

## **Nabada (Tell Beydar), an Early Bronze Age City in the Syrian Jezirah**

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Marc Lebeau

Around 2600 BC, in the valley of the Khabur and its tributaries, in the NE of nowadays Syria, in the neighbouring regions (Balikh, Euphrates, Tigris) and, more generally, in the whole Upper Mesopotamia, a very wide cultural phenomenon happens, deeply affecting the foundations of the social-economical organisation, the strategy of human settlements and the nature of their interactions.

It is a huge process which spreads out in a relatively short time, a few generations, in such a way it can be considered as a revolution. This is the « second urban revolution ».

In a short time thus, the structure of the society or the societies installed in Upper Mesopotamia becomes more complex and the majority of the population adopts a fully urban way of life, framed by a system of associated institutions. Complex societies are appearing, grouped within cities which are considerably enlarged, protected by massive city walls. Those cities control a dense network of smaller urban centres, villages, hamlets and farms. The territory is thus reorganized and the agriculture is not limited anymore to dry farming areas but is extended to more marginal zones. The appearance of élites implies a pyramidal society, which is headed by top rank officials who emphasize their status with the construction of monumental and ostentatious buildings, palaces or temples, with the adoption of elaborate burial practices, with the use of expensive materials in the realization of prestige goods. The territory is reorganized in districts which are controlled by the main cities. At the end of the process, when writing is appearing in Upper Mesopotamia, a kingdom emerges, the Kingdom of Nagar, the ancient name of Tell Brak.

The writing appears in Northern Mesopotamia in the Early Jezirah IIIb period (c. 2475-2325 BC), in Mari and in Nabada (the ancient name of Tell Beydar). And with writing, it is a whole set of cultural and administrative concepts which link again the Khabur plains to Central and Southern Mesopotamia.

Upper Mesopotamia and, more precisely, the Khabur valley are again in contact with the countries of Kish, Sumer, and the Diyala valley. The region can once again be considered as a bridge between Sumer, the Euphrates, largely controlled by Mari, and Western Syria, dominated by Ebla.

The Khabur plains are rich and well managed. The cities are linked together by a very dense network of routes, the so-called *hollow ways*, which are installed at that time. The glyptic of

Nabada frequently illustrates the existence of the trade, when depicting carts, chariots and waggons.

Gallery-forests line the tributaries of the Khabur river and shelter animal life. The breeding is quite developed, as attested in the administrative documents from Tell Beydar, and a peculiar attention is devoted to the equids, a number of which, as mentioned in Ebla documents, being considered as having a very high value.

The vicinity of the metal sources of Ergani-Merden and Göltepe, in South-Eastern Anatolia, is an important economical factor. The development of bronze metallurgy is obvious in the urban centres, and the copper-arsenic alloy is progressively replaced by the copper-tin bronze. There is no doubt that Upper Mesopotamian cities played a major role in the supply and in the trade of the new metallic products.

The new cultural arises around 2600 BC and reveals southern influences, filtered by Central Mesopotamia and the Diyala valley, whose population is largely semitic. The language spoken in Nabada is semitic, as well as geographical and individual spellings. But a « sumerized » culture or better a « Kishite » culture do not mean a sumerian organization of the society. The peculiarities of the North are numerous and increase in the second part of the Early Jezirah III, as it can be demonstrated by the glyptic and the architecture. Exchanges happened in both directions. The nature of the geographical frame of the Khabur Triangle, the rainfall that allows dry-farming in the major part of Upper Mesopotamia and strategical choices lead to a peculiar organization of the social structure and the territory. The culture of the *Jezireh* plains, irrigated by two major tributaries of the Euphrates, the Balikh and the Khabur, is certainly not to be considered as a copy of the sumerian one. It is founded on different values, distinct features and asserts and demonstrates its independence through other options, elaborated from a globally different environment.

We attend the birth of a new civilization, the *Jezirean* civilization, even being a short-lived one since it will not resist to the Akkadian conquest. This civilization will last during almost three centuries. It was born from the early local component, regenerated by sumerian cultural concepts and was later brutally destroyed and included in a much larger territorial entity, at the very moment it was reaching the zenith of its fame.

## **The excavation team**

The joint Syro-European archaeological mission of Tell Beydar is organized by the European Centre for Upper Mesopotamian Studies, in collaboration with the Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums of Syria. The European universities being part of the Centre are currently the Universities of Munich, Venice, Brussels and Madrid. The European part of the mission is directed by Marc Lebeau, the Syrian one is lead since 1995 by Antoine Suleiman. From 1992 to 2004 twelve seasons of excavations and three seasons of restoration have been carried out.

## **Tell Beydar**

Tell Beydar, the crown city of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, is an urban site extending on a surface of 25 ha. It is located 35km NNW of Hassake at the cross point of two major roads: the E-W road leading from the Tigris to the Euphrates, and the N-S road that leads to the Diyarbekir plain and to the region of Altinova.

