

## AMUQ VALLEY REGIONAL PROJECT

### K. Aslihan Yener

The Oriental Institute's Amuq Valley Regional Project season took place from 1 August to 22 September 1999 and consisted of a continuation of the Amuq Valley Survey, the first season of the Orontes Delta Survey, and the second full season of excavations at Tell Kurdu, one of the major prehistoric settlements in the Amuq Valley near Antakya (ancient Antioch), located in southernmost Turkey. The initial work in the Amuq Valley was undertaken in the 1930s by the Oriental Institute's "Syro-Hittite" Project, and included excavations at Kurdu (Braidwood and Braidwood, OIP 61) which exposed phases C–E, the Halaf-Ubaid portion of the sequence, in four trenches and completed the missing segments of the prehistoric sequence. Braidwood completed a regional survey, recording 178 sites, and made soundings at half a dozen sites to secure a ceramic chronology. The resulting Amuq sequence has remained the standard chronological framework for Near Eastern prehistory.

### Amuq Valley Survey and Orontes Delta Survey

In 1995 the Oriental Institute returned to the Amuq Valley after a long hiatus with a survey that focused on the regional developments in the valley throughout its long history of occupation. Directed by Tony Wilkinson, this survey included both a geoarchaeological and a settlement component. Between 1995 and 1998 the settlement survey added 54 sites to the original list of 178. The geoarchaeological work during these same years greatly clarified the environmental and geomorphological history of the valley by documenting sedimentation across the valley, indicating shifts in the course of the Afrin and Orontes Rivers, and recording several episodes of lake formation. In addition to this regional work, the project team undertook salvage work at Tell Judaidah (1995), mapped Tells Dhahab (1995) and Imar (1998), and excavated at Tell Kurdu (1996, 1998, 1999).

The results of the previous years' Amuq Valley surveys show that between Amuq A (Neolithic) and the end of Phase E (Late Chalcolithic), the dominant settlement was located near the center of the valley. An east-west distribution of sites is apparent along an earlier course of the Afrin River, and another alignment along the Kizil Irk. The settlement patterns suggest a two-level hierarchy, the second level being represented by small 1 ha sites. Tell Kurdu was probably the main site, with a size of 11–14 ha during phases C to E, although it may not have been fully occupied in all phases. By phases H–I the main settlement had shifted towards the southern edge of the valley dominated by Tell Tayinat in the third millennium and by Tell Atchana in the second millennium. This shift in settlement to the junction of the east-west and north-south routes reflects the importance of commercial and political traffic for the economies of the Middle Bronze Age and later periods.

In 1999 the project consisted of three separate surveys, which both continued the survey within the valley proper and expanded westward into the Orontes River delta and the adjacent uplands of the Amanus Mountains. Timothy Harrison, University of Toronto, conducted a survey of third-millennium sites in the valley, looking specifically at the red-black burnished ware

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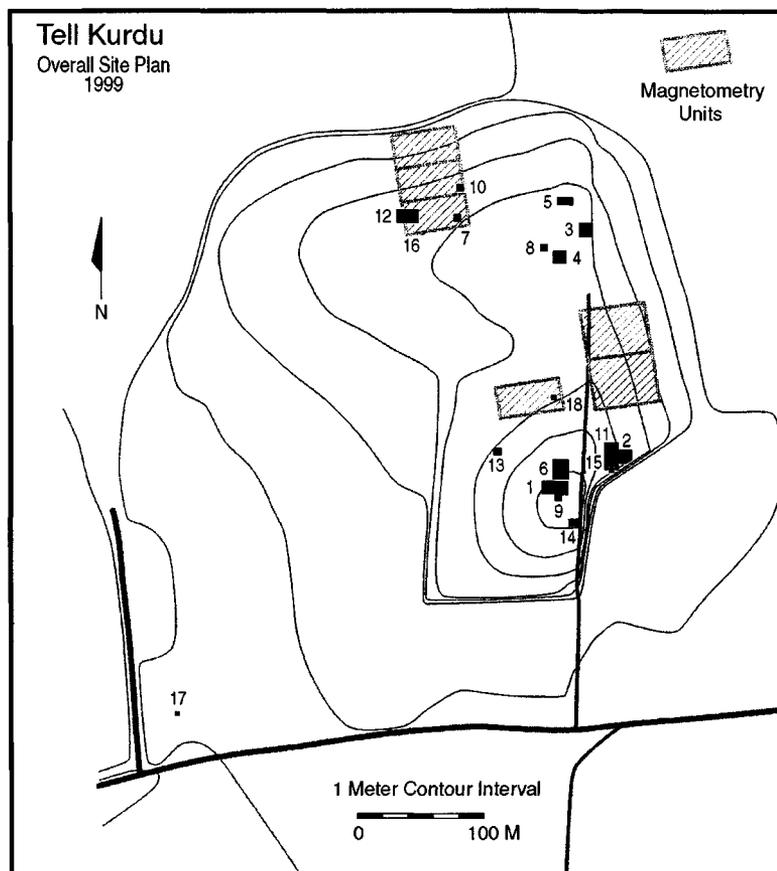


