

HAMOUKAR

McGuire Gibson

The continuation of research at Hamoukar, originally scheduled to take place in fall 2002, was postponed because we thought the Iraq war would begin in October. Since we did not want to be eight kilometers from the Iraqi border when war broke out, we postponed until spring 2003. The



Figure 1. Area B Burnt Building, from south.

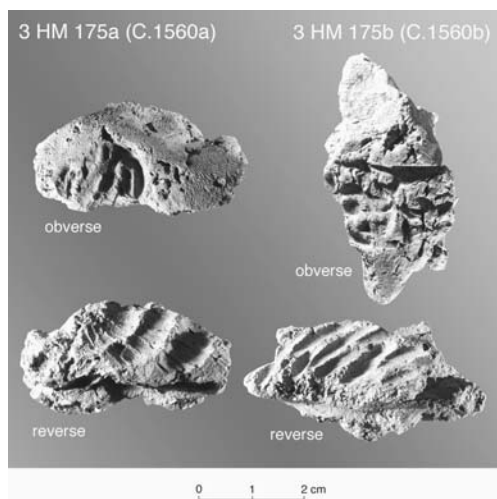


Figure 2. Two clay sealings, showing stamp seal impression on their obverses and impressions of basketry and string on their reverses. These sealings were applied on either boxes or baskets

Hamoukar
Syria

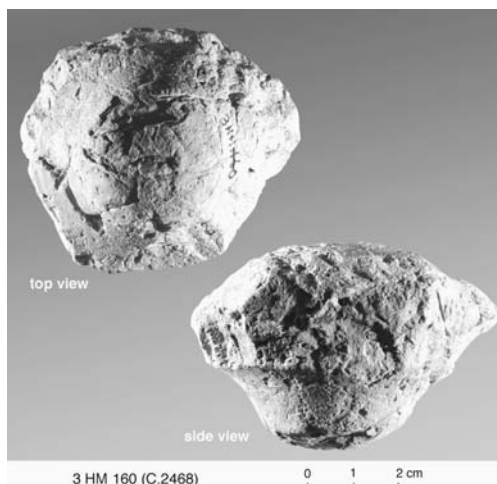


Figure 3. Jar stopper: clay lumps such as this one were inserted into the neck of jars to close them and prevent spillage or unauthorized access to the content of the vessel. Most jar stoppers bear the impression of one or more seals on their tops

HAMOUKAR

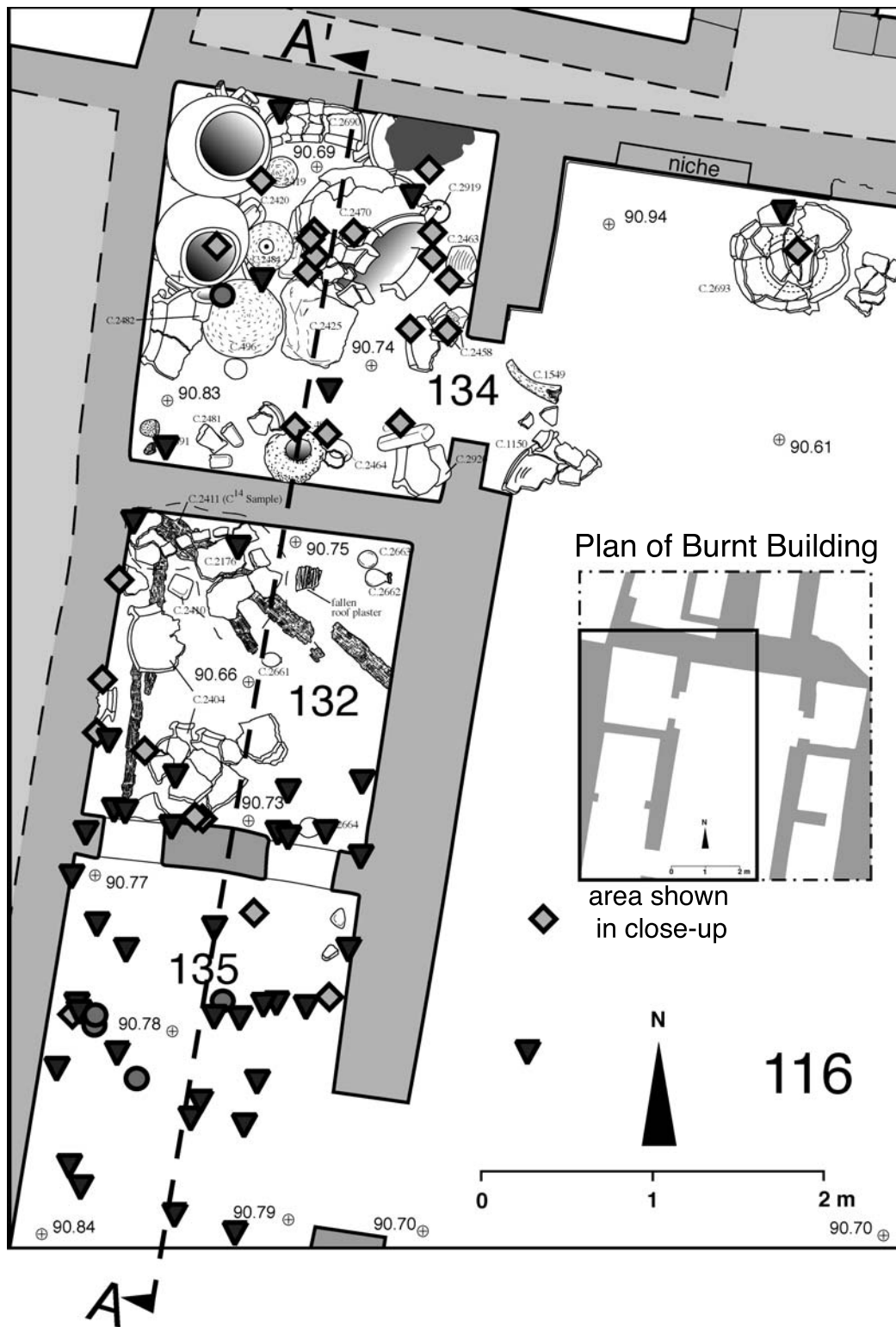


Figure 4. Hamoukar Burnt Building, close-up of three western rooms, showing findspots of clay sealings. For explanation of symbols and Section View A-A', see figure 5

