

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE EXCAVATION IN TELL BDERI 1985

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Following an international appeal by the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria to rescue the antiquities along the Lower Habur River the Free University of Berlin is sponsoring and financing an excavation in tell Bderi under the direction of professor Hartmut Kühne. The local responsibilities are met by Mr. Peter Pfälzner, M.A., as field director.

Within a large irrigation project for the Habur River a dam is planned about 35 Km south of the provincial capital Hasaka. The lake created by this dam will submerge about 30 archaeological sites within the Habur valley. Tell Bderi is one of the major sites in this area. It lies about 15 Km south of Hasaka on the eastern bank of the river. The extension of the large mound is about 310 meters from North to South and 245 meters from East to West. The tell, which raises twelve meters above surrounding flood plain, has a «cake-like» shape with a flat plateau (plan 1; fig 1). This is due to the fact that there is no occupation of the site later than the Bronze Age.

The aim of the first season was twofold: first, to achieve a stratigraphic sequence of all occupation levels represented in the tell and second, to excavate one architectural level on a larger scale. For this purpose two areas were chosen: the southern slope and the northern plateau of the tell.

1. The southern slope area:

A step trench was dug down in the areas 2945, 2943 and 2941 (fig 2). 26 levels were distinguished out of which levels 2 to 7 should be dated to the Late Bronze Age. In level 4 and 5 architectural remains of dwelling houses were discovered, which are dated by Nuzi-Ware and the so called Younger Habur Ware to the mid second millennium B.C. The building in level 4 yielded five succeeding floors. There are no traces at all of a Middle-Assyrian occupation. This shows that the site was abandoned after the Hurri-mitannian period.

With level 8 through level 26 an uninterrupted sequence of Early Bronze Age layers was uncovered. Altogether they are eleven meters thick. Judging from the complete lack of Middle Bronze Age material there is a hiatus between the Early and Late Bronze Age occupation. The most prominent architectural remains of the Early Bronze Age were excavated in the levels 9, 20, 23, 24 and 25.

In level 9 a fairly well preserved double wall with lime plaster, connected with a doorway and a plastered floor was discovered, which seems to be part of a larger building (plan 2; fig. 3). After its abandonment the building was filled up completely with mud bricks. In the same area three complete vessels found by accident outside the trench in the sur-

face debris. They are Early Bronze in date and lay approximately at the same height as layer 9, so that they may have belonged to this stratum.

Level 20 includes part of a house wall, built of mud bricks over a stone foundation. This building technique is up to now unique on the site. The floor of the same house is paved with coarse pebbles.

An interesting installation was uncovered in level 23 : a water canal, carefully built of stones and lime mortar and descending towards the center of the tell (fig. 4). For the latter reason it is supposed to have served as a water supply rather than a waste water drainage. In level 24 a well preserved lime plastered floor was excavated connected with a mud brick wall.

Level 25 yielded clear evidence of a town wall (fig. 5). This massive mud brick wall is at least 2,40 m wide, however its inner face has not yet been discovered. A glacis, apparently built of pisé, protects the town wall on its outer face. South of this wall, and thus outside the former town, eight layers of architectural remains and ash debris were uncovered. They belong to later occupation phases and could not be correlated with the stratigraphic sequence inside of the town wall. Levels 4 and 5 outside the fortification wall reveal a house plan and a series of three succeeding ovens (fig. 2). Levels 6 and 7 consist of large quantities of ash. These ash layers stretch from the foot of the town wall to cover a distance of 20 m outside the settlement, gradually descending in elevation. The bottom of this ash deposit was reached in a deep sondage at the foot of the tell and lay about three meters below the present plain level. Virgin soil was reached immediately below the ash layers.

Until now no occupation levels earlier than the Early Bronze Age were found, but the presence of one Halaf-Ware sherd on the surface of the tell points to earlier occupation strata.