The topography of the site consists of a circular city, protected by perimetral fortifications with seven gates. This site clearly dates to the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC and was partially reoccupied in the Hellenistic period.

At the base of this circular site there is a lower city of more than 50 ha, built during the Mitannian period, probably in the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC, which was abandoned and later rebuilt in the neo-Assyrian period (this part of the site is called Beydar II). Antoine Suleiman has also identified a third settlement, called Beydar III, about 1km S of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium tell. A sounding was opened there in 1996. The virgin soil has been reached and Late Chalcolithic 1 and 2 levels have been recognized (c. 4300–3700 BC).

## **The City in the Early Jezirah IIIb Period**

I will be presenting the results concerning the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium city in the Early Jezirah IIIb, corresponding to the Early Dynastic IIIb in S Mesopotamia. The excavation has revealed several later levels, three of them belonging to the Akkadian period, as well as traces of more ancient occupations from the Early Jezirah I to the Early Jezirah IIIa. Let us concentrate here on the city at one period, between 2500 and 2350 BC.

The topography is based on concentric circles. Starting from outside, we encounter first a fortification circle (diameter: 600m, perimeter: 2km), which clearly represents a rampart.

Inside this perimeter and at an altimetry slightly lower than the plain, lays an empty space corresponding to the lower town. Deep soundings carried out a few years ago in this area have

revealed that a wide and deep moat, dating most probably from the Early Jezirah II, surrounded the upper city. This moat was rebuilt or deepened in the Early Jezirah IIIa period. A natural and very deep filling of pure clay, in the centre of the section, suggests the presence of water on this spot for a long time.

Further inside rises an upper city, of a diameter of 400m that culminates at 20m, while at the centre of the site stands a small acropolis (diameter: 60m, height: 7.50m).

Several gates can be identified that cut both the outer perimeter and the flanks of the upper city. A modern graveyard occupied the central acropolis and the S and E parts of the upper city. This cemetery was partially removed to allow the excavation of the levels protected by the acropolis.

The site is located along the wadi 'Awaidj. Pedologic analysis has demonstrated that in the Bronze Age its course was regular and quite abundant. Its spring is situated in the plain, next to the Turkish town of Mardin, a city that controlled one of the main roads to SE Anatolia, the access to the rich Diyarbakir plain and to the metal ores of the Altinova region.

Seventeen excavation areas have been set up in the "crown city". Two of these areas, fields H and K, were set up on the N part of the outer fortifications. Thirteen fields were opened in the upper city, on and around the central acropolis; fields G and I are stratigraphic soundings on the N slope.

The tell basically illustrates the evolution of a 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium city, while its top level, in the upper city, is to be dated from the Hellenistic period. In the last centuries before our era Tell Beydar was but a large village, characterized by single-room houses, often with central pillar, and by a public building ("palace") with an economic function. Field A is devoted to the study of this Hellenistic occupation, which is presently carried out by a Spanish team.

The tell itself, as I said, is protected by an outer perimeter of fortifications. A stratigraphic sounding on the N slope of the upper city has allowed us to identify an inner perimeter of fortifications as well, but this one precedes the period we are discussing here. The natural erosion has unfortunately destroyed the Early Jezirah IIIb inner rampart.

## **The Palace**

The small central acropolis is 7m higher than the upper city and 27.50m higher than the plain. The presence of an acropolis is not at all a common feature of the “crown cities” of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium.

Here, under a Hellenistic and several Akkadian levels, the excavations have brought to light a large official building of the Early Jezirah IIIb period, which can be interpreted as the Beydar “palace”. The excavation seasons carried out from 1993 to 1997 allowed to confirm this interpretation through the excavation of an entire Official Block that was probably built around 2500 BC and then partially rebuilt twice, before the beginning of the Akkadian period. The main function of this building seems to have been of ceremonial nature. A second storey certainly existed, which was the residence of the city ruler.

### **First building phase, ca. 2500–2475 BC**

The first phase of the Palace, around 2500–2475 BC, is recognizable by its walls built with pale mud bricks. In this phase the palace was composed of thirteen rooms and one courtyard, while in a later period (still in the EJ IIIb) it was partially reorganized and reoccupied. A thick layer of plaster covered the floors. Despite some missing portions, due to the presence of Hellenistic and Akkadian pits, the basic structure of this building can be easily reconstructed.

This palace should have had a second storey covering more than half of its surface. Its shape is trapezoidal and its approximate dimensions are 32 x 21m, the ratio between length and width being of three to two. The main entrance to the building is located on its S façade. It consists of a small room leading, to the E, to a bathroom and to a double-flight staircase allowing to access the upper floor of the building, and, to the N, to a squarish courtyard showing arches on two sides that stand on square pillars. The presence of these square pillars is unusual in the context of contemporary palatial architecture. Three massive buttresses reinforce the W façade of the central courtyard. Eastwards the courtyard opens, through two arches, to a long rectangular room.

