

The Excavations at Tell Bderi 1986

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The second season of excavations at Tell Bderi lasted from 20th of August to 8th of November 1986. The mission under the direction of Prof. Dr. H. Kühne was again financed by the Free University of Berlin. Special thanks are due to the Director General of Antiquities and Museums, Dr Afif Bahnassi the Director of Excavations, Dr. Adnan Bounni and the Director of Surveys, Dr. Kassem Toueir for their generous support. We are also grateful to the Directors of Antiquities in Der ez-Zor and Hasaka, Mr. Assad Mahmoud and Mr. Jean-Simone Lazare, for their friendly assistance. Particular acknowledgement is due to Dr. Mahmoud Heretani, Director of the Ethnographical Museum in Aleppo, for his support of the mission as Representative of the Directorate General. The members of the 1986 team were Heike Dohmann as site supervisor of the step trench, Nicole Vögtlin and Ulrike Hauswaldt as site assistants, Sabina Kulemann in charge of pottery and small finds, Martin Geiger as cook and Peter Pfälzner as field director.

Like in the first campaign the excavation concentrated on two areas: the step trench on the southern slope and the area excavation on the northern plateau of the tell. Additionally a small sounding was made on one of the small mounds surrounding the tell at a distance of about 200m. The 1 by 10m trench was stopped after recognizing that the mound was natural and did not contain any archaeological material.

The step trench on the southern slope.

After the complete stratigraphy of the tell from layer 1 to layer 25 had been established in 1985, this year's aim was to dig down the successive architectural strata in the upper part. Respectively within prominent and most interesting layers the trench was enlarged to get a broader account of the ground plan of their architecture. Parallel to the work in the upper layers the bottom stratum 25, containing the large defensive-like wall, was excavated on a broad scale to clear up the extent and function of this large structure.

In the upper part of the 5 meter wide step trench level 4 had been excavated at the end of the 1985 campaign. At the beginning of this year's work the layer was removed in order to unearth layer 5 completely which had only been excavated in its western part the year before. Level 5 consists of the two rooms excavated in 1985 and a floor area east of the rooms, probably an open court, that is bound by an enclosure wall.

Level 6 consists of one room with fairly well preserved walls, which had been founded into the more ancient levels 7 and 8. Walls and floor of this house had been deepened into the earth of the former tell slope. The upper courses of the level 8 walls were destroyed partly during these later building activities. Both levels 5 and 6 can be attributed to the Hurri-mitannian period within the Late Bronze Age.

Level 7 is the upmost layer of the Early Bronze Age. At this point the step trench was extended to a width of 23 m in order to excavate the very well preserved architectural plan of the underneath lying level 8 a broader scale. Both levels 7 and 8 seem to be structurally and chronologically connected, because some of the walls show a similar layout. But in fact the large house plan of level 7 seems to represent a functionally distinct building. Two neighboring rectangular rooms were provided with basin-like lime plastered floors. One room has a single shallow lime floor. The other room is equipped with several deeper basins of differing shapes. Two of them are connected with each other by a narrow lime canal. They might have been used for tanning hides. Similar facilities can be seen in recent oriental houses, where hides are tanned in the same kind of basins for several days in a water-lime solution.

Level 8 plan 2 is so far the best preserved architectural layer within the step trench. Its walls are standing to a height of 1 to 1.5 m. Four of the rooms contain a very rich inventory of ceramics. The floors were nearly completely covered by broken pottery. Probably the majority of the pots can be restored from the sherds. Additionally a cylinder seal, a clay jar sealing with seal impression, stone pearls and a large bronze sickle complete the inventory of the rooms. From all these finds it will be possible to reconstruct the functions of rooms and houses. Two house units can be distinguished architecturally. The eastern unit consists of two connected rooms, one rectangular (3 by 2 m) and one square (3 by 3 m). They are flanked on their eastern side by an open court or working place. Provided with a small and shallow lime basin and a circular hard-baked lime container, both deepened into the mud floor. Northeast of these

installations is a 'tenur'. The rooms themselves contain low benches and podiums made of mud and mudbricks and obviously used as working platforms (fig. 2). A fire-place is situated at the western wall of the square room. The house must have extended further to the north and east. A door in the northern side of the rectangular room is either an entrance to the house or a connection with other northern rooms.

