a base for a number of smaller units (loci 2 and 3-53/59) to be raised on the spot. The brick pavement unearthed in square 53/55 may also have had a predecessor. The surface of the ramp excavated this year was on a level much too high to correspond with the Southern Temple and must have served its successor. It is essential, therefore, to check whether there are any remains of an older structure of the same type below the ramp. The exact relation between the wall bordering the ramp and the terrace needs also to be précised. It is noteworthy that cleaning of the eastern part of the terrace yielded numerous fragments of Ninevite 5 pottery, as well as some clay *bullae* with seal impressions.

## “GREAT WALL” EAST OF THE TEMPLE AND ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES

Further to the east, at the eastern border of Sector W, investigations continued of the so-called Great Wall explored in 2008 and 2009 (Bieliński 2012: 525–529). This wall, nearly 4 m wide, ran toward the northeast, starting from the southwestern corner of the Southern Temple. The present fieldwork, comprising three narrow test trenches dug in squares 51/58, 52/58 and 51/59, was designed to trace the northeastern extent of the structure [Fig. 18].

The wall, which now can be dated to the very beginning of the Early Dynastic III period on Tell Arbid, continues to escape identification of its original function. There is every reason to think that it extended beyond the 18 m section that is now in view, but its northeastern extent remains problematic as this part of the wall was damaged by a pit. Testing further on along

the assumed line of the wall uncovered a few mud-brick walls of similar, but not identical alignment [Fig. 19]. Two were superimposed, and at least the younger one was of an Akkadian/post-Akkadian date, while the other could not be dated, so it may yet prove to be coeval with the “Great Wall”. One should also note the discovery of a fragment of the third inner buttress (W 9-52/57) of this wall, located at the northern interface of squares 52/57 and 52/58. The distance between this buttress and the previous one is similar to that between the first two buttresses that were discovered [Fig. 20].

Along the line of the expected course of the “Great Wall” explored this year excavators encountered numerous Khabur-Ware pits that had disturbed and destroyed earlier remains. A large

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Khabur-Ware period chamber tomb, with a “diamond-patterned” mud-brick roofing, was found in square 51/59, just under the surface [Fig. 22]. It measured 2.70 m by 1.40 m and was oriented NW–SE, with an entrance shaft on the southeast. It was dug into a corner formed by two substantial mud-brick walls, one of which may be connected with the “Great Wall”. Damage to the bricks in the southeastern

part of the grave is probably evidence of penetration by robbers in the past. The grave could not be explored this year for lack of time. Beyond the grave, further to the southwest, a set of small clay objects was discovered, apparently *in situ*. The circumstances of this discovery, as well as possible interpretations of this very special assemblage are presented in this volume in a separate paper (Szymczak 2013).

