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HAMMAM AL TURKMAN ON THE BALIKH : FIRST RESULTS OF THE FIFTH CAMPAIGN, 1988 (1)

The fifth campaign of excavations at Hammam al Turkman on the Balikh was carried out from August 5 until October 30, 1988 under the direction of the present writer (2). Participants came from the University of Amsterdam, the State University of Leiden and Groningen State University. The campaign was financed by the Netherlands Foundation for Archaeological Research ARCHON and by the University of Amsterdam. During the 1988 season, work was concentrated on the Middle Bronze Age levels high on the southern slope of the mound (J-L 22-23) (fig.1); another important aim was the deepening of the western test trench in order to reach EB II and EB I levels (I-H 23) (3).

The Early Bronze Age (Hammam Period VI) (4).

The earliest Early Bronze Age levels reached in 1988 lay at ca. 25m above the modern surrounding fields, and consisted of rectangular domestic architecture of a simple nature, oriented WNW-ESE. Single brick walls, plastered on the inside, enclosed rooms with furnishings such as ovens, storage vessels and other household pottery. The sequence of floors within approximately the same walls suggests a relatively uninterrupted culture process, in spite of fires ending several sub phases. Coarse cooking wares gradually decrease in number as one rises through the strata; plain simple ware is solidly represented, and a date in EB II is suggested by Anatolian grit-and-plant tempered black/brown burnished ware and one painted East Anatolian sherd much like one found in Hammam VI east (5). The development seems to have been relatively uninterrupted through EB III into EB IV, when the "town wall" was built (6). The latter appears to have had two main phases, of which the first was constructed against partially cut-away older remains, as if to double as a retaining wall; its ruin was associated with fire, since a thick layer of ash against the outside marked the elevation at which the wall's second phase began. It was this second phase that features the suite of rooms mentioned in our last report (see note 6) (fig.2).
Higher up, a heavily burnt kitchen area in I 23 was found to contain carbonized wheat and lentils, a handled tray for baking bread, and an unbaked clay grain scoop (fig.3).

Summarizing the Early Bronze period, the excavations have so far yielded a 10m thick deposit of EB remains, with much more to be expected. EB II domestic quarters begin our present sequence, followed later by a well-plastered building with a large kitchen. Still later in the third millennium BC dates a monumental bathroom (7). Together with a building with a monumental entrance on the northern slope of the mound (8) and the presence of the town wall, these findings emphasize the fully developed urban character of the settlement, in which the administration of goods was one of the functions fulfilled.

This is witnessed by the Old Akkadian economic text (from an admittedly secondary context) mentioning a consignment of barley for a priest (9). There is no doubt that Hammam was a regional center of considerable importance during the third millennium BC. It may have measured some 4 hectares.

The Middle Bronze Age (Hamman Period VII)

As said above, the main goal set for the 1988 season was to reach the earliest MB levels in squares J-1 22-23, in order to investigate the history of the administrative complex found in 1986 and to tie it in with domestic architecture excavated earlier (10).

Approximately one meter of soil containing MB I remains is still to be excavated in these squares. At present four phases of the administrative complex can be distinguished, but the existence of earlier ones can be demonstrated with certainty. Our present "first" building seems to follow the layout and orientation of its predecessors; its northern wall ran WSW-ENE (fig.4) and was built of square mudbricks. An extremely well-built glacis with a 5 cm thick mud plaster coating sloped up to it at a 18° degree angle. The "bastion" found in 1984 (11) may have been connected to this wall. At this stage, no clear division was found between official and domestic function of the various rooms; this changes in the next phases.

The building history is now interrupted by an interlude not yet clear in all its finesses. An almost perfectly square room measuring some 5 x 5 m with massive, carefully constructed walls without doors was 'sunk into' the earlier phase by cutting a large pit into the latter and partly by leveling it (fig.5). The room (strongroom or cellar?) was plastered on the inside with a single coating of simple lime plaster, precluding any wet functions. The old walls which had partly been dug away yet served as the bases for platforms and walls surrounding and thus incorporating the feature in the rest of the complex.
Storage and administration of goods were now practiced, as is attested by the find of a very fragmentary Old Babylonian style economic text mentioning silver, as well as by a hoard of sealed bullae that had been broken and thrown away into a corner of a room in the southern wing. A unique finding was associated with a baked clay cylinder seal from the northwestern part, which showed a simple procession of male figures (fig.6) (it belongs to a group of cylinders and impressions dating from the 19th century BC and distributed as far afield as Tell Sukas, Tell Mardikh, Alishar, Kültepe Ib and Karahüyük near Konya) (12): one sealing (fig.7) found close by proved to have been made with that very cylinder. This extremely important find proves beyond any doubt that a local official had been fulfilling his administrative functions here (13). Several of the other bullae bore seal impressions with inscriptions; these are, however, very fragmentary.

