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TALL BAZI

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Tall Bazi is located on the east or Jazirah side of the Euphrates a few kilometers north of the Tishrin dam. Here the valley widens to a large fertile plain. The fertility of the area around Bazi is in sharp contrast to the surrounding semiarid landscape, which is situated at the southern border of the region where there is sufficient rainfall for cereal farming. This geographical situation explains the cluster of ancient tells in the vicinity of Bazi ranging from the Ubaid to the Islamic period.

In the spring of 1993, excavations began at Tall Bazi on behalf of the German Archaeological Institute Damascus as part of the Tishreen Dam salvage operations. The 6th campaign was concluded in June 1997. The excavations are directed by B. Einwag and A. Otto.¹

We wish to thank the General Director Prof. S. Muhesen and W. Khayata for their support. Our representatives H. Hammade, R. Sharaf, U. al Sayasna, B. al-Ahmed and G. Dabboura were always very helpful to us. Many thanks are also due to E. Strommenger for providing us with equipment, to W. Orthmann for lending us his balloon, and to T. McClellan and A. Porter of the Tall Banat mission for their fruitful neighbourship and for providing us with a kite. Last but not least our efforts would have been fruitless without the extraordinary efforts and enormous help in every respect of the villagers from Banat and Abu Dağma and the family of our guardian A. al-Yahia.

Description of the site

Tall Bazi consists of a citadel and a lower town (figs. 1-4). Both were occupied during the Late Bronze Age. The Citadel, about 200 m in diameter and 60 m high, lies on a spur of the hilly terrain bordering the Euphrates valley, separated from it by an artificial ditch. During the first three campaigns several parts of the Citadel were briefly investigated.

West and north of the Citadel lies the lower town. It was built on the natural gravel terrace of the Euphrates flood plain, only a few metres above the valley level. The northern part of the lower town is partly covered by the modern houses of the village Banat and has not yet been investigated, though walls can be seen on the surface.

More favourable were the conditions in the western part of the lower town. Here there are no overlying later structures. This area of the site which we have called the "Weststadt" measures about 200 by 120 m. Excavations began in 1993 and have been extended in each campaign. By the end of the latest season about half of the area of the Weststadt had been excavated, covering an area of over 10.000 sqm (fig. 2).

1. Participants of the six seasons were the following (in alphabetical order): K. und B. Clerc, J. Heusch, K. Kohlmeyer, M. Miftah, K. Niepelt, K. Obermeier, H. Otto, P. von Polheim, M. Roumi, A. Samara, H. Schmid, D. Szelag, P. Ternes, A. Weiser.

Stratigraphy and Historical Background

As already mentioned the main period represented in Bazi is the Late Bronze Age. The Weststadt dates exclusively from the end of the Late Bronze Age. It is a one period settlement with only two phases. The Weststadt seems to have had only a short lifespan, before it was completely burned. Every single house bears witness to the sudden event which apparently hit the inhabitants so unexpectedly that they had to leave most of their belongings behind.

The stratigraphy of the Citadel is more complex: the core of the Citadel is a hill from natural limestone bedrock, rising approximately 50 m above the plain level. Above the natural rock there are several layers, mostly of latest Late Bronze Age deposits, although the deepest layers may turn out to be a bit earlier. Immediately above the Late Bronze Age are the remains of a Roman castle above which very shallow traces of an Ottoman watch-tower are left.

Late Bronze Age Bazi belongs to a series of contemporaneous settlements which form a regularly spaced chain along the Euphrates valley. Several of these settlements also possess fortified citadels, such as Emar (Meskene)², Faq'us, the citadel of the land of Aštata³ and al-Qitar.⁴

The necessity for such well-defended citadels is explained by the historical situation:⁵ During the Late Bronze Age the Euphrates valley was a centre of interest and conflict for the major powers of that time: the rulers of Mittani, Egypt and Hatti tried to establish control over this rich and strategically important region. Around the middle of the 14th century B. C. the Hittite king Šuppiluliuma I installed one of his sons as viceroy in Karkemiš (Jerablous). Šuppiluliuma's successor Muršili I fortified the citadel of the country of Aštata with its centre Emar (Meskene) and provided it with a garrison. Tall Bazi is situated almost exactly halfway between these two sites, the most important centres along this stretch of the Euphrates, about 60 km from each of them.

