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Paolo Matthiae
Alessandra Enea, Luca Peyronel, Frances Pinnock



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New Discoveries at Tall Bazi, Syria

Berthold Einwag, München

In the Seventies, when the Euphrates-dam near Tabqa was built, a huge area of the Euphrates valley was flooded including many important sites like Habuba Kabira for example. Just north of the present lake, near Djebel Khalid, there is a new dam in construction, the Tishreen-dam. The future lake will cover the complete northern part of the Euphrates valley as far as Jerablus/Carchemish at the Syrian-Turkish border.

Since the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the nineties various missions have been taking part in the rescue work in that region.¹ In that background we visited all the sites within the Tishreen-dam area. Our special interest fell on a place named Tall Bazi, on the east site of the Euphrates only a few kilometres north of the Tishreen dam and close to the site of Banat (McClellan - Porter 1997).

In spring 1993, initial soundings were undertaken at Tall Bazi on behalf of the German Archaeological Institute, Damascus (Einwag *et al.* 1995; Otto - Einwag 1996; Einwag - Otto 1996a; 1996b; 1997). The unexpected good results led to an annual continuation of the work so that the 6th season was concluded in June 1997.² The excavations are directed by B. Einwag and A. Otto.³ We wish to thank the General Director Prof. S. Muhesen and the Department of Antiquities for their continuous support.⁴

The Euphrates Valley at Tall Bazi

The upper Syrian Euphrates-valley is usually quite narrow and widens only at two places to a large fertile plain. This is the case near Tall Ahmar/Til Barsip in the north and further south near Tall Bazi (Fig. 2a). 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.

¹ See Acts of the Symposium on the Archaeology of the Upper Syrian Euphrates (The Tishrin Area) January 28th-30th, 1998, Universitat de Barcelona (in press).

² Participants of the six seasons are the following (in alphabetical order): K. and 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.

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The site (Fig. 1a)

The archaeological remains of Tall Bazi consist of a citadel and a lower town. Both were occupied during the Late Bronze Age. The citadel, 200 m in diam. and 60 m high, lies on a spur of the hilly terrain bordering the Euphrates valley. It is separated from it by an artificial ditch dug into the natural rock. During the first three campaigns several parts of the citadel were briefly investigated.

The lower town lies at the foot of the Citadel, to the north and west. The northern part of the lower town is partly covered by the modern houses of the village of Banat. It has as yet only been investigated through planning of walls visible on the surface and the collection of surface-samples.

Intensive excavation work was carried out in the western part of the lower town, the so-called "Weststadt". It was built on a natural gravel terrace of the Euphrates flood plain, only a few metres above the valley level. The good conditions of preservation and the absence of overlying later structures offered a favourable opportunity for large scale investigations. 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.

Stratigraphy and periods

The main period of occupation represented in Bazi is the Late Bronze Age. As far as we could conclude in the present state of excavation, the "Weststadt" is the latest part of the settlement. It dates exclusively from the end of the Late Bronze Age and has only one building level with two phases.

The stratigraphy of the Citadel is more complex as the trenches on the plateau revealed. There are several layers of the Late Bronze Age, and above there are the remains of a fortification of Roman date and shallow traces of a probably Ottoman watch-tower. Late Bronze Age Bazi is not to be seen as an isolated phenomenon. It belongs to a series of contemporary settlements which form a regularly spaced chain along the Euphrates valley. Several of these settlements also possess fortified citadels, such as Emar/Meskene (Beyer 1982), Faq'us (Margueron 1982a) and Tall Qitar (McClellan 1986).