After only a short period the complex was renovated considerably: the square feature was filled up and its walls were breached. Through and over the breaches, new walls were constructed to form the building excavated in 1986 (14). Since also this building, datable to MB II,

proved to have had an administrative function (witness the find of a unbaked lexical cuneiform text on a cube of clay) and since the main layout of the complex was retained, we can speak of an ongoing cultural tradition on this part of the mound. However, some short intervals in the occupation of the complex are indicated by the stratigraphy, and this is emphasized by several burials of adults which were definitely not associated with occupied houses. The length nor the absolute dating of these intervals can be determined as yet, but it is clear that they occurred during both the MB I and the MB II periods.

Also the last MB II phase of the complex, excavated in 1984-6, retained approximately the layout of its predecessors. The subsequent Late Bronze Age inhabitants, whoever they were, built their palace directly on this last MB II complex. In the general planning of their complex, they may have followed the earlier architects consciously in the location of the "official" wing, which lay west of a courtyard separating it from more domestic quarters. Layout and orientation as well as method of construction of the Late Bronze Age palace, however, are completely different from that of its predecessor (15).

Most phases of the northwestern "official" part of the complex knew concomitant but relatively slight alterations in the southern wing. Curtain walls could be installed, moved or taken away, ovens added or deleted, doors relocated. The architecture of the two parts differed in aspects of monumentality, layout and construction. However, the above example of finds concerning administration in distinct areas of the complex should make one wary of drawing black-and-white conclusions about functions of rooms based on their formal aspects alone (16). The so-called 'domestic' southern part or "wing" of the complex clearly also served business functions.

The analysis of the MB pottery from the first three seasons, encompassing MB I material from squares adjacent to those described here, seems to be supported by more recent finds. Shapes and wares similar to (17) bowls nos. 4, 5 and 9 occur in the lower complex, as well as goblets with only slightly sinuous sides (ibid. no. 54); jars with trumpet necks (158) and pots with ridged rims (105, 106) are also in evidence.

Without direct textual data, or significant quantities of exogenous material liable to trading, it is difficult to assess a town's place in any trading network that may have existed. Until now, Tell Hammam has not produced any direct evidence that could link it with, e.g., the Old Assyrian trading expeditions to Anatolia. Only circumstantial evidence of a general nature can be adduced for trade so far. Nevertheless, the working hypothesis that Hammam might have had something to do with karum-like activities (18) need not yet be given up. In order to establish such a function, the excavations of the Middle Bronze Age settlement should eventually produce evidence of a "palace" (the MB administrative complex?), a pulled-down town wall (?) and a karum (19). This is mentioned here in connection with a peculiarity of the tell.

The topographic plan of the mound (fig.1) clearly shows that there is a deep erosion gully with rather steep sides in the southwest. Middle Bronze Age sherds were found at the very southern foot of the tell, whereas the gully sides proved to have eroded into and through thick deposits of Parthian and Roman period material. The MB sherds cannot, it would seem, have rolled down to their findspot from the MB remains in squares J-N 22-24. Our hypothesis that therefore there must have existed, in the MB period, a settlement apart from the one on the main mound, has now fortunately been confirmed through several soundings in squares O 32-33 and V 42 and 45. These produced solid evidence of both MB I and II occupation in the form of domestic architecture as well as burials with their contents. The space between and over the originally separate MB settlements had subsequently been filled up with late (i.e., ca. 2nd century BC-5th century AD) occupation. Elsewhere on the mound, the architecture of this late period proved to have been widely spaced, facilitating subsequent erosion, ant it must have been facilitated in a similar fashion here in the main gully (20). This extremely important find of separate but associated Middle Bronze settlements will obviously be the target of our efforts during further seasons.

It is clear that Hammam al Turkman played an important role as a local centre throughout the Bronze Age, and probably long before then. What reasons there may have been for deserting the site around 1300 BC (other than its height, which had reached an impractical 39m above the - modern - fields) is unknown; Late Bronze Age occupation of a rather special character has been encountered at the neighboring small, mainly prehistoric site of Tell Sabi Abyad, proving that the region as such was not deserted (21). Re-occupation of Tell Hammam only took place after a millennium, and then in the form of rather widely-spaced houses and other buildings (22). The mound may or may not have housed a garrison in this late period (23), but it probably never regained its former importance as a regional center. It did produce such minor but interesting works of art as a mould-made Asklepios figure (fig.8).

