The Hirbemerdon Tepe Archaeological Project 2008: A Preliminary Report

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In 2008, the archaeological work at Hirammon Tepé continued following...

Town and the High Mound were occupied.

Period of occupation is the early second millennium BC, when both the Outer Town and the High Mound were occupied. The site is characterized by multiple phases, its major architectural remains are located in the upper levels. In addition, there are terraces and palatial and hunting activities in the upper levels. In the lower levels, subsistence economy that includes archaeological activities along the river. Towards the Tur Abdin, creating a perfect landscape for a combined southeastem limit of the Upper Valley, about 40 km southwest of the modern city of Bismil at the upper levels, about 40 km southwest of the modern city of Bismil at the...

**Project 2008: A Preliminary Report**

**The Hirammon Tepé Archaeological Project**

Jason Ur

Nicola Laneri
the premises traced in the previous six years of work and have been based upon a broader understanding of the role the site had in the history of the upper Tigris river valley. During this archaeological campaign, the Hirbemerdon Tepe Archaeological Project was focused on defining and further investigating the following points:

1) To enlarge the exposure of the area of the architectural complex dating to the Middle Bronze Age in the High Mound (Area A). In particular, archaeological excavation was performed in the public/ceremonial sector located in the southern part of the complex.

2) To begin with the excavation of the Step Trench AB-AC that will cut through the whole High Mound and guarantee a better understanding of the chronological phases of occupation in this area of the site. In so doing, we decided to first test the area north of the architectural complex to better define the phases of occupation occurring before the construction of the architectural complex at the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

3) To continue with the regional survey of the area surrounding the site of Hirbemerdon Tepe.

_Excavation on the High Mound_

The investigation on the High Mound aimed at extending the eastern limit of the architectural complex of the Middle Bronze Age. In so doing, we excavated a 20x10 m. trench positioned along the main E-W section (Fig. 1). As noticed in the previous archaeological campaigns, the latest archaeological loci correspond to a series of badly disturbed architectural features belonging to the Medieval/Islamic period and the Iron Age phase. While the Medieval/Islamic is recognizable only in a few patches of walls and little material culture (e.g., Glazed Ware), the levels belonging to the Iron Age phase are more complex to identify and are comprised of an Early

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2 For a better understanding of these later phases, we are planning the excavation of a step trench starting from the 2009 season.
of the Geometric survey done on the High Mound in 2004 (January 2006),

With these premises in mind, our main scientific efforts have been dedicated

Ware (Lauver et al. 2008).

numerous other settlements of the region, the so-called Red Brown Wash evident from the pottery assemblage that characterizes the site as well as millennium B.C., that is, the Middle Bronze Age (Fig. 2 and 3). This is especially phase of occupation of this small-sized site was the first half of the second

starting from the first work of archaeological reconnaissance at the site

The architectural complex of the Middle Bronze Age

presence of a large architectural complex.

However, the most important archaeological phase at Hibemerton Tepe

This region (Maloney et al. 2007: 43-44).

a broad post-Assyrian horizon visible at numerous other sites of the upper

Java with large painted jars typical of Late Iron Age ware (e.g.,

this later phase is represented by different variations of painted ware (e.g.,

pits and one internal burial). Moreover, the material culture associated with

the one found at Zifaret Tepe (Maloney et al. 2007: Fig. 20), which the latest part

has shown a few archaeological features, pottery and in iron daggers similar to

Late Iron Age or Hellenistic (phases). The first period is marked by a series of

Iron Age/Neo-Assyrian period, a Late Assyrian and a post-Assyrian
The archaeological work has confirmed the premises and a series of radiocarbon dates have further demonstrated that this architectural complex chronologically ranges between ca. 2064 and 1416 B.C. (Laneri et al. 2006). The architectural complex can be possibly divided into three main sectors (Fig. 2): one central sector dedicated to more public/ceremonial activities; another area, separated from the central one by a long alley, that is marked by the presence of long narrow buildings built in an agglutinated manner and that show clear signs of working activities, such as mortars, pestles, grinding stones and hydraulic facilities found in situ; and finally, a third sector located in the southwest corner with an unclear function.