2. The northern area:

Two areas, 2965 and 2963, were excavated on the flat plateau in the northern part of the tell. Architectural complexes from the topmost levels of

each area could be unearthed there on a broad scale. Since the settlement of the Hurri-mitannian time occupied only the southern and central part of the mound, the upmost levels in the northern area belong to the Early Bronze Age occupation.

2.1. Area 2965 :

Seven levels were excavated in this area, the lowest of which (level 7) is a fairly well preserved architectural stratum. This level reveals a building, of which five rooms could be unearthed (fig. 6). The northern and eastern limits of the building are not yet known. Room A contained a completely preserved inventory of Early Bronze Age date (fig. 7). It was completely excavated and documented in this campaign. The room is square and rather small (2,25 by 2,25m). Sixteen complete pots were found in situ lying on the floor of the room (fig. 8). Sixteen other pots could be restored completely from the preserved fragments. Particularly remarkable are three complete pots with double barrle handles. In one part of room A a small accumulation of grain was found including wheat, barley, emmer and einkorn. Furthermore there were mortars of polished stone and a "working plate" made of baked clay.

Room B could only be partially excavated and was empty, except for one nearly complete pot of Early Bronze Age date. Room C is the largest room of the building so far known. Like room A it contained a completely preserved inventory (fi. 6). Although the pottery had been more smashed than those in Room A, up to now five pots could be fully restored. Three pot covers made from unbaked clay, two jar sealings of Jemdet-Nasr type, a very well preserved impression of a basket and one stone mortar were included in the inventory of room C. A horse-shoe shaped oven was built near the southern wall of the room.

Rooms D and E were only partially cleared. Due to the erosion of the slope of the mound, these rooms are badly preserved. Their floors had been paved with lime plaster.

Two building phases can be distinguished within this house. The earlier one comprised only rooms

A, B, D and E. During the second phase, the house was enlarged as room C was added to the reused earlier rooms. Outside the building an area with pebble pavement was unearthed, that could either have been a street or a court.

Judging from a first preliminary survey of the pottery from rooms A and C, the building should be dated to the final Early Dynastic III-Period or the beginning of the Akkade-time.

2.2. Area 2963 :

This area lies immediately below the area 2965 on the slope of an erosional valley of the tell. The four levels uncovered in this area are slightly earlier in date than the building in area 2965. Level 4, the lowest layer in area 2963, revealed a section of a living quarter of the Early Bronze Age town. A street, or rather a narrow lane, with two angles separates two houses (fig. 9). The houses contain lime plastered floors that had been renewed several times. These renovations are due to two main building phases of this living quarter. The eastern house shows, in its limited excavated part, an interesting ground plan: it is surrounded by an outer and fairly thin enclosure wall decorated with small pilasters. Inside, there is a corridor following the enclosure wall. The corridor surrounds an inner structure with thick walls, which is paved with a lime floor (fig. 10).

Three sherds of a painted pot stand were found in the same level. They resemble pieces of the so-called

“scarlet ware”, but are definitely a particular north Syrian painted ware of the Early Dynastic time. The other types of pottery from this level including “metallic ware” and pots with “triangular ledge handles”- show close parallels to the Early Dynastic II and III material from Tell Chuera. 4

Summary :

The most important results of the first season of excavations in Tell Bderi can be summarized as follows: the main occupation period at Tell Bderi is the Early Bronze Age. In this time the settlement had its largest extension, the town being surrounded most probably by a city wall. There seems to be a long and uninterrupted occupation during most of the 3rd millennium B.C. This can be concluded from the succession of 18 levels within the step trench, which can be attributed to this period. The town thus must have been one of the major centers for the Middle and Lower Habur valley in the Early Bronze Age.