It remains for future campaigns to specify the nature of this central function of the site in more detail, especially in the Middle Bronze Age. During that period, the general area of northern Syria is known to have been subjected to several attempts at unification under one political banner. The extent and penetrating effects of such attempts into local systems and structures, however, are extremely difficult to gauge (24). The archaeological information from sites such as Hammam al Turkman will eventually, when combined with textual data, facilitate an answer to these intriguing matters.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) Permission and support from the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums are again gratefully acknowledged. The then Director-General Dr. Afif Bahnassi and his successor Dr. Ali Abu Assaf, as well as Dr. Adnan Bounni, the Director of Excavations, were helpful in every conceivable way. In the field, the team could not have functioned without the much appreciated

help from Mr. Murhaf al Khalaf and our representatives Mr. Muhammad Muslim and Mr. Muhammad Maktash.

(2) For the final report on the first three seasons, see now van Loon (ed.) 1988. Earlier preliminary reports are to be found in Akkadica 27 (1982), p.30-45; 53 (1983), p.1-23; 44 (1985), p.21-40 and 52 (1987), p.1-9; cf. AAAS 33 (1983), p.131-152 and p.299-313, and AfO XXXI (1984), p.146-150.

(3) Eventually, a typological connection is aimed at between the early and late Hammam VI sequences (east and west on the mound) described in Curvers 1988a.

(4) For the HMM periodization, see now van Loon (1988), p.13.

(5) Cf. Akkadica 27 (1982), p.43, fig.4.

(6) Akkadica 52 (1987), p.1f. For an assessment of the EB III-IV sequence at Hammam, see now Thissen 1989.

(7) Meijer (1988), p.82 with pls.35 and 36.

(8) Ibid. p.79f.

(9) Van Soldt (1988), p.669.

(10) Akkadica 52 (1987), p.2, and Meijer (1988), p.83-88.

(11) Cf. Meijer (1988), p.84, with pl.39.

(12) Mazzoni 1975. A comparable series of seals is known from Susa, although Collon rightly notes that these differ in details from the Syrian examples, cf. AfO 26 (1978-9), p.107.

(13) He probably was a lowly official, as both the material of his seal and the lack of an inscription seem to suggest. Some of the sealings seem to stem from jars, others may have adhered to bolts.

(14) Akkadica 52 (1987), p.7, fig.6.

(15) Meijer (1988), p.88ff, and Akkadica 52 (1987), p.3 and fig.14.

(16) On the relation of excavated architecture and its functions, see for example Meijer (1989a); cf. Tunca (1984), p.XVIII.

(17) See Curvers (1988b).

(18) Van Loon (ed.) (1988), p.XXV-XXVI. For new joins to Dossin's texts about Zalpa mentioned there, see now Villard 1987.

(19) Palace (or at least the dwelling for a ruba'um): see Veenhof (1972), p.292f, n.422f; town wall: ARM VII: 1,5-8, and ARM XXII: 233,14; karum: Veenhof loc.cit.

(20) The erosion of the gully, of which the beginning can be dated to no earlier than the 4th century AD, may have been facilitated also by an -entirely hypothetical- gateway through the western continuation of the 4m wide defensive wall excavated in squares O-Q 28/29; for this wall, cf. Meijer (1988), p.92 (sub stratum X:4b) and pl.50.

(21) Akkermans and Rossmeisl, in press.

(22) Meijer (1988), pp.91-94. Apart from the wide spacing of the buildings, their method of construction was also remarkable: large bricks were often laid with much space in between; foundations were often dug in deeply; plastering was nonchalantly executed and of bad quality (except in wet installations such as basins).

(23) Ibid.; cf. also p.XXVI in that volume.

(24) Meijer 1989b.

