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Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Proceedings of the 5th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

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Fortified citadels in the Early Bronze Age? New evidence from Tall Bazi (Syria)

Berthold Einwag, Munich

Abstract

Fortified Citadels on a mountain spur have so far never been attested for the Early Bronze Age, whereas they are well known in the Late Bronze Age and are commonly ascribed to Hittite influence. Tall Bazi demonstrates that the idea of building a fortification on a mountain can be traced back to the Early Bronze Age. At that period the citadel of Bazi had huge circular fortification walls, an artificial ditch at the strategic weak point and an outstanding fortified building (Building 2) with exhaustive traces of military events. The Citadel seems to have formed the heavily fortified part of a larger unit which consisted of the settlement area of Tall Banat adjacent to Bazi, the mortuary mound Tall Banat-the Cone and a cultic area at Tall Kabir. This settlement complex of Banat-Bazi must have been one of the major Early Bronze Age cities in the Euphrates valley and Western Syria with an outstanding fortified citadel whose exact function yet has to be established by further investigations.

Keywords: citadel, fortification, Early Bronze Age, Syria, mountain spur, artificial ditch.

The Syrian Euphrates valley between Karkemish and Tabqa belongs to the best investigated areas in Syria due to two salvage projects. Excavations in the southern part, now covered by the Assad-lake, were untertaken mainly in the 1970's. Excavations in the northern part, the Tishreen dam area, mainly took place in the 1990's. The Tishreen dam, built about 9 kms downstream of Bazi near Tall Qitar, was finished in 1999. Despite the flooding of the valley, several excavations are still in progress. One of them is the excavation of the citadel of Tall Bazi on the eastern side of the Euphrates, about 45 km south of the Syrian-Turkish border. The citadel of this larger settlement complex has not been flooded because it lies on a natural mountain spur (fig. 1).

¹ For an overview see J. Cl. Margueron (ed.), Le Moyen Euphrate, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 10-12 mars 1977, Leiden 1980, and D. A. Freedman, Archaeological Reports from the Tabqa Dam Project: Euphrates Valley, Syria, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research 44, Cambridge MA, 1979.

² G. del Olmo Lete and J.-L. Montero Fenollós (eds.), Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates, The Tishreen Dam Area. Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at Barcelona, January 28th - 30th 1998, Barcelona 1999.

³ The excavations, directed by Adelheid Otto and myself, began 1993 on behalf of the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus and have been continued since 1999 by the University of Munich, financed since 2000 by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. We are grateful to the Department of Antiquities in Damascus, especially to the director general Dr. Bassam Jamous and the director of excavation Dr. Michel Maqdissi.

The location of Tall Bazi and the history of the excavation

Tall Bazi is located immediately south of the Early Bronze Age town of Banat which has been investigated by Ann Porter and Tom McClellan.⁴ Banat is a 30 ha settlement with a city wall in the North and East. In the West it is bordered by the Euphrates. Excavations have revealed domestic and workshop areas, public buildings and graves inside the city walls, a huge mortuary mound (Tall Banat-the Cone) and a cultic area including a *templum in antis* (Tall Kabir) outside the city wall.⁵ Glimpses into the wealth and far-reaching connections of the city are offered by the extraordinarily well built and richly equipped chamber tomb 7, which is now exhibited in the courtyard of the National Museum of Aleppo.⁶

Our excavations at Tall Bazi began in 1993, but the early investigations at the Citadel were limited to few trenches in order to reveal basic informations about its character and dating.⁷ The settlement of Tall Bazi consists of three parts: the Citadel on a natural mountain spur, high above the valley, a settlement area at the foot of the Citadel (Northern lower town / «Nordstadt») and a planned settlement enlargement dating back to the Late Bronze Age west of the Citadel (the Western lower town / «Weststadt»).⁸ Until 2004, our excavations had revealed no Early Bronze Age levels. Bazi seemed to form an ensemble of the Late Bronze Age. This assumption derived mainly from the fact that we had concentrated our efforts on the lower parts of the settlement which were supposed to be inundated first. Only after the flooding of the Euphrates valley and the lower settlement areas in 1999, our investigations concentrated on the higher parts of the northern lower town and on the citadel itself.