In the Middle Bronze Age the site is unoccupied. A reoccupation takes place in the Late Bronze Age. The Nuzi-time settlement that is represented in two main building levels, covers only a smaller part of the former settlement area. Beginning from the time of the Middle-Assyrian empire the occupation on the site ends abruptly. There are no later remains on the site, except for a modern cemetery. Smaller settlements from the Roman and Islamic times can be found in the vicinity of the tell. 5

Footnotes :

- (1) We wish to thank the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, its general director Dr. A. Bahnassi and director Dr. A. Bounni for the permission and the support of this excavation. We also wish to express our thanks to M. Heretani, representative of the Department of Antiquities in the campaign of 1985 in Tell Bderi for his help and assistance during the excavation.
- (2) The members of staff in the 1985 campaign were: H. Dohmann, C. Giers, M. Goodman, S.

Hauser, S. Kulemann, P. Larsen, A. Pfalzner, H. Pfalzner, P. Pfalzner, and P. Stier.

- (3) Tell Bderi is site No. 16 (Tell Boudeiri) on the map: “Barrage du Khabour: Les Tells Voués A La Submersion”, added to the “international appeal to rescue the Antiquities along the Middle Khabur River”.
- (4) see H. Kuhne, *Die Keramik von Tell Chuera*, Berlin, 1976
- (5) A more detailed preliminary report is planned to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Damaszener Mitteilungen*.

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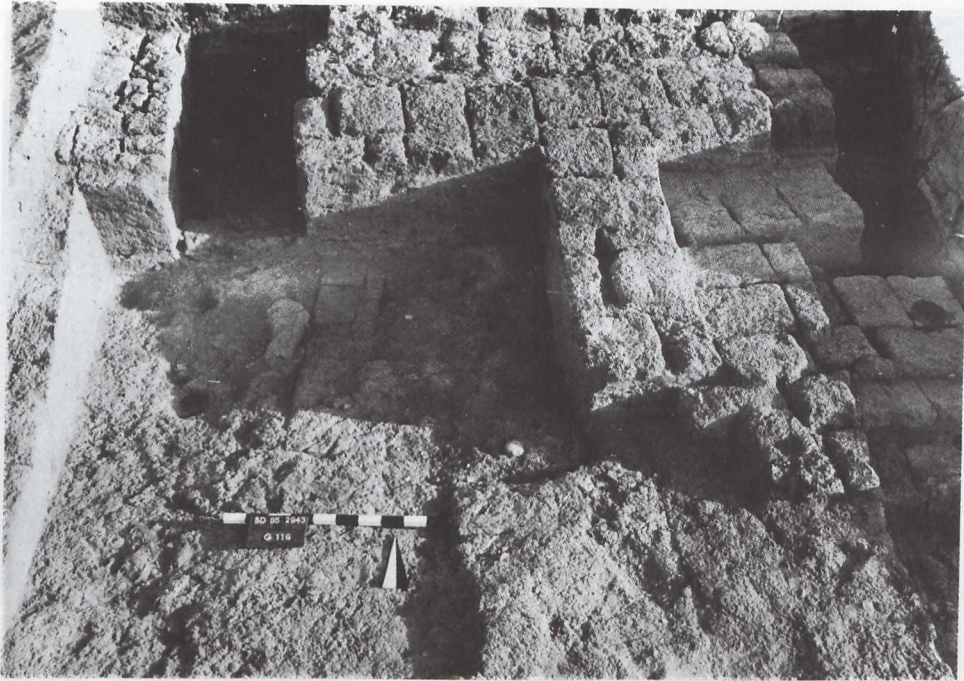


fig. 3: The building in level 9, step trench on the south slope, seen from south



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fig. 5: The town wall in level 25, step trench on the south slope, seen from southwest



fig. 6: The building in level 7, area 2965 on the northern plateau, in foreground room C with the inventory of



fig. 7: The building in level 7, area 2965 on the northern slope; the inventory of room A

