

# The Chalcolithic Period Mesopotamia

## Part II: The Halafian and Ubaid Cultures

# Chronology

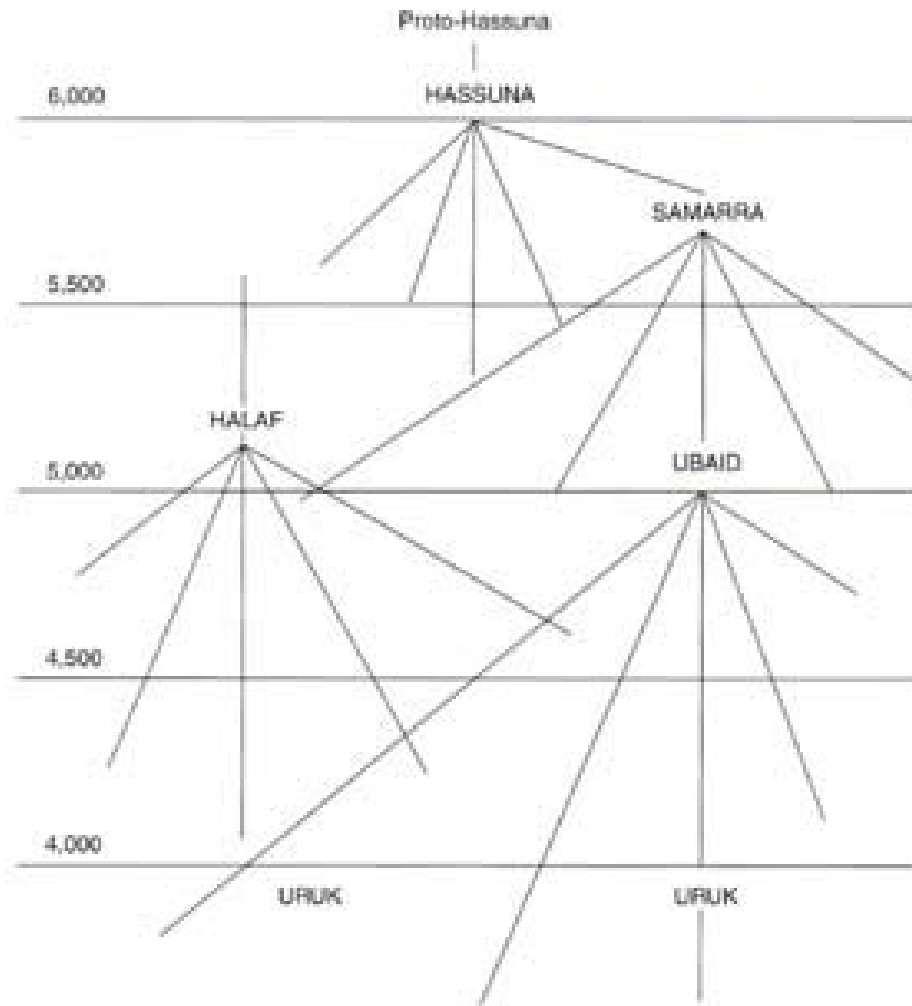


Figure 3.14 Interdigitation and succession of prehistoric and protohistoric Mesopotamian cultures, showing descent of Sumerian Culture from Samarra through Ubaid. Uruk is a period named from the city

# Halafian (~7500-6300 BP)

- Named after Tell Halaf (Khabur Valley, Syria)
- Type site is Tell Arpachiya (burnt building)
- Late Neolithic or Early Chalcolithic?
- Well-known for distinctive finely painted pottery
- Rapid spread east and south of small farming communities over huge area across Syria, northern Iraq, southern Turkey
- Sites: Arpachiyah, Tell Sabi Abyad, Yarim Tepe, Tepe Gawra, Tell Halaf

# Halafian Sites

- Identified by four features:
  - Pottery (plain and fine wares)
    - Finely painted geometric and animal motifs
  - Architecture
    - Mudbrick *tholoi* (round, domed structures) and rectangular dromos, cobble streets
  - Food Complex
    - Dry-farming agricultural villages and herding
  - Egalitarian Exchange Network
    - Homogenous villages (1-2 ha) surrounding *Central Places* (Arpachiya and Tell Brak)
    - Local communities “became” Halaf

# Halafian Pottery

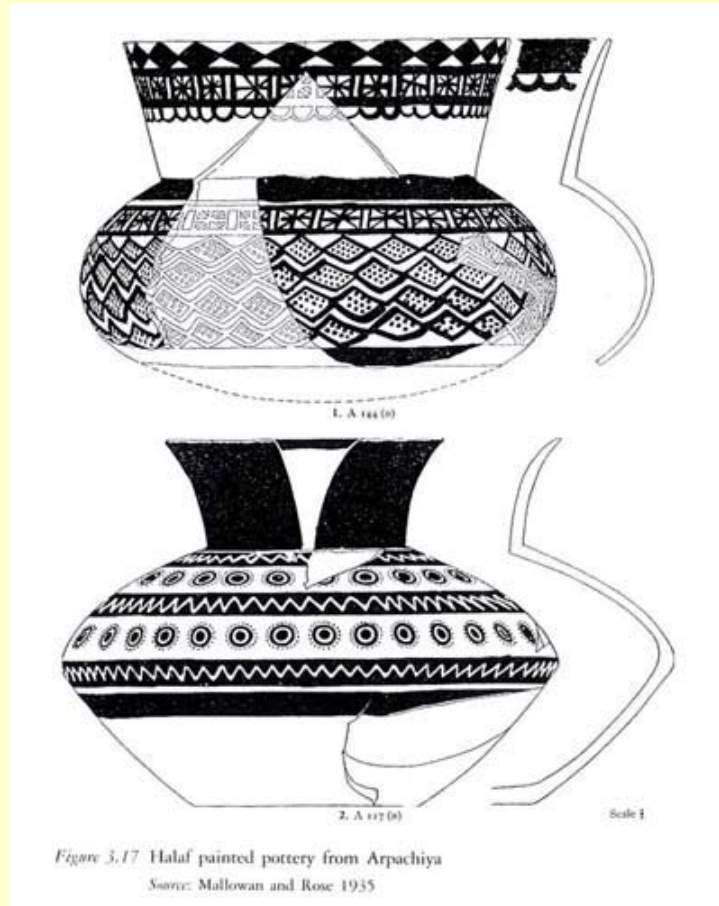
Distinct, elaborate, arguably finest in NE