The Citadel of Tall Bazi on a mountain spur

The citadel is situated on a natural mountain spur, 60 m high, sloping down on three sides. This spur is the highest and the most protruding one of the hilly terrain bordering the Euphrates valley. Only at its southern end, this spur was connected with the elevated terrain. This narrow connection is cut by a ditch, ca. 40 m wide and more than 10 m deep (fig. 1). It was clearly cut into the solid rock, and

⁴ A. Porter and T. McClellan, The Third Millenium Settlement Complex at Tell Banat: Results of the 1994 Excavations, DaM 10 (1998) 11-63. T. McClellan, Urbanism on the Upper Syrian Euphrates, in: del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999 (see footnote 2), 413-425.

⁵ T. McClellan and Anne Porter, Survey of Excavations at Tell Banat: Funerary Practices, in: del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999 (see footnote 2), 107-116; A. Porter, The Third Millennium Settlement Complex at Tell Banat: Tell Kabir, DaM 8 (1995) 125-64; E. N. Cooper, The EB-MB Transitional Period at Tell Kabir, Syria, BCSMS 33 (1998) 271-280.

⁶ A. Porter, Communities in Conflict: Death and the Contest for Social Order in the Euphrates River Valley, Near Eastern Archaeology 65:3 (2002b) 156-73; for further objects of the tomb see: J. Aruz (ed.), Art of the First Cities, New Haven and London 2003, nos. 109d, 122-126.

⁷ B. Einwag and K. Kohlmeyer and A. Otto, Tall Bazi –Vorbericht über die Untersuchungen 1993, DaM 8 (1995) 95-121; B. Einwag and A. Otto, Tall Bazi – Vorbericht über die Untersuchungen 1994-1995, DaM 9 (1996) 15-45; B. Einwag and A. Otto, Tall Bazi, in: del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999 (see footnote 2), 179-191.

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the Weststadt see A. Otto, Alltag und Gesellschaft zur Spätbronzezeit: Eine Fallstudie aus Tall Bazi (Syrien), Subartu 19 (2006).

not caused by natural processes like erosion or wadi-like structures. The location of the citadel was obviously chosen for its defensive advantages. Apparently the artificial ditch was made when the mountain spur was transformed into a fortified citadel, thus strengthening the strategic position. At the northern flank of this ditch a building was erected («Building 2», see below) (fig. 2).

The slope of the citadel is covered by several circular walls running horizontally around the hill in different heights. These walls are built of large limestone blocks, some of them are more than 1 m long. They were set on the bedrock which was carved in some places to serve as a stable base for the stone blocks. Since these walls have been visible up until today, they were often exploited to gain precious building material; the most recent exploitation occurred in the 1950's, when the houses of the village Banat were built from the stones of the walls. Some of the circular walls are obviously defensive walls, others served as retaining or terrace walls. About half the way up the citadel's slope, a huge wall can be followed nearly around the whole slope. It is partly cut into the bedrock and is partly built of large limestone blocks.¹⁰

Comparable settlements

The characteristics of a citadel on a natural mountain spur, mentioned above, are rarely attested. The usual settlement in the Euphates Valley is a so-called «Tall»-formation in or near the flood-plain. There are only a few outstanding examples using high locations for various reasons. An early example of a settlement high above the valley is the Late Uruk settlement of Djebel Aruda, some 30 kms downstream of Bazi in the vicinity of the large town Habuba Kabira / Tall Qannas. It has been argued, that religious (and/or administrative) reasons might be responsible for choosing that particular location. ¹¹

Two other examples were dated to the Late and possibly Middle Bronze Age. One is Tall Qitar, located on a steep mountain high above the plain level. ¹² The fortified lower and upper settlement bore extensive traces of private dwellings and a temple, being in use during the Late Bronze Age and probably going back to the Middle Bronze Age. The defensive structure of the site at the narrowest point of the Euphrates valley is obvious.

The other one, Tall Faq'ous, was investigated by J.-Cl. Margueron in a single campaign in 1978.¹³ It is the closest parallel to Tall Bazi, concerning the topographical situation. Located on the west bank of the Euphrates on a steep moun-

⁹ The artificial ditch has been investigated by geologists in September 2006. The assumption of an ancient riverbed or any other natural processes causing the ditch can be securely excluded.

¹⁰ See A. Otto, JCS (in press) figs. 6-9: the «Big Wall».

¹¹ P. M. M. G. Akkermans and G. M. Schwartz, The Archaeology of Syria, Cambridge 2003, 195-6.