The western house unit of level 8 was excavated on a larger area. It is built wall by wall with the eastern unit. At least three building phases can be distinguished within this house. The oldest part is a rather large (3 by 4 m) rectangular room, later reduced by an inner wall into a square room. Its floor is lime plastered in the southern half of the room in the way, that it forms a shallow basin. On its one side, it is bordered by three diagonally laid bricks on the floor. A working podium on the opposite side of the basin contains three narrow lime canals which lead down into the basin. This installation was used for artisanal or domestic working activities obviously concerned with liquids but of a kind not yet to be determined.

In the second building phase the western rooms were added, separated from the first room by a double wall. The easternmost of the new rooms is rectangular (ca. 2 by 4 m) and serves as kind of a central room. It gives access to adjoining rooms of the house by doorways on three sides, in its eastern, southern and western (later blocked) walls. The entire northern half of the same room is flanked on all three sides by a lime-plastered bench. A low rectangular platform in between served as fireplace. In the southeastern corner of the room stood a 'hub' or water-pithos. The room probably was a meeting- or sitting-place.

The westernmost rooms of the house are square (2 by 2 m) and have lime plastered floors. North of them is a large room or courtyard containing a broken big pithos. The connection between this group of rooms and the central room is not yet clear. A small chamber to the north is taken up nearly completely by a big 'tenur'. The row of two or three rooms in the southern part of the house was constructed in a third building phase. The houses of level 8 represent a section of a densely built area of the ancient town. It can be dated by the pottery to the late Early Dynastic III or the Akkade Period.

At the bottom of the step trench on the south slope of the tell level 25 was excavated on an area of 17 by 10 m (Fig.3). The large wall, which was already partly unearthed last year could be cleared over the total width of the trench. It is now sure that it is the defence wall of the town. The wall is at least 2.80m thick, but its inner face has not yet been reached. In its western half there are two broad recesses or disturbances from the wall's rear side. The bricks are rather small, at the average 20 by 20cm in size. Built against the outer face of the wall is a broad and sloping glacis. The glacis is 1.70 to 2m wide and made of mud without the use of bricks. A special technique of pise is applied. Partitions of mud - 0,5 to 1 m wide and sometimes more than 1 m long - are set side by side in several layers. As different clays are used the partitions differ sometimes in color from each other. In the eastern part of the wall the glacis seems to be renewed and broadened once or even twice. A city-gate leads through wall and glacis. The gate is three meters wide and its passage is lined on both sides by orthostats (Fig. 4). They are roughly dressed, unsmoothed stone slabs, about 20 cms thick. The orthostat at the eastern side is still standing upright. Its height is 1.25 m high. The one from

the western side is fallen down and broken in several large pieces lying in the passage of the gate.

At the outside the gate is flanked on its western side by a tower. It is only 1.80 by 1.80 m large and built of brick debris and mud within a framing of upright standing mudbricks. The tower (Fig. 3) is a later and rather careless addition inserted into and on the glacis. A way marked by pebbles leads away from the gate in southern direction. The way is flanked on both sides by a mudbrick wall over a distance of 4 meters. Both walls turn inside shortly in front of the town defence in order to form two antae at the width of the gate's passage. This rendering seems to have no defensive function, but is rather an optical extension of the gateway, perhaps for representative reasons. Like the tower it is a later addition to the gate.

Judging from the pottery found in the passage of the gate the defences are dated tentatively to the beginning of the Early Bronze Age, i.e. The Early Dynastic I or II period. If this dating proves to be correct, it could be the earliest example of a defensive system including a glacis and an orthostat gate in Syria.

The area excavation on the northern plateau (Fig. 5)

The aim of the excavations in this place is to uncover the upmost preserved architectural level on a broad scale. While in the first campaign an Early Bronze Age layer with a well preserved inventory was discovered slightly to the slope of the plateau, in the beginning of this year's campaign it proved that a Late Bronze Age occupation is covering this layer at the top of the northern plateau. The walls of this architectural layer are rising only to a height of some 30 to 50 cms, lying densely below the surface of the tell. The ground plan of the architecture however

is well preserved and nearly undisturbed plan. It proved to belong to one building, which was excavated on an area of about 25 by 25 ms.

