

HAMOUKAR

Clemens Reichel

“I know that you are walking to ‘B,’ but I need to show you something in ‘E’ it’s great but not what I am looking for” Since I couldn’t get more out of Kate I changed course. Instead of the well-trodden path from our dig house to Area B, our main excavation area on the high mound — across the village’s soccer field and Hamoukar’s only paved road, up the slope and across several ridges, crossing the front yards of several houses while fighting off several wildly barking dogs — I turned right and walked to Area E to the south of the dig house, where two trenches were in process of excavation. All I had gotten out of Kate in the meantime was “I am not in a Ninevite V level, but I don’t think that I can go deeper here” When I got to the edge of the eastern trench I understood what she meant. The trench literally was covered in baked brick — a paved courtyard in front of an elaborately constructed facade, the lower courses of which also had been built of baked bricks. Clearly a public building from the later Early Bronze Age. A great discovery but not what she had been looking for. The site had tricked us again.

Surprising as this reaction may be to an unprepared reader, it is all too familiar to our excavators. There really is no shortage of finds at Hamoukar, but sometimes these finds aren’t at all what we are hoping for, forcing us to rethink our understanding of this site’s history and our approach to it.

It was early June — our 2010 field season, which had started in late April, soon was to be wrapped up. A lot had changed for me since our previous field season, which had taken place in September/October 2008. In December 2008 I had left Chicago for a position as assistant professor at the University of Toronto and curator at the Royal Ontario Museum. My continued directorship of Hamoukar, a joint project between the Oriental Institute and the Department of Antiquities in Damascus, represents one of the few lasting factors of my life. My teaching schedule, however, no longer allows me to undertake fall seasons, hence in 2010 we opted for a spring season. It was to begin in late April 2010, after most of us took the opportunity of attending ICAANE (International Conference for the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East) in London. Unfortunately, the volcanic eruption in Iceland grounded some of us for over a week. Getting to Syria from London became an adventure, to no one more so than to Chicago students Kate Grossmann and Tate Paulette, who had planned on getting married in Italy after ICAANE and who ended up hitchhiking across Europe to make their wedding date.

The 2010 season saw a number of familiar faces: Salam al-Kuntar (Department of Antiquities, Damascus) continued as Syrian co-director; Mahmoud el-Kittab (Raqqa Museum), a member of the Hamoukar expedition since 1999 and more recently of the Tell Zeidan expedition, as driver and housekeeper; Tate Paulette, Kate Grossman, and Mike Fisher (NELC, University of Chicago) as excavators. In addition to Syrians and Americans, however, Hamoukar 2010 was a truly international team with members coming from Belgium, Canada, Germany, Lebanon, Spain, Turkey, and the UK. Archaeologists included Yvonne Helmholz (University of Münster); Tracy Spurrier, Khaled Abu Jayyab, Jad Kaado, Joanna Velgakis, Aaron Shapland (University of Toronto); Rasha Elendari (Damascus University); Ian Randall (University of Chicago), Amanda Schupak (New York); Tuna Kalaycı (University of Arkansas); Max Price

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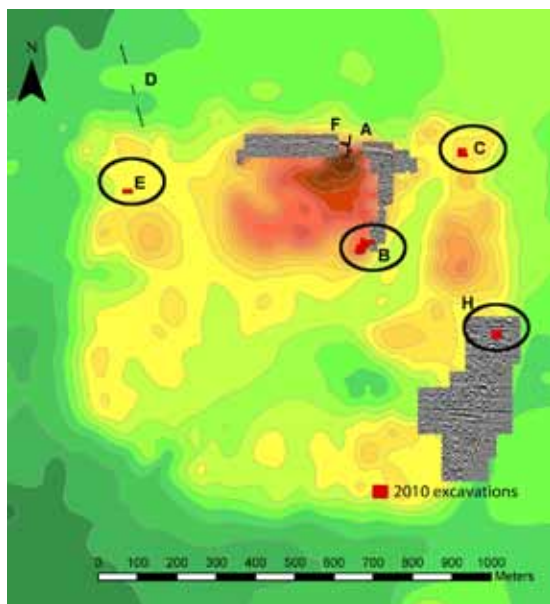


Figure 1. *Map of Hamoukar's Main Site*: 2010 excavation areas are circled; 2007-2008 magnetometric surveys on the high mound and in the outer town are superimposed

(Yale); Jill Goulder (University of London); Steve Renette (Ghent University); and Alejandro Gallego-Lopez (Madrid University). Björn Oldsen (Alpirsbach, Germany) joined our team as site and object photographer.