The historical situation especially of that region is mentioned in various written sources and explains the necessity for such well-defended citadels (Einwag *et al.* 1995, 98 ff). The rich Euphrates valley was a centre of interest and conflict for the rulers of Mitanni, Egypt and Hatti. In the 15th century BC. the Egyptian rulers tried to regain control over Syria. In their military conflict with Mittanian rulers Thutmosis I and Thutmosis III crossed the Euphrates and erected their stelae. In this context the report represents in connection with the list of geographical names on the north-east wall of the 7th pilon in Karnak one of the most important written sources concerning the historical geography in north Syria. Thutmosis III was able to cross the Euphrates with his army at Carchemish while the Mittanian king avoided a battle by retreating eastwards to the heartland of his kingdom. The Egyptian army went downstream along the Euphrates destroying and plundering more

than 60 cities before they left the river valley at Emar/Meskene and turned westwards.

In the time of his successor Amenophis II, after the Mittanian kings had regained control over large areas, Syria was divided into two zones of influence: a southern Egyptian and a northern Mittanian zone.

This balance of power was smashed by the Hittite king Shuppiluliuma I in the middle of the 14th century, when he conquered huge parts of Syria and installed his sons as viceroys in Carchemish/Jerablus and Aleppo. His successor Murshili II fortified the citadel of the country of Ashtata with its centre Emar/Meskene and provided it with a garrison. With the collapse of Mittanian power the Middle Assyrian empire grew stronger and expanded westwards towards the Euphrates.

These are in brief the historical outlines in which the settlement of Tall Bazi is situated, between the two most powerful cities along this stretch of the Euphrates, Carchemish and Emar, about 60 kms from each of them.

The Citadel (Figs. 1a, 2a, 2c in the background)

The Citadel of Tall Bazi consists of a natural rock. On the slope numerous stone walls, one above the other, running horizontally around the Citadel have always been visible. One of them founded on a natural rock ridge at the base of the slope could be investigated over a length of 120 m. Very probably this wall served as a fortification wall.

On the eastern flank a long trench was made all the way up the steep slope (fig. 1a) in order to examine the wall structures which were visible on the surface. These walls turned out to belong to a rather complex system of terrace walls which covers the whole slope. The walls are built of unworked limestone blocks and are filled behind with small stones or stone chips. Some of them were merely retaining or terrace walls facilitating occupation of the steep slope, but others clearly served as fortification walls.

The terrace walls together with the filling material behind it formed little platforms which enabled small houses to be built on top. These buildings are badly eroded due to the steep slope. In some cases only in innermost corners traces of floors and associated finds remained. Near the flatter top of the Citadel some more complete rooms were preserved. The nature of these rooms has still to be definitely established by excavating a larger area.

The Plateau of the Citadel

On the plateau of the Citadel a surrounding wall with protruding towers of Late Bronze Age date is visible in places. A large rock-cut hollow, probably a cistern dating to the same period gives the Citadel its characteristic appearance (Figs. 1a, 2a). The topographical situation in connection with the fortification and the water reservoir emphasises the role of the Citadel as a place of refuge in times of war. In this context it may be noted, that the "Weststadt" was not fortified at all.

Close to the cistern some trenches were opened in order to gain information about the nature of the occupation parts of the Citadel. In the

limited excavation two buildings were identified. On the western edge of the plateau the first building contained several rooms with paved floors of large stone slabs (Einwag - Otto 1996a: 19 f, pl. 4c).

The second building further to the east is characterised by huge walls which are more than 2 m wide. Up to now only a corner of this building has been uncovered. It is separated from the first by a street or other open area. Further investigations are necessary to clarify the nature of these structures.

It is, however, obvious that the buildings on the Citadel differ in many respects from the houses in the lower town. Some of the small finds point to an official purpose, such as hollow terracotta wall-nails (Einwag - Otto 1996a: 20, fig. 2, pl. 14a), parallels to which were found in temples excavated in Emar (Margueron 1982b: 32 ff, figs. 9, 10).