Figure 1. Site plan. Tell Kurdu, 1999

tradition in the Amuq. During the course of his investigations, a basalt fragment containing an Iron Age hieroglyphic Luwian inscription was discovered in the garden of a farm house on Tayinat al-Sughir. Earlier excavations at Tayinat had yielded several similar fragments.

The Orontes Delta Survey team expanded the Amuq survey further westward along the Orontes (Asi) River, providing new information about settlement in the coastal delta and along the Mediterranean shore. Co-directed by Hatice Pamir of the Mustafa Kemal University in Antakya, the team unearthed over thirty new sites in the delta

near the coastal town of Samandağ. Although the majority of the sites were classical, Byzantine, and Islamic, the Late Bronze Age site of Sabuniye, first excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley, was rediscovered, measured, and intensively surveyed. In future seasons cores taken from the delta will allow us to reconstruct the ancient shoreline, which will provide a greater understanding of the settlement patterns in the delta area and eastward into the Amuq Valley. This should in turn help to clarify the movement of commodities from the Mediterranean, including the Aegean-related materials that appear at Tells Atchana/Alalakh, Chatal Hoyuk, Tayinat, and Judaidah.

Our reconnaissance of the mining regions in the Amanus Mountains continued in partnership with the Turkish MTA (Mineral and Research Institute General Directorate) and Boğaziçi University. Veins of arsenopyrites in conjunction with chalcopyrite were clearly evident in one of the many gallery entrances, presenting intriguing implications for the appearance and production of the very early arsenical bronzes (Amuq F) found at previous excavations at Amuq sites.

In addition to continuation of the projects discussed above, in future seasons we hope to initiate surveys in the Amanus foothills and mountains, begin full analyses of surface collections, and conduct an intensive second phase of survey work on specific sites such as Tayinat and Atchana, in order to examine a number of issues. The apparent lack of integration of the Amuq Valley within the Old Assyrian system of trading colonies is intriguing; it may be that another network operated to link Anatolia with Syro-Palestine. Another is how the kingdom of Mukish, with its capital at Alalakh/Tell Atchana, fits into the administrative and economic framework of

the Hittite Empire, a matter that has so far proven archaeologically elusive. Future excavations at the pivotal sites of Tells Tayinat and Atchana will elucidate the nature of these dynamics.

### Excavations at Tell Kurdu (Trenches 11–16)

The excavations at Tell Kurdu are the first part of a long-term project of excavations at several different mounds that seeks to examine chronological shifts in both intra- and interregional dynamics in the Amuq Valley. Another important target is to attain a fine-grained ceramic sequence for the region, both as a tool for analyzing surface collections for the regional survey and as a contribution to the chronological framework of southeastern Anatolia and western Syria. We chose Tell Kurdu because the mound was occupied during a period in which an important transformation was taking place, from the early domestication concerns of the Neolithic to the incipient urbanism of the Chalcolithic period. As a regional center, Kurdu undoubtedly played an important role in interregional interactions, and pottery styles point to connections with the Halaf and Ubaid of northern Mesopotamia. Raw materials from the neighboring Amanus Mountains (e.g., serpentine, various other stones, timber, and possibly copper and other metals) would have been the local commodities of value, and craft production probably supplied goods for both intraregional consumption and extraregional export.

Tell Kurdu consists of two mounds connected by a saddle (fig. 1). Under the field direction of Chris Edens, ten trenches of various sizes were placed on the northern and southern sectors of Tell Kurdu in 1998. Three large trenches and three smaller trenches were exposed in 1999 and revealed levels dating to Amuq E (Ubaid-related, ca. 4800–4400/4300 BC), Amuq D (ca. 5200–4800 BC), and a late phase of Amuq C (Halaf-related, ca. 5700–5200 BC). Based on the excavation results, the extent of the Amuq E settlement on the south mound can now be estimated at 2–3 ha. The Amuq E deposits formed a small but comparatively high mound.