In 2010 our main efforts were expended on two areas of the main mound: Area B at the southeast corner of the high mound with its Late Chalcolithic architecture, and Area C in the northeast corner of the outer town with a large Early Bronze Age building complex. In addition to that, Kate Grossman, our faunal analyst since 2006, pursued her dissertation research on urban developments throughout the Ninevite V period by opening several trenches in search of forerunners to Hamoukar's Early Bronze Age city, which covers most of the outer town (fig. 1).

As explained in earlier reports, the ridge on which Area B is located has seen considerable erosion over the millennia, giving

us access to levels dating to Late Chalcolithic periods 3-4 (ca. 3500 BC) right below the surface. In 2001, 2005, and 2006 we exposed remains of two large administrative complexes (C-A and C-B) that had been destroyed by fire. Thousands of clay sling bullets found in the burnt debris indicated that these buildings had been destroyed by warfare. Numerous pits full of Uruk pottery, which had been dug from a higher, now eroded floor, indicated that this attack most likely had been launched around 3500 BC during the takeover of northern Syria by southern Mesopotamia's superpower. In 2008 we expanded our excavations to the north of these two complexes to contextualize them within the fabric of the Late Chalcolithic city. Nothing, however, seemed to match up. The architecture found here was more substantial than the burnt complexes and did not align with them (fig. 2). More seriously, no traces of destruction were noted – it appeared as if the conflagration had stopped right at the northern wall of C-A. On the last days of the 2008 season, during cleaning along the northern edge of the trench, we finally came across a stretch in which ash and burnt debris was pouring out of the baulk. Relieved to discover that my warfare theory had not been altogether wrong, I still felt as if I had exaggerated the extent of the destruction, which now looked more localized and patchy. I hypothesized that only areas of political and economic significance were defended and accordingly attacked and destroyed, with domestic areas surviving relatively unscathed. Even a casual look at the plan of the 2008 excavations, however, showed that the architectural remains excavated in 2008 were more substantial than Complexes A and B and clearly did not look “domestic.”

Yvonne Helmholz, who currently is collecting data for a dissertation on socioeconomic complexity in Late Chalcolithic Hamoukar, managed to solve this mystery while removing unexcavated “lumps” and badly eroded baulks between trenches left by others after different seasons. When articulating the northern wall of Complex B she noted a strip of densely packed soil of irregular width extending along it. As she went deeper it became nar-