Finely painted in black, brown, red on buff background

Finest monochrome from specialised workshop at Arpachiyah



# Halafian Pottery





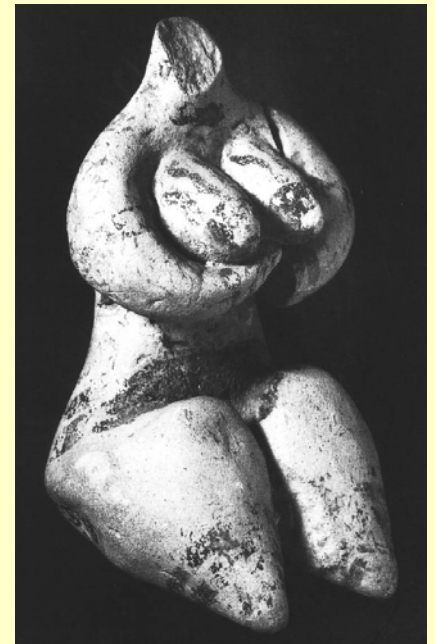
# Halafian Art



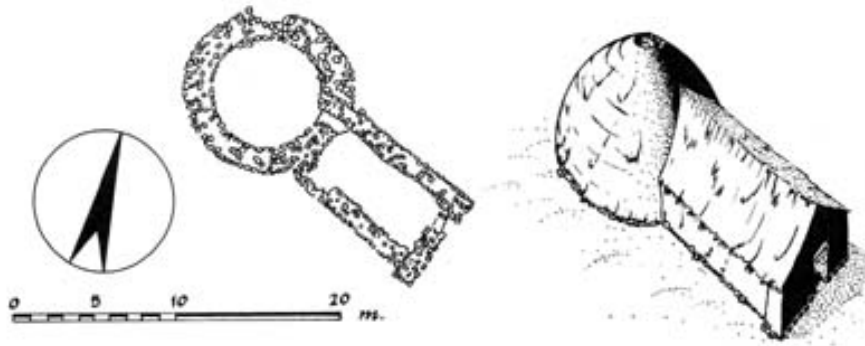
Amulets

Figurines

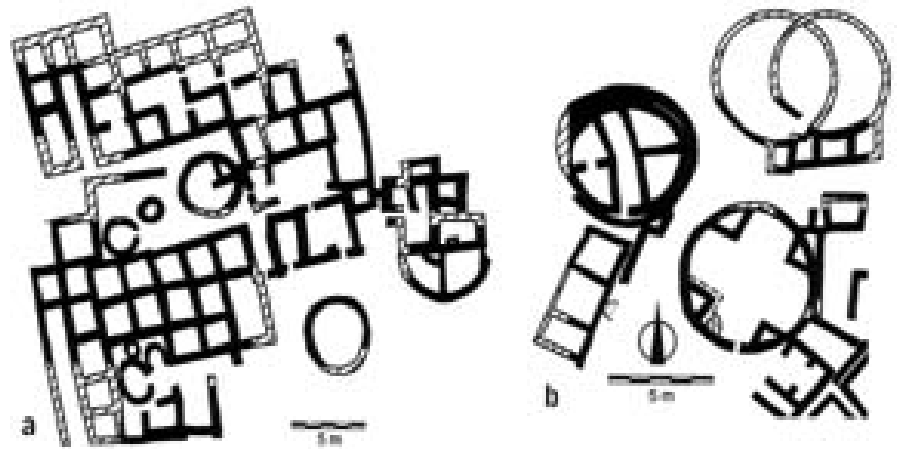
Stamp seals – mark onset  
of personal property?



# Halafian Architecture



106 Reconstruction and plan of a 'tholos' at Arpachiyah. Halaf culture, Middle Chalcolithic period



Halafian and related sites revealed circular plans, with "tholos" houses alongside rectangular architecture as seen in these plans of Halaf-related buildings in Level 6 at Tell Sabi Abyad (a), and Level 3 at Yarni Tepe (b). Reconstructed walls are hatched.

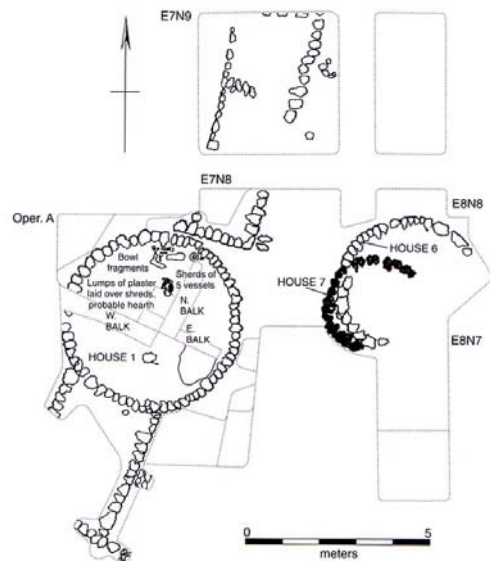


Figure 3.18 Tholoi ('roundhouses') in plan at Girikihaciyan

Source: Watson and LeBlanc 1990:28. Reprinted courtesy of the UCLA Institute of Archaeology





# Tell Sabi Abiyad



- Local development Neolithic to Halaf
- Fine Ware (local) & DFBW (import)
- “Burnt Village”
- Multi-roomed houses
- Special purpose rooms



# The Ubaid Culture of Mesopotamia

The late-6<sup>th</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> Millennium  
(~7500/7000-5800 BP  
~5500-4000 BC)

# Mesopotamia – Major Ubaid Sites



- Tell al-'Oeulli
- Tell Ubaid
- Tell Abada
- Susa
- Eridu
- Uruk
- Ur
- Tepe Gawra
- Arpachiyah

# The Ubaid Period

- Follows Samarran, coincides with latter part of Halafian
- First identified by Woolley in 1923-24 by pottery
- Characterised by:
  - Farming villages (irrigation) and herders (?)
  - Appearance of temples
  - Distinctive and delicate painted pottery (but more austere than Halafian)
- Six chronological phases identified by pottery differences

# Site Locations and Settlement Patterns

- Earliest substantial villages of **southern** Mesopotamia alluvial plains
- Spread north and west along Tigris and Euphrates rivers replacing Halafians – exchange networks?
- Residential architecture, temples, storage buildings, courtyards – combination of private and public space