¹² T. McClellan, A Syrian Fortress of the Bronze Age: el-Qitar, National Geographic Research 2/4 (1986) 418-440; id., El-Qitar: Third Season of Excavation, 1984-85, Abr-Nahrain 24 (1986) 83-106. The ancient name «Til-abnim» is already attested during the Middle Bronze Age in Mari texts (e.g. ARM I 10).

¹³ J. Margueron, Aux marches de l'empire hittite: Une campagne de fouille a Tell Faq'ous (Syrie), citadelle du pays d'Astata, in: La Syrie au Bronze Récent, Paris 1982, 47-66.

tain spur protruding into the valley, it has only a narrow access and thus forms an ideal emplacement for a fortress. The excavator has proposed that it was founded in the 14th century B.C. under the reign of Mursili II. He traces fortified citadels on mountain spurs back to Hittite influence. Another example for a settlement on a mountain spur in the Syrian Euphrates valley is Meskene-Emar, about 60 km south of Bazi and close to Faq'ous.

Building 2 at the artificial ditch

When we arrived at Bazi in the spring of 2004, heavy winterrain had washed out reddish mudbrick material on the northern slope of the citadel's artificial ditch. We began to investigate it by scraping the surface of the slope. Massive mudbrick walls appeared, many of them 1.80 - 2.0 m wide. The mudbrick walls sat on a massive stone socle, which is up to 3 m high. Large limestone blocks were used for this socle which is set on the worked out bedrock. The walls could be identified as belonging to a single building, named Building 2 (figs. 2-6).

This building faces south towards the ditch (fig. 2). Its front measures 25 m and is orientated west-east. It consists of an enormously thick wall, measuring 9.2-9.5 m in width at the front, and has a curious layout: two triangular niches flank the central entrance (figs. 3, 4). These niches begin about 0.5 m above the ground and are 5.0 m wide and 5.2 m deep. They can be traced within the stone blocks and at the eastern niche also within the mudbricks, which are set in an angle compared to the course of the mudbrick massive to the north. The niches were filled up to a height of 1.7 m with fine limestone gravel, on which several clay sling bullets were lying in the eastern niche. This indicates that the original surface was still preserved in the eastern niche.

The central entrance was 2.4-2.8 m wide and lead axialy into the building (fig. 5). It was strengthened on both sides by protruding towers, 4-6 m wide, of which the western one is partly eroded. The entrance consisted of a corridor, that was more than 4.5 m long and lead to a roughly square chamber of 3.9 x 4.2 m (room 1). On the eastern side of the chamber there was a shallow bench, made of mud and mudbricks and covered with white plaster. The floor was paved with a white gipsum-plaster («Estrichboden»). So far only the eastern half of the entrance has been excavated, but we suppose a symmetrical layout. A second corridor, 2.9 m long and 2.0 m wide, lead from room 1 to room 2 of which only the walls' surfaces have been cleared. This doorway, however, was made narrower in the second phase by carefully setting one row of mudbricks on the inside of the opening. At a later point, the doorway was crudely closed up to hip-height with complete and broken mudbricks, stones and mud (fig. 5). Presumably it was a hostile attack that caused the people to block the door, as it apparently happened in a hurry. Either it was not finished or it was partly removed.

Furtheron, the outlines of two other rooms were recognized. Room 3 contained a central mudbrick block and served as a stairway room. This staircase presumabely gave access to the upper storeys of the building. The mudbrick walls of room 4 appeared immediately beneath the surface and are preserved to a height of more than 4 meters. The floor consists of plaster on top of a gravel layer which levels the unevenness of the bedrock.

This was the situation at the end of the 2004 campaign. In the spring of 2005, the excavation of Building 2 was continued. Work concentrated on the areas towards NW and NE with no or few overlaying later structures. By the end of the campaign 2005, Building 2 had been investigated up to a length of 30 meters in N-S-direction. It appeared that the original groundplan had been enlarged and changed several times and that the building had been connected to the circular defensive walls of the Citadel (figs. 3, 4).

The phases and chronological setting of Building 2

Building 2 shows three phases (see table 1). In its earliest phase (level 9b) it was a compact building with broad walls and a central chamber-gate, built directly on the solid, sloping rock of the artificial ditch. During the second phase (level 9a) further rooms were added to the East and West. The remains of at least 12 rooms have been uncovered so far. Their walls are only two mudbricks thick (0.8-0.9 m). In some places, the circulation was changed. For example in room 3, a door was cut into the outer wall to connect the original building with the western extension. The door is preserved to a height of 2.5 m. Its width measures 0.9 m at its base and 0.7 m at its surface. Although the top is missing, it shows the rudiment of a vault (fig. 6).