The Citadel of Tall Bazi

The slopes of the Citadel

Numerous stone walls have always been visible on the slope of the Citadel and have provided the villagers throughout the years with material to build their houses. These stone walls run horizontally round the Citadel and can be identified one above the other every few meters up the slope of the Citadel (fig. 3).

The lowest wall was investigated over a length of 120 m. It was founded on a natural horizontal rock ridge which was cut down in places to serve as a level surface on which the huge limestone blocks of the wall were placed. This wall, like many of the others, too, was built in several sections which ended in right-angle turn up the hill. Very probably this lowest wall served primarily as a fortification.

Starting from this wall we made a long trench all the way up the steep eastern flank of the Citadel in order to examine the structures which were partly visible on the surface (fig. 3). These horizontally running stone walls turned out to belong to a rather complex system of terrace walls which cover the whole slope. They are built of unworked limestone blocks and are filled behind with small stones or stone

2. D. Beyer (ed.), *Meskéné - Emar. Dix ans de travaux 1972-1982* (1982).

3. J. Margueron, "Aux marches de l' empire Hittite: une campagne de fouille à Tell Faq'ous (Syrie), citadelle du pays d'Aštata", in *La Syrie au Bronze Récent, XXVIIe R.A.I., Paris 1980*, Paris 1982, pp. 47-66.

4. T. McClellan, "El Qitar: Second Season of Excavations, 1983-1984", *Abr-Nahrain* 23, 1985, 39ss.

5. See extensive discussion of the historical background in *DaM* 8, 1995, 98-105.

chips. Some of them were merely retaining or terrace walls facilitating occupation of the steep ground, but others clearly served as fortification walls.

Obviously the terrace-walls enabled small houses to be built on top. Due to the steep slope many of these buildings are badly eroded, and only in the innermost corners fragmentary remains of floors and associated finds were left. Only near the flatter top of the Citadel some more complete rooms were preserved. The nature of these rooms has still to be definitively established by excavating a larger area. Some small finds, however, may point to the fact, that the rooms were used for special functions. The discovery of clay models of a sheep's liver and a sheep's intestine suggest that extispicy was practised in or near this building⁶. It may be of interest to note that actual clay models of intestines have not previously been identified, even though cuneiform texts attest to the examination of this organ in divination.

Further information about the nature of these rooms or houses, as well as of the whole system of the retaining walls on the slopes and the possible means of access is hoped to be gained by further excavations.

The Plateau of the Citadel

Around the edge of the plateau of the Citadel a stone wall can be seen on the surface in places. Rectangular towers are visible at regular intervals along this wall. This is the uppermost fortification wall of the Citadel, dating from the Late Bronze Age, as is the large rock-cut cistern at the north-western corner of the plateau. This cistern, hewn out of the natural rock, gives the Citadel its characteristic appearance (fig. 4).

The cistern emphasizes the role of the Citadel as a place of refuge in times of war. Close to the cistern we opened some trenches in order to gain some information about the nature of the plateau (fig. 1). The remains of two buildings were identified. The one further to the west contained several rooms, their floors paved with large stone slabs. Separated from it by an open space (a street or a place) the corner of a second building was uncovered. It was oriented east-west and its enormous walls were about 2 m wide.

Both buildings differ in many respects from the houses in the lower town. Their functions are not yet certain, but some of the small finds point to an official purpose. Hollow terracotta wall-nails, of which a complete example 22 cm long and several fragments have been discovered⁷, have parallels in temples at Emar. The importance of the latter building may also be indicated by the discovery of a silver bracelet with geometric decoration which was deposited in the foundations of the building.⁸

The Roman Fortification on the Citadel

The ideal defensive situation of the citadel was exploited in the Roman period when the Romans built a fortification on the site probably to watch and protect an important crossing point over the Euphrates. The apparently still existing Late Bronze Age fortification wall around the edge of the plateau of the Citadel was reinforced by a second fortification wall with protruding towers.

6. DaM 9, 1996, 20-22, figs. 3-4, pl. 14b-d.

7. DaM 9, 1996, 19-20, fig. 2, pl. 14a.

8. AW 463.

We have excavated several rooms of the fortification including one with an altar still in it.⁹ The inventory includes ceramics and large quantities of metal objects or weapons, such as lance-heads and trilobate arrow-heads.