# Site Structure

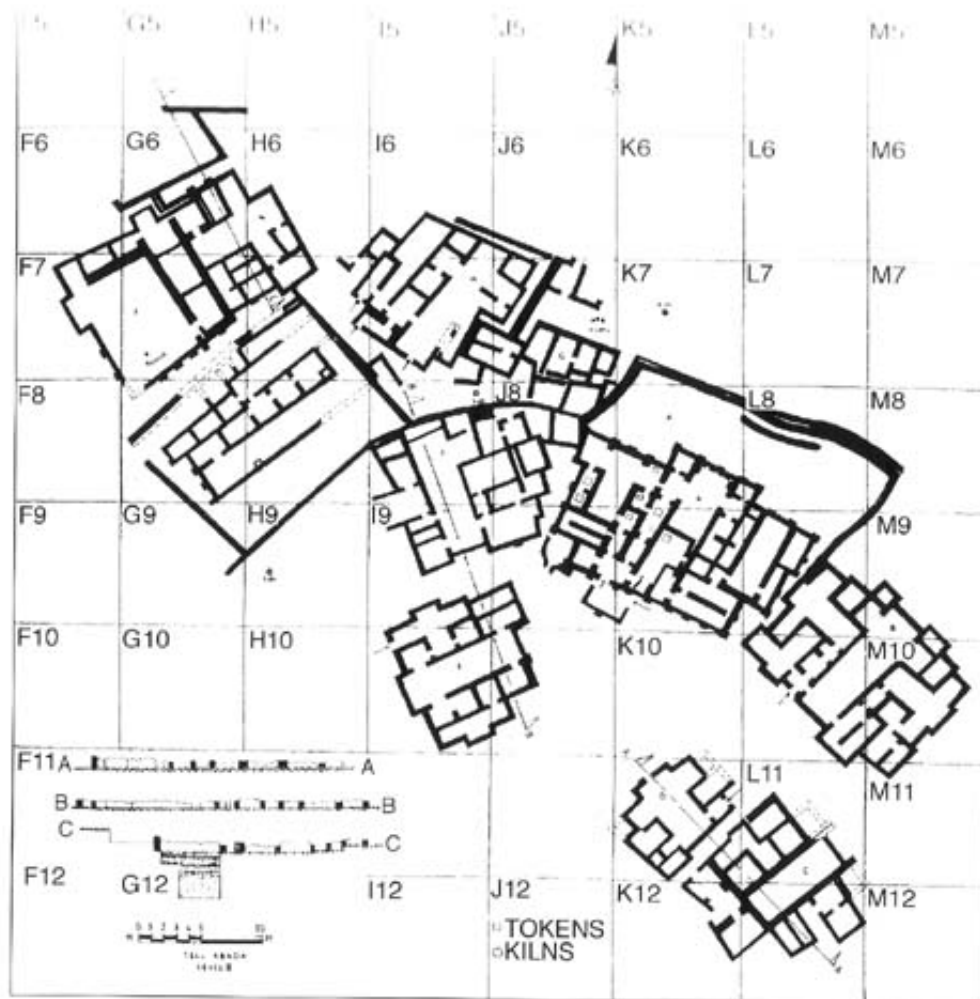


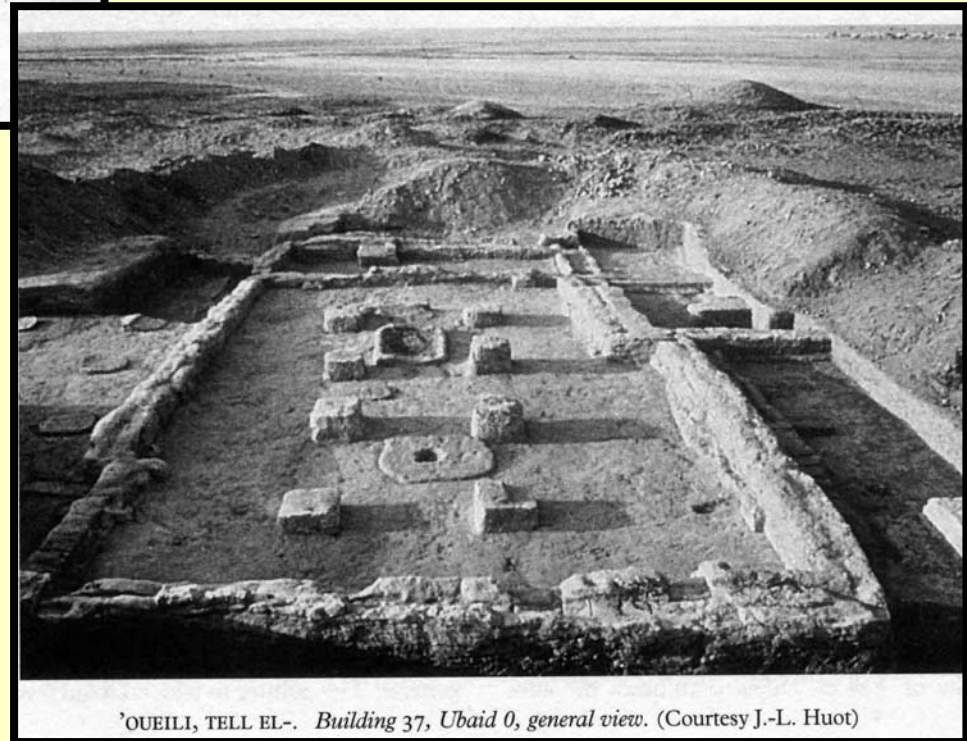
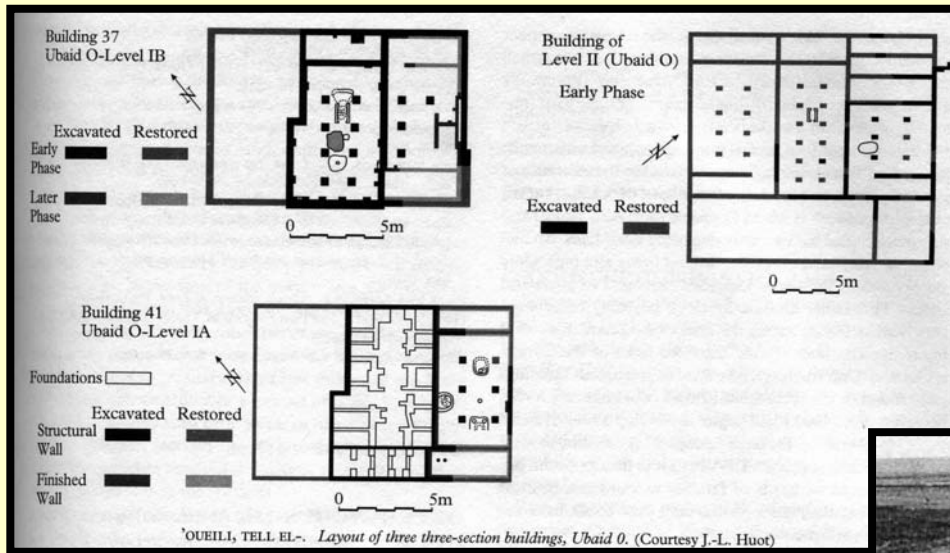
Figure 3.23 Plan of the Level II settlement at Tell Abada showing large houses tightly nucleated (early Ubaid 3)

Source: Jasim 1985, pt 2: fig. 13

Tell Abada village plan

# Tell Ouelli

- Ubaid 0
- Earliest known village settlement
- Architectural similarities to Hassunan and Samarran