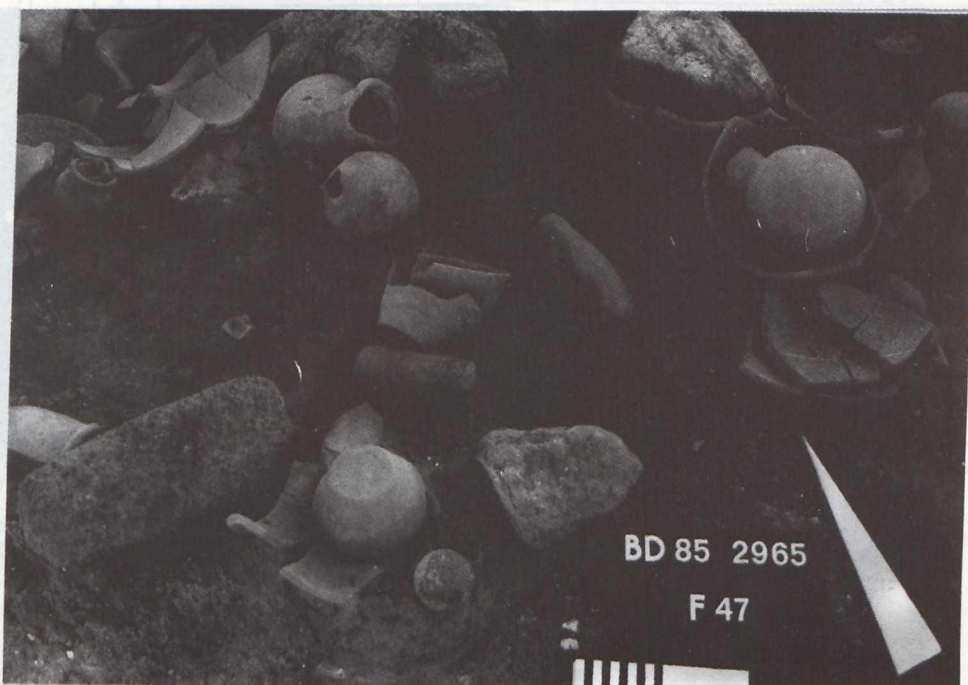


fig. 8: The building in level 7, area 2965 on the northern plateau; detail of the inventory of room A

