

The Uruk period in the Qadissiyah region (Iraq)

Dr. Friederike Bachmann (Berlin/Germany)

KALAM

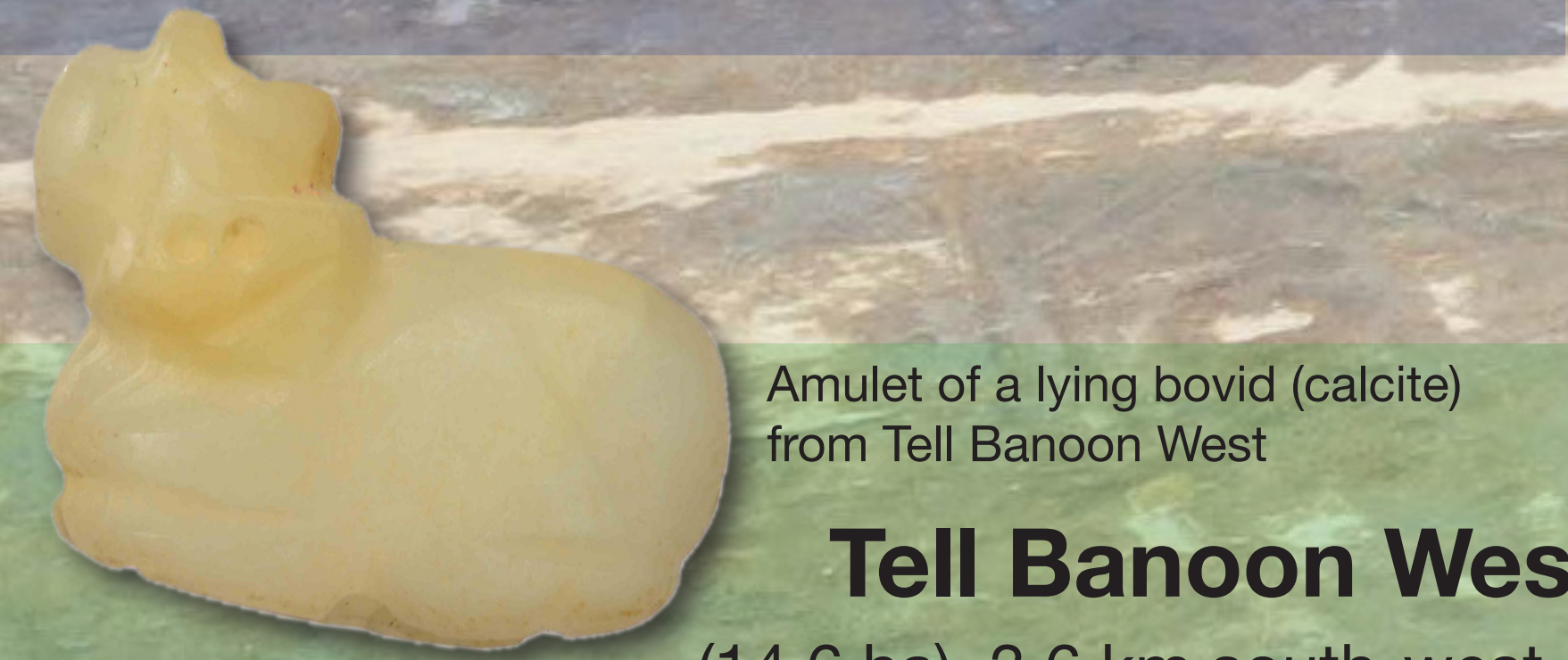
Archaeological excavations and surveys, especially in recent decades, have given us a clearer picture of the socio-political and economic complexity and interaction during the Uruk Period (LC 2 – LC 5) and will continue to do so.

The survey presented here is part of the international **KALAM** project, which deals with the analysis and protection of archaeological landscapes in Iraq and Uzbekistan and is funded by the German Volkswagen Foundation. The German part at LMU Munich is led by Adelheid Otto, Berthold Einwag and Jacob Jawdad; the present author took part in the 2023 and 2025 campaigns focussing on the Uruk material. The aim of this survey project, which began in 2022, is the systematic investigation and documentation of the archaeological remains in the highly endangered area between Šuruppak (Fara) and Isin (Išān al-Bahriyāt) in the governorate of al-Qadissiya.