# Domestic Architecture

- Dense architecture – abutting houses with multiple rebuilding episodes
- Mudbrick houses of variable sizes (100-600 m<sup>2</sup>)
- Tripartite and T-shaped plan – long central room with smaller chambers off sides
- Open courtyards, paved streets, alleys, freestanding storage structures
- Tell Madhhur – fire preserved food-processing equipment (ceramic serving and cooking vessels, spindle whorls, loom weights, bone awls, clay tools)
- Tell Abada – 8 houses all with same artefact assemblages – no major resource differences between households

# T-Shaped Houses

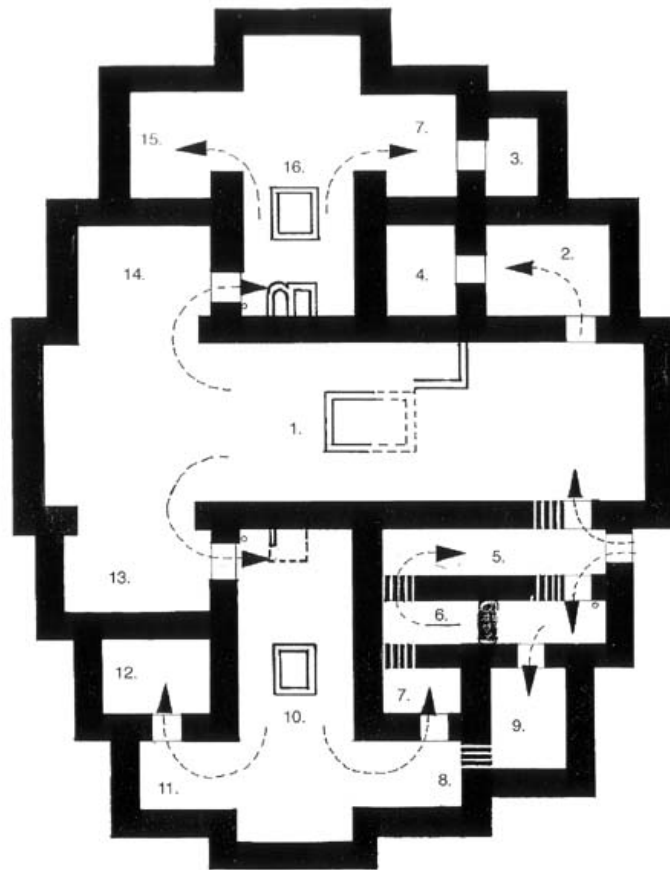
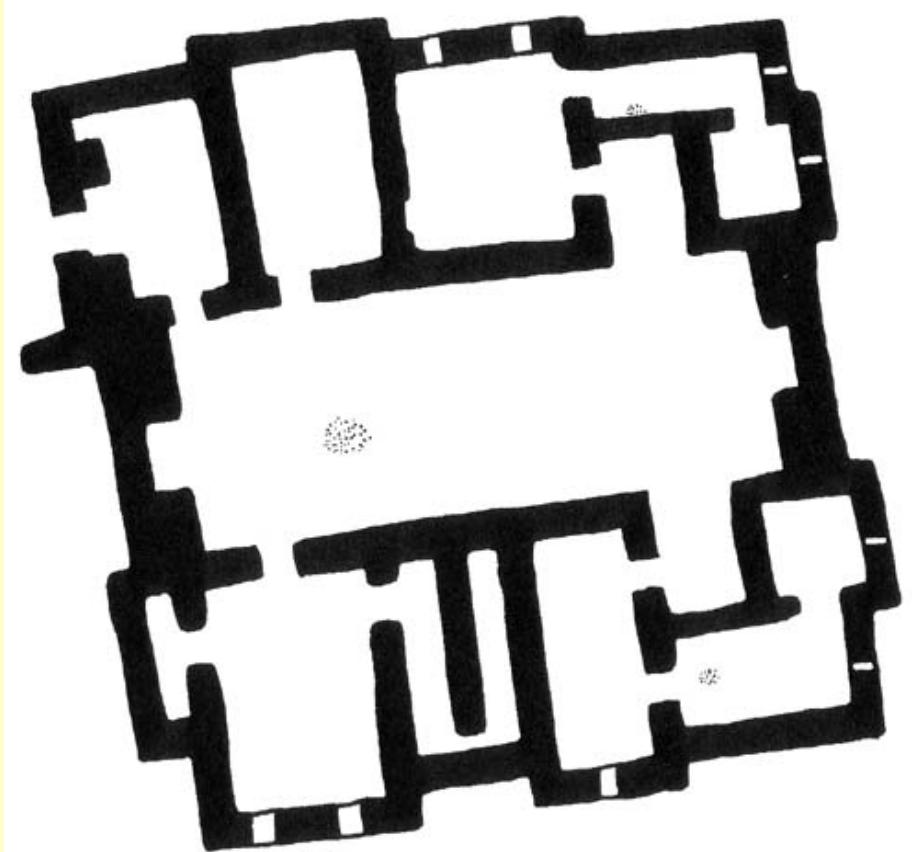