The Roman castle was built immediately on top of the Late Bronze Age walls by cutting them down to a height of about 1m. The Roman walls were built in the same construction technique as was used in the Late Bronze Age and which continues to be the common one in this region today: the socle was built from unworked limestone blocks, and the upper part of the wall was built out of mudbricks.

Probably this fortification was an important point on the ancient road from Hierapolis (Membij) to Zeugma (Belkis). The ancient name of Tall Bazi in the Roman period may have been 'Apammari', a name that is found on the Tabula Peutingeriana.¹⁰

The Northern Slope of the Citadel

One of the many outstanding questions concerning the Citadel is: how could one get up the Citadel, and where was the access onto the plateau. During certain light conditions a shallow depression in the surface leading up the Citadel is visible on the northern slope. In order to examine a possible access road trenches were opened half way up the northern slope. Here the traces of an access route were found which led through a gateway with a flanking roundtower. Nearby was a bastion built from big stone blocks which were set against a huge mudbrick wall from an earlier phase, whose purpose remains to be determined. The bastion was built on top of an industrial area dating to an earlier period of the Late Bronze Age of which only a small part was excavated.¹¹ The sequence of overlying structures here seems to span most of the Late Bronze Age. The lowest level which was reached dates at the latest from an early phase in Late Bronze Age.

The Weststadt (figs. 2, 4-10)

The main focus of the most recent campaigns has been the large-scale horizontal excavation of the western part of the lower town. The so-called Weststadt is founded on a gravel terrace slightly elevated above the level of the flood plain, and will be the first part of the site flooded by the waters of the new lake.

The first trench, made in spring 1993, hit the northern corner of a house (House 1), the floor of which was not more than half a meter below the surface. In the course of the subsequent excavations the area was constantly enlarged and a long test-trench was dug in the direction of the hilly edge of the valley, in order to get information about the southern extension of the Weststadt. By the end of 1997 an area of more than 10,000 sq m had been excavated (fig. 2). It consists of several areas of houses which are arranged along several main streets. The northernmost street is 6 m wide and leads in a curve through the quarters, destroyed only in the middle by a wadi.

Along these main streets the private houses are sometimes attached to each other (area of Houses 16-32), sometimes separated by narrow lanes, as is the case in area to the north-east, Houses 1-5. Here the narrow lanes could be closed as is indicated by door-sockets at the entrances from the street. Apparently these lanes were accessible only for the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses. They served also for the evacuation of water, and were in some instances provided with real drainage channels; between houses 6 and 7 such a channel was covered by stone slabs.

9. DaM 8, 1995, 109f; AW 470-471.

10. DaM 8, 1995, 120-121.

11. DaM 9, 1996, 22-23, pl. 5c-d.

The houses of the Weststadt

So far 49 houses have been completely or partially uncovered. They all belong to one period and have at most two phases. The plans of the houses are very much standardized as is the building technique. In most instances the walls were built from square mudbricks set on a stone socle. In the northern half of the Weststadt only the stone socles survived due to erosion and the shallowness of the layers, whereas in the southern part the heavily burned walls are in some instances still preserved to a height of 1.5 m.

The normal groundplan of a house consists of a large long room 10-20 m in length, flanked on one side by 3 to 6 small rooms (fig. 6). The main room is always equipped with an oven and a horse-shoe shaped hearth with a platform in front of it, and sometimes with benches on the sides. In some instances a staircase led to the roof or to a second storey which in many instances evidently existed (fig. 7). As we shall see later, a second storey may have solved the problem of restricted space for living being available in the main room of the house, because manufacturing activities took place in this room on the ground floor.

