

AMUQ VALLEY REGIONAL PROJECTS

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Oriental Institute Expedition to Tell Atchana/Alalakh

Alalakh (modern Tell Atchana) in the Amuq Valley of southern Turkey was the capital of the kingdom of Mukish that encompassed the valley during the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (ca. 2000–1200 B.C.). Mukish was a minor power, a vassal state within larger empires. Yet Alalakh and the Amuq region as a whole have proved to be uniquely informative about a number of important cultural developments over the long span of history from the Neolithic to the medieval period. This site and its hinterland have yielded a host of clues concerning innovations in agriculture, trade, metallurgy, and political organization in what was for millennia a prime zone of settlement and a crucial corridor of communication between the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea.

The first archaeological survey of the Amuq Valley — the plain of Antioch in classical times — was conducted by Robert Braidwood in the 1930s on behalf of the Oriental Institute. Braidwood's site no. 136 was Tell Atchana, which was subsequently excavated by the noted

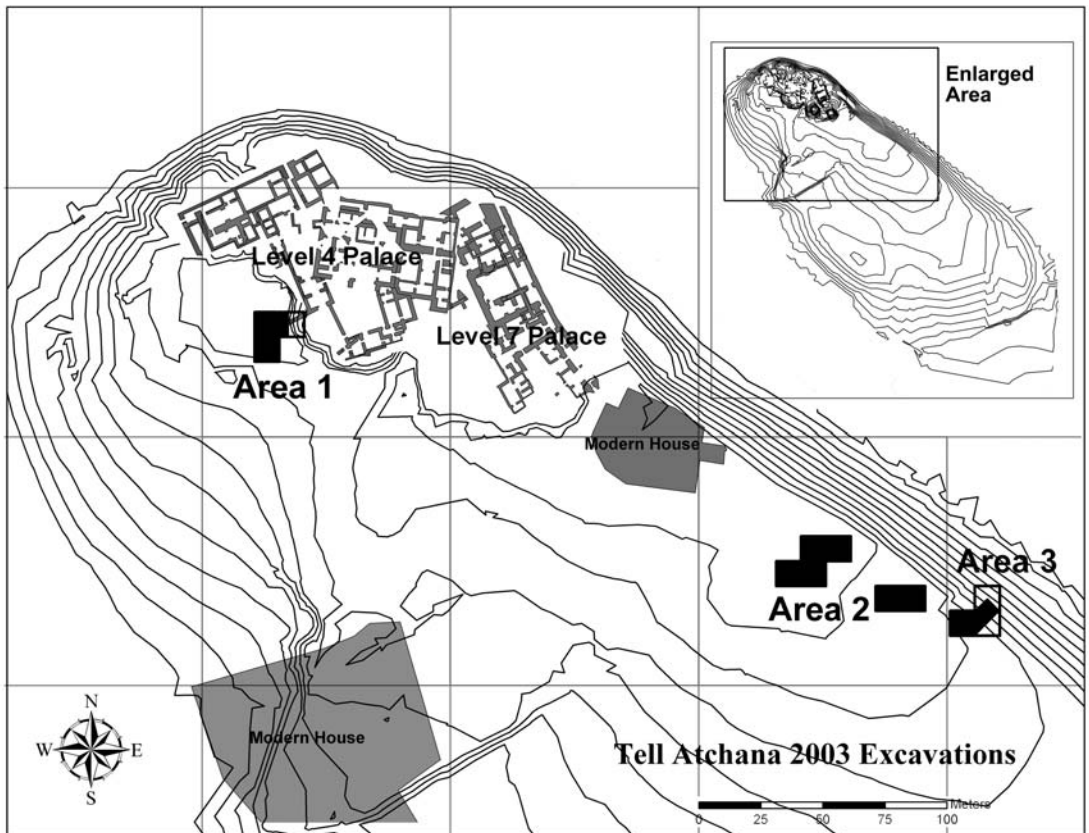


Figure 1. The northwestern part of Tell Atchana (Alalakh). The map shows the three areas excavated during the 2003 season. Maps by Eudora Struble and Aaron Burke

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British archaeologist C. Leonard Woolley, who identified it as ancient Alalakh. Woolley dug large areas of the site between 1936 and 1949, with a five-year hiatus during the Second World War. On the north end of the mound he found a stunning sequence of temples and palaces complete with Akkadian cuneiform archives, Minoan-style frescoes, Egyptian artifacts, Hittite reliefs, and Syro-Mesopotamian sculptures. The eclectic nature of these cultural remains and their intrinsic historical and artistic value have marked Alalakh as a place of special interest. But Woolley failed to record or publish many details of interest to archaeologists and historians, and archaeological methods have improved enormously in the past fifty years. For this reason a team led by Aslihan Yener returned to Braidwood's site no. 136 in the summer of 2000 to investigate Alalakh as part of the Amuq Valley Regional Projects.