Figure 3.24 The house at Kheit Qasim III (Ubaid 3) showing circulation

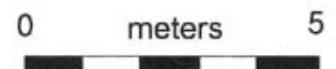
Source: Forest 1984:119 and 1980:222

Kheit Qasim III T-Shaped house



hearth

window



3.1 Ubaid house from Tell Madhhur (after Roaf 1989:93, fig.1)

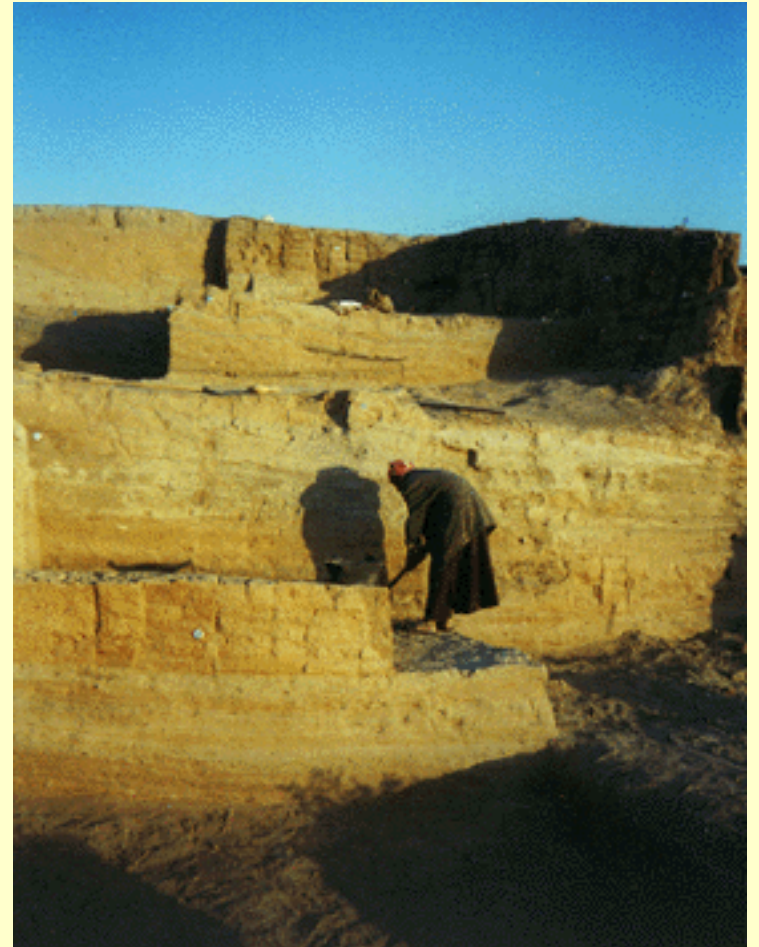
Tell Madhhur T-shaped house



# Architectural Features



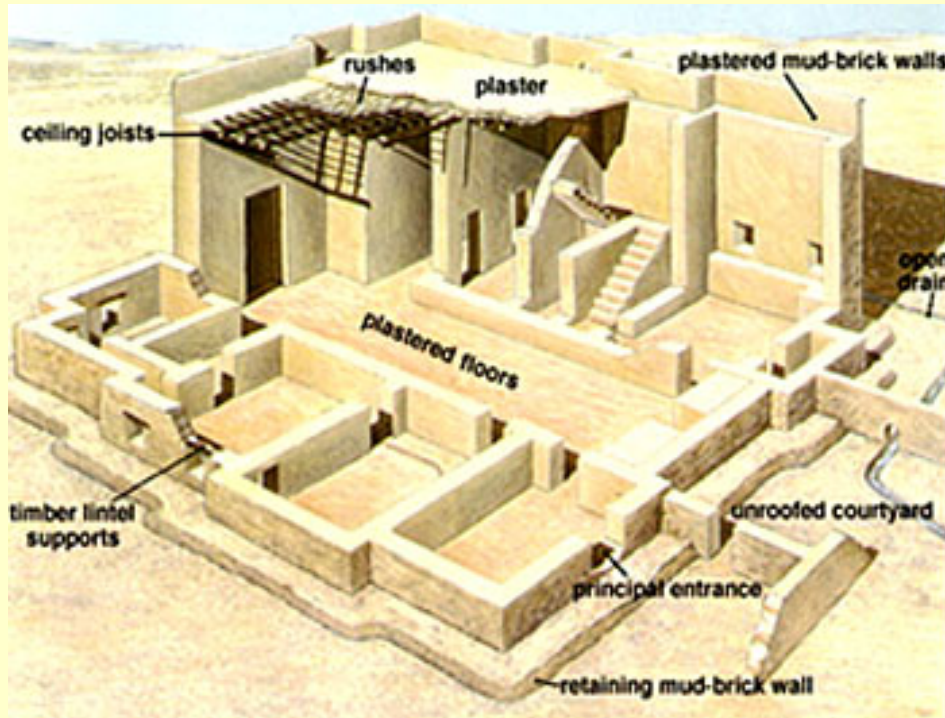
Late Ubaid architecture from Ur



Ubaid midden from Ur

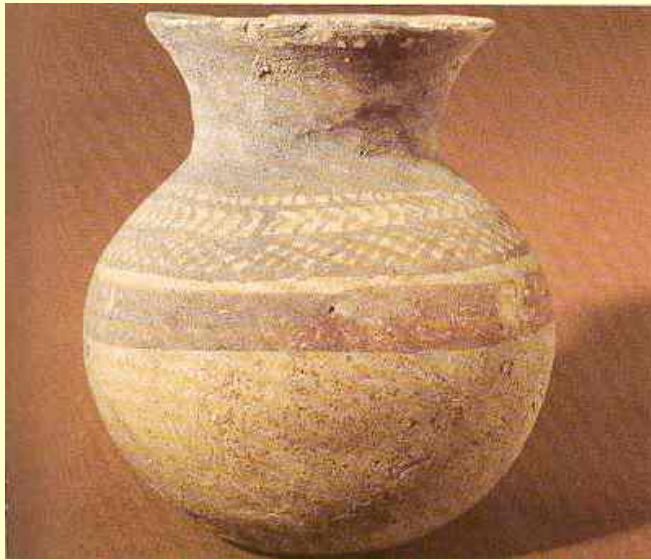
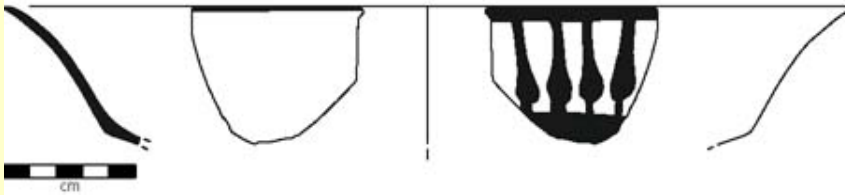


# Reconstructed Ubaid House

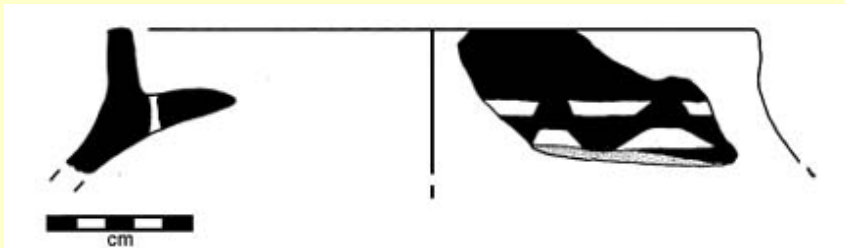


- One-storey with flat roof (activity area)
- Larger than Neolithic houses
- Central hallway with attached rooms
- Rooms with features for specialised activities (sleeping, cooking, reception)
  - Based on debris type, access, flooring

# Ubaid Pottery



- Typical pottery is fine, pale brown or greenish in colour, and often with dark black or brown paint
- Forms:
  - Beakers
  - Bowls with wide flaring rims or incurved sides



# Ubaid Pottery



- Coarse ware: reddish brown cooking pots with lug handles, functional, no decoration (local)
- Fine ware: origin south Mesopotamia (items of exchange)
- Repaired (drilled, bound)



# Economy

- Irrigation farmers and herders (staples)
  - Wheat, barley, flax, lentils, cattle, pigs, sheep/goat (Iran) – concentrated around water resources
- Nomadism (herding sites to north where drier?)
- Clay and bitumen resources, copper – focus on local resources (thus, differed a lot by region)
- Trade and Exchange
  - Massive scale – major economic feature
  - Sustained large villages and led to inequality and social stratification – Complexity
  - Resource deficiencies (except clay) stimulus for expansion north (stone, metal) and south (into Arabia for fish and pearls)
- Tribute economy
  - Beyond subsistence to construct temples, stock storerooms, support craftsmen, import goods – focus on generating surplus