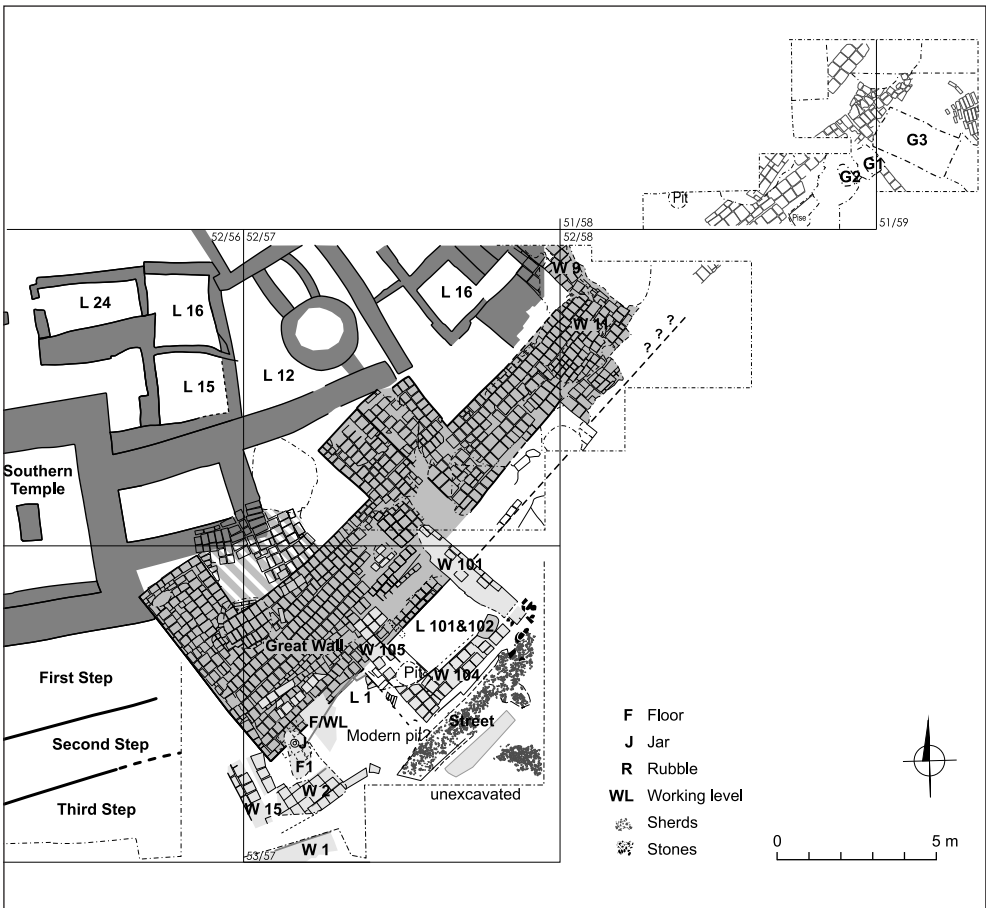


Fig. 18. “Great Wall” and structures excavated to the northeast (Plan A. Szymczak, Ł. Wojnarowicz, Ł. Rutkowski, K. Kiersnowski, D. Kossowska, D. Szelaĝ, A.M. Kotarba; digitizing M. Momot, Ł. Rutkowski, A. Szymczak)



Fig. 19. "Great Wall", general view after the 2010 season  
(Photo A. Szymczak)

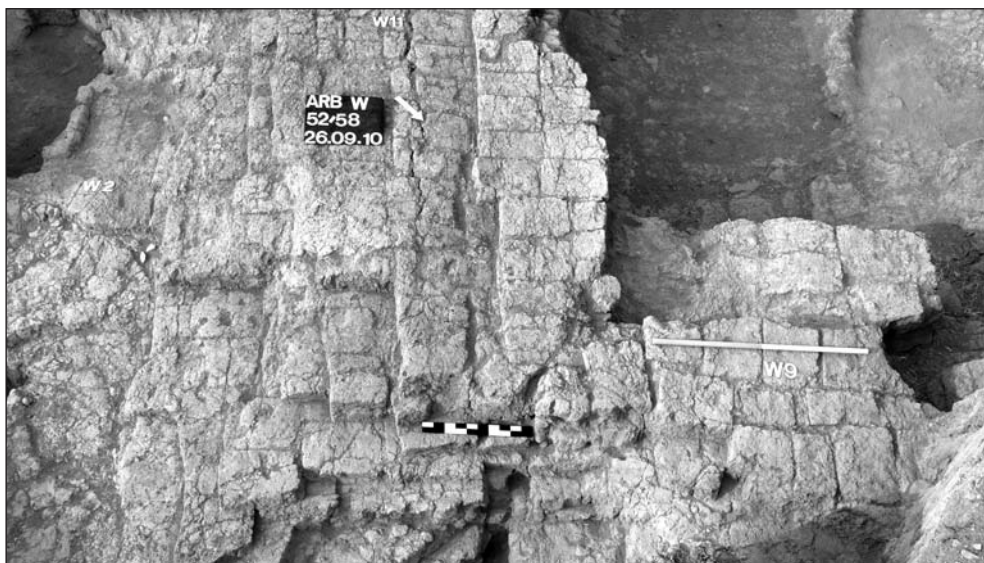


Fig. 20. Fragmentary inner buttress of the "Great Wall"  
(Photo A. Szymczak)



Fig. 21. Akkadian structure raised on top of the “Great Wall”  
(Photo A. Szymczak)



Fig. 22. Khabur Ware-period masonry tomb found on top of the “Great Wall”  
(Photo A. Szymczak)

## RECAPITULATION

Summing up the fifteenth campaign of Polish–Syrian archeological explorations on Tell Arbid, one should point out the importance of discoveries made this year around the Southern Temple in view of it being the first Ninevite sanctuary with such

an accumulation of elements unknown up till now in this period. Moreover, the trial pits dug inside the cella of the temple suggest that we are dealing here with a whole series of sanctuaries built one upon the other.

Prof. Piotr Bieliński

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

00-927 Warsaw, Poland, ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28

piotr.bielin@wp.pl

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