In particular, the archaeological work of last summer concentrated on investigating the southeastern part of the public/ceremonial sector (Fig. 3). This section of the architectural complex is composed of at least two large outdoor spaces, in one of which the archaeologists have discovered numerous unique objects whose function was ceremonial. Moreover, most of these objects, such as highly decorated ceramic vessels, human and animal clay figurines, and clay votive plaques (Fig. 4), were recovered nearby a stone basin located along the southwestern edge of the piazza.

Next to the piazza lays a monumental building that has only one entrance from the main alley and is based on an antechamber and a series of rooms. Among these rooms, a long room appears as the most important one. It is directly accessible from the antechamber through a door that is in axis with the main door serving the whole building and is marked by a stone altar and two perpendicular drains located behind it (Fig. 3). This room was monumental as is demonstrated by its size, the thickness of the outer walls and the large flagstones paving it. Moreover, a foundation deposit, consisting of a piglet inserted in a fine cup of the Red Brown Wash Ware assemblage, was found in the northeastern corner of this room and further emphasizes its importance. During the excavation of 2008, our main goal has been to bring to light the room lying directly east of the long-room, that is room 52. This room has its entrance from a vestibule located next to the antechamber and was sealed
In terms of pottery assemblage, most of the pottery categories found seeded stones and fragmented storage jars. Sliced stones and fragmented storage jars.

and broken vessels were found, whereas the other one was filled with mid-

and broken vessels were found, whereas the other was filled with mid-

the architectural complex. Moreover, in one of these rooms numerous whose were accessible from the plaza and the monumentality of the whole plaza. The rooms between the floors of the uppermost building and the plaza's floor. The rooms at a lower level. Four meters of difference in elevations are recognizable.

Casemate masonry in order to connect the higher building to the plaza's locale as a mud-brick substitute and a series of small rooms constructed in a need for a mud-brick substitute and a series of small rooms constructed in a

an extraordinary relating construction consisting of a wide stone wall built in top of

an extraordinary relating construction consisting of a wide stone wall built in top of

To further emphasize its monumentality, the western side was built on top of

To further emphasize its monumentality, the western side was built on top of

almost total lack of working logs suggests a public purpose for this sector.

almost total lack of working logs suggests a public purpose for this sector.

location and monumentality both in plan and architectural together with an

location and monumentality both in plan and architectural together with an

function and the distinctive features of this building. However, its central

function and the distinctive features of this building. However, its central

Due to poor state of preservation, it is very difficult to reconstruct both

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consists of a series of outdoor and indoor rooms and wide external walls.

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because of their size and of the slope, this building is poorly preserved and

because of their size and of the slope, this building is poorly preserved and

Due to a steep slope in the vicinity, the public area was built using a

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main plaza. Ceremonial objects were purposely disposed of and purposefully broken in the

Ceremonial objects were purposely disposed of and purposefully broken in the

of a courtyard of these ceremonial spaces prior to their abandonment. The

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broken objects were found in this room confirming our preliminary hypotheses

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a squared bench of stone foundation and mud-brick superstructure. A few

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by the collapse of the roof. Along the western wall the archaeological found
as a marker for the first half of the second millennium B.C. whereas the
painted ware (that we named Pseudo-Khabur Ware) forms a clear link with
northeastern Syria (Laneri et al. 2008).

In terms of paleobotanical analysis carried out at the site by Matte Held,
the assemblage of crops is quite typical for the Middle Bronze Age in this
region as well as at other northern Syrian and southeastern Anatolian sites
(Laneri et al. 2008). However, the presence of grapes and other remains of *Vitis
Vinifera* within some of the rooms of the ‘architectural complex’ appears of
great importance for a better understanding of the socioeconomic landscape
of the region during the Middle Bronze Age.