Trench 11 and trench 15 were placed to the west of and adjacent to a building exposed in 1998. Three phases of pottery kilns, both square and round, formed three sides of a central open space (fig. 2). Fragments of other kilns could also be discerned. Numerous wasters and considerable ceramic slag suggest that pottery was produced at a level above a cottage industry and that it was a specialized craft product. Adjacent to and within the kilns were both dark-faced burnished wares and Ubaid-like monochrome painted wares dating to Amuq phase E, which are parallel with examples found at Hammam et-Turkman in the Balikh Valley (level IVA) and Ras Shamra on the Syrian coast (level IIIB). Benjamin Diebold, the ceramics specialist for the excavation, re-

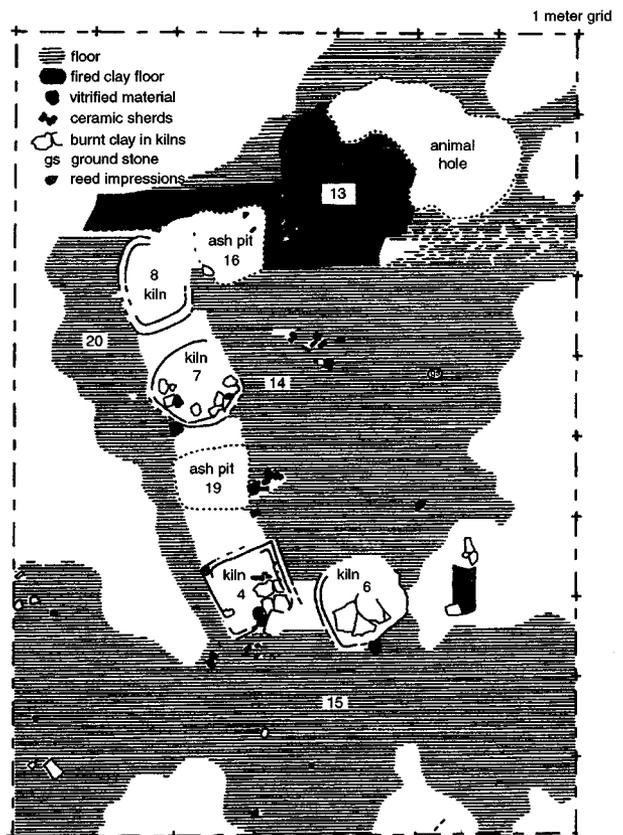


Figure 2. Kilns, trench 11. Tell Kurdu, Ubaid period

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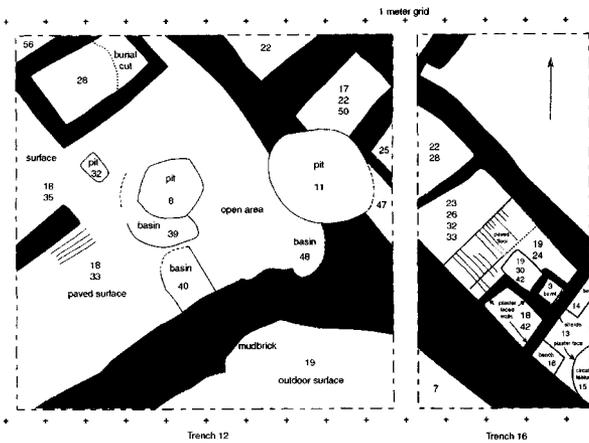


Figure 3. Multi-room house, trenches 12 and 16. Tell Kurdu, Halaf period

intended to cover the modern mound surface to virgin soil below the present level of the surrounding plain. What appeared to be a terrace platform was partially visible in a bulldozer cut, and the step trench was placed to investigate its connection to the large multi-room building made of pisé slabs excavated on the summit in 1998. Part of a building as well as bedded trash deposits were found in association with two ovens in a corner of the room. The trash deposits contained numerous fragments of clay sealings (fig. 5), tokens, figurines, and beads. The dominant component of the ceramic assemblage was a very finely made, Ubaid-like monochrome painted ware, much like that found in the large building on the summit. Many designs are congruent with those from Hammam et-Turkman (level IVA) and Tepe Gawra in northern Mesopotamia

(levels XV–XVII, ca. 4700–4350 BC). Multiple-brush wavy line patterns are striking and common during phase E at Tell Kurdu as indicated by the burials discovered in 1998. Stratigraphic considerations suggest that these ceramics are earlier than those from trenches 11 and 15. The assemblages from these trenches, then, may serve as a basis for a preliminary subdivision of the Amuq E phase at Tell Kurdu, to be explored in future work.