The small rooms are of roughly square shape, each measuring about 2 to 3 meters in length. In most instances they are accessible only from the main room. Some of them are equipped with different installations, others are filled up with ceramic vessels and clearly were used as storage rooms (fig. 6). The jars which were stored in one or more of the small rooms, were fairly standardized: very common was a set of vessels consisting of several large jars with shoulder decoration, sometimes still containing carbonized grain, some middle-size pots and bottles, and several small to tiny bowls and pots (fig. 9). They were kept in these rooms together with many other objects, such as numerous stone tools (mortars, grinding and other working stones), and a variety of tools from bronze (sickles, knives, borers, adzes and others) (fig. 8). Even weapons, such as daggers or arrowheads, were found here, and jewellery from different materials. Apparently they were sometimes stored on wooden shelves along the walls. Quite surprisingly we found that even cylinder seals were kept in these small storage rooms among the vessels. The fact that the inhabitants left almost all their possessions behind including weapons, jewellery and other precious objects, illustrates the unexpectedness of the final destructive catastrophe.

The main room served several purposes. The hearth and certain small finds, such as kernoi (hollow ring-shaped pottery vessels perhaps used in special ceremonies) and terracotta or limestone figurines, point to the main room as a living area and as a focus of family activities. Other finds and installations show that within the same room the manufacture of several objects took place. In some of the houses working installations, tools and moulds for bronze handicraft were found, and in other houses the raw material, the finished and partly finished objects for the production of weights or jewellery were recovered. The most simple jewellery was made from shells and pebbles from the Euphrates, more sophisticated jewellery was made from carnelian and other semi-precious stones. Two small steatite moulds served for the production of jewellery of gold or silver (fig. 10).

A survey of all the excavated houses of the Weststadt shows that almost every household was specialized in the manufacture of particular products, such as bronze weapons or tools, stone weights, jewellery of different materials, and other objects. This, in combination with the fact that in nearly every house weights were present, suggests that the inhabitants were not only artisans but also merchants.

The far-reaching relations of these people are also proved by several exceptional objects which were found in the houses. Many of them, such as rare jewellery pendants, frit boxes or glazed bottles, are clearly luxury items imported from abroad.

The Central Place within the Weststadt

The houses of the Weststadt were in most instances built very close to each other (fig. 5). In those cases when they were separated from each other, the lanes between them were quite narrow.

In the middle of the residential area, however, there is an area of completely different character (fig. 2). Investigations last year showed that this was an empty, slightly sloping space during the first phase of occupation of the Weststadt. During the second phase the whole area was levelled by filling in with much gravel material and by building several shallow terraces. On top of them some crude walls were built which may partly have belonged to rather irregular rooms loosely arranged on the terraces. Unfortunately not many objects were left in these rooms, mainly due to the wadi which found here the least resistance and the easiest way down the slope.

A likely interpretation of this area is that of a trading centre or a 'bazaar'-area. During the first phase it may have been an open and slightly sloping market place. In the following phase it was levelled, partly covered, and several small selling facilities installed. Here was perhaps the place where the people of Tall Bazi sold the products manufactured in their houses, and bought agricultural products in turn. This would fit well with the picture of the people given by the lay-out of the house quarters and the material in the houses: the Weststadt seems to have been an urban settlement of merchants and artisans. It could well have been the commercial center of the region where exchanges between the urban inhabitants and the rural population took place.

Summary

The large-scale excavation of the western lower town has added much to our knowledge of Syro-Mesopotamian domestic architecture of the Late Bronze Age. The short lifespan of the quarter and the violent destruction which led to the preservation of the objects in situ, allow insights into the function and purpose of the houses and into the social and economic background of this wealthy urban suburb. Furthermore the Weststadt allows detailed analysis of the organization and principles of a well planned settlement.

It is remarkable that not one single building with an official or religious function could be identified within the Weststadt. From the trenches on the Citadel we may conclude that these buildings were located on top of the Citadel and at various points on the slopes. Given the facts that the Weststadt was built on a flat terrace only a few meters above valley level and that it was not defended, but the Citadel was extremely carefully fortified, it seems even more probable that the official buildings were there. In the future we hope to continue excavations on the higher parts of the site which fortunately will not be flooded entirely.

Abbreviations and literature

AW

1996

A. Otto, B. Einwag, "Tall Bazi im syrischen Euphrattal. Ausgrabungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Station Damaskus, in einer Stadt des 2. Jts. v. Chr.", *Antike Welt* 6:459-471.