# Other Technologies

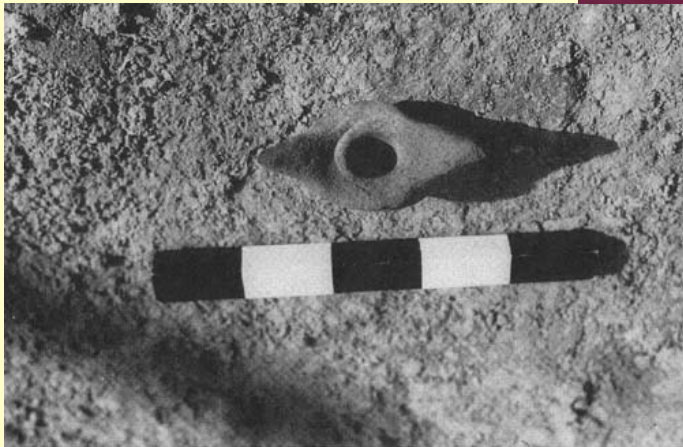
Weaving, pottery  
manufacture, lithics, food)



Clay Imitations



4.3 A piece of bitumen from the Uruk Mound at Abu Salabikh that was used to secure a string, visible in the upper left corner, that tied a reed mat or mat container

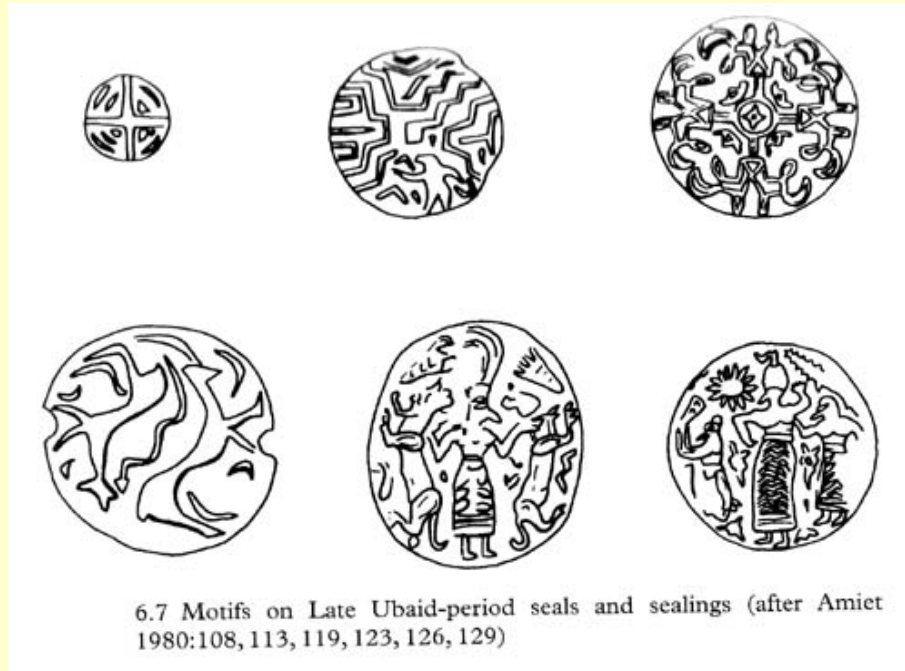


4.2 An axe made of clay fired at a high temperature from Jemdet Nasr (scale marked in 5 centimeter divisions)





# Ownership of Property, Elites, and the Emergence of Administration



Clay tokens – commodities or counters?

Stamp seals decorated with animals and geometric designs – mark property?



# Ubaid Art



Figurines usually female, sometime with child

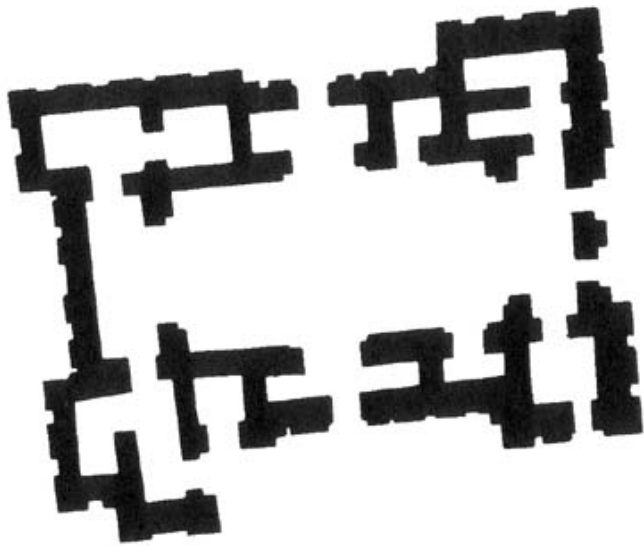
Lizard heads – protruding eyes

Decorated – paint, tattoos, jewellery

# Ideology and Images of Power

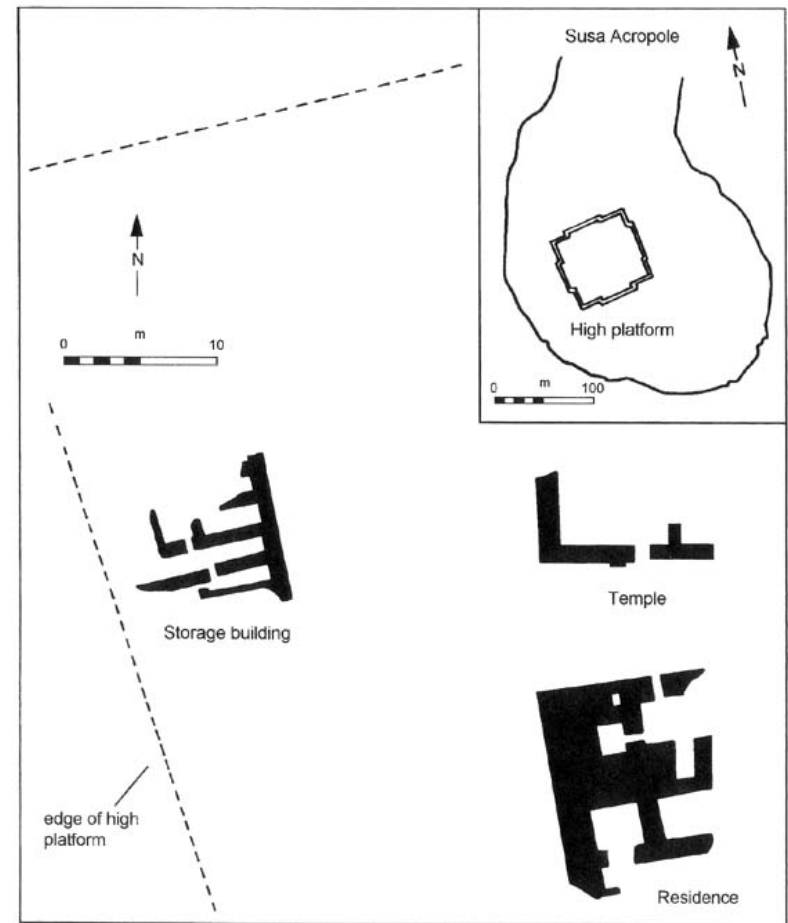
- Way of conceptualising the world and one's place in it
- Tangible evidence:
  - Monumental architecture: 1) temples and ziggurats, 2) palaces, 3) city walls
  - Massive scale and elaboration exceeding functional requirements – commemorative
- Religion
  - Public places of worship and dedication serve to legitimise inequality