The dating of the building is provided by the pottery associated with the single rooms and floors. It can be attributed to the Hurri-Mitannian period, i.e. the 15th to 14th century B.C. There are several examples of painted Nuzi-sheards and quantities of equally characteristic common wares. A cylinder seal made of white fayence and engraved in Mitannian Common Style. Which was found on the floor of one of the rooms ensures the dating. Several building phases can be distinguished within the structure. The original layout of the building (level 5) was only slightly modified during a second main using phase (level 4), connected with new floors. Architectural changes were made during a succeeding using phase (level 3). The function of the building probably changed in this time, as several 'tenair' or breadovens point to an ordinary dwelling house character. Another later using phase (level 2) is attested by the abandonment of parts of the original building. While the remaining rooms were provided with new floors.

The Mitanni-building rises on a platform of unbaked mudbricks (Fig. 6). Its function is to provide a plain surface for the construction of the building by terracing the area. The height of the terrace does not exceed one meter and its extension is at least 25 by 25 meters. The northern, western and southern parts of the terrace have been excavated. The platform is eroded of these three sides because it occupies the whole of the northern plateau of the tell.

Entrance to the building is given from its northwestern corner. A corridor leads over the platform to the interior of the building. The cor-

ridor gives, in its central axis, access to a circular room (Fig 7). This room is reached by a monumental threshold built of two large roughly cut stone slabs. The tholos is well built with a heavy stone foundation carrying a mudbrick wall. The interior of the round structure of a diameter of 3.3 meters is empty and there is no other door within the room. The function of the tholos giving a rather representative impression can not be determined at the moment. The structure is outstanding, because the tholos-type had so far been completely unattested in Late Bronze Age architecture.

A person entering the interior of the building had to turn left at the end of the corridor to reach - via a small entrance-room - a public room or court, which is situated beside the tholos. This room or court gives access to a very large room on the east side and a succession of long rectangular rooms on its southern side. Another smaller door on the south side leads to a stone step into the southeastern room of the building.

The succession of rooms to the south starts with a door room (3 by 2ms large). Judging from the hingestones still in situ two successive doors in the same axis can be reconstructed. The first must have been a double-winged door with a mudbrick-threshold and the southern one a single large door. The following, equally small room (3.5 by 2m) obviously served only as a passage-room. Within it the axis of succeeding rooms turns in a right angle to the east. Through a later blocked door in the eastern wall of this room access is given to a large representative room (5 by 3 ms, Fig. 8). It has markedly thick walls on all sides, three to three and a half bricks in width. The floor is covered by lime plaster. A fragment of a cuneiform tablet was found here.

An even larger room follows to the east, reached by a door in the same general axis. The room seems to be L-shaped, but is not yet completely excavated in its southern part. This room has equally thick walls and kept remnants of a lime plastered floor. The above mentioned cylinder seal was found on it. North of the room a large courtyard is situated, paved with an uneven mud floor. Lots of pottery and several metal tools like a needle, a knife and an arrowhead were found within this area. A mudbrick buttress projects into the court on its south on wall. It might have served either as an optical subdivision or as a statically necessary reinforcement. A

further entrance to the building from the north side of the courtyard is expected but not yet cleared.

The original function of the Mitanni-building can not yet be determined. The large layout, the solid building technique with heavy stone foundations, the thick walls, the mudbrick platform and finds like the fragment of a cuneiform tablet and a cylinder seal - and perhaps even the tholos - point to a building of major importance. It might have been either a very representative dwelling house or a medium-sized public building of administrative functions.

Literature:

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 F. Naumann, *Architektur Kleinasiens*, 2. Aufl., Abb. 553 auf p. 419
 E. Heinrich, *Paläste im alten Mesopotamien*, 1984, 167 f. Abb 103

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Fig. 1: Southern slope area, level 8-architecture as seen from the east.

Literature:

- F. von Luchan, *Angelschichten in Sennacherib's Sa. 2*, 27, 26-27, 28, 4, 306-175
F. Neumann, *Architektur Kleinasien*, 2. Aufl., Abb. 552a-c, p. 419
E. Heinrich, *Paläe in alten Mesopotamien*, 1904, 167f., 206-203



Fig. 2: Southern slope area, level 8, room N with a bench and broken inventory, as seen from the north.

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Fig. 3: Southern slope area as seen from the south, level 25 with the town wall in the foreground.