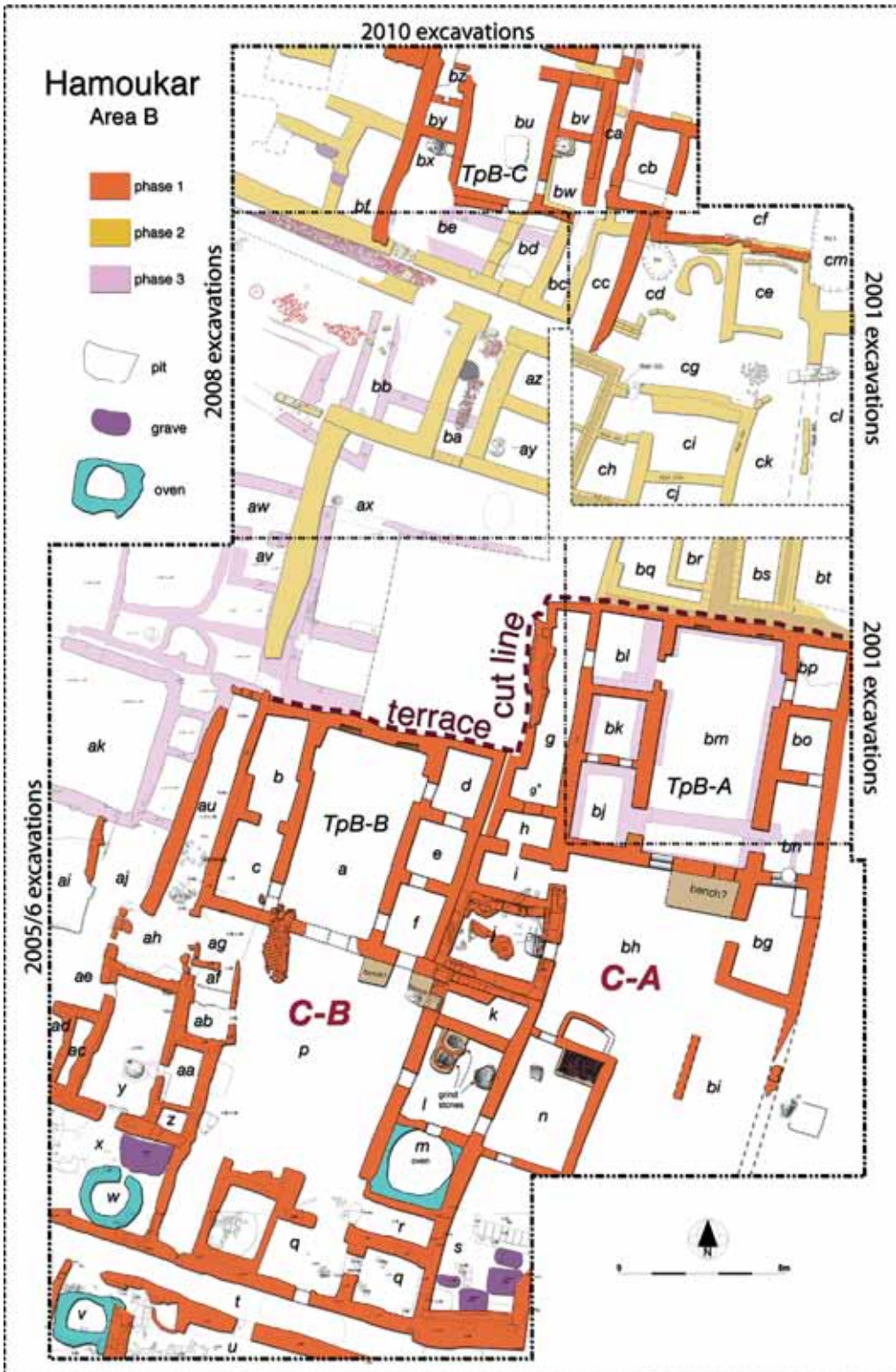


Figure 2. *Early Urban Structures: Plan of Late Chalcolithic architecture in Area B, showing major phases of occupation (Level 1 = burnt phase)*



Figure 3. **Terracing:** Ancient cut line through Area B, separating terrace with burnt buildings to the south from earlier levels to the north (Yvonne Helmholtz and Clemens Reichel excavating)

rower but followed the line of the Complex B wall all the way down (fig. 3). It was a cut, but not just for a wall — the whole terrain that contained Complexes A and B had been leveled to counter the slope along the edge of the mound. Though the burnt level was lower in elevation than the architectural remains exposed in 2008, it actually was later than those. Walls to the north of and contemporary with Complex B would have been on a higher terrace, now lost to erosion. Fire-hardened sling bullets, found in 2008 just below the surface, must have been imprints of this destruction level, having survived wind and water erosion much better than mudbrick architecture. The gap in

the destruction level, accordingly, was an environmental phenomenon, not an ancient lack of thoroughness in wiping out a city.

Another tripartite building (TpB-C) was found in a 5 x 15 m trench supervised by Tracy Spurrier and Rasha Elendari, to the north of the spot where burnt levels had appeared in the baulk in 2008 (fig. 2). Badly damaged by Uruk pits, its function remains uncertain, though some functional indication might be given by two almost identical installations found in rooms -bw- and -bx-, consisting of large, shallow bowls on benches made of mud and broken bricks (fig. 4). Their surfaces showed significant abrasions, suggesting that they were used as stationary grinders, but it remains unclear what would have been processed in them. Central holes in both bowls allowed for ground substances to be collected from below in bowls or jars. Channels below these features, leading into room/courtyard -bu-, might have



Figure 4. **Mystery Grinding Bowl:** One of two large, shallow bowls from TpB-C (room -bw-; see fig. 2) apparently used for grinding; dashed line indicates the course of a water channel (partially removed) leading into central room/courtyard -bu-

carried away wastewater after cleaning these installations. Neither channel was coated in bitumen or plaster, suggesting that they were secondary and somewhat ramshackle installations, possibly constructed during the crisis that preceded the destruction of these buildings.

The more substantial size of the earlier walls excavated in 2008 contrasts sharply with the flimsy nature of some of the walls from the destruction level (fig. 2). Did the latest level of Area B architecture already represent an impoverished phase? In order to address this question we decided to remove

parts of Tripartite Building (TpB) -A- (fig. 2). Supervised by Aaron Shapland, we encountered the remains of an earlier, much more substantial building below TpB-A that largely, though not entirely, corresponded with the outline of its successor. A deliberate infill of this building with sterile soil at first made it look like a foundation to TpB-A. The discovery of doorways, secondary alterations in the architecture, and of wall plaster made it clear, however, that these were rising walls (fig. 5). Future seasons hopefully will help us to understand why this building was filled in, only to be replaced with a much more modest construction.