For the faunal remains, the analysis has been initiated by Remi Berthon who
has included in his study both the Middle and Late Bronze Age levels (Laneri
et al. 2008). The first data show a subsistence based on domestic animals.
According to Berthon, cattle were of great importance in the food supply at the
site during these archaeological phases. The high number of pigs and caprines
bones also suggests that both had an important role in the economy of the
site. While pigs were a good meat supplier, sheep and goat could have been
used also for secondary products as indicated by the relative high number of
old individuals. Hunting was also an important factor at Hirbmerdon Tepe
during the second millennium B.C. as has been demonstrated by the presence
of antler and deer bones.

*The Step Trench AB-AC*

Another important step towards a better understanding of the chronological
sequence at Hirbmerdon Tepe is the excavation of a long step trench of about
3 meters wide and 50 meters long that will further investigate the northern
sector of the High Mound (Fig. 1). As a preliminary step in this direction, last
summer we decided to investigate the area north of the architectural complex
(the AB section). In so doing, we have been able to define a few disturbed
floors directly underneath the complex’s architecture. In particular, Locus 12
unsuitable for agriculture. Because of its agricultural potential the terraces
(Kuzmoch 2002), and an eastern zone of dry eroded uplands that are
west of the western zone of cultivated terraces and low hills (Dogan
areas; a western zone of cultivated terraces and low hills (Dogan
The survey region can be roughly divided into two geomorphological
millennia, or more.
MBA settlement continuum with with Hithermordon, and also the
patterns of MBA settlement continuum beyond the site. We are particularly interested in the
use and modifications beyond the region and to identify various forms of human land
(Fig. 5). Our goals are to document phases of secondary and non-secondary
June 2008. Our survey region is a 48 km² area on the right bank of the Tigris
The Hithermordon MBA Survey (HMTS) conducted its second season in

Hithermordon MBA Regional Survey

Further confirming a possible occupation at the site during these periods,
early Archaeological complexes not recognizable by the excavation, the discovery
earlier finds include pottery, clay, and bone, and the occurrence of a washing of
above the natural bedrock. These shards are probably part of a washing of
fragments of Chalcolithic ware of the Chalcolithic period were found directly
in addition to these data, fragments of the first half of the third millennium

Between the late third and early second millennium B.C.,

Thus, these data confirm a cultural continuity at this site
scattered and badly disturbed phase of architecture belonging to the late third
emerging from this section of the steep French AB-AC is the presence of a
together with earlier types of red burn wash ware. The occurrence of a
brought to light in layers directly underneath Middle Bronze Age levels and
Moreover, in the Outer Town Dark Rimmed Orange Bowls were
Rimmed Orange Bowls were found out of context during the excavation and
has brought to our attention a high density of Dark Rimmed Orange Bowls
are where most sedentary settlement is found. The eastern uplands have very limited pockets of cultivatable soil and have been used primarily as pasture.

In the 2007 season, most of our efforts were in the western cultivated terraces. The largest sites (tepes) were defined by the edges of mounding and collected in sub-areas. These sites were only a small portion of the total archaeological landscape, however. Elsewhere, fieldwalkers made transects at 25 m. intervals across harvested agricultural fields. Artifacts were marked with color coded flags (red for lithics, blue for ceramics) and collected. The positions of the flags were then recorded via a GPS-enabled mobile computer. Sites were defined by interpolating the density of surface scatters in a GIS framework. The eastern uplands, which were subjected to a brief reconnaissance that was guided by high resolution Ikonos satellite imagery in 2007, were the primary focus of survey in the 2008 season. A range of sedentary sites, campsites, and various landscape features were identified (discussed below). In total, we recovered 92 places that were termed "sites," although they vary from multi-hectare mounded tepes to light scatters of Paleolithic tools. The general classes of site types are described below.