Fig. 4: Southern slope area, town wall-gate, level 25, as seen from the south.



Fig. 5: Northern top, the mitannian building as seen from the east.



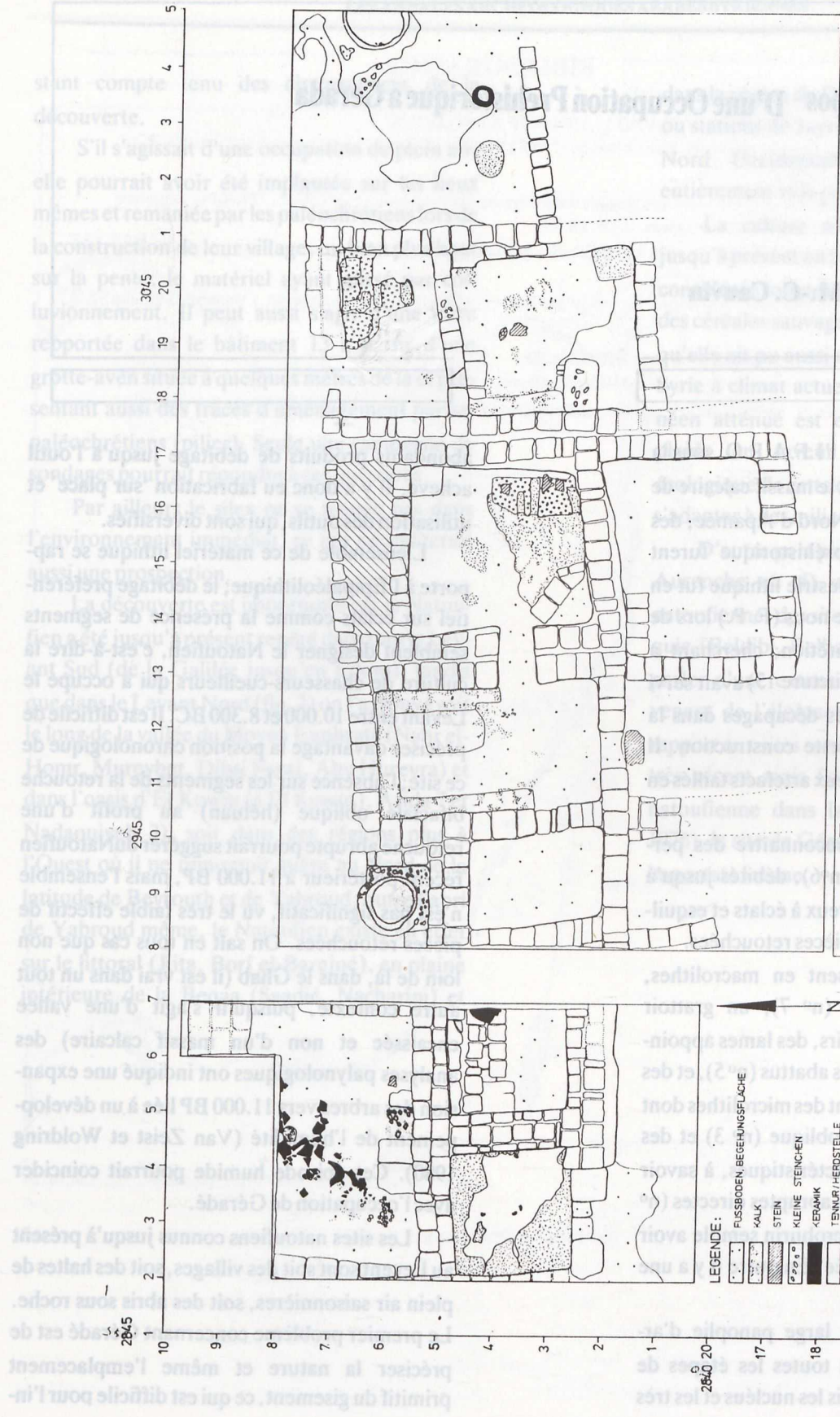
Fig. 6: Northern top, mud-brick terrace of the mitannian building.



Fig. 7: Northern top, circular (tholos) with its entrance-threshold within the mitannian building as seen from the north.



Fig. 8: Northern top, mitannian building, room I, as seen from the east.



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