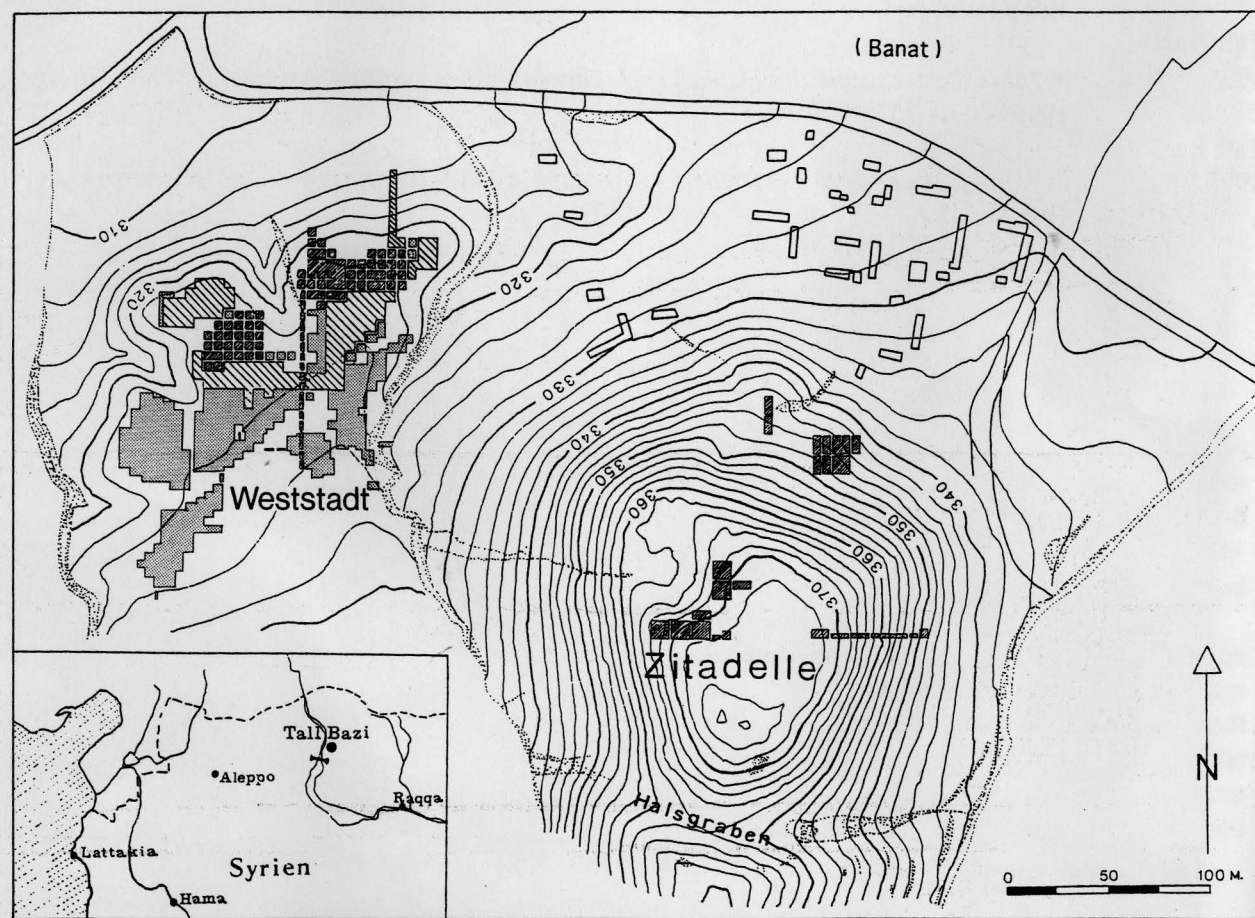
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B. Einwag *et alii*, "Tall Bazi – Vorbericht über die Untersuchungen 1993", *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 8:95-124

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Tall Bazi







- | | | | |
|---|------------------------|---|----------------|
|  | Grabungsareale 1993-94 |  | moderne Wege |
|  | Grabungsareale 1995 |  | Wadi |
|  | Grabungsareale 1996-97 |  | moderne Häuser |

Figure 1.- Topographical plan of Tall Bazi: the areas excavated 1993-1997.

