

# THE EL-QITAR PROJECT

THOMAS · L · MCCLELLAN

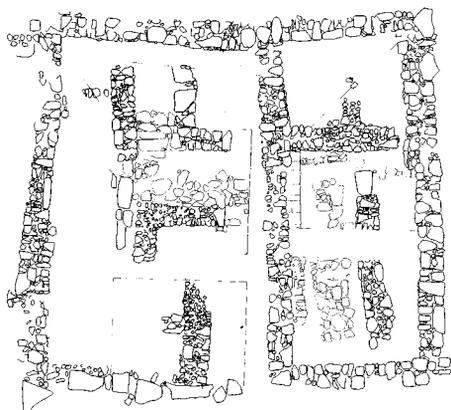
**T**he 1987 season at el-Qitar ran from May 2 to July 29th and marked the last major season of excavation there because the site has been selected as the spot for the new Tishreen Dam across the Euphrates River. The dam will raise the water level 30 m high and create a lake about 60 km long, extending northward to the Turkish border.

Upstream modern villages and ancient tells will be inundated within about five years, but at el-Qitar extensive bulldozing and drilling was already underway this past season, and with construction on a huge dam shortly to begin directly on top of our River Gate and Lower Settlement (Area X) we faced the equivalent of archaeological triage. Consequently we broke off work in places like the Lower West Gate, where there are still unanswered questions, and opened up several entirely new parts of the site in order to gain a more complete picture of the overall site.

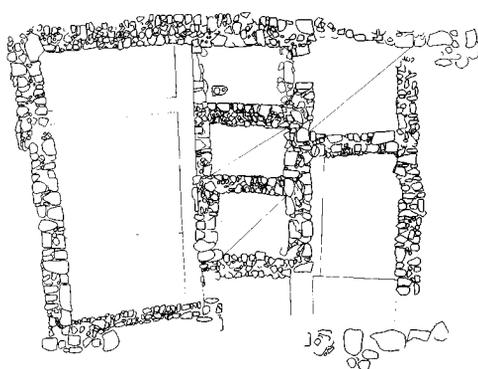
● *Postholes in Building 17 looking southwest.*



● Building 16



● Building 17



early phases

EL-QITAR

1987



We located our camp in the village of Abu Qal Qal this year to take advantage of electricity, a good water supply, and new paved roads. Katie Snell cooked and organized the kitchen and dining room the first eight weeks. In camp Mandy Mottram spent most of the season working on neolithic lithics and sherds collected by stratified random sampling in 1986 from Haloula, north of el-Qitar. Dorothea Ditchfield was in charge of the pottery processing and registration of objects and samples.

On the Upper Settlement at el-Qitar Joanna McClellan continued work on the Orthostat Building where she found eastern walls of two rooms that had eluded us in previous seasons. One of the walls was lined with orthostats that had fallen or been intentionally shoved out of place in the construction of a later building; another wall was largely carved out of bedrock, in imitation of orthostat construction. Or perhaps the reverse, orthostats imitate walls of solid rock. She also found good stratigraphic and architectural evidence for an intermediate phase between the Orthostat Building (Building 14) and a later structure, Building 15.

New trenches were opened by Daniel Snell, Anne Porter, and Radi Ukhdi near the highest point on the site, (north of Building 10) where portions of several large structures were found. Several Classical period graves were cut into these ruins, and Snell found traces of gold leaf in the robbed burials and one beautiful gold earring.

In the Lower Settlement which is most directly threatened by the dam, Buildings 16 and 17, located along the

city wall southwest of the River Gate, were excavated under the supervision of Andrew Anastasios and, for several weeks, by Dora Constantinides, both from the University of Melbourne. We wished to compare the function of structures abutting the city wall with Buildings 11 and 12 more centrally located in Area X. One hypothesis was that structures next to the city wall were more likely to be related to defensive or administrative functions, such as barracks or store rooms, in contrast to buildings in the center of the site that were domestic in nature. We also suspected Building 16 might have a plan similar to domestic houses at the German excavation of Mumbaqa where a central court with platforms and hearths is flanked by small square rooms. Any resemblance to that building type was dispelled when excavation revealed new lines of walls not anticipated. Furthermore the stratigraphy was much more complex than that of Buildings 11 and 12. Erosion, and possibly intentional destruction along the city wall, had eradicated the southern portions of Building 16 in its latest stages, while its northern portions were still intact. Thus the plan of the structure based on visible walls prior to excavation was of composite elements from several periods.

By the end of the season the basic outline of an early phase of the building was recovered; it revealed that our initial division of the structures into Buildings 16 and 17 was not applicable in the earlier phases since a doorway, later blocked, joined the two. On the other hand, we could find no connecting doorway from the eastern side of Building 16 to its "central" room, in any phase. Thus in the early phase we may speak of an eastern building and a western building. The western structure was a "split level" built with three different levels to accommodate the steep slope between the city wall on the lower side and the street on the upper side. Although the upper part was eroded, there was a stairway, flanked by walls, leading from the street down into a passageway paved with stones. From it one doorway led into a room at the same level, while another led up into a small room at an intermediate level between the street and the passageway and a third passed down into a lower room(s) that adjoined the city wall.

The larger eastern structure was filled with thick ashy deposits in some rooms, broken pottery, several basalt bowls, and internal features such as benches, ovens, and postholes. One long central room contained four or more

ovens dating from slightly different periods, and must have been unroofed. Over one hundred postholes were found in it in almost but not quite recognizable patterns which we are still analyzing. It is doubtful that the posts or wooden poles were implanted all at one time since it would have created an impenetrable forest. In a post hole phase ovens and shattered pots were found in the same area. About five boxes of potsherds from these structures are being shipped to Chicago for stratigraphic and functional analyses.