Tell Abu Bag'a (30 ha), 1.2 km south of Šuruppak (Fara), is a unique settlement that was inhabited during the Uruk (8.5 ha), Early Dynastic, Ur-III and Early Babylonian periods.

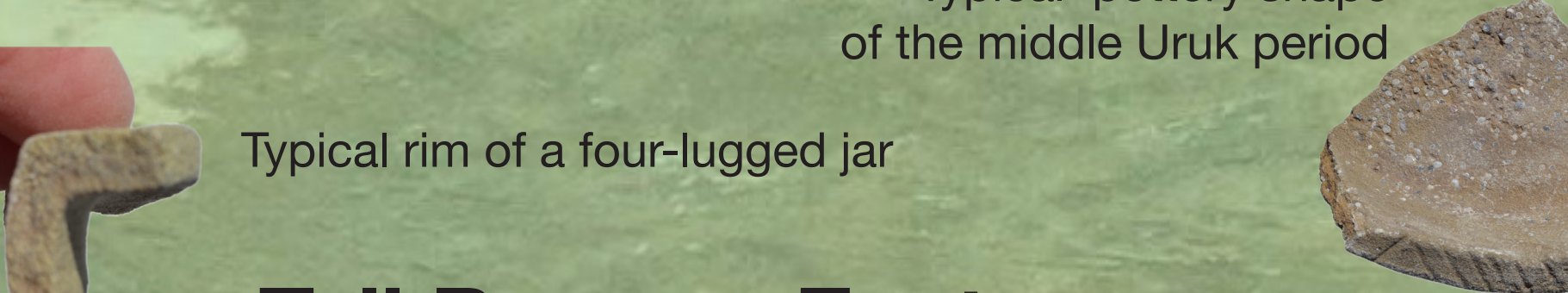
The city lies on the course of the ancient Euphrates and comprises Uruk period residential and industrial areas in the northern parts of the lower town. A geophysical survey of the main hill, where the settlements from the Uruk period and the later period overlap, revealed two large buildings with different orientations. The building to the north probably dates from the Uruk period. The measured values clearly indicate pottery kilns in some places. This was also confirmed during the survey. The pottery sherds show very typical forms of the Middle Uruk Period (LC 3-LC 4).



Tell Banoon West (14.6 ha), 3.6 km south-west of Fara, extends in a flat-oval shape from north-east to south-west and was mainly inhabited during the Uruk period and to a lesser extent during the ED I period.

The local pottery repertoire show typical shapes from Middle to Late Uruk Period. Many overfired or slagged fragments are signs of local production.