Figs.1-8 see p.7-12

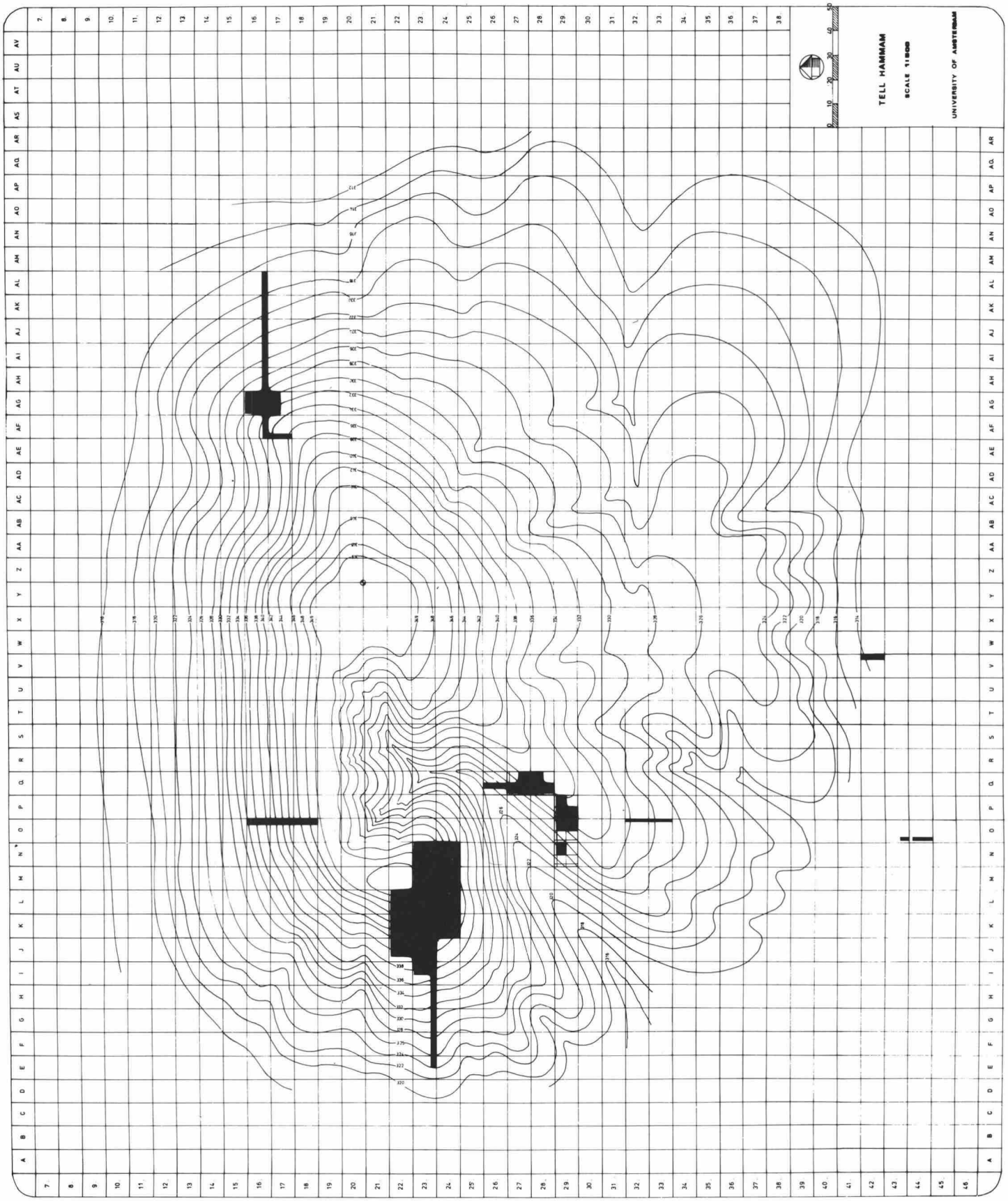

Fig. 1. Sketch map of Tell Hammam al Turkman. Areas excavated 1981-1988 indicated in black