In the first three field seasons at Alalakh from 2000 to 2002, extensive preparations were made for the renewed excavation of the site. This involved an intensive surface survey and the production of detailed topographic maps, and an inventory of previously excavated finds stored in the Hatay Archaeological Museum in Antakya. In 2003, we conducted our first full season of excavation, digging from September 1st to October 17th with an international staff of thirty-nine archaeologists and students and seventy-two hired workers from the local villages (see the list of acknowledgments below). Our dig headquarters, long on the drawing board, are now successfully established in the village of Tayfur Sökmen, two miles from the site. Three large, colorful (red-and-yellow) prefabricated buildings — a dormitory, dining hall/laboratory, and office — were erected over the summer thanks to the extraordinary efforts of senior field supervisor Amir Sumaka'i Fink and his coworkers. Remarkably, the dig-house compound, begun in mid-July, was completed by the end of August with running water, electricity, and all necessary furnishings, ready for the arriving team. We rented two additional houses in the village of Tayfur Sökmen and another in the nearby city of Antakya (ancient Antioch) to serve as extra dormitories and storage depots. Three other projects — the University of Toronto's Tell Ta'yinat project, directed by Timothy Harrison (University of Chicago, Ph.D. 1995), the Tell Kurdu project, and the Amuq Valley survey — are partners with us in this new "archaeological village." We are now open for serious archaeological business!

Alalakh is located near the bend of the Orontes (Asi) River. The site measures 750×325 m, with a total area of about 22 hectares (54 acres). After clearing the weeds and brush, we laid out eleven 10×10 m excavation squares (1,100 square meters) in three areas unexcavated by Woolley (fig. 1). In our excavations we are not depending on Woolley's analysis but are developing our own fine-grained stratigraphy, which we can later compare to Woolley's strata. In our first season we have already identified several phases of architecture (named Local Phase 1, 2, etc.). These are tentatively dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age. The latest phase may even belong to the early Iron Age, although we need to do further analyses of the pottery and stratigraphy and obtain dates for our radiocarbon samples before we can be sure.

The supervisor of Area 1, Gabrielle Novacek, oversaw three of the 10×10 m squares. Eudora Struble and Adam Miglio served as square supervisors in this area. (All three are graduates students of Near Eastern archaeology in the University of Chicago.) Area 1 is in the palace-temple zone on the north end of the site, in a spot where Woolley had left several hundred square meters of earth unexcavated in front of his dig house. We suspected that we might find here the southwest wing of the "Hittite fortress" that Woolley assigned to his Level II/III period (fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C.), and we were not disappointed. After several weeks of digging we finally exposed the eroded tops of thick mudbrick walls encasing three rectangular chambers that we will excavate in the future (fig. 2). These walls and chambers are reminiscent

of Hittite monumental architecture, reflecting Hittite suzerainty over Alalakh during the last two centuries of its existence.

As expected, many of our initial finds in this area came from thick deposits of highly disturbed topsoil that covered the monumental building, and thus have no contextual provenance. Of particular interest are the abundant copper-based metallurgical residues and indications of ironworking. After some initial puzzlement we deduced that Woolley had used this area as a sherd yard where his pottery was sorted. A sherd yard explains the striking concentrations of diagnostic potsherds we unearthed in the topsoil of Area 1, having in effect sifted through Woolley's trash. Unfortunately this pottery had long since been removed from its original context and so is of little value archaeologically.