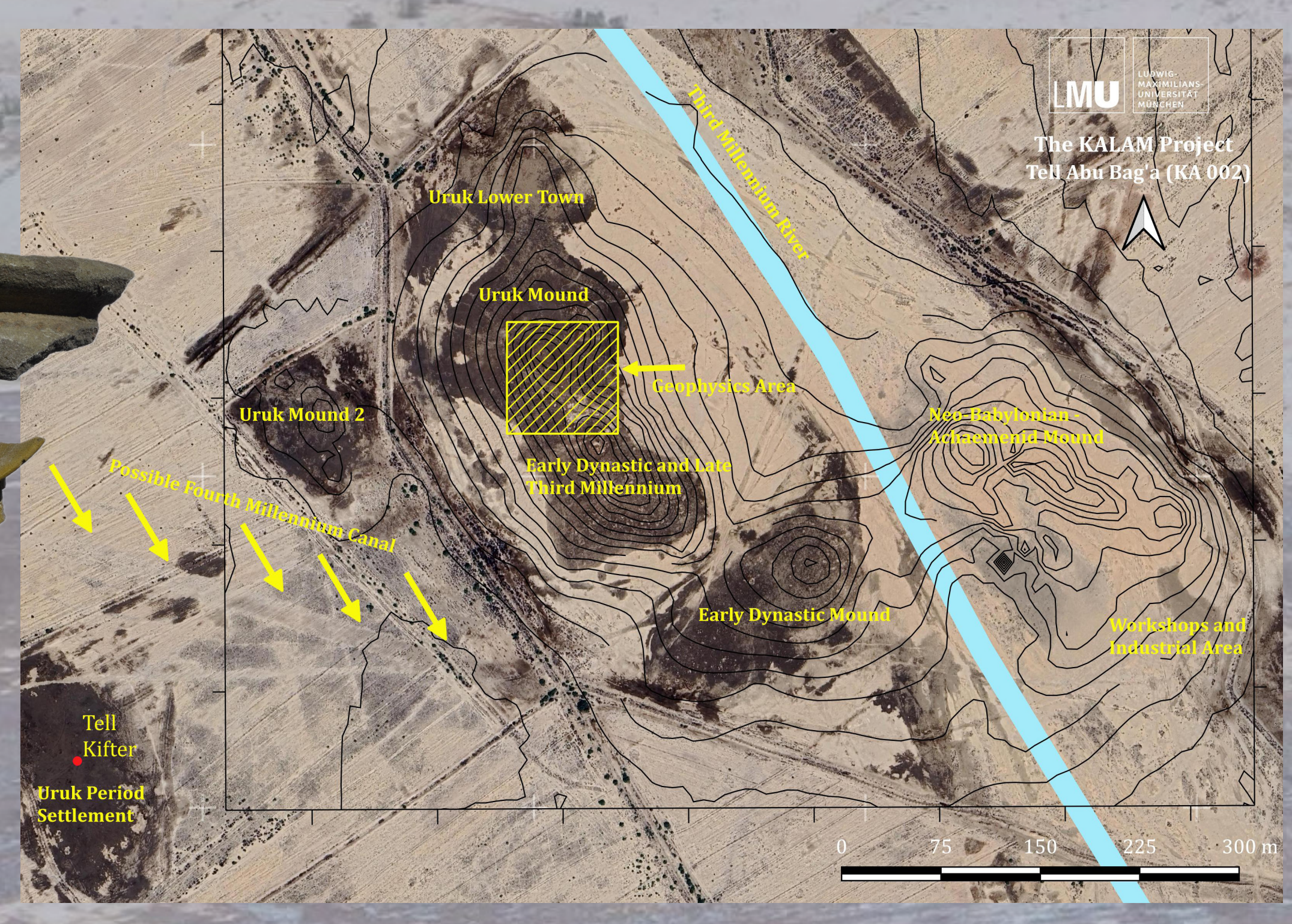
ESRI and Google images show a residential neighbourhood in the western part of the settlement consisting of many medium to small-sized houses located on narrow streets of 1 m or more in width. The houses are characterised by narrow walls that are not comparable with those of later periods.