**Tepes.** The HMTS region has three mounded sites. Hırbemerdon Tepe (Site 1) and Kavuşak Tepe (Site 4) were already identified by Algaze during his survey of the Batman-Bismil region (Algaze 1989, Algaze et al. 1991). Other mounded sites exist to the south (Güzel Köy, Site 34) and southwest (Ahmetli Tepe, beyond the survey limits). Mounded sites in the Upper Tigris region are small compared to those found in the broad alluvial plains in adjacent areas of northern Mesopotamia, mostly under 5 hectares. All of the mounded sites in the HMTS region had MBA occupation.

**Unmounded Ceramic Scatters.** The cultivated fields in the HMTS region are characterized by an almost continuous scatter of small artifacts at a low density, a phenomenon known throughout the Near East and Mediterranean (Wilkinson 1982, Bintliff and Snodgrass 1988). Transect walking in the area immediately around Hırbemerdon Tepe revealed elevated concentrations of artifacts that represent sites (Fig. 6). Two of them (Sites 19 and 22) were
surface survey alone. They may mark the burials of pastoral nomads, or they might represent some other form of symbolic or ritual activity. Because they have little associated material culture, they are difficult to date without excavation.

**Campsites.** The Upper Tigris region as been the location of winter pasture grounds (*küçük*) since at least the 15th century, when tribes of the Akkoynunlu confederacy controlled the area (Woods 1999). In more recent times, transhumant Kurdish tribes have migrated between the Taurus mountains in the summer and descended into the Tigris valley and foothills during the winter months (Cribb 1991:196-207, based on the work of Beşikçi, Hütteroth 1959). In the 2008 field season, several campsites in the eastern uplands were visited and planned (reported in detail in Ur and Hammer 2009). Site 18 is a 20th century camp consisting of stone built rectangular animal enclosures and cleared spaces where tents were erected (Fig. 9). Further down the wadi, an older and more disturbed campsite (Site 26) is probably far older, but had little surface artifacts in association. The archaeology of pastoral nomads has been understudied in the Near East, and the eastern uplands offer important new empirical evidence for them.

**Cisterns and Other Water Catchment Features.** Near the campsites in the eastern uplands were found several features for capturing and storing runoff rainfall. These features would have been critical for providing drinking water for people and animals in this otherwise dry zone. Southeast of the Site 18 campsite, a cistern (*sarnic*) was cut into the side of a wadi (Site 24). It was fed by two small channels carved into a large area of exposed bedrock. Rainfall would have flowed across the bedrock, into the channels, and then into the tank of the cistern, which could have held 9 m³ of water. Another method of water capture was found at Site 28, where a circular stone structure was built in the base of a wadi. Water flowing down the wadi would have been redirected and held in the structure. This feature was probably intended for watering animals. These water catchment features demonstrate the modifications and adaptations of human groups to the otherwise inhospitable
During both ancient and more recent times, the relationship between pastoralist and agricultural communities has been a fundamental topic for archaeological studies. Allow us to further investigate, the Hibreremon Tepe Regional Survey will focus on the relationship between the pastoralist and the farming community at the frontier between the two. This will allow us to determine a more coherent chronology for the occupation of the site. In addition, to this element, the political landscape of the upper Tigris region during the Middle Bronze Age and its surrounding region has further demonstrated the importance of the site in the eastern uplands, and show that the landscapes of pastoral nomads can be

Conclusions
(Southeastern Turkey) as Documented by Archaeological Data. *Quaternary International* 129: 75-86.


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Fig. 2: The architectural complex of the Middle Bronze Age

Fig. 3: View of the ceremonial/public sector of the Middle Bronze Age architectural complex
complex
architectural
in the plaza of the
volte piazza found
reconstructed clay

Fig. 4: a partially

Fig. 5: The Hesperian Tepha Survey Region
Fig. 6: Surface artifact concentrations in the area around Hirbemerdon Tepe

Fig. 7: Lower Paleolithic hand axes from the Tigris terrace NE of Hirbemerdon Tepe
Fig. 9: The pastoral nomadic campsite at Site 18.

Fig. 8: The cairn field at Site 16.