# Non-Domestic Architecture: The Appearance of Temples



3.3 Temple from Eridu (after Safar et al. 1981:fig. 39, Temple VII)

## Eridu Temple



4.9 The high platform at Susa (after Stève and Gasche 1971:plan 2)

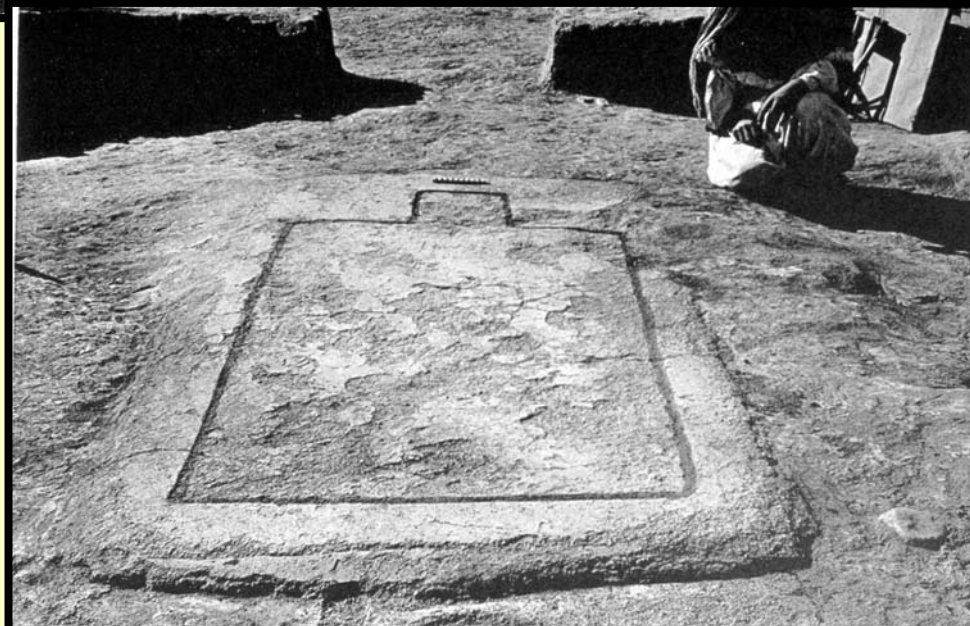
## Susa Platform





## Tepe Gawra

- Ritual goods (fine pottery and seals) and household goods (spindle whorls, grinders, clay mullers)
- Caretaker “priest”