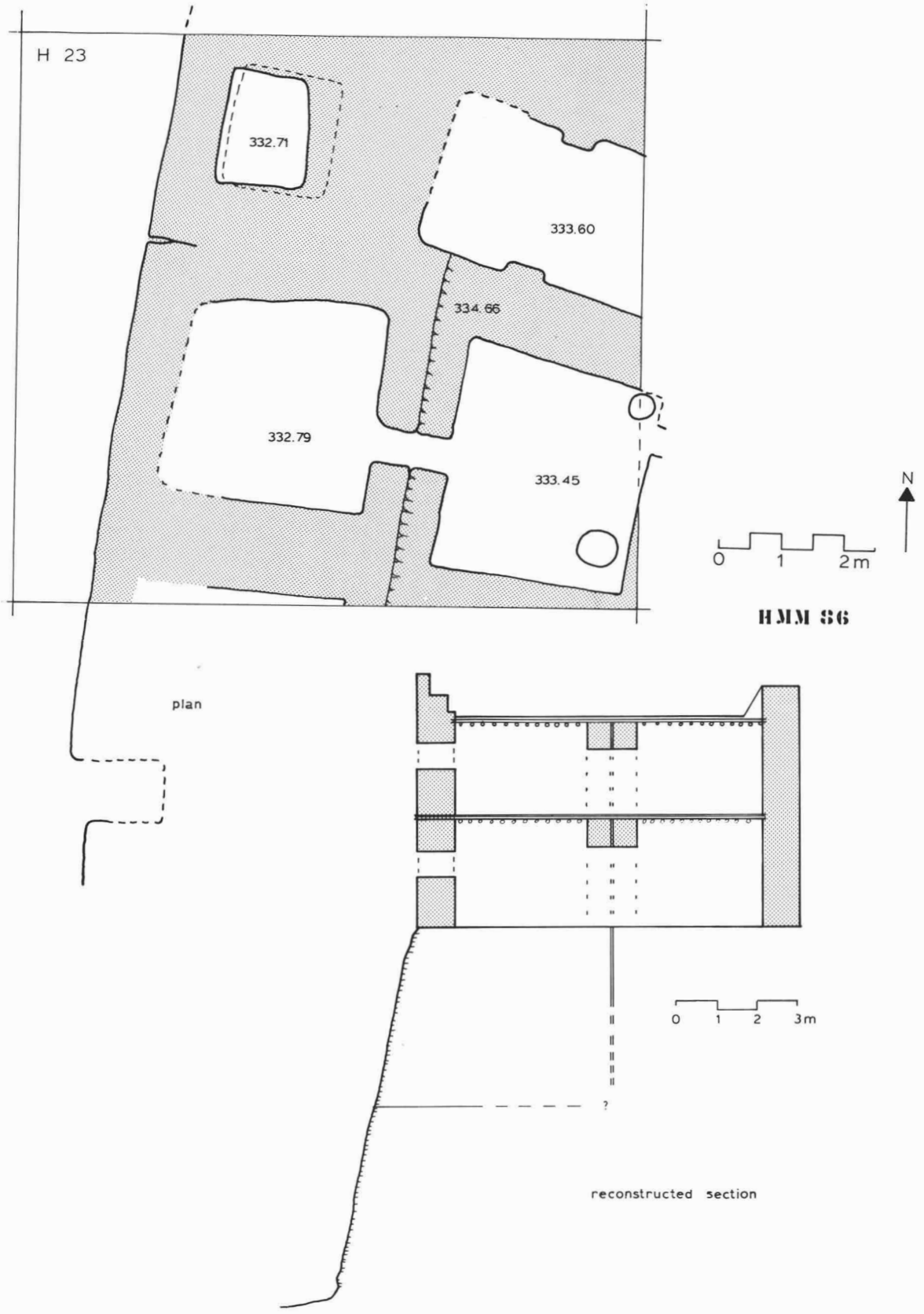

Fig. 2. Section and sketch plan of EB IV suite of rooms in town wall

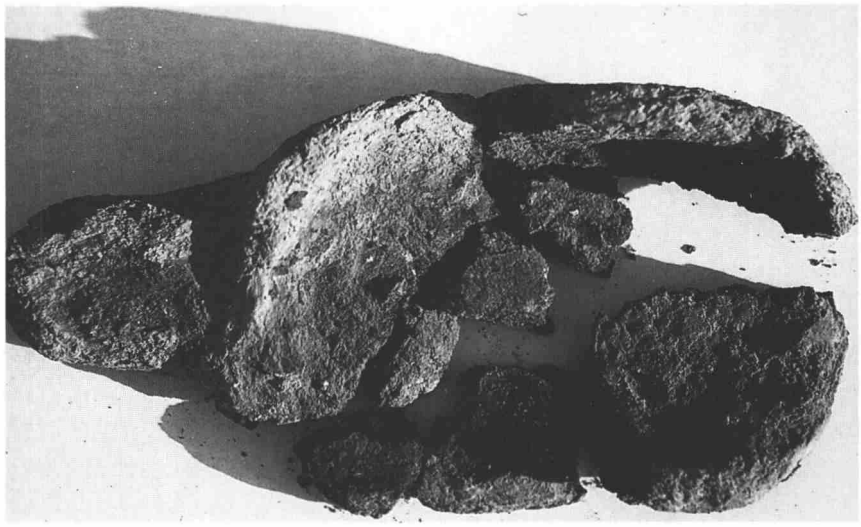

Fig. 3. Unbaked clay grain scoop from EB IV kitchen area in I 23

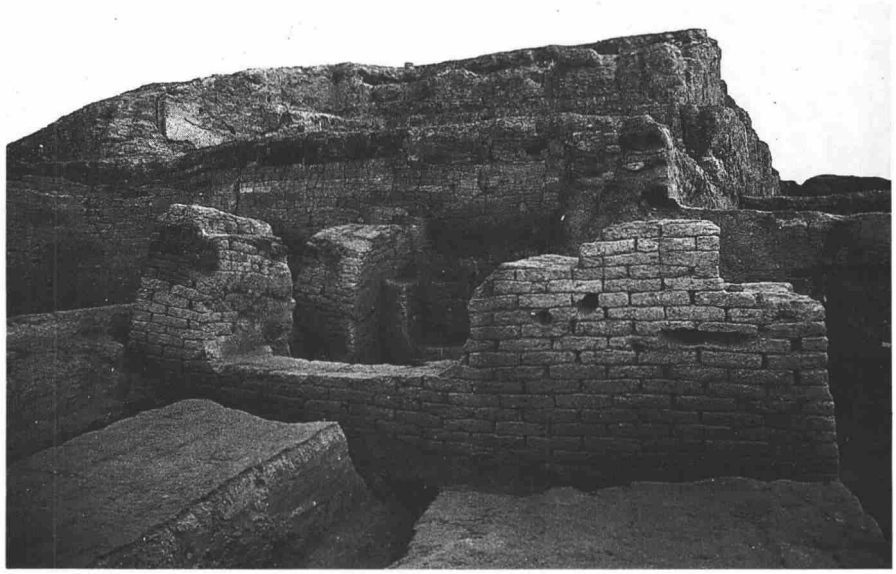

Fig. 5. View of square MB Ib room, facing east. Note breaches in earlier walls (foreground and left), and breaches in the walls of the square room itself for foundations of later MB complex (wall visible in section in background)