The Citadel in Roman time

After the final destruction of Tall Bazi the site was abandoned for a long time. In the Roman period the ideal defensive situation of the Citadel was re-used. A fortification was built on the Citadel, probably to watch and protect an important crossing-point over the Euphrates. The new fortification consists of a surrounding wall with protruding rectangular towers and a gateway on the north-eastern edge of the Citadel. Some of the Late Bronze Age wall must have been still visible. The later occupants built their walls in some cases immediately on top of the Late Bronze Age wall. They used the same building technique as was used in the Late Bronze Age and which continues to be the common one in this region today. The walls consist of two parts: a stone socle about 1 m high built from unworked limestone blocks, and an upper part of the wall built out of mudbricks.

Several rooms of this fortification have been excavated. The inventory includes ceramics and large quantities of metal objects and weapons, such as lance-heads and trilobate arrow-heads. In one of the two rooms we uncovered a decorated altar but without inscription (Einwag *et al.* 1995: 109 f, pl. 11c; Otto - Einwag 1996: 470-471). Nevertheless there are some indications which suggest, that the Roman Bazi should be identified with "Apammari", a station mentioned on the Tabula Peutingeriana on a branch of the ancient road from Hierapolis to Zeugma (Einwag *et al.* 1995: 120-121).

The northern slope of the Citadel

The access to the plateau is one of the many outstanding questions concerning the Citadel. In many parts the slope is too steep to allow easy access to the Citadel. On the northern slope, however, during certain light conditions a shallow depression in the surface leading up to the plateau of the Citadel is visible. At that place, half way up, we opened some trenches in order to examine a possible access road. Indeed we found traces of an access route which was renewed several times and a gateway with a flanking round tower. Nearby was a bastion built from big stone blocks which were set against a huge mudbrick wall of an earlier phase, whose purpose remains to be determined. The mudbrick wall and the bastion were built on top of an

industrial area dating to an earlier period of the Late Bronze Age. Of this level only a very small part could be excavated (Einwag - Otto 1996a: 22 f, pl. 5).

The sequence found in this area seems to span most of the Late Bronze Age. Together with the yet unexcavated northern lower town this belongs to the older part of the city whereas the so-called "Weststadt" is an enlargement of the site towards the end of the Late Bronze Age.

The "Weststadt" (Figs. 1a-b, 2b-d)

The favourable conditions in "Weststadt" allowed large scale horizontal excavations, which were the main focus of the most recent campaigns. By the end of 1997 an area of more than 10,000 sq. m had been excavated (Figs. 1a-b).

The "Weststadt" is founded on a natural gravel terrace which slopes slightly downwards to the north. The elevation of some meters above the level of the flood plain protects the settlement in case of high water. But it remains the lowest area of the site, and will be the first part of Tall Bazi to be flooded by the waters of the new lake.

The excavation in the "Weststadt" began in spring 1993 when the first trench hit the corner of a house (House 1) (Fig. 1b; Einwag *et al.* 1995: 111 ff). The floor was less than half a meter below the surface and the inventory contained lots of ceramics and bronze objects. The little time left in the first season allowed us only to open a few additional trenches which at the end yielded the complete plan of House 1. In the northern part it was badly eroded with only one stone-setting left. The ground plan has a rectangular shape with one large long room and a row of for small square rooms along the long side.

In the following campaigns the excavation area was enlarged in order to get information about the structure and extent of the "Weststadt". The "Weststadt" consists of several areas of houses which are arranged along several main streets. These main streets are very wide measuring 6 to 10 m in width. The houses along these main streets are sometimes attached to each other (area of Houses 6-7, 16-22, 26, 29, 30, 32). In the north-eastern part they are separated by narrow lanes (Houses 1-5) which could be closed as is indicated by door-sockets at the entrance. Probably access was restricted to the inhabitants of the neighbouring houses.

The houses

The investigations in the "Weststadt" not only give information about the street-system but also allow detailed insights into the domestic architecture and the building techniques. The vast archaeological data available (more than 50 houses have been completely or partially uncovered) will allow detailed statistical analysis of the results. This analysis is still in progress.