TALL BAZI

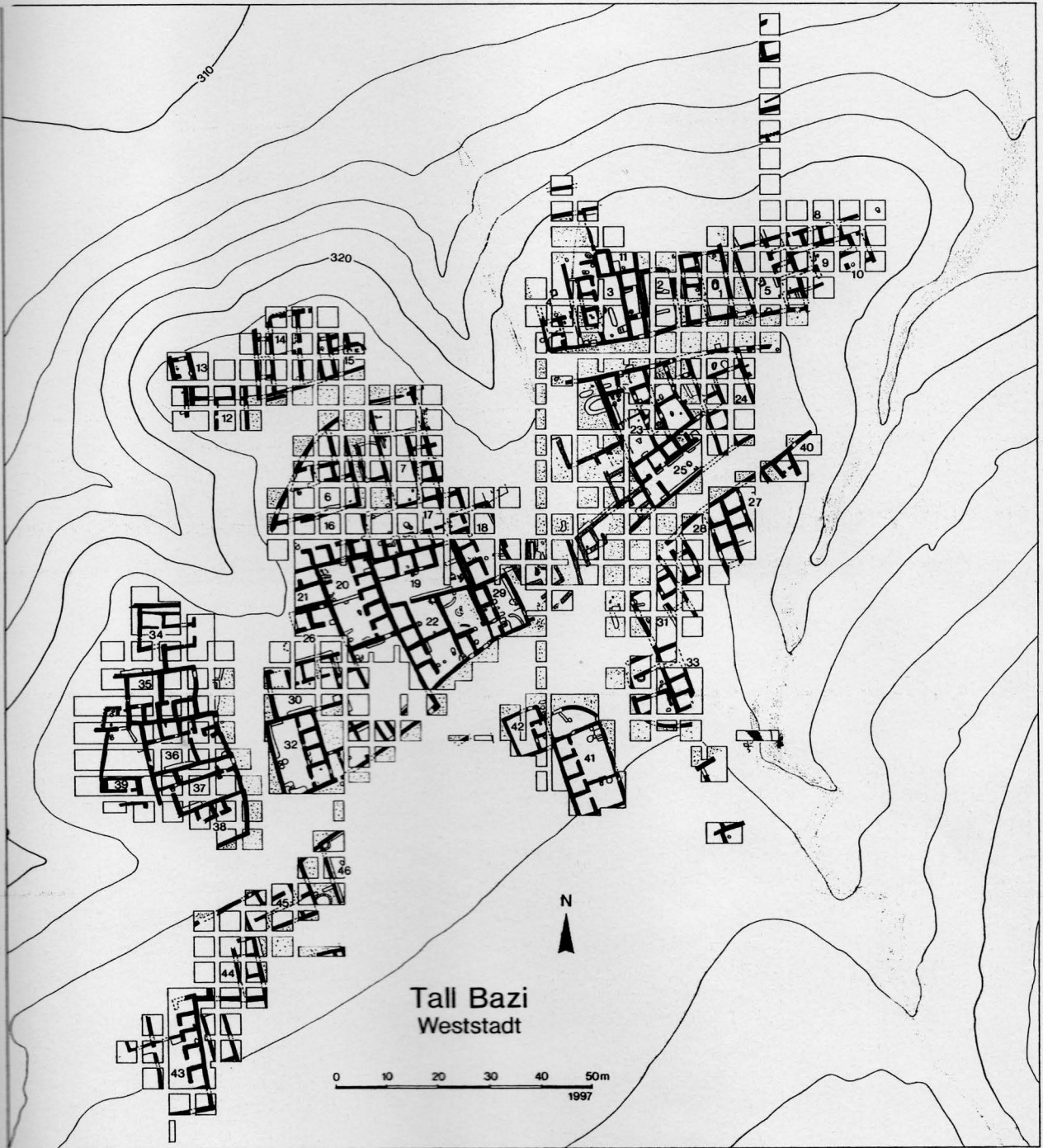


Figure 2.- Schematic plan of the Weststadt.