Along the bottom of the mound in Area B Khaled Abu Jayyab, helped by Joanna Velgakis, resumed work that initially was undertaken in 1999 by Judith Franke. One of Judith's first trenches, along the perimeter of the mound, had encountered a zone of dense, clay-rich but virtually sterile soil, leading McGuire Gibson to suggest that this "strip" was part of a 3 m wide wall that had been discovered earlier during that season in a step trench along the slope of the high mound several hundred meters to the north. His hypothesis was confirmed in 2008, when a geophysical survey along the slope of the mound managed to follow its line from the step trench to the bottom of Area B (fig. 1), suggesting that it indeed was a Late Chalcolithic city wall (see *2008-2009 Annual Report*). A sounding along the inside of the wall, undertaken by Khaled in 2005, showed that it had been set against earlier levels with no floors associated with the wall that would have dated it securely. In the hope of finding a better context in Area B we opened a 3 m wide trench across the line of the wall. The inner face of the wall was reasonably well defined with several abutting floors and features. The pottery samples retrieved from them were limited but they confirmed a date to Late Chalcolithic 3 (4000-3700 BC), hence several centuries earlier than the burnt level on top of Area B. Several big ovens against the wall indicate that large-scale food production in Area B, as attested through in the ovens of Complexes A and B on top of the mound, already was pres-



Figure 5. *Forerunners*: a) Area B from east with TpB-A partially removed, exposing substantial earlier building below (phases separated by dashed lines); b) A. Shapland articulating infant burial



Figure 6a-f. **Early Bronze Age Public Architecture:** a) Aerial view of Area C, arrows indicating viewpoints shown in pictures b-d; b) niched facade excavated in 1999; c) room with niched doorways and partially excavated “podium” (circled) in 2008; d) room with excavated “podium” and fire installations after 2010 season; e-f) close-ups of fire installations

ent centuries earlier. Defining the outer wall remained tricky, and more work will be needed to firmly determine its full width.

Much of the excitement during the 2010 season focused on those areas in which Hamoukar’s second, and greatest, urban expansion was addressed. Jason Ur’s site survey (recently published as *Oriental Institute Publications 137*) indicates that by the late Early Bronze Age the city had expanded to a size of almost 100 hectares, extending into an outer town that nowadays makes up most of the main site. Excavations in Area C in 1999, 2001, 2006, and 2008 had uncovered remains of two large building complexes that are separated by an alley (fig. 6a). A relative wealth is indicated by the presence of baked-brick pavements in almost every room, a major expense in an area devoid of abundant fuel sources. The recovery of numerous clays sealings suggested the presence of some level of administrative complexity. The exact function of these buildings, however, continued to elude us. A niched facade above

a podium, discovered in our initial 1999 sounding, first suggested it to be a temple, but the facade turned out to be located inside a small square room (fig. 6b). Similar but larger podiums with niched facades have been found in courtyards of the palace at nearby Tell Beydar. No further evidence for cultic activities was found in this area until 2008, when we found a plastered, multiply recessed doorway that led into a large, elongated room in the southeastern edge of the excavation area (fig. 6c). Its opposite end was beyond the reach of the excavation that year, a fact made worse by the last-minute discovery of a brick podium whose front was level with the line of the baulk, right where a cult podium would be expected in a cella. There was no time to expand the excavation, so we had to contain our curiosity until 2010. This time we widened all of Area C to a 30 x 30 m excavation, but unfortunately the full extent of this room still remains beyond the excavation's limit. We do, however, have a better understanding of its placement within Area C. Accessed from the alleyway mentioned above it is preceded by an anteroom paved with baked bricks that opens to the main room. Both rooms contained fire installations of seemingly secondary nature, possibly of metallurgical nature, built against their walls (fig. 6e, f). Those in the main rooms were made of large broken cooking pots that were set against the walls and encased by upright baked bricks. While the "podium" from 2008 unfortunately turned out to be a ramshackle, secondary feature (fig. 6d), a cultic function nonetheless is suggested by a curious square pottery basin with incised decoration (fig. 7), of which fragments were found on top of and scattered around the podium. Several spouts along its base suggest that it was used for libations. Just how much farther this room still extends remains unclear. The function of a large square mudbrick feature, located off-center close to the right (western) side of the room behind the "podium," will have to be investigated next season. A cache consisting of numerous beads and fragments of a cylinder seal, found on the floor right behind the "podium," possibly was dropped during the ransacking and looting of this building.