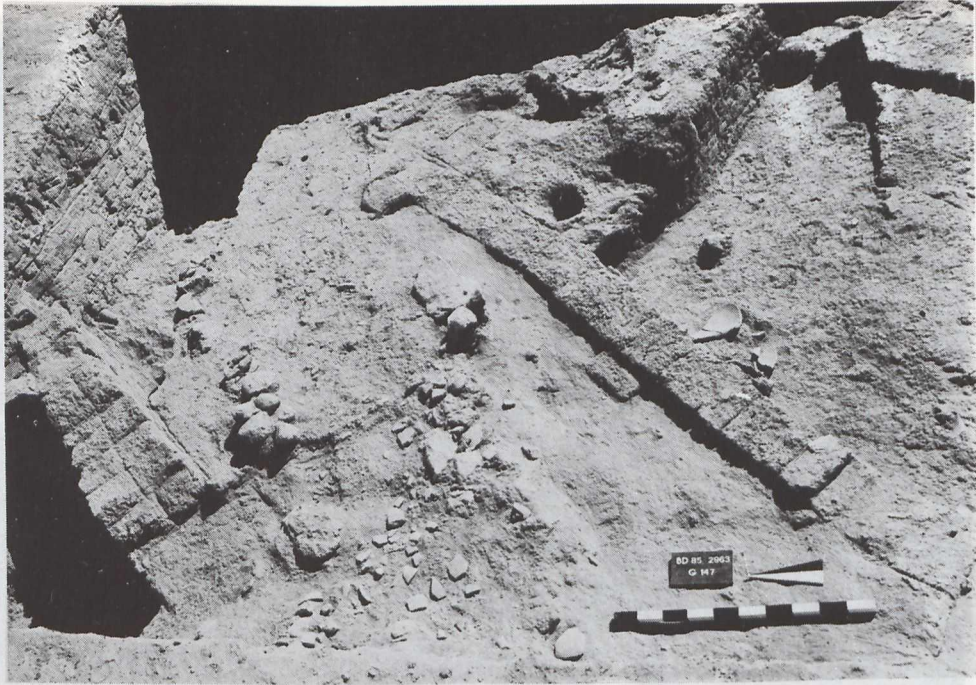
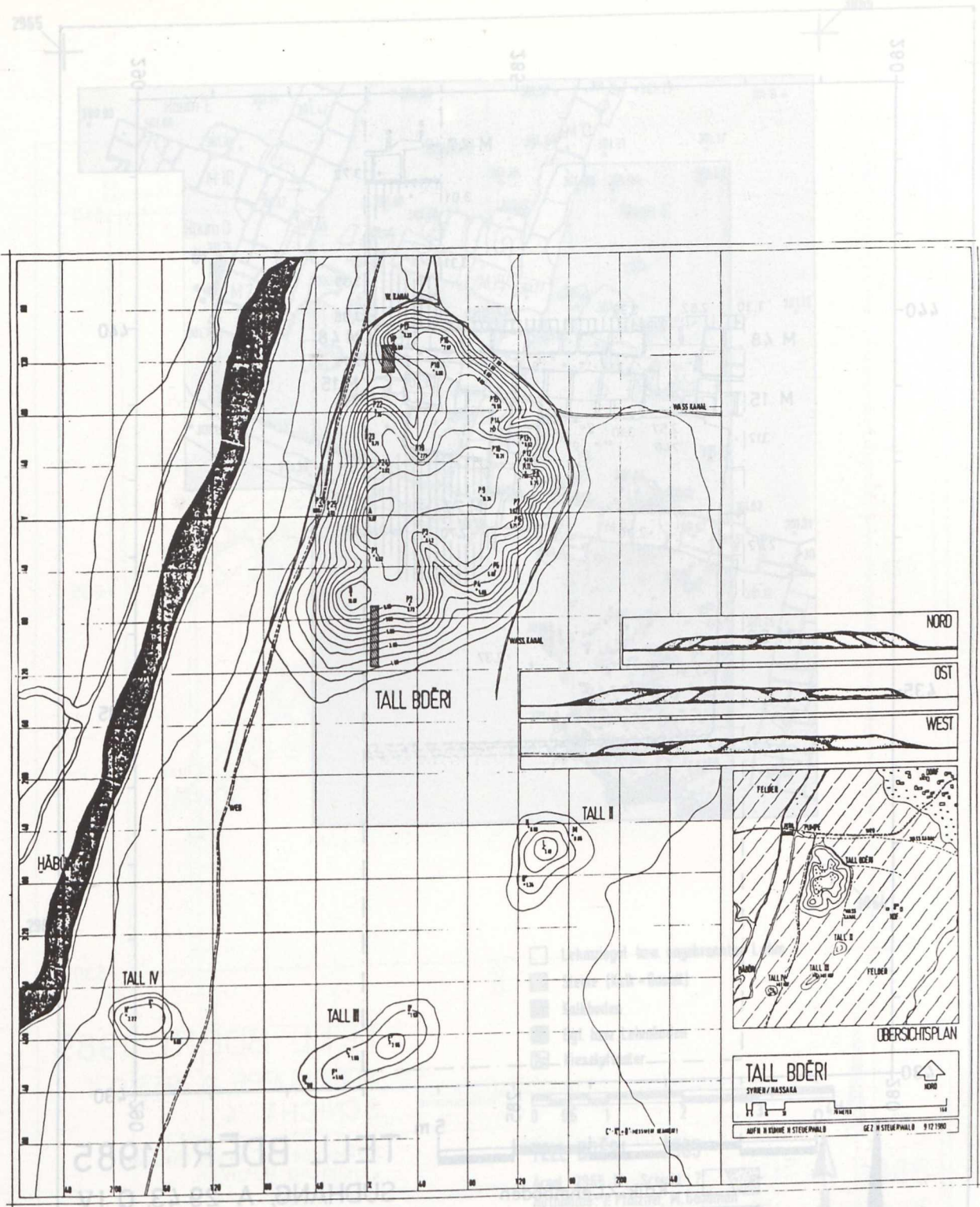