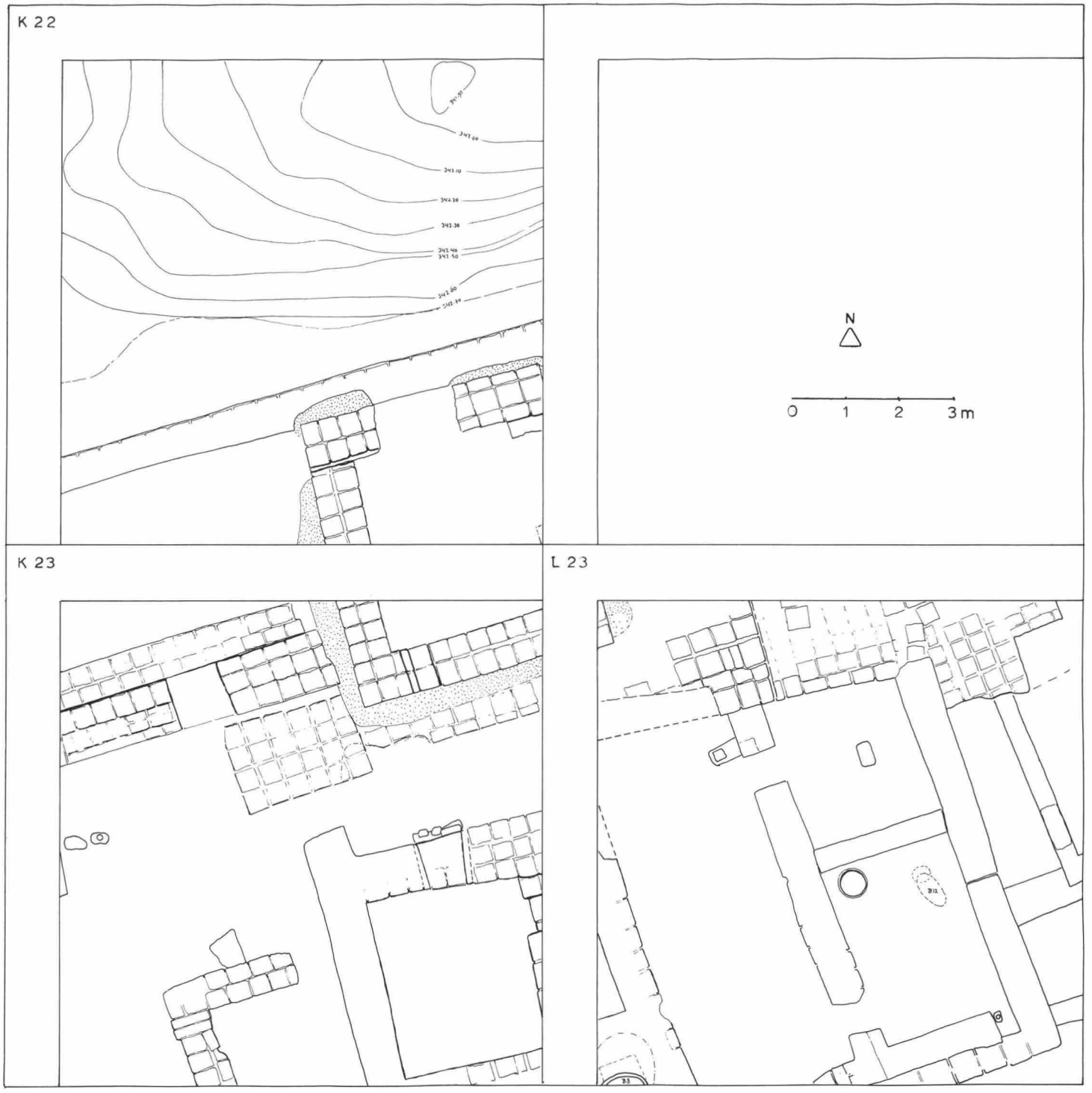

Fig. 4. Layout of part of MB I complex with glacis. Interruption of walls for later square room is clearly visible (cf. fig. 5)