Phase 2 (level 9a) was thoroughly destroyed by a military event. The thousands of sling bullets and numerous flint arrowheads found in and around it testify this thesis. Indeed, the white floor of the entrance was hardly visible at the moment of the excavation because it was covered by thousands of biconical objects of unbaked clay (fig. 5). Between them and the floor the imprints of wooden beams and reed were observed. Obviously the clay objects («sling bullets», fig. 7) had fallen down when the ceiling of the entrance collapsed. The purpose of these objects, which were also found at other places like Banat and Banat North (White Monument), is a matter of debate. However, in most instances these objects which are distributed over a long time and a wide area are presumed to be sling-bullets. The sling is an old distance weapon, still used by shepherds today. An experienced slinger is able to hit a target over a hundred meters, possibly with lethal effect. In fact, during the limited sondages conducted within the building, the remains of a human victim were uncovered among such sling bullets in room 5.

The only other objects found among the biconical objects were lancet-shaped arrowheads of flint (fig. 8). They measure appr. 4.05-4.9 x 1.3-1.6 x 0.4 cm, are extraordinary well treated and have a fine, sawlike retouche all around. Comparable arrowheads, called «Lanzettspitzen Typ Tall Brak», are dated to the late Early Bronze Age or Akkadian period. 16

The heavily damaged building was filled up to 2.8 m high, repaired in some places and re-used in a third and final phase (level 8), before it was destroyed for-

¹⁴ A. Porter, The Dynamics of Death: Ancestors, Pastoralim, and The Origins of a Third Millenium City in Syria, BASOR 325, 2002, 16.

¹⁵ M. Korfmann, Schleuder und Bogen in Südwestasien, Bonn (1973); J. Obladen-Kauder, Die Kleinfunde aus Ton, Knochen und Metall, Demircihöyük IVB (1996) 249ff.

¹⁶ K. Schmidt, Norsuntepe, Kleinfunde I. Die lithische Industrie, Arch. Euphratica 1, Mainz 1996, 68-70.

ever. Phase 3 of Building 2 could be reached so far only on a very limited scale. Because the floorlevel was raised upto 2.8 m, it is heavily eroded near the flanks and the middle is still covered by later levels. However, the northern half of room 3 yielded several broken jars on the floor within the burnt debris.

In the following level (level 7) different buildings and alleyways were built above the abandoned ruins of Building 2, thus covering it completely (see Tab. 1). The character of the area changes distinctively (levels 7 a-f).

The amount of pottery revealed so far from the area of Building 2 is limited but allows us to place the building towards the late Early Bronze Age. A preliminary study of the ceramics indicates that the level 9 pottery highly ressembles the one of Banat Period III which is dated to the Early Bronze Age IVA (= Mardikh IIB1).¹⁷ The pottery of level 8, the final occupational phase of Building 2, is comparable to that found in the Pfeilergebäude at Tall Bi'a¹⁸ and in the Bauschicht 1' of Palace F at Tall Chuera, ¹⁹ both are dated to the Akkadian period. The pottery of level 7f is comparable to that from Tall Kabir level 6, ²⁰ Qara Qosaq level II²¹ and from the levels overlying Palast B and the Pfeilergebäude in Tall Bi'a.²² From level 7 e upwards the pottery has all the characteristics of the Middle Bronze Age I.

Table 1. The phases and levels of Building 2 at the Bazi citadel

Bazi Citadel, area of Building 2	Bazi Levels
Building 2 covered by buildings and alleyways	7e-f
Destruction	
Building 2, phase 3: partly damaged building filled up and renovated,	8
floor level rises 2.8 m; last reuse of Building 2	
Destruction, military event	
Building 2, phase 2: central building enlarged, rooms with thinner	9a
walls added, circulation partly changed	
Building 2, phase 1: central building built on solid rock at artificial	9Ъ
ditch	

¹⁷ A. Porter, The Ceramic Horizon of the Early Bronze in the Upper Euphrates, in: del Olmo Lete and Montero Fenollós 1999 (see footnote 2), 311-320, fig. 3; P. M. M. G. Akkermans and G. M. Schwartz, The Archaeology of Syria, Cambridge 2003, 247-251.