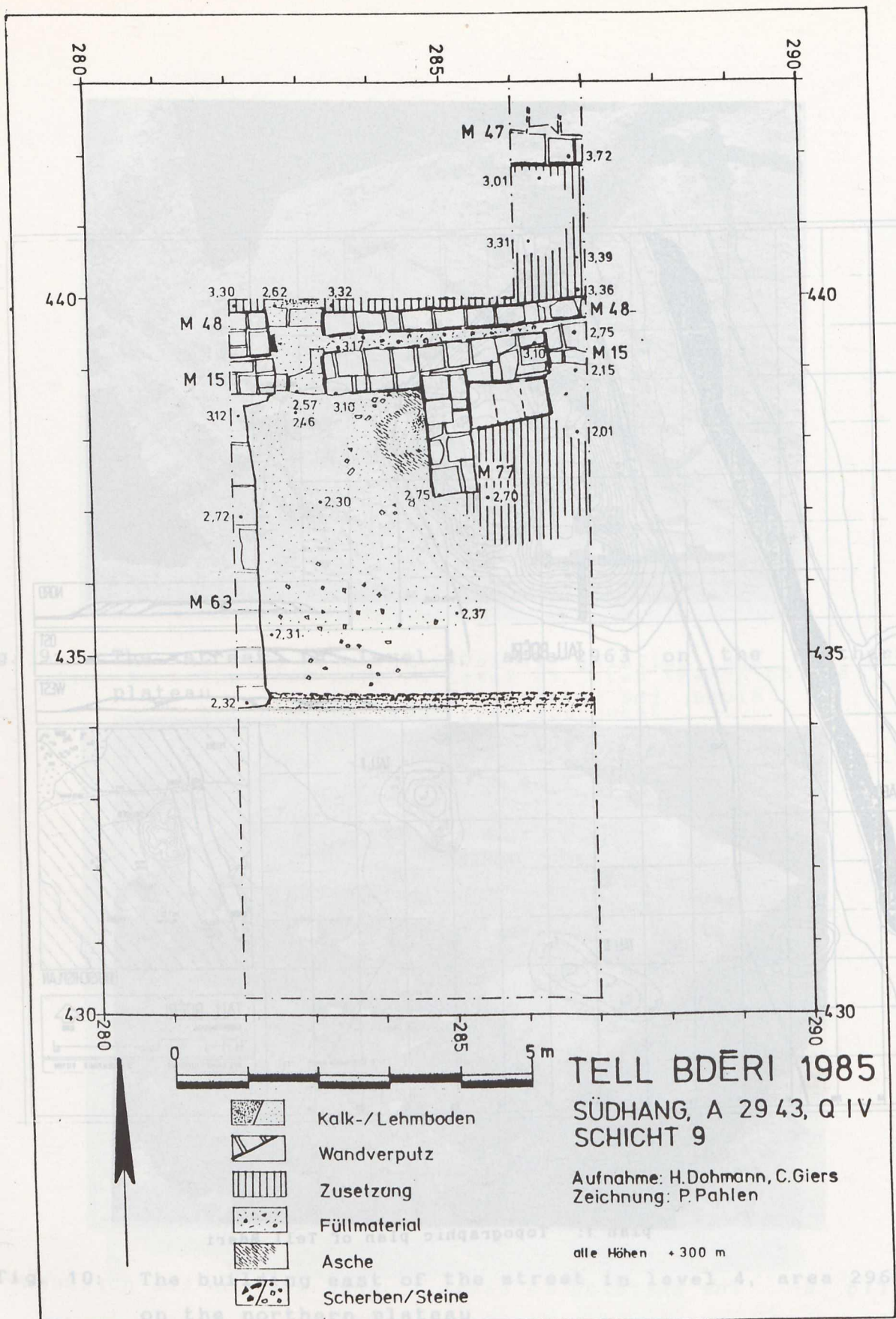
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fig. 10: The building east of the street in level 4, area 2963 on the northern plateau