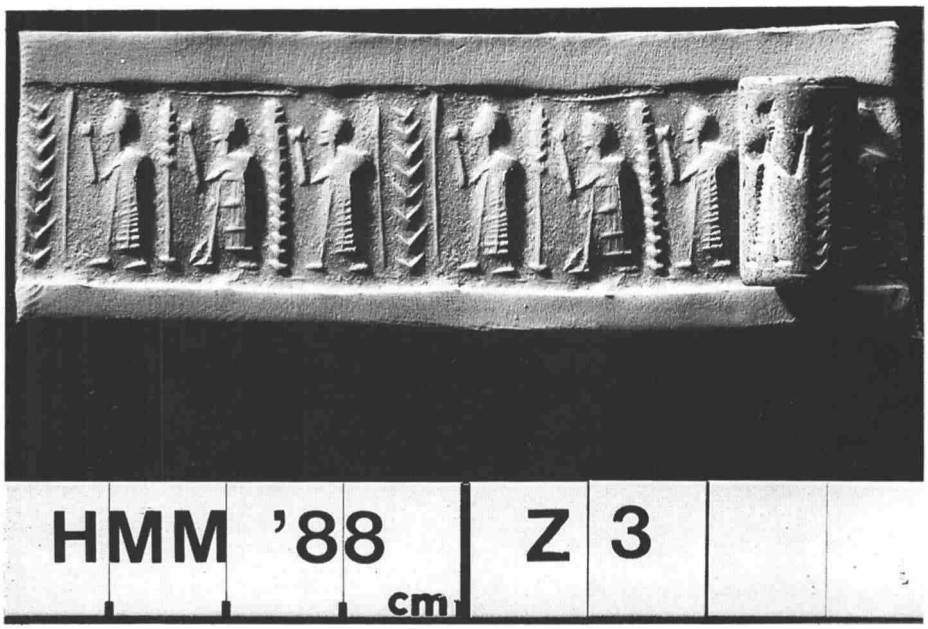

Fig. 6. Impression of cylinder seal from MB I complex

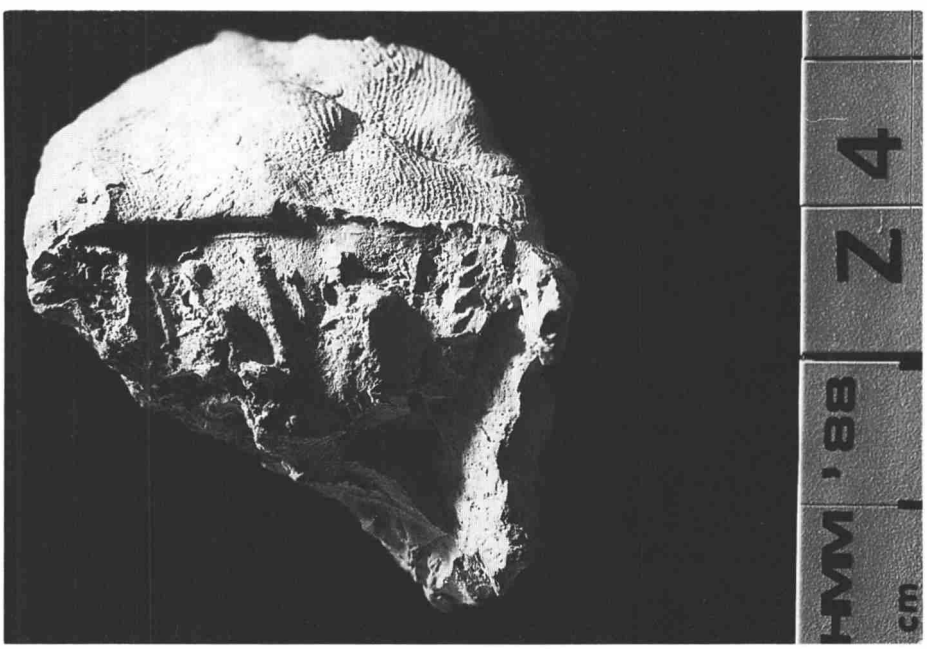