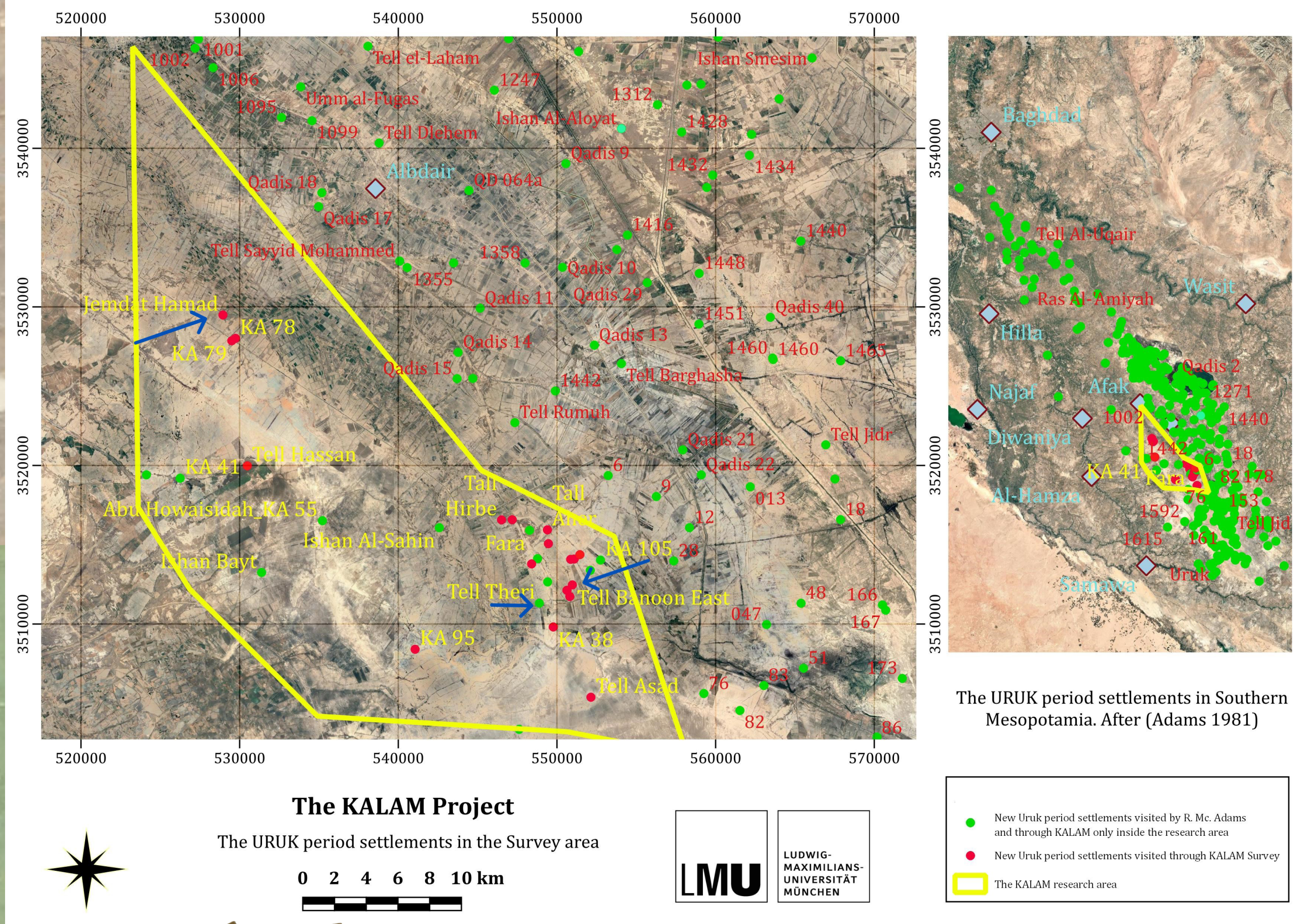
Tell Banoon East (3.9 ha) is about 150 metres away, separated by a canal. This tell is characterised above all by an extensive industrial area. The surface finds show very popular features, such as beveled-rim bowls, reserved slip or rope handles and can be clearly dated to the Middle and Late Uruk Period.