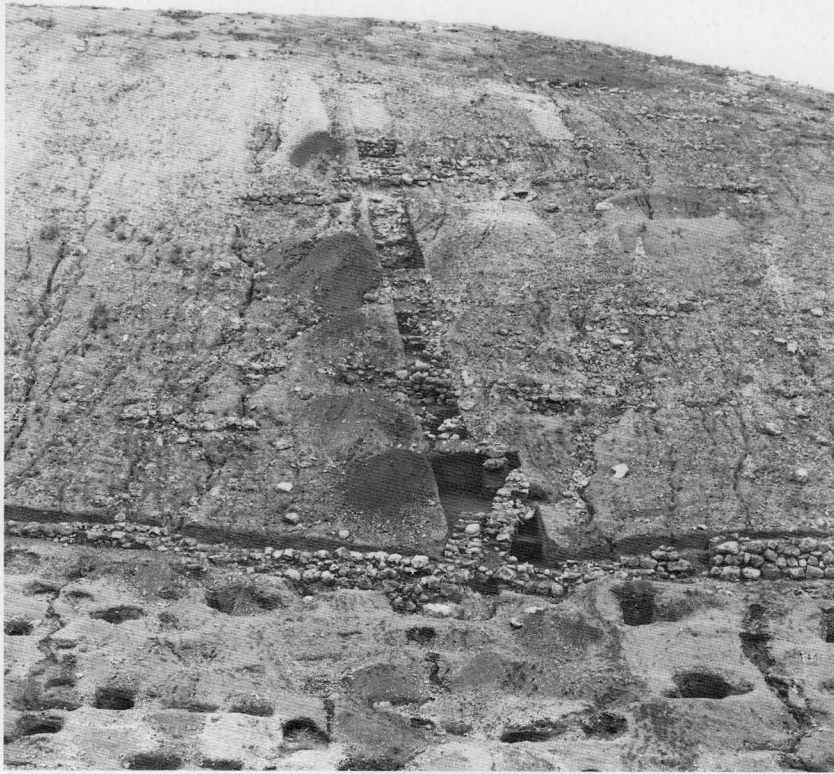


Figure 3.- The eastern slope of the Citadel.



Figure 4.- Quarters of the Weststadt with the Citadel in the background.



Figure 5.- Aerial photo of the south-eastern part of the Weststadt.



Figure 6.- Standard house in the Weststadt.