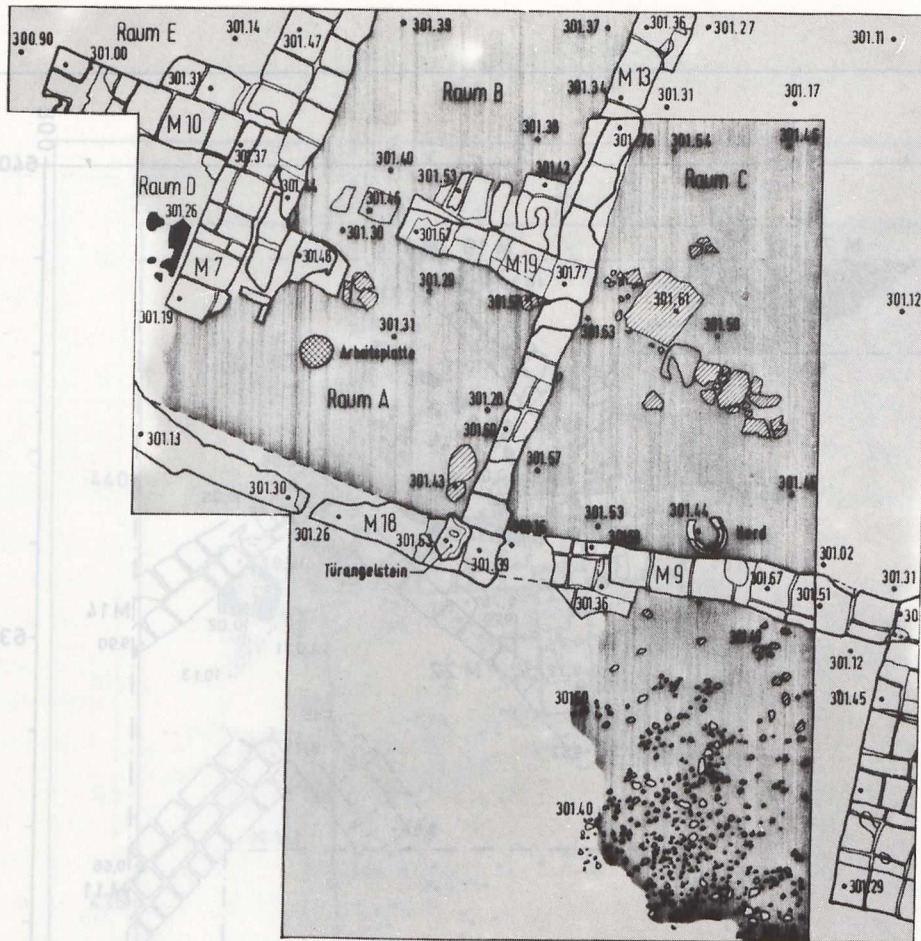
plan 1: Topographic plan of Tell Bderi



plan 2: The building in level 9, step trench on the south slope

2965

3065



2964

3064

- Lehmziegel bzw. ungebrannter Lehm
- ▨ Steine (Kalk + Basalt)
- Kalkboden
- Bgf. bzw. Lehm Boden
- ▤ Kieselplaster