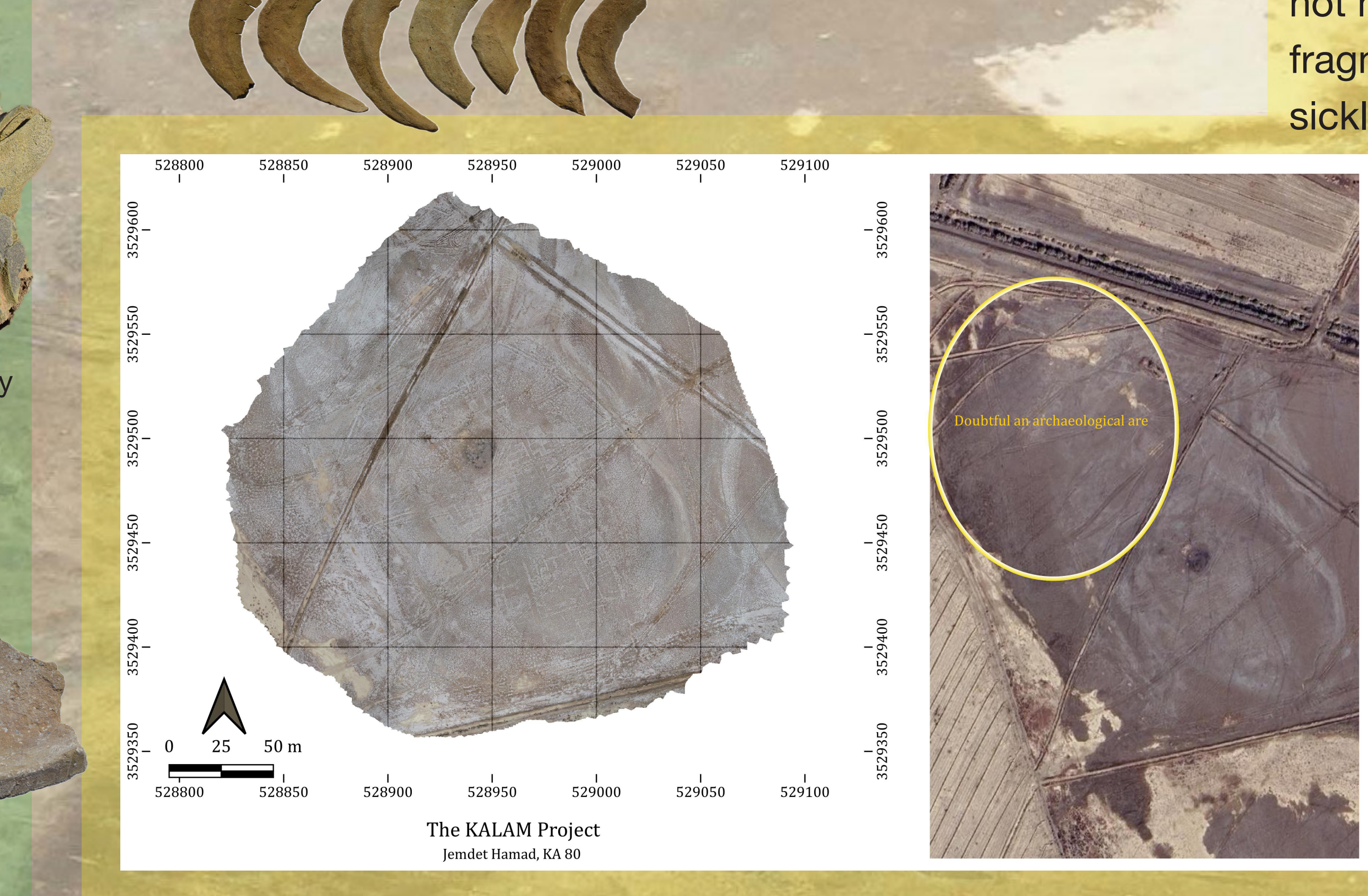
Maps and photos by the author and the KALAM survey project.



FOUR EXAMPLES OF THE URUK PERIOD SETTLEMENTS (LC 2/3-5 / 4000 – 3200 BCE)



Clay sickles from Tell Banoun East



Tell Theri (9.5 ha), 3.7 km south of Fara can be regarded as one of the most important industrial area in the region during the Uruk period because of numerous kilns and workshops dedicated to the production of pottery and clay-tools and a considerable number of stone tools.



Jemdat Hamad (2.2 ha), 2.8 kilometres north-east of Isin, is completely flat. There were not many surface finds, and those that are found are too fragmented. In addition to these finds, working stones, sickles and flint blades have also been found at the site.

The most fascinating aspect is the almost complete layout of the settlement. The drone images taken after the rainfall event provide a unique perspective on the urban planning and organisation of the settlement and offer a valuable opportunity to identify the layout of a residential area from the Uruk period.



RESULTS

Overall, the KALAM survey project has produced new, important and insightful results on the settlement structure and material culture in southern Mesopotamia. For settlements of the Uruk period, it was shown that to the north and north-east of Šuruppak (Fara) and to the south along the former course of the Euphrates there were both large settlements such as Tell Banoon West, and numerous smaller villages such as Jemdat Hamad. In most cases, vessels and tools were produced locally, for which the existence of one or more pottery kilns (Tell Theri) or a veritable industrial zone (Tell Banoon East) are not the only reliable indications. The high proportion of misfiring is also clear evidence of local production. The repertoire of tools (ring-stones; workstones, clay sickles, clay axes) indicates that the population lived primarily from agriculture and farming, but possibly also from textile processing (loom weights; perforated clay or stone discs). It can be observed that the pottery from the Uruk-period settlement sites is predominantly overfired.

As part of the KALAM survey project, the immense damage caused by massive looting and the increasing destruction of the landscape through the ongoing construction of water channels to irrigate the fields has become alarmingly apparent. In addition to the archaeological research, it is an urgent concern of this project to draw attention to the ever-increasing threat, to document the damage and thus to raise awareness of the cultural heritage.