Trench 12 and trench 16 were placed at the west end of a building partly revealed by a magnetometer reading in 1998 on the northern part of the site. A courtyard and a second open space framed by a multi-room rectilinear structure with surprisingly thick walls of puddled mud were unearthed (fig. 3). This trench produced the earliest assemblage, corresponding with Amuq phases C and D, and probably contained a late Halaf-related culture with a very strong local component. As suggested in the Braidwood report, the characteristic Amuq dark-faced burnished ware was common in this phase, although not as common as its unburnished counterpart. Although the Braidwoods

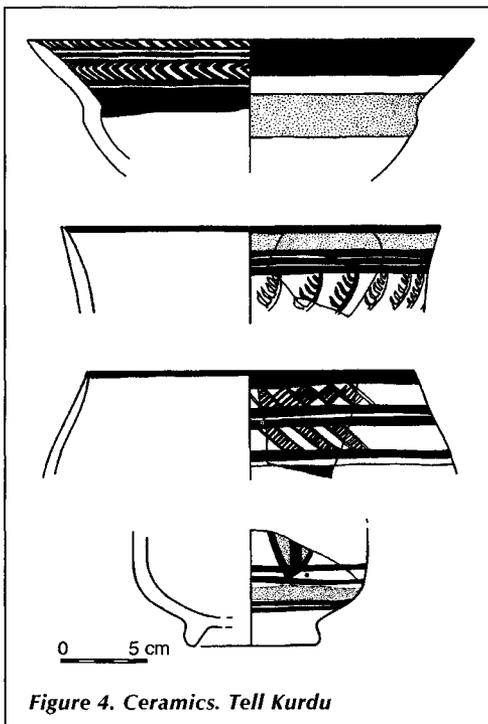


Figure 4. Ceramics. Tell Kurdu

ported that the ceramics included many straight-necked jars characteristically decorated with bands and swags, sinuous-sided bowls and cups in both plain and bichrome wares; bowls with multiple-brush wavy line designs were by far the dominant motif. Quantitatively, 7% of the total assemblage from trenches 11 and 15 was dark-faced burnished ware, agreeing with the earlier results from the Braidwood excavations. However, only 28% of the total sherd assemblage (by count, not weight) was painted, in contrast to the approximately 75% frequency indicated in the Braidwood report.

Trench 14 contained a step trench over the east slope of the south mound and was intended to cover the modern mound surface to virgin soil below the present level of the surrounding plain.

suggest that 35–40% of the phase C assemblage was dark-faced burnished ware, our findings indicate that only 27% of rims and 14% of the total sherd bulk (including body sherds) were burnished.

Of special note are generic Halaf-related elements including carinated bowls with bucrania and a body sherd in Halaf style (fig. 4), made of a finely levigated, well-fired creamy paste with lustrous red paint decorated with dotted circles. Excellent parallels can also be found at Umm Qseir, in the middle Khabur River area of northeastern Syria. This assemblage is dominated by dark-faced unburnished cooking wares, dark-faced burnished wares including very fine, thin-walled jars with a nearly lacquer-like finish in black, and larger forms, including basins and a large, heavy, highly polished storage jar. Good parallels can be found at Ras Shamra (level IVC) and in the Rouj Basin.