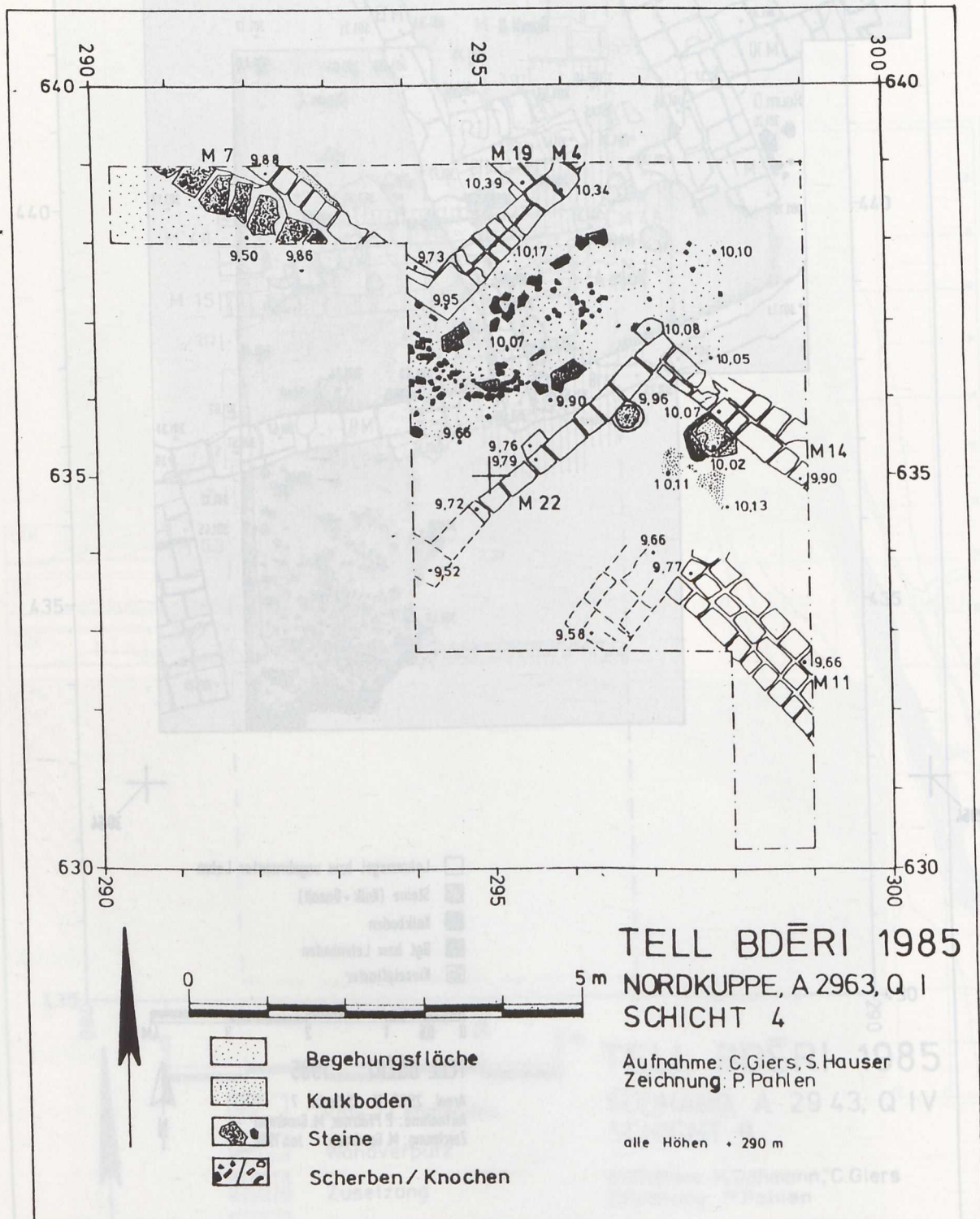


TELL BÖRİ 1985

Areal 2965 II, Schicht 7
 Aufnahme: P. Pfälzner, M. Goodman
 Zeichnung: M. Goodman Jan 1986



plan 3: The building in level 7, area 2965 on the northern plateau



plan 4: Street and adjoining house in level 4, area 2963
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