Fig. 7. Bulla with impression of cylinder seal of fig. 6

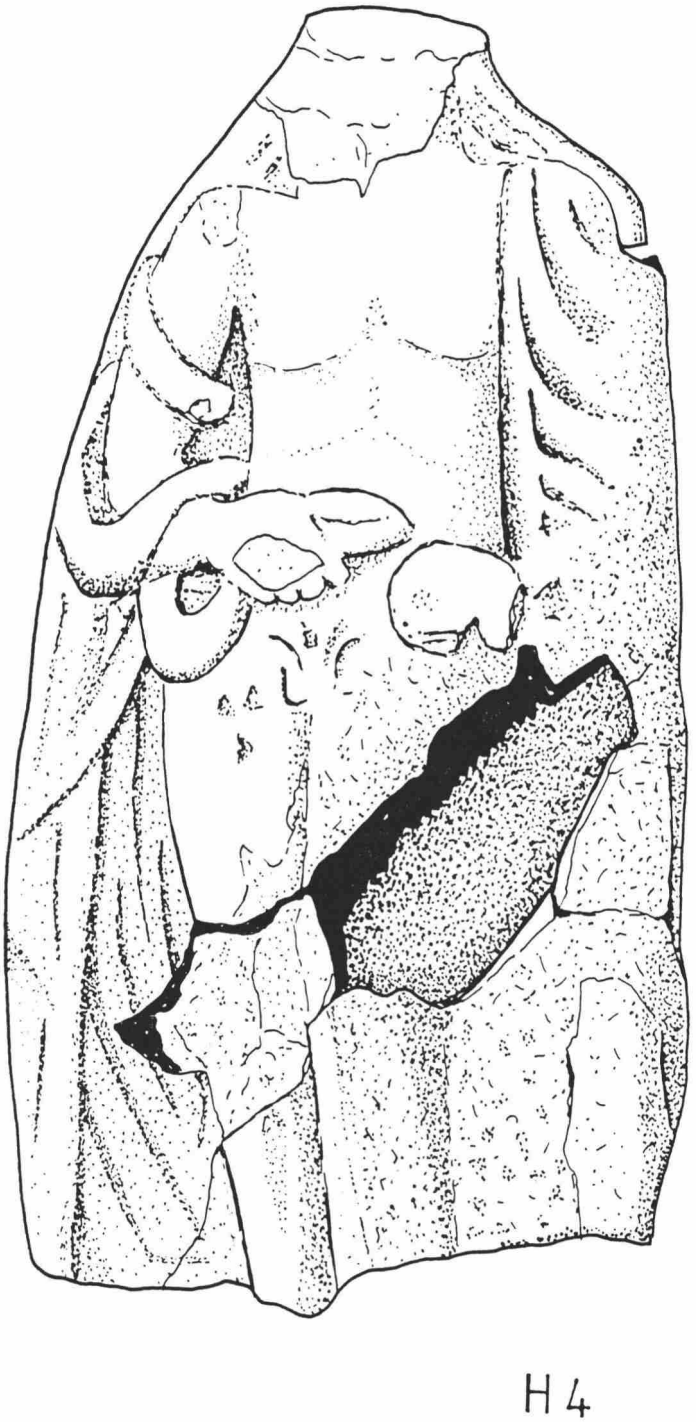

Fig. 8. Terracotta Asklepios figure. Height 17.2 cm