Excavations in Area 2, in the east-central part of the site, were supervised by Amir Sumaka'i Fink. Six 10 × 10 m squares were laid out in this area just south of a cluster of "private houses"

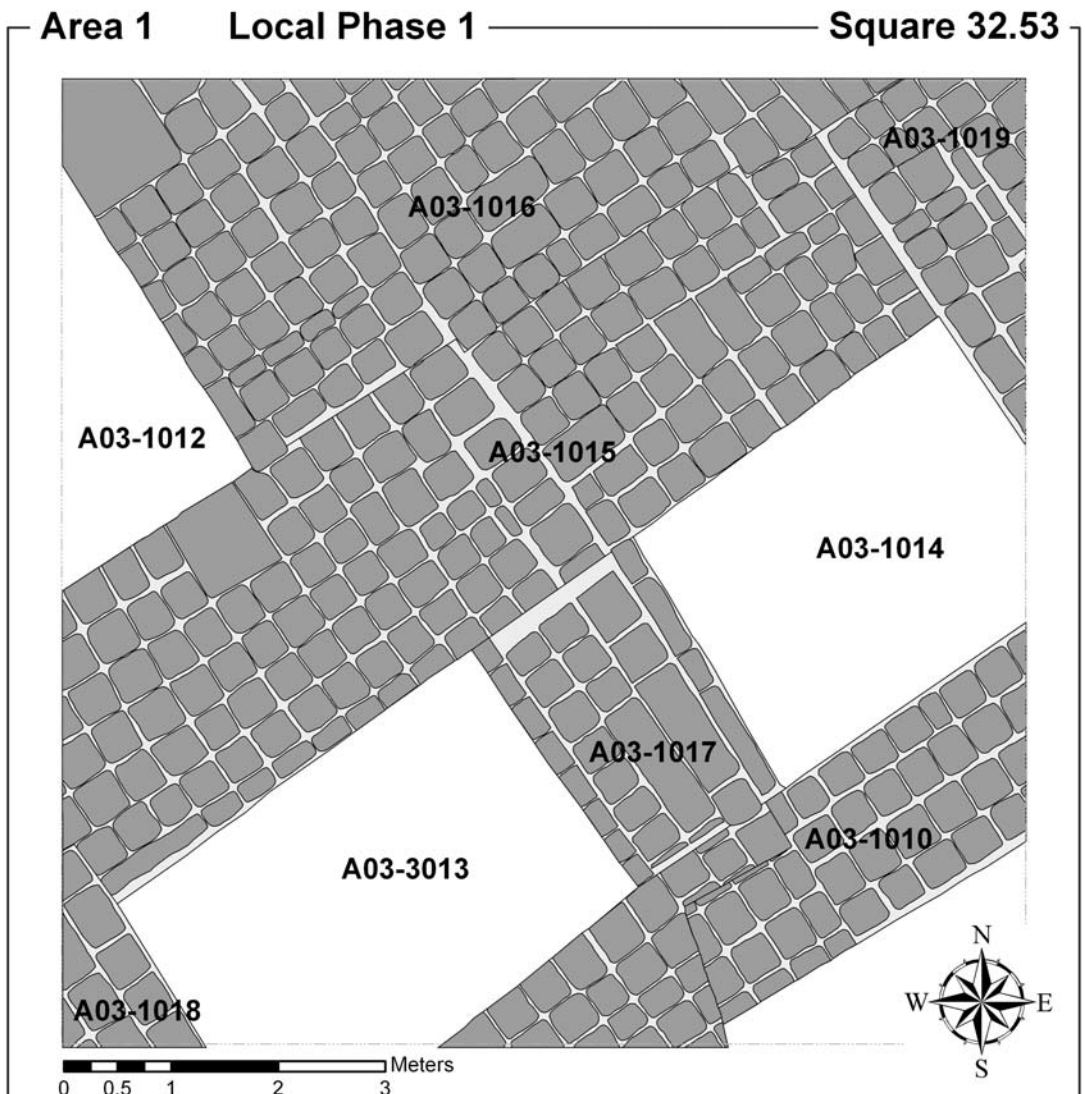


Figure 2. Area 1. Mudbrick walls, possibly part of Woolley's Level III/II Hittite fort