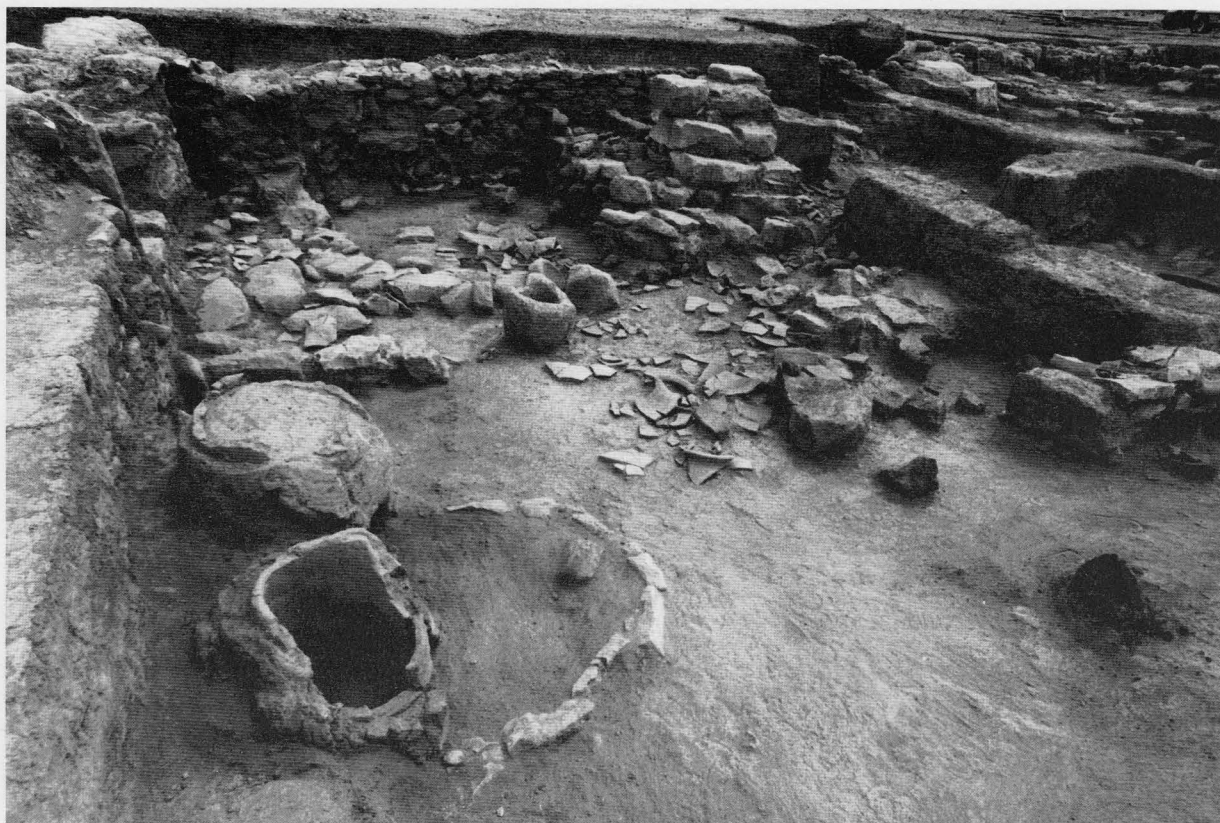


Figure 7.- Main room of House 29 with hearth and oven with the staircase in the background.

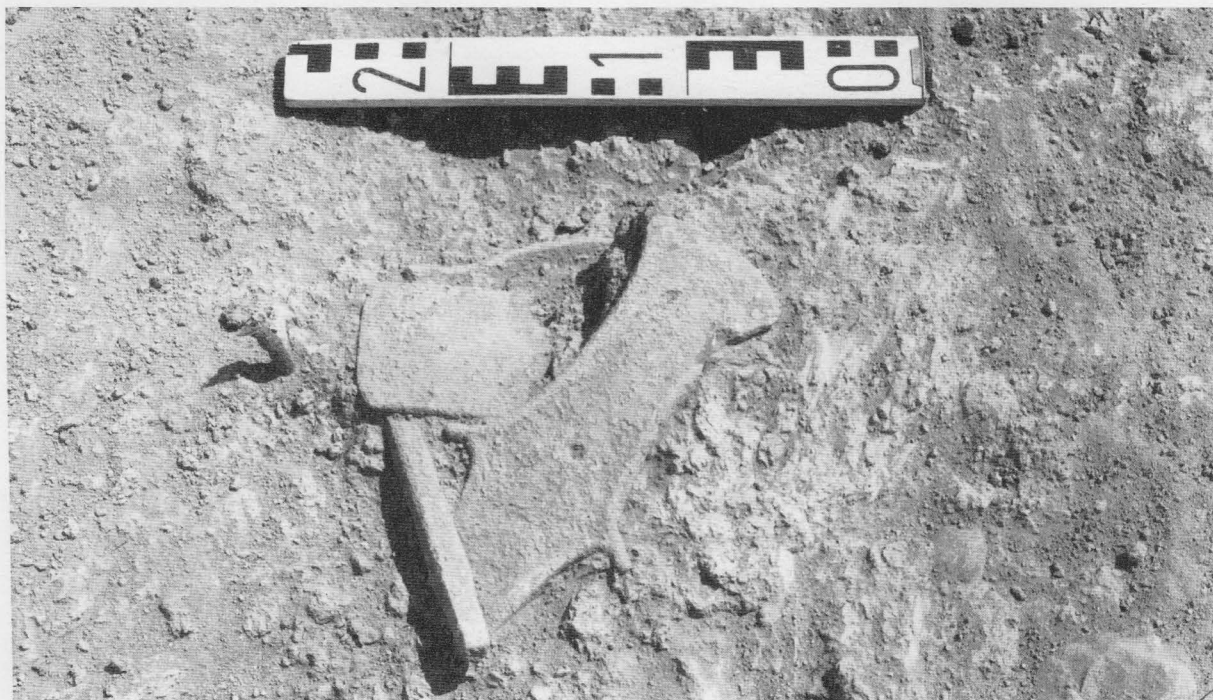


Figure 8.- Several bronze tools (sickles, chisels, knives) from the Weststadt.



Figure 9.- Set of ceramic vessels from a storage room in House 18.



Figure 10.- One of the steatite moulds for jewellery from House 20.