Plans of the houses are standardised (Fig. 2d). The normal ground plan of a house consists of a large long room 15-22 m in length. It is in most cases equipped with an oven and a hearth with a platform in front of it. This

main room is flanked on one side by 3 to 6 small square rooms some of which were used as storage rooms.

Beyond a standard ground plan the houses show mostly a uniform building technique. The lower part of the walls consists of a socle of unworked limestone, whereas the upper part is formed by square mudbricks.

The houses show varying states of preservation. Towards the north and along the edges of the plateau sometimes only the lowest layers of the stone-socle survived. Further to the south, the houses are more complete and the heavily burned walls are in cases preserved up to a height of 1.5 m.

The final catastrophe which hit the town occurred so suddenly, that the inhabitants fled their houses leaving almost all their possessions behind including weapons, jewellery and other precious objects. We do not know who was responsible for this catastrophe. We also do not know if the inhabitants made a final stand within the fortified citadel.

However, it is evident, that the people had no time to gather their belongings when they left. And they never came back.

This is obviously the reason why we find in the excavations not only the objects of daily life: i.e. common ceramic or stone tools, but also precious objects like a golden disk with spiral decoration (Fig. 3a) or a small frit vessel with geometrical decor (Fig. 3c). In addition to this cylinder seals, bronze weapons and other jewellery of silver and precious stones should be mentioned.

The inventory found in the houses allows a detailed insight in the daily life and living conditions of the inhabitants of the "Weststadt". Each house contained a standard repertoire of ceramic vessels: big storage-containers, jars and pitchers, bowls and plates, tiny cups and miniature vessels including quite curious terracotta-objects like that of a "kernos", a hollow ring on which were attached 7 small vessels and a spout in form of a ram's head (Fig. 3d; Einwag - Otto 1996a: 41 ff, pl. 12d, e). The houses of the "Weststadt" served not only for living as it is indicated by the inventory but also at the same time for the commercial manufacture of goods.

This is the case in House 19, the so-called house of the "metal-worker", where we found special installations and lots of tools, moulds (fig. 3b) and other small finds connected with melting and metal-working.

A survey of all the excavated houses in the "Weststadt" shows that almost every household specialised in the manufacture of particular products such as bronze weapons or tools, stone weights, jewellery of different materials and other objects. Noteworthy is the wide-spread production of beads and weight-stones indicated by large quantities of raw material as well as of partly finished objects.

In the burnt down houses much of the inventory was preserved and gives us an idea about the activities which took place in the different parts of a house. The production took place in the main room of the houses as is indicated by special installations. The square side-rooms, which measure usually 2 to 3 m, are accessible only from the main room. Some of them are equipped with benches, others were found filled up with ceramic vessels and clearly were used as storage rooms. The space needed for living may have been provided by a second storey.

The settlement pattern of the "Weststadt" (Fig. 1b) shows a particularity: contrary to the dense building areas along the streets, there was a large space in the middle of the dwelling quarters left open. Investigations last year showed that this empty slightly sloping space was later on levelled with some shallow terraces and some crude rooms were erected on the edges.

The completely different character of this place together with the fact that the inhabitants manufactured goods for sale in their houses leads to an interpretation as a market place or bazaar area (Einwag - Otto 1996a: 33 f). The presence of weights in nearly every house suggests that the inhabitants were not only artisans but also merchants. The "Weststadt" seems to have been an urban settlement of merchants and artisans and could well have been the commercial centre of the region where exchanges between the urban inhabitants and the rural population took place.

Summary

Excavations in Tall Bazi from 1993-97 have brought to light a Late Bronze Age settlement, consisting of the two elements of a strongly fortified citadel and a lower town, which apparently was not fortified. Because the lower town will be flooded first by the new Tishreen-lake, since 1995 our main efforts concentrated on the large scale horizontal excavation of the "Weststadt"; this is a late enlargement of the lower town, which was planned and built within a short period of time.