HAMOUKAR

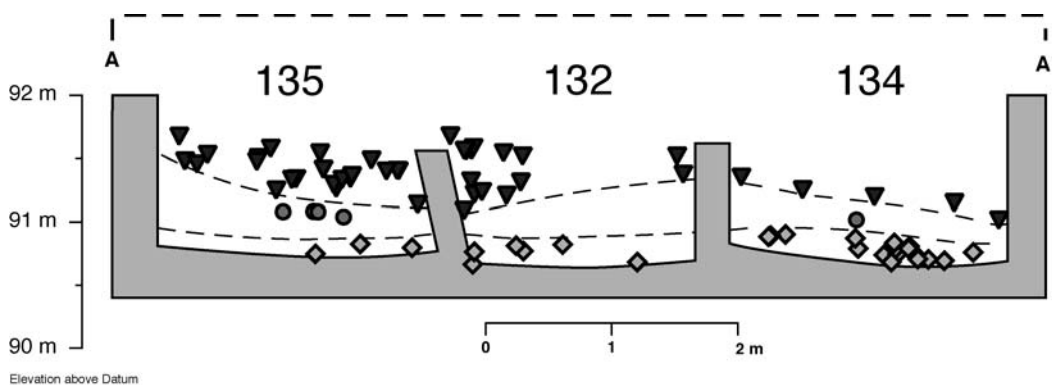


Figure 5. Section view A-A' (location marked in fig. 4): showing spatial distribution of clay sealings in destruction debris as recovered during excavation. Sealings from ground floor and upper floor context are identified by different symbols. Hamoukar Burnt Building

war, when it came in the spring, prevented our work once again. Currently, we are planning to resume digging in the spring of 2004.

With all my energy concentrated on the Iraq crisis, I cannot say that I have gotten much done on the analysis of our findings at this remarkable site, which saw the development of one of the earliest cities in the early fourth millennium B.C. However, Clemens Reichel, in preparation for some public lectures, refined his analysis of the findspots of seal impressions from the Burnt Building we excavated in Area B (figs. 1–5). And I understand from my co-director in Syria, Dr. Amr al-Azm, that substantial progress has been made on the analysis of the seeds collected from the site. Jason Ur's work on the settlement history of Hamoukar and the area around it has been incorporated into the study of a much larger area, so that he can now show road systems linking northern Iraq and much of northern Syria. In this research, he is making increasingly sophisticated use of satellite images, remote sensing, and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) technology.

We have been making inquiries about geomagnetic surveying of the site of Hamoukar. When done in the right circumstances, patterns of resistance and non-resistance can show ancient buried walls, baked brick pavements, pits, and other features that are not otherwise visible. This technique, which works best on stone or baked brick walls, has been refined in recent years so that even unbaked mudbrick walls can show up dramatically. The advantage to the excavator is that one can make decisions about where to dig most effectively. Hamoukar is a very good candidate for such treatment since it has a very large lower town that has well-built houses dating from about 2200 B.C., almost directly under the present surface. Some of these houses proved to be rich in finds, having been abandoned with most of their contents left in place. Although the site is more famous for its early city remains, these houses of the last part of the third millennium B.C. also deserve investigation since they will help to answer one of the major questions in North Syrian archaeology: did the

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DETECTIVE WORK: The function of many of the 250 clay sealings found in the debris of the Burnt Building was difficult to explain at first. Many of them were basket sealings (fig. 2), not jar sealings (fig. 3), as the large number of storage vessels found in these rooms would have suggested. The building's pristine, undisturbed find context called for extra care in field mapping. During the excavation the findspots and elevation of sealing in the destruction debris was recorded very carefully; this data was later added to the plan of the building. Both plan and section of the building's three western rooms (figs. 4–5) show that the sealings actually belonged to two distinct assemblages, the ground floor and an upper floor which had collapsed during the destruction of the building by fire. Almost all basket sealings belonged to the upper floor assemblage, resolving the apparent contradiction between container and sealing. The evidence shown here lends empirical proof to the notion that there was a second floor on the building. Drawings by Clemens Reichel

HAMOUKAR

cities of that time come to a sudden end or was there a gradual process? One scholar, Harvey Weiss of Yale, has suggested that all of northeastern Syria was abandoned at the end of the Akkadian period (2200 B.C.) and he has proposed the following causes in different articles: (a) volcanic action, (b) meteoric impact, or (c) a shift in the global weather pattern. There is some evidence at Hamoukar, as at some other sites, that there was a continuation of settlement beyond the Akkadian period, so our evidence could be critical in addressing the proposed collapse.

Plans are underway to mount the next season of excavations, and next year's report should be as exciting as those of previous seasons at Hamoukar. We anticipate working on both fourth millennium and third millennium levels, completely exposing the Burnt Building of Area B and making more progress on the third millennium public building of Area C, and we will begin real planning for the geomagnetic survey.

I would like to thank the Friends of Hamoukar for their generosity in the past and for their help in the future. We will be in touch.