Just as other Upper Khabur sites, Hamoukar reached its largest extent during the later Early Bronze Age (2500–2200 BC). Expanding into a large outer town it extended over almost 100 hectares. The origins of this expansion, however, appear to be much earlier. Ur's site survey already indicated that pottery from the preceding Ninevite V period (ca. 2900–2600 BC) in the outer town covered almost the same area as the later city. In 2008 Kate Grossman had dropped several soundings in search of architectural remains from this time period. Supported by a Wenner-Gren dissertation grant in 2010, she reopened two areas (E and H) that previously had been excavated, hence provided "windows" below the omnipresent late third-millennium architecture. Excavations in 2001 in Area H, located at the eastern edge of the village in agricultural land outside the officially



Figure 7. Libation bowl from Area C, found in association with the "podium"

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Figure 8. **Bricked Complexity:** Baked bricked facade and paved courtyard, Area E; date: ca. 2400 BC

designated boundary of the site, uncovered the remains of well-built houses (see the 2001–2002 *Annual Report*) with paved courtyards very close to the surface. Below them Kate was able to uncover remains of three sizable building units that were associated with Ninevite V pottery. Several ovens and large storage jars indicate that food storage and processing played a major part in some of the rooms or open spaces. In Area E on the western edge of the site, where work had been called off in 2001 due to lack of results, she reopened two 10 x 10 m trenches. The results were unexpectedly rich, even if not for the time period that Kate was looking for. The eastern trench, supervised by Tuna Kalaycı, contained the late third-millennium baked brick building and court described at the outset (fig. 8). The obvious display of wealth, evident from the building materials chosen, leaves no doubt that this is a non-domestic, representative building, but a larger excavation will be necessary to understand its function. The western trench (supervised by Max Price) contained numerous burials from the mid- to late



Figure 9. **Glyptic Firsts:** Cylinder seal of green stone from Area E, with rolled-out modern impression showing erotic scene; date: ca. 2400 BC

Early Bronze Age — some of them quite rich in grave goods, especially in miniature vessels. The status of the buried not only could be appreciated from the grave inventories but also by the jewelry found in association with the deceased — rings, bracelets, and pendants made of copper and bone. Perhaps the most spectacular find of this area — if not of the whole season — was a cylinder seal that had been worn as a necklace. Once the seal had been cleaned we were stunned to see that the theme of our first cylinder seal was quite naughty... (fig. 9). In addition to that seal, numerous seal impressions were found in both Areas H and E (fig. 10).

More than a year has passed since the end of the 2010 season, yet we are far from being done with our analysis and data processing toward publication. In light of the current events in Syria the timing of our next field season — scheduled for spring 2012 — remains speculative. During a recent trip to Hamoukar, Salam undertook some repairs on our house, which had suffered some damage due to winter rains. The site is guarded and, apart for the ongoing problem of illegal house constructions on site, protected. Our main concern presently has to be for the safety and well-being of our Syrian colleagues and friends.

In closing, I would like to thank those individuals and institutions who have made the 2010 season a resounding success. The Syrian Department of Antiquities, notably Dr. Bassam Jamous (Director General of Antiquities and Museums) and Dr. Michel al-Maqdissi (Director of Excavations), issued our excavations permit quickly and provided us with logistical support throughout the season. The Oriental Institute not only supported our work logistically but also financially. In 2010–11 the University of Toronto provided two Research Opportunity Program (ROP) positions to allow me to train undergraduate students in data analysis. Last but by no means least, several sponsors have contributed generously over the past few years: Howard Hallengren (New York); the late Alan Brody, Carlotta Maher, Cathy Brehm, Rita and Kitty Picken, Toni Smith, Anton and Sonia Koht, Virginia O’Neal (Chicago), and the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto). Without their unwavering support this season would not have been possible.



Figure 10. Mesopotamian Parallels: Seal designs showing parallels with Mesopotamia glyptics: (top) row of four human figures with bird-shaped heads and large circular eyes, facing left; left arms are raised, right arms are lowered; oblique lines crossing bodies at waist height, probably indicating weapons; date: ca. 2400 BC; (bottom) eagle holding two lions, approached (or attacked?) by a male figure from right side