Therefore the "Weststadt" allows a detailed analysis of the organization and principles of a well planned settlement. Furthermore the excavation of more than 50 houses with streets, lanes and places has added much to our knowledge of Syro-Mesopotamian domestic architecture of the Late Bronze Age.

The short life span of the house quarters and the violent destruction, which led to the preservation of many objects in situ, allow insights into the function and purpose of every house and into the social and economic background of this wealthy urban suburb.

However, a more detailed analysis of the houses and the society connected with them will require further study: the evaluation of the vast amount of archaeological data is still in progress.

Remarkably enough not one single building with an official or definitely 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 (Einwag - Otto 1996a: 18 ff).

Given the fact that the "Weststadt" was built on a flat terrace only a few metres above the valley level, and at the base of the hills immediately to the south it could not be efficiently defended, but the Citadel was extremely carefully fortified and it seems probable that the official buildings have to be sought up there.

For the future we hope to bring light into some of these open questions by continuing excavations on the Citadel, the higher parts of which fortunately will not be flooded entirely.

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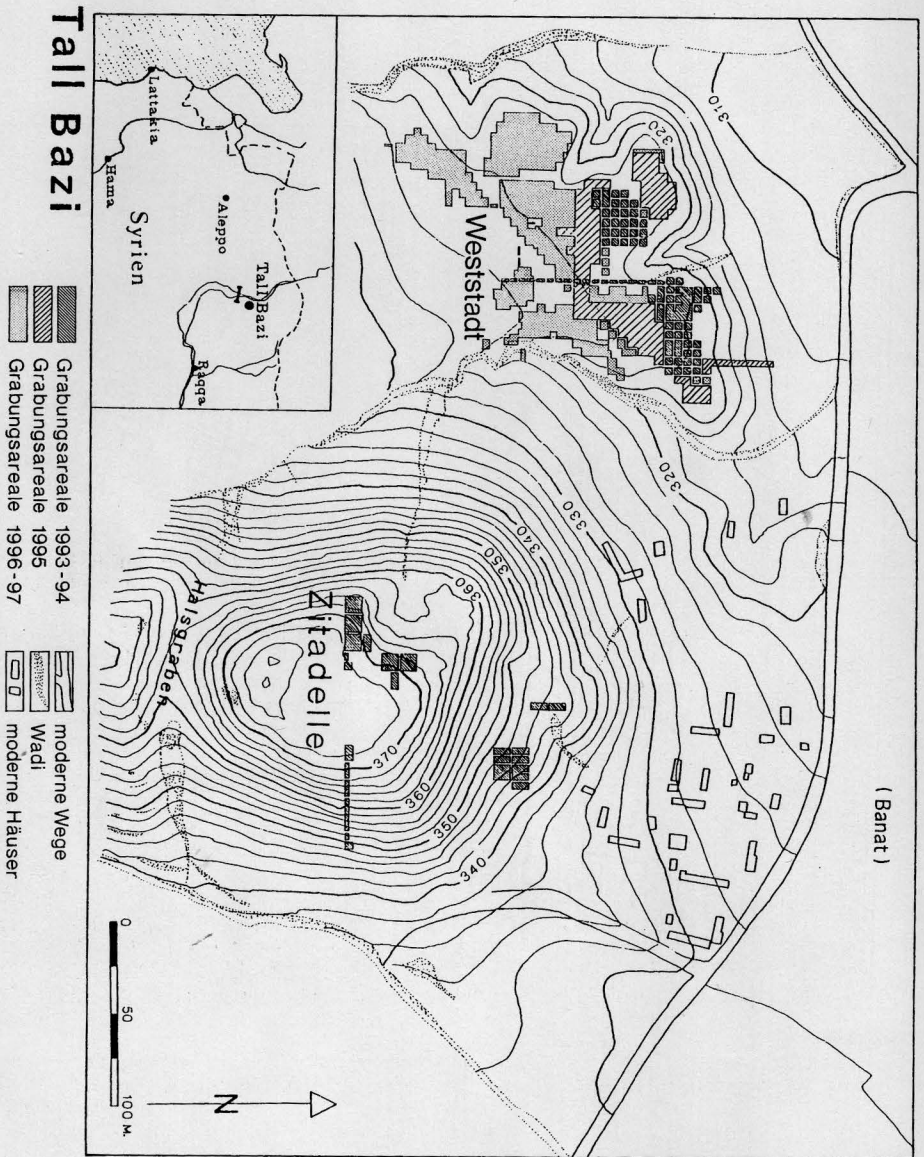