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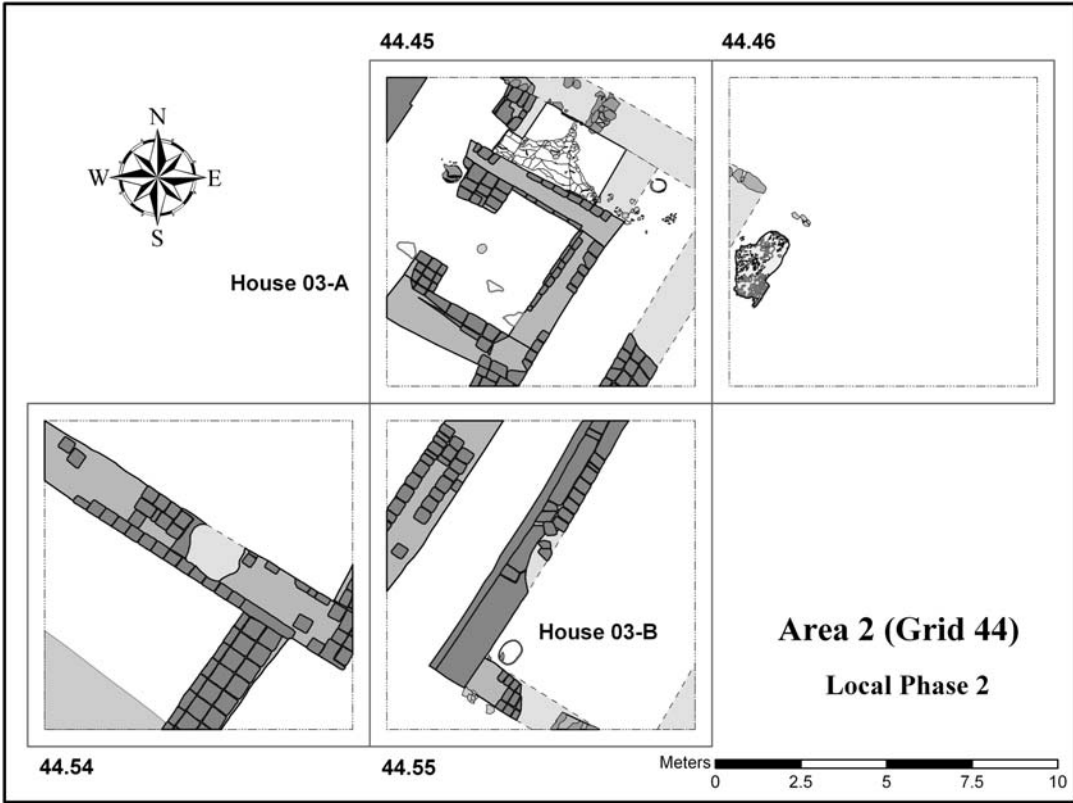


Figure 3. Area 2. The two buildings of local phase 2

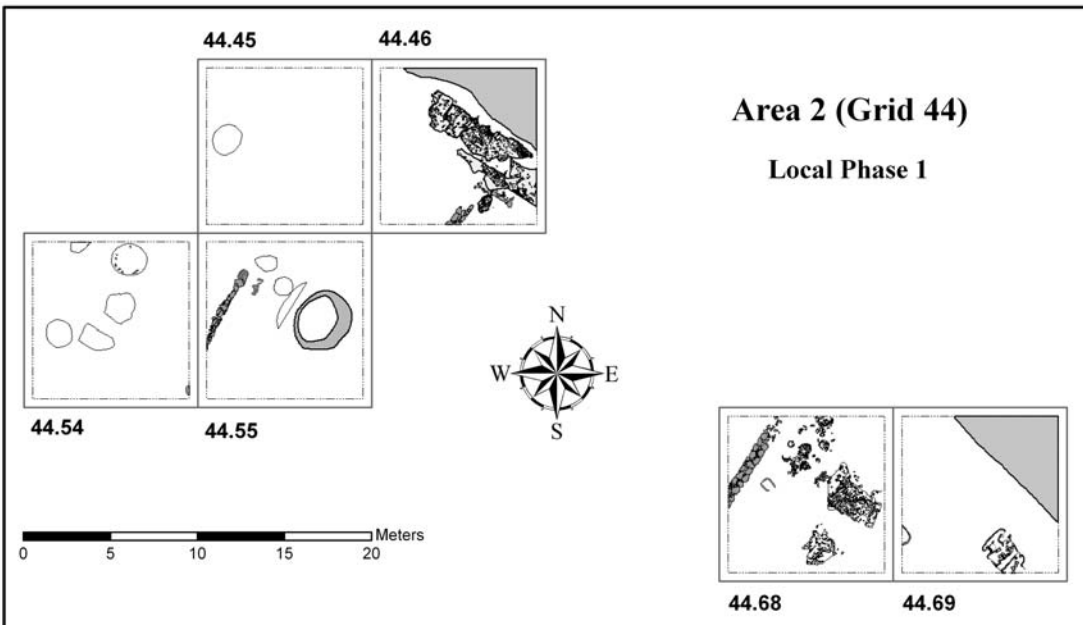


Figure 4. Area 2. The latest phase of occupation at Tell Atchana



Figure 5. Area 2. Pottery kiln. Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts

exposed by Woolley in the 1930s and 1940s, not far from the northeastern slope of the mound. The square supervisors in Area 2 were Katherine Strange Burke, Glenn (Joey) Corbett, Leann Pace, and Bike Yazıcıoğlu (all graduate students of Near Eastern archaeology in the University of Chicago), as well as Murat Akar (a graduate student at Middle East Technical University in Ankara) and Sarah Miglio (a graduate student at Wheaton College).