¹⁸ The Pfeilergebäude at Tuttul is securely dated (e.g. by seal impressions) to the late Akkad period; E. Strommenger and K. Kohlmeyer, Die Schichten des 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr. im Zentralhügel E, Tall Bi'a/Tuttul – III, WVDOG 101, Saarbrücken 2000, 42-52; A. Otto, Siegel und Siegelabrollungen, Tall Bi'a/Tuttul – IV, WVDOG 104, Saarbrücken 2004, 4-16.

¹⁹ W. Orthmann and A. Pruss, Der Palast F, in: W. Orthmann et al., Ausgrabungen in Tell Chuera in Nordost-Syrien I, Saarbrücken 1995, 121-172. Very characteristic are high beakers with a hollow flat bottom and fine grooved rim, ibid. figs. 78, 79.

²⁰ A. Porter, The Third Millenium Settlement Complex at Tell Banat: Tell Kebir, DaM 8 (1995) 125-164, figs. 14-19 (pottery of Building Two at Tall Kabir).

²¹ G. del Olmo Lete et al., Qara Qusaq I, Barcelona 1994, 36ff, 68ff; G. del Olmo Lete et al., Qara Qusaq II, Barcelona 2001, 203ff.

²² Strommenger and K. Kohlm

Interpretation of Building 2

The function of Building 2 has not been established yet, because floor levels have been reached only on a very limited scale due to the considerable height of the standing walls and of the collapsed material inside the rooms and because of various overlying levels. Few sherds, but immens numbers of sling bullets have been found everywere. The thousands of egg-shaped sling bullets in Building 2 and the fact that the gate was blocked in a hurry, point at a violent ending of the building. This and the location of Building 2 at the weakest point in the fortification's defensive system, directly related to the artificial ditch, speak in favor of its strategic function.

The results of the spring season 2005 show that Building 2 was not an isolated structure but stood in connection with the circular defensive walls of the citadel. It was built at a time, when the artificial ditch was in use because it is set on the treated slope. This indicates that not only Building 2 dates back to the Early Bronze Age, but also the whole concept of the fortified citadel on a mountain spur. It is difficult to find parallels for this surprising result.

The central element of Building 2 in the first phase is a kind of chamber-gate flanked on either side by a staircase and a so far doorless room. Comparable gates can be found in the Middle and Late Bronze Age, for example the gate of Alalakh VII or the Watergate in nearby Karkemish which possibly dates back to the Middle Bronze Age.²³

The second reason not to interpret Building 2 as a residence is its location. It is turned away from the city and the Euphrates valley and is situated at a crucial strategic point. A defensive function seems more probable. However, if Building 2 functioned as a highly fortified entrance at the slope of the citadel, there must have been a reason to fortify the citadel in this sophisticated manner: major buildings should probably be sought on the plateau of the citadel.

Other Early Bronze Age Remains on the Plateau of the Citadel

To prove this hypothesis, we dug several trenches on the plateau of the citadel. Additionally, a survey with ground penetrating radar (GPR) was untertaken during the 2006 campaign. The aim was to investigate the slopes and the centre of the citadel more thoroughly in order to get more information about the extension of the Early Bronze age occupation. Indeed, most of the citadel's plateau which measures approx. 1 ha, is covered by Early Bronze Age IV structures. Their floors share the thick white gypsum-plaster. The remains of 12 rooms have been hit so far. However, the layout and function of the uncovered remains still have to be determined.

During the 2006 season it certainly could be established that the cut-out northwestern corner of the citadel is of EB IV date and may be interpreted as an early cistern. Southwest of the cistern there is a large building dating back to EB IV, still

²³ Z. Herzog, The City-Gate in Eretz-Israel and its Neighboring Countries, Tel Aviv 1976, figs. 44, 49; B. Gregori, «Three-Entrance» City-Gates of the Middle Bronze Age in Syria and Palestine, Levant 18 (1986) 83-102.

preserved to a height of 4 m in some places. At the northwestern edge of the cistern we hit a staircase with carefully worked limestone slabs which leads to a door in a broad wall. In front of the door several of the ubiquitous sling-bullets and the upper part of a black Syrian bottle were lying. We followed the staircase over a length of 10 m, but it continues further down the western slope. Might this indicate a representative Early Bronze Age access to the citadel?