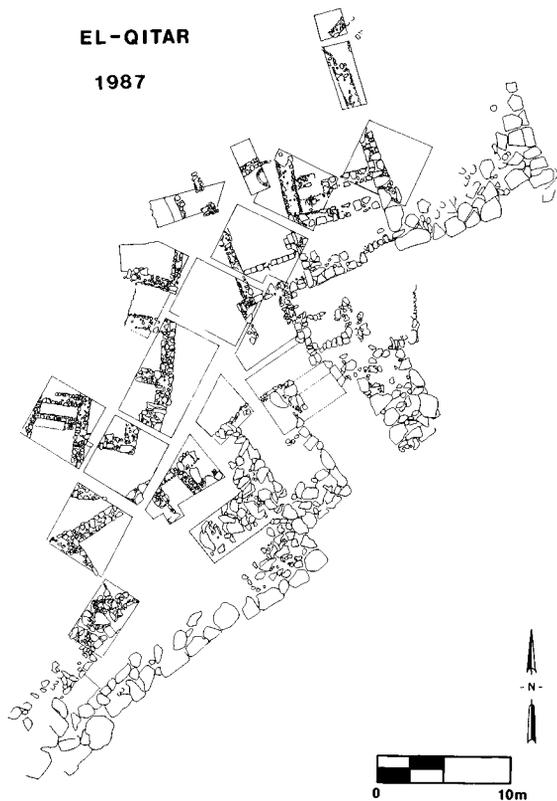
Excavations in these buildings along the city wall demonstrate that there was no typical tripartite structure of the Mumbaqa type here, nor was this an area of domestic structures. The use of space adjacent to the city walls in Area X at el-Qitar seems to be rather different from the domestic use of space towards the center of Area X, at least on the evidence of architecture and non-movable features. On the other hand, they are not obviously military in nature. The large number of postholes and ovens in one unroofed room may point to some kind of craft activity next to the city wall.

At the River Gate we set out to recover the architectural design of its different construction phases, and, as part of our special interest in settlement design, see how street systems, recorded from aerial photographs, connected to the gate. We did not entirely succeed in these goals because severe erosion had carried away most traces of later gates, nor paradoxically did we recover the complete plan of the earliest because we could not dig through the deep deposits of soil covering it just a few meters up slope. But we recovered a stratigraphic sequence rich in complexity and we found orthostats in the earliest exposed city gate.

We had walked over and examined the exposed remains of the (earliest and main phase) River Gate on and off for over ten years, but details of its layout eluded us. With the discovery several years ago of orthostat-piers in the Lower West Gate of Area Y (Upper Settlement) we took more seriously the identification of one or two stones that previously we had rather skeptically noted as possible orthostats in the River Gate. But within a day or two of removing loose rocky debris we exposed a pair of orthostat-piers in the passageway. The eastern one was still basically intact and had cut marks where another architectural element fitted in above it. But the western orthostat-pier was shattered down to within 1–2 cm of its base. In a typical city gate of the Middle Bronze-Late

Bronze period there should be one or two more sets of orthostat-piers in the passageway. These two orthostats, which must have been partially exposed above ground for centuries or millennia, may have had another set, all traces of which have disappeared, placed in front of them near the entrance of the River Gate. Alternatively, yet another set may have been located behind them. So we dug behind, and up slope from, the set of newly discovered orthostat-piers. Instead of finding other orthostats, we discovered that on the west side of the gate, at the inner end of the western orthostat, its flanking wall ended and a passageway or street led up slope. At first it was quite reminiscent of the stairway found between two sets of orthostats in the Upper West Gate, but by the end of the season we found no trace of a flanking wall to delimit the other side of such a stairway; rather the area was a wide street or open plaza.

- *River Gate, all phases.*



Thick deposits of stony street material were found along the inner edge of the large tower that protected the southwest side of the River Gate. One and possibly two doorways opened from the street into rooms built on top of the tower's stone foundations. Thus in several details the plan of the earliest exposed River Gate shows similarities to the Lower West Gate:

1. orthostat-piers,
2. streets leading off at almost a right angle from the gates,
3. rooms built on top of defensive walls.

There were virtually no traces of later city gates, but we found several phases of streets leading to the gate area, and portions of structures some of which are related to the defensive system. One of the most important aspects of our work in this area was the recovery of a good stratigraphic sequence of several phases, beginning with the River Gate just discussed, which is either Middle Bronze Age or early Late Bronze Age in date, and ending sometime near the end of the Late Bronze Age. Augusta McMahon spent most of the season excavating and drawing the city gate, while Anna Curnow, Lorraine Brochu, and Anne Porter (all from the Oriental Institute except Ms. Curnow who studies at Melbourne University), dug the adjacent trenches.

The combined work in the River Gate and Buildings 16 and 17 abutting the city wall shows that the area immediately inside the city wall was devoted to non-domestic activities; it also shows that the urban plan of the Lower Settlement that I have published elsewhere, with its buildings, streets, and city walls, does not represent one single period, rather it is a palimpsest of several architectural periods, especially on the edge of the settlement near the defensive walls. This realization was reinforced when our departmental representative Radi Ukhdi excavated a stone circle on the northeastern edge of the Lower Settlement and showed that it is a Classical circle-grave (possibly the foundation of a small tumulus) unrelated to the Late Bronze Age settlement.