We detected two phases of settlement in Area 2 very close to the modern surface. The lower, earlier phase was probably inhabited at the close of the Late Bronze Age (Woolley's Level 1), just before the great political and economic collapse that put an end to both the Hittite empire and the city of Alalakh. In this phase we exposed two large, multi-roomed mudbrick houses separated by a street (fig. 3). In one of the houses we came across a plastered bathroom, a luxury that was enjoyed by many households in Late Bronze Age Alalakh, as Woolley's excavations showed.

Cautiously comparing our architectural phases to Woolley's, we can say that our finds in the upper, later phase in Area 2 shed light on Woolley's topmost and ephemeral "Level 0." This was understood by him to represent a brief period of occupation during the twelfth century B.C., after the collapse of the ruling dynasty. But he found no architecture in this part of the site to go with this phase. Using a slower and more controlled excavation method than he employed we were able to detect a badly preserved but nonetheless coherent architectural phase just below the modern surface (fig. 4). The buildings in this phase are quite different from the phase before it and may well belong to the post-collapse period, that is, the early Iron Age. One of the most interest-

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Figure 6. A clay goddess figurine unearthed in Area 2.
 Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts

ing discoveries in this final phase is a multi-chambered pottery kiln (fig. 5). We are now in the process of analyzing the ceramic assemblage and other materials in Area 2 in order to elucidate this last, post-Hittite settlement of Alalakh, of which very little was known before (fig. 6).

Area 3 (fig. 7), straddling the top of the slope along the eastern edge of the site, was supervised by Aaron Burke, assisted by square supervisors Jacob Lauinger and Edward Stratford (all three are University of Chicago graduate students). Our excavations in this area were designed to expose the sequence of fortifications of the city. A 10 × 10 m square was laid out on the crest of the slope, but to our surprise we found here not a city wall but a large kitchen or workshop with vessels for preparing and serving food lying next to a horseshoe-shaped ceramic hearth. This hearth or oven was extremely well preserved and sat intact upon the floor. Other fragmentary hearths were found in the area, indicating a large scale of production. Preserved on the floor were several clay andirons, four basalt grinding bowls, flint debitage, and twenty-four intact or restorable ceramic vessels. The repeated relining of the

intact hearth with successive layers of clay indicates that this workshop continued in use for a substantial length of time.

In excavation squares farther down slope in Area 3, we did find evidence of fortifications in the form of a large mudbrick wall, but this is much lower and more deeply buried than we expected and is probably to be dated to the Middle Bronze Age. In Area 3 we did not find Late Bronze Age fortifications from the latest period of occupation at Alalakh, contrary to our expectations. But we did find several dozen burials and evidence of many more eroded or disturbed burials on the slope. A cemetery may well have been on this part of the site during the last centuries of the city, which would have important implications for the size of Alalakh in the Hittite period.

Of the burials in Area 3 one stood out as special: a tomb with multiple individuals and special grave goods (fig. 8). This tomb has a plastered superstructure on a cobblestone foundation. On the top of the tomb were two columns of baked clay tile headstones stacked four high and a row of cobblestones. Within the plastered superstructure, which may once have encased a wooden coffin, four individuals were laid tête-bêche, each separated from the other by fragments of broken plaster. Individual no. 2 was buried with many gold, carnelian, ivory, and amber beads. A number of gold appliqués, decorated with raised rosettes or radial lines, were found around individual no. 3, probably from a now-disintegrated cloth or headdress placed over the head (fig. 9). Some beads and appliqués came from around the torso, which suggests an elaborately beaded and gold garment or headdress. A gold ring was still on no. 3's finger and gold sheet earrings or



Figure 7. Bird's-eye view of Area 3. Photograph by Murat Akar

hair rings by the skull (fig. 10). A number of copper-based toggle pins were found as well as a silver one, all used to fasten the burial garments. Some of the pottery came in pairs: two Cypriot base ring jugs, two red lustrous ware spindle flasks (fig. 11), and two trefoil-mouth buff jars. In addition, a bovine leg bone and numerous bird bones were found in the tomb. The spindle flasks would have contained beer or wine and the jars would have held other liquids. It seems that these individuals were buried with all the sustenance they needed in the afterlife.