Conclusions

Building 2 was probably a monumental gate building in its earliest phase (level 9b), to which further rooms were added in its second phase (level 9a). This second phase was thoroughly destroyed by a military event, as is testified by the hurried blocking of the gateway, countless sling bullets and numerous flint arrowheads. The heavily damaged building was filled to a depth of 2-3 m, was repaired and reused in a third and final phase (level 8), before it was destroyed forever. Even today, Building 2 stands to a height of 5 m in some places. This last reuse phase of Building 2 (level 8) was violently destroyed, too. After this destruction, the character of the area changed considerabely. In the following level 7 different buildings and alleyways were constructed above the ruins of Building 2, covering it completely (see Tab. 1). These developments took place between the EBA IVA (level 9) and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (level 7).

Building 2 is not an isolated phaenomenon, but apparently the fortified gate of a much larger structure which covers most of the plateau of the citadel. This Bazi citadel stands not alone but forms the highest part of the Early Bronze Age settlement of Banat–Bazi. The Banat–Bazi-complex covers an area of about 39 hectares. It does not reach the size of the capitals in the Jezirah, but belongs to the larger cities in the Euphrates valley and Western Syria. ²⁴ Its fortified citadel on a mountain is unique so far. It suggests that Banat–Bazi is one of the important centres of the Syrian late Early Bronze Age which must be mentioned in the archives of Ebla. ²⁵

²⁴ Sizes of sites in North Syria during the late Early Bronze Age: Chuera: 65 ha; Mari: 60 ha; Hadidi: 56 ha; Ebla: 56 ha; Banat-Bazi: 39 ha; Tuttul: 36 ha; Sweyhat: 30 ha; Selenkahiya: 15-20 ha.

²⁵ For the possible identification of Banat-Bazi with Armanum / Armium see A. Otto, JCS (in press).



Fig. 1: Tall Bazi, citadel with artificial ditch, view from southeast.

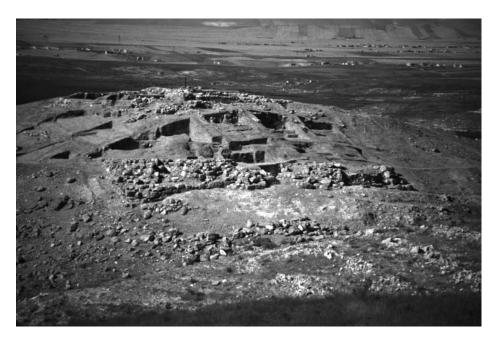


Fig. 2: Bazi, citadel, Building 2, view from south.

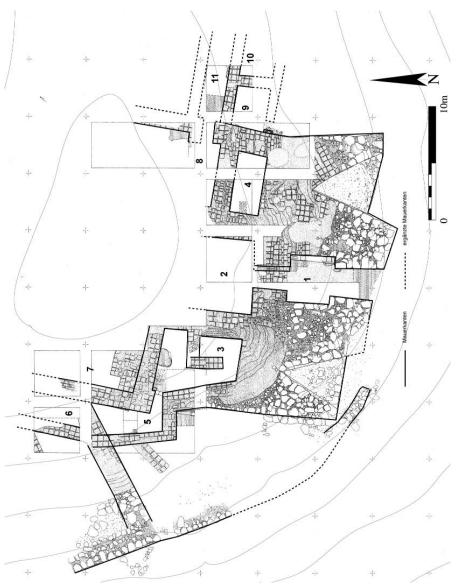


Fig. 3: Bazi, citadel, Building 2, groundplan.



Fig. 4: Bazi, citadel, Building 2, 3D reconstruction model.



Fig. 5: Bazi, citadel, Building 2, entrance room 1, view from south.



Fig. 6: Bazi, citadel, Building 2, vaulted doorway between rooms 3 and 5.

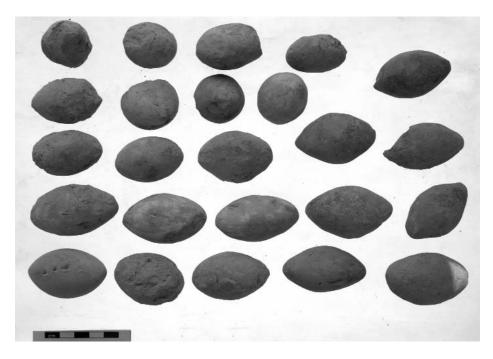


Fig. 7: Biconical sling bullets from Building 2, entrance room 1.



Fig. 8: Lancet-shaped arrowheads with fine, sawlike retouche from Building 2, entrance room 1.