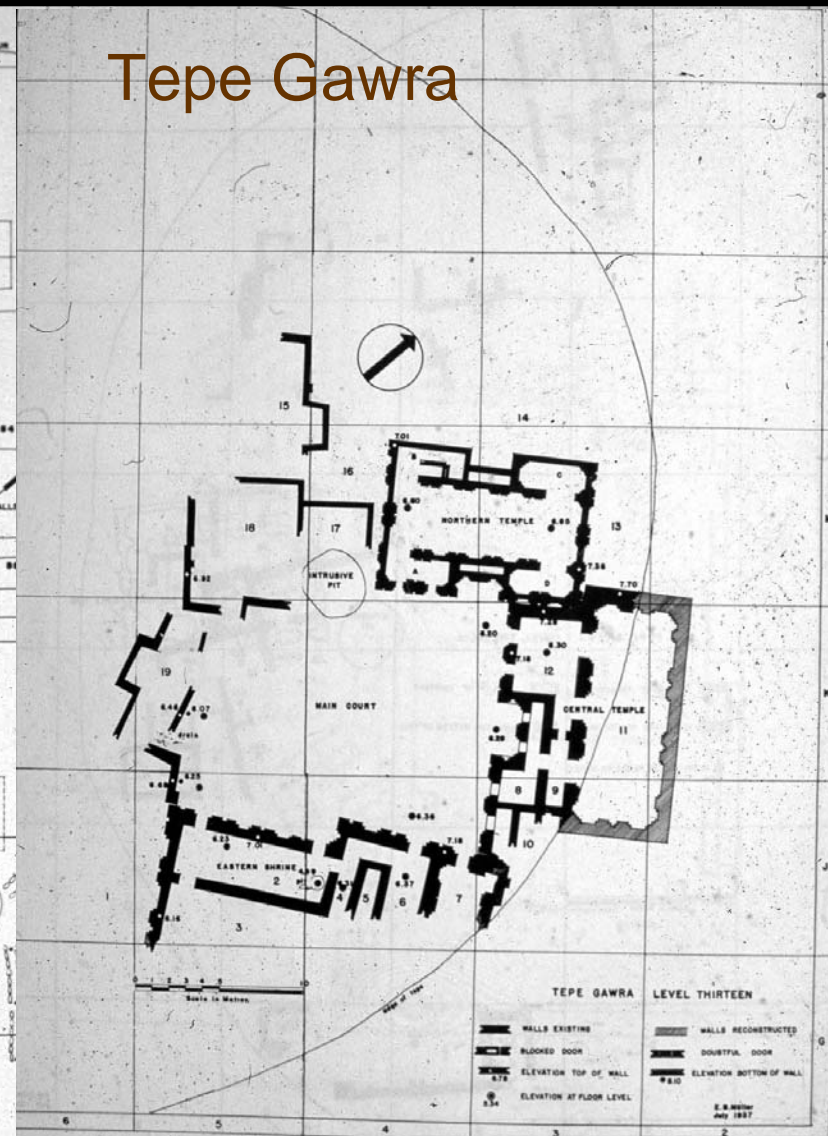


# Tepe Gawra

3 tripartite buildings  
facing open courtyard

Graves

Social stratification

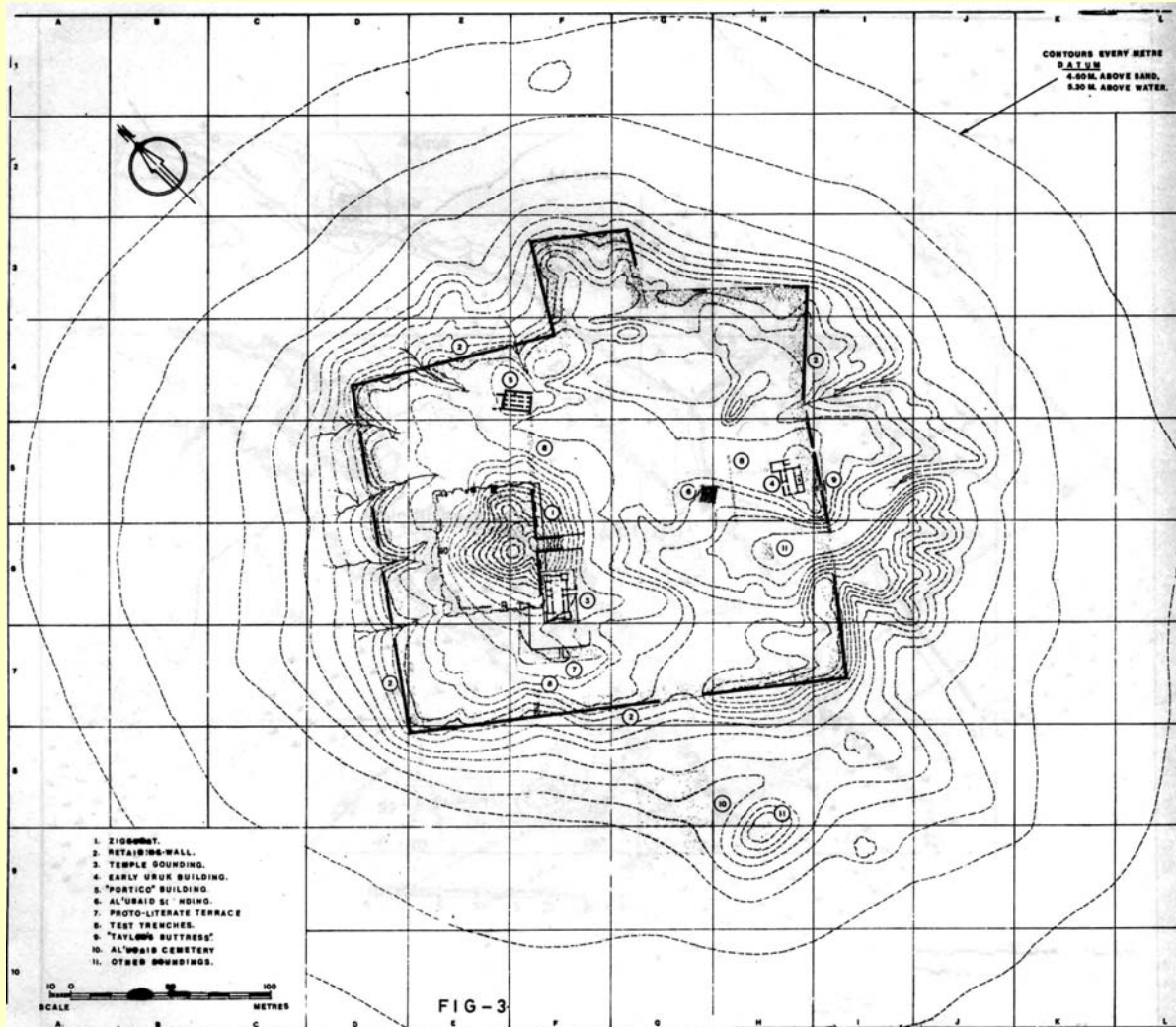


## TEPE GAWRA LEVEL NINE

THE JOINT ASSYRIAN EXPEDITION  
THE UNIVERSITY MUSEUM, PHILADELPHIA  
THE AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH

PAUL BEGLER, 1955  
K. M. HAYES, 1937  
1955, 1956, 1957

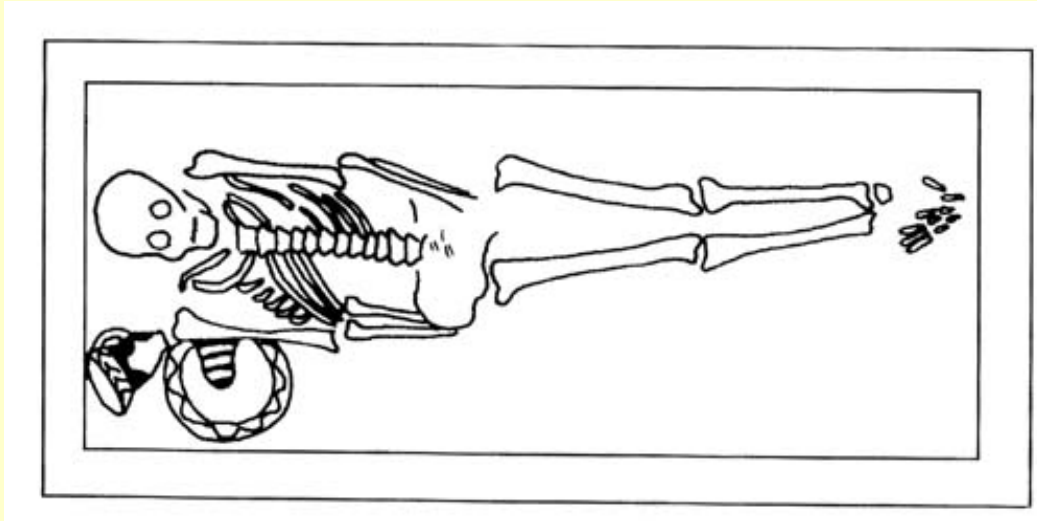
# Eridu



- Early Ubaid
- Proto-urban
- First temples
  - 10 temple phases
  - Earliest simple mudbrick shrine
  - 10th phase – tripartite plan with rooms flanking central corridor on large platform
- Massive cemetery
  - 1000 graves
  - 200 excavated
  - Pottery, clay tool, figurines



# Mortuary Practices



Burials represent *idealised* social relations and maintain ideologies

- Cemeteries – mostly adults and children, grave goods common – differences in grave goods between individuals, disappears Late Ubaid (empty buildings)
- Regional differences in cemeteries
- Eridu cemetery
  - Extended single interments
  - Grave goods – finely painted pottery (bowls), baked clay figurines
- Means of keeping community ties, land rights, inheritance – focus on the community

# Ubaid Society – Evidence for Economic & Social Differentiation

- Distinctions between houses and temples
- Tell Abada
  - Major differences in artefacts between houses
- Susa (Late Ubaid, 10 ha)
  - 10 m tall platform covering 5000 m<sup>2</sup>, mosaic bands
  - Temple, storerooms, residence of priest atop
  - Nearby cemetery
  - Seals and sealings – simple and complex, differential economic control, ownership
- Temple run economy?

# Ubaid Society – Evidence for Economic & Social Differentiation

- Tribute economy
  - Mobilize tribute from producer to elite (persuasion) to fund political institutions, sponsor long-distance trade expeditions, acquire exotic goods and prestige, gifts to win supporters
  - Persuasion accomplished through religion – honouring deity