Fig. 1a Topographical plan of Tall Bazi showing the areas excavated 1993-1997.

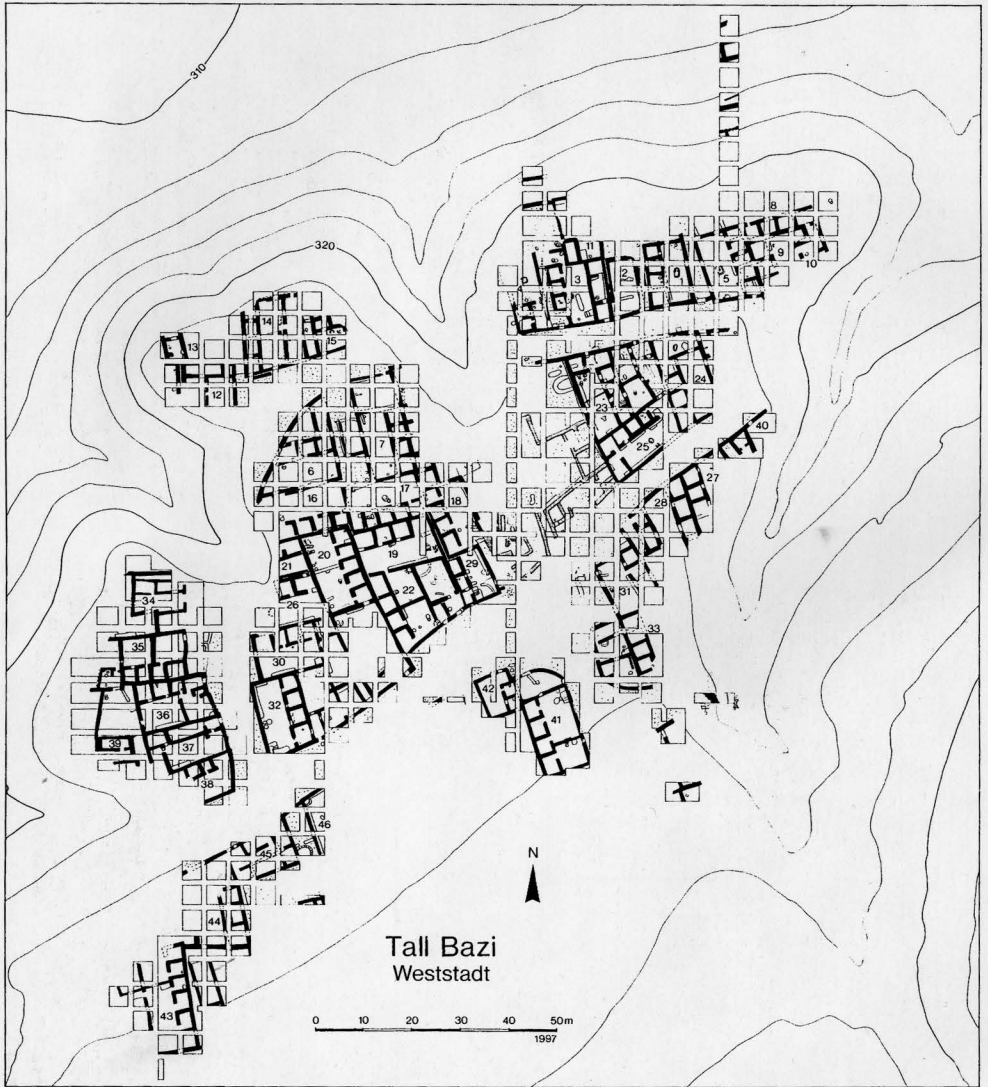


Fig. 1b Schematic plan of the "Weststadt".