When one thinks of Alalakh one thinks about cuneiform tablets. We found two fragments of the same tablet in Area 2. The first fragment was found in topsoil on the first day of excavation and was registered as object number 1 in our catalog of small finds. The second fragment was found two weeks later. Our epigraphist Jacob Lauinger immediately identified this tablet as a lexical text containing a Sumerian bird list. Another tablet found in Area 1 is an economic text. Rounding out our corpus of inscriptions from the first excavation season are two clay envelope fragments and a Hittite hieroglyphic stamp seal.

The renewed excavation of Alalakh has generated considerable interest among those aware of the importance of this site and the potential for fascinating new discoveries. In our 2003 season, we hosted busloads of visitors from academic institutions in Israel and Germany. We were also visited by Turkish friends and colleagues from Istanbul, Ankara, and Antakya, including a group of faculty members from Mustafa Kemal University, the local university of the state of Hatay. The state governor also paid us a visit, together with members of the local press. During the last

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Figure 8. Detail from a unique plastered tomb in Area 3. Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts



Figure 9. Gold appliqué found in Area 3 plastered tomb. Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts

week of excavations we hosted the documentary film crew from public television station WTTW in Chicago that was producing a film about the Oriental Institute and chose to visit Alalakh and the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in Luxor, Egypt. The film crew was guided by Sel Yackley, chairwoman of the Chicago Amuq Committee and a longtime supporter of the Amuq Valley Regional Projects.

Our exploration of Alalakh will continue in a second field season from August to October, 2004. We eagerly anticipate a visit by the Oriental Institute tour group to be led by Director Gil J. Stein, as well as several other visitors who have told us of their interest in coming to Alalakh. In the coming season, we will complete the analysis of the large quantity of excavated material collected in 2003 and undertake additional excavations to connect Area 2 with Area 3, in order to solve some pressing stratigraphic problems. A project is also in the works to renovate the famous Woolley dig house, which still stands on the site and was recently declared a historical heritage site. It will make an ideal visitor's center once it is renovated to include rest room facilities, a watchman's residence, an exhibit area, and an on-site depot.

All in all, our first season was a resounding success. Alalakh lived up to its reputation in terms of compelling finds, and we were delighted that we were able to operate on a large scale with a diverse team who lived and worked together very efficiently and with good cheer. Congratulations to all who participated and made this a special excavation!

Acknowledgments

In addition to the authors, the 2003 Tell Atchana/Alalakh staff consisted of the following people: Aaron Burke, Katherine Strange Burke, Glenn (Joey) Corbett, Jacob Lauinger, Adam Miglio, Gabrielle Novacek, Leann Pace, Samantha Stewart, Edward Stratford, Eudora Struble, and Bike Yazıcıoğlu (University of Chicago); Hatice Pamir, Tülin Arslanoğlu, Mustafa Baltalı, Sedat Biçer, Can Ercan, Bilge Gürkan, Murat İvecan, Adem Öncü, and Ahmet Ünal (Mustafa Kemal University, Antakya); Amy Gansell and Stine Rossel (Harvard University); Susan Helft (University of Pennsylvania); Fazıl Açıkgöz (Niğde Museum); Nita Lee Roberts (New York University, Institute of Fine Arts); Murat Akar (Bilkent University, Ankara); Katrin Hieke (Tübingen University); Joseph Keller; Sarah Miglio (Wheaton College); Dominique Collon (British Museum); and Brenda Craddock, Franca Cole, and Phil Andrews (U.K.).

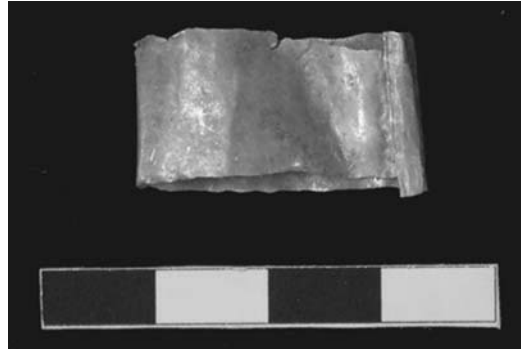


Figure 10. Gold sheet, possibly a hair ring, found in Area 3 plastered tomb. Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts



Figure 11. Area 3. Red lustrous ware spindle bottle found in the plastered tomb. Photograph by Nita Lee Roberts

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