Small finds include a number of important administrative devices. The corpus consists of geometrically shaped tokens that bear considerable resemblance to those at Tepe Gawra (level XVIII, ca. 4900–4800 BC) and decorated stamp seals as well as stamp seals in very unusual shapes. Seals in the form of small, stylized dogs, miniature fingers or hoofs, similar impressions on ceramics (cf. Gawra XI, ca. 3700–3600 BC = first mixed range in the Amuq), and double conical seals were the most amusing (fig. 6). Beads with incised figurative designs again with close resemblance to those at Tepe Gawra (level XIII, ca. 4250–4000 BC), occurred in a whole variety of shapes, although in less secure contexts. One in particular, a cylindrical bead, may represent an early stage of the use of beads as seals, something that appears at other sites during the subsequent Uruk period. A sealing (fig. 5 bottom) with a foliate impression from a secure context in the step trench resembles examples found at Tepe Gawra (level XIII) and the late-Ubaid site of Değirmentepe in eastern Turkey and may be indicative of long distance communication. Bailing tags, basket sealings, and other lumps of mud, some impressed with fingerprints, tokens, or string, indicate a complex management of commodities at the site.

The considerable numbers of polished stone objects (axes, adzes, bowls, maces, pendants, and beads) were made of a variety of stones, including serpentine, obsidian, nephrite, basalt, marble, gabbro, and soapstone. Clay objects included painted figurines similar to examples found at Tepe Gawra (level XVII), miniature human figurines with conical headgear and cylindrical skirts (Amuq E), and other animal figurines. Tiny fragments of copper suggest that metal was also a part of the assemblage at this site.

In conclusion, the recently initiated excavation project has begun to address the nature of Tell Kurdu's interregional interactions, the relation between local consumption and importation, and the nature of the important transition from the Halaf to Ubaid and Ubaid to Uruk periods, issues that have compelling implications for other regions, as well.

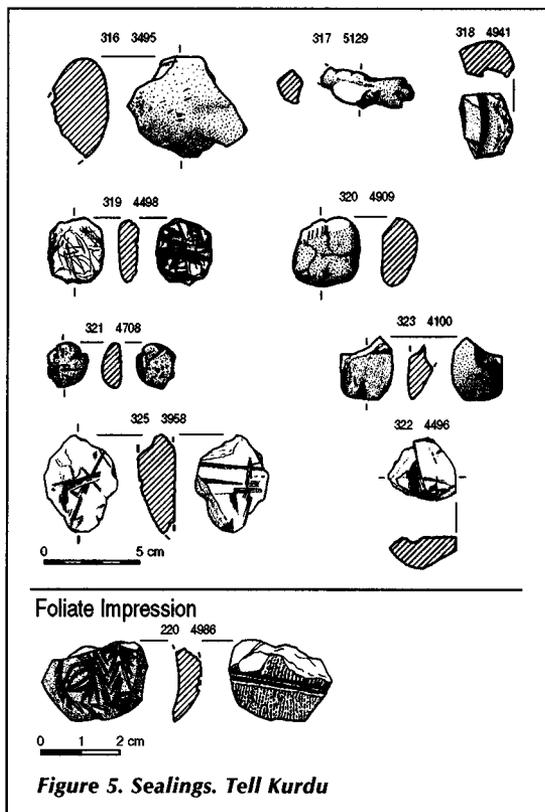


Figure 5. Sealings. Tell Kurdu

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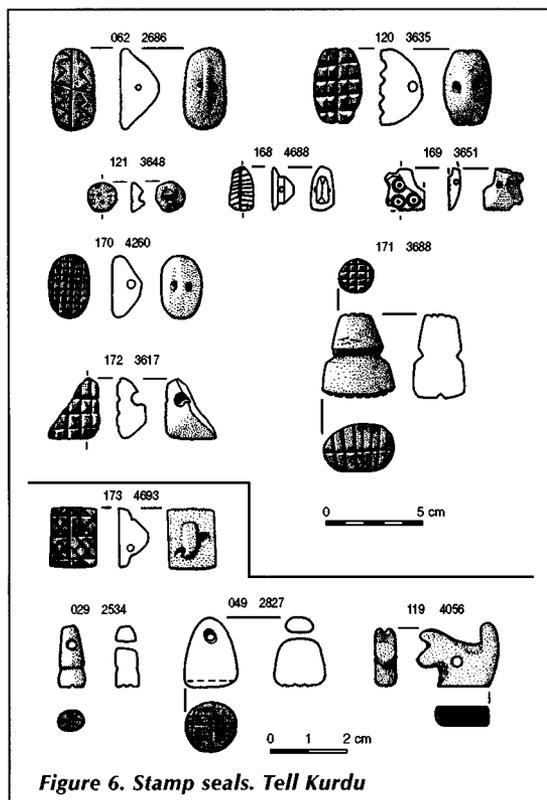


Figure 6. Stamp seals. Tell Kurdu

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