Fig. 2a Tall Bazi: general view from the opposite (western) riverbank of the Euphrates.

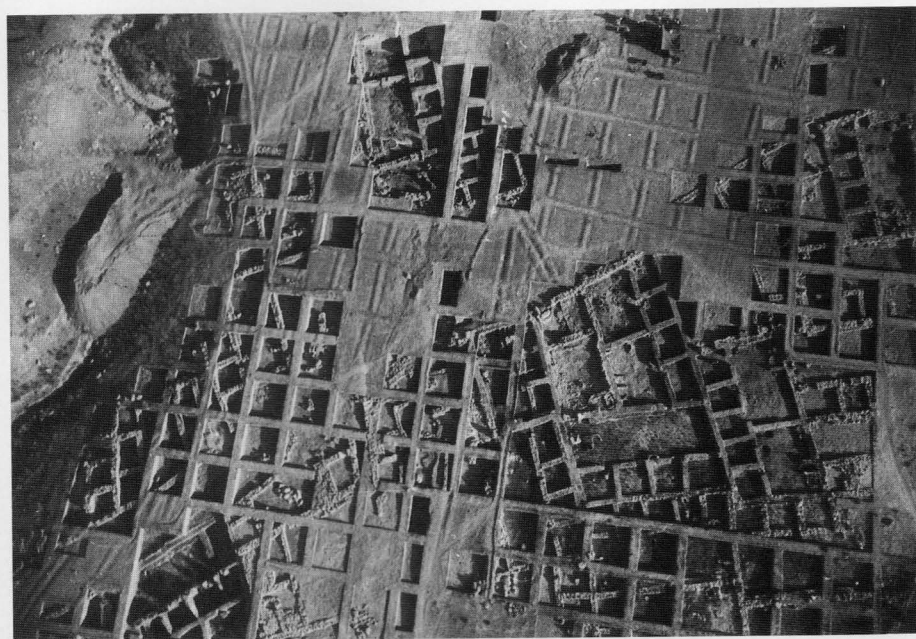


Fig. 2b Aerial photo of the south-eastern part of the "Weststadt" (North is at the top and House 41 in the lower part of the picture).

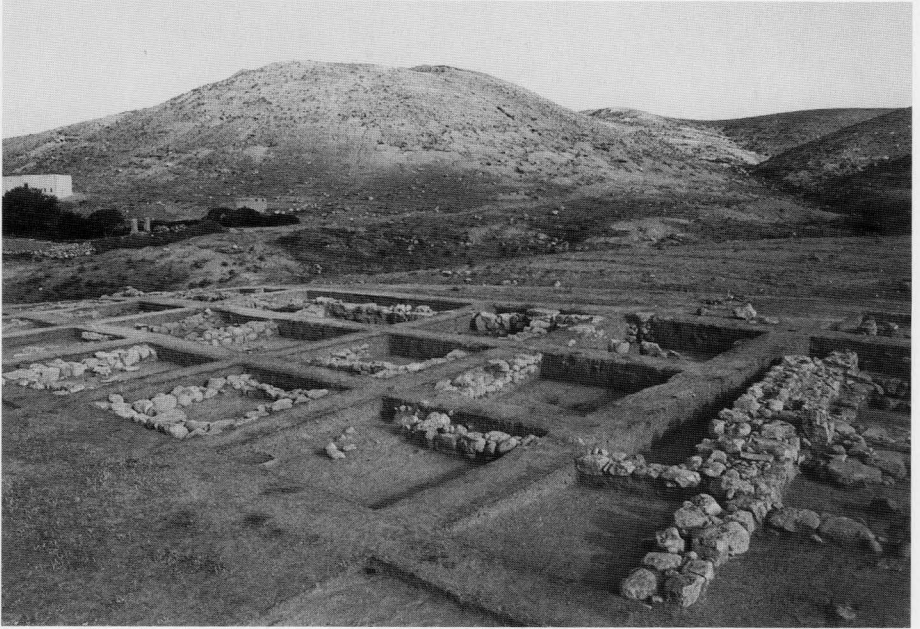


Fig. 2c Stone socles of some houses of the "Weststadt" with the Citadel in the background.

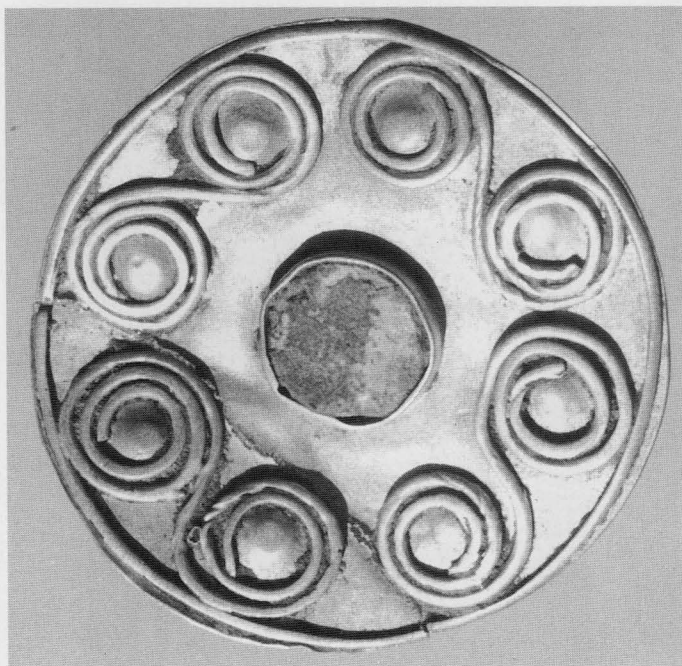


Fig. 2d Ground plan of a standard house of the "Weststadt" (House 43).

Fig. 3b Steatite mould for producing jewellery (length 8.2 cm).



Fig. 3a Golden disc with spiral decoration (d. 2.3 cm).



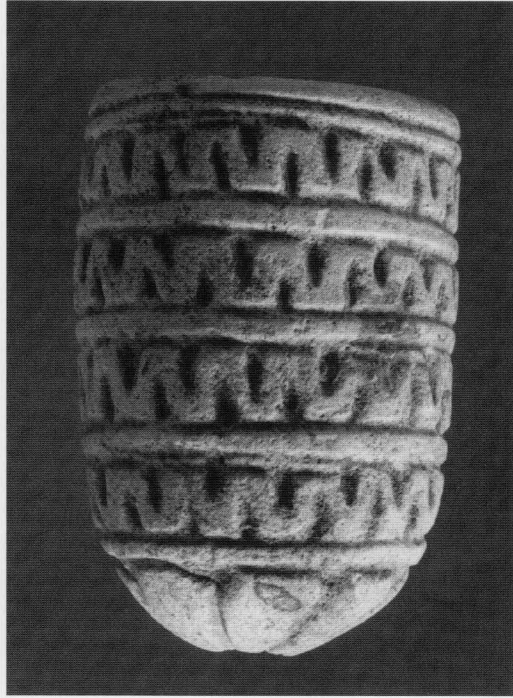


Fig. 3c Miniature frit-vessel, with geometrical decoration (height 3.8 cm).



Fig. 3d Kernos with a spout in form of a ram's head (terracotta, d. 21 cm).