From this courtyard it was possible to access, westwards, to the main room of the building (ca. 50m<sup>2</sup>) — a room that we believe to be a reception room. This main room, the walls of which are very well preserved, was the key point for the circulation to the W part of the Block, and the main access to a small trapezoidal room, equipped with a podium delimited by a small brick wall. Another recessed door leads from the main room to a long corridor that originally hosted a staircase leading to the second floor, the residential part of the building.

Let us remark that the W part of the Palace, in its 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> occupation phases, almost completely disappeared, the walls having been erased up to the first layer of bricks by the builders of the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase. The new free spaces so obtained were then raised two metres high.

The original building illustrates well the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium tradition of Mesopotamian official architecture, characterized by the presence of central spaces surrounded by wings of smaller rooms. Despite its rather modest dimensions, the building is remarkable for the high quality of the construction and the clarity of its plan. SE of the Palace, a wide street paved with stones gives access to the entrance of the building. This street is equipped, in its middle part, with a gutter. In its present state, the street belongs to the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the building, but it is certain that this monumental access existed already in the first phase. “Main Street” ran from the S gate of the upper city to the entrance of the Palace. Its upper section is flat.

### **Second building phase and spatial reorganization (ca. 2475–2450 BC)**

The building was enlarged during the second occupation phase, still in the EJ IIIb period, by the construction of new architectural units, composed of series of two or four small rooms, E and N of the original façades. The NE corner of the Palace at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> phase is unknown due to the natural erosion of the tell. The number of rooms is doubled: the second phase counts 26 or 27 rooms. Despite these modifications, the original plan and the first phase walls are entirely preserved. The NW staircase is however erased and transformed in a corridor giving access to the four rooms of the new NW wing.

The previous E façade is pierced by a door giving access to one of the small rooms of the E wing and the inner circulation is deeply modified. Several doors are blocked; others were cut into the mass of the ancient walls. The pillars in the central courtyard were reinforced and, as a result, the width of the arches is reduced. The excavations also reveal that the Palace is separated from the rest of the upper city by a glacis made of pisé all along its N façade and perhaps along its E façade as well. This glacis is most certainly a remake of an earlier glacis, dating to the first phase.

### **Third building phase and spatial reorganization (ca. 2450–2415 BC)**

Deep modifications affect the structure of the building around 2450 BC. The ruler of the city — whatever the nature of his power or its degree of independence from Nagar, which was the regional capital at that time — does not seem to have neither the resources nor the liberty to order a complete reconstruction of a palace, whose walls are seriously weakened or damaged. Therefore, he reoccupies the intact part of the building (the E half of the original palace),

keeping the original floor level. The surface of the courtyard is reduced by the construction of three small annexes. In the W half of the palace, where the walls of the first phase, made of pale mud bricks, are still preserved but weakened, the walls are erased and the spaces are filled in with regular layers of bricks 2m high. On top of this filling, red mud brick walls are built, either on top of the erased walls of the first phase, or slightly shifted. All these modifications or reconstructions are made with very clayish red mud bricks of poor quality and seem to have been hastily made. The construction is rough and hidden by a thick white plaster. The quality of the architecture is considerably lower than in the first phase. The general planning is less readable, even if the function of the rooms in the central part of the building remains similar. One can notice however the presence of some interesting installations, like a toilet built on top of an 18m deep sewer made of half jars embedded the ones into the others; and a domestic canalisation that evacuates the rain waters from the central courtyard. One may also remark the existence, in the SE corner of the block, of a very nice mud brick staircase leading to the second floor, which is a refection of earlier staircases. The conservation of the walls is rather exceptional, some doors being preserved on their complete height.

Twenty tablets have been found in the Palace, in an archaeological context datable of the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of occupation of the Early Jezirah IIIb building. Sixteen administrative tablets were discovered in 1996 in a small room of the N wing of the building.

To conclude this short analysis of the building, let us come back shortly on the original plan, most probably conceived around 2500–2475 BC. The basic plan of the first phase is centred on a sequence of three main central spaces: the “pillar courtyard” and two rooms, one of which is equipped with a plastered podium on the floor. Service rooms surround those three spaces. The sequence of a courtyard and of two elongated spaces is one of the main features of the Mesopotamian palatial architecture, from the Amorite period on, around 2000 BC. These reception suites are composed of a courtyard, often very wide, and of a first rectangular room followed by a second one that seems, in most cases, to correspond to the “throne room”. The official blocks are obviously invested with a ceremonial function. They constitute the core of the palatial complex. The other official blocks known so far are all later than the Early Dynastic III. The most ancient palaces known in southern Mesopotamia, like the palaces of Kish or Eridu, for instance, do not present such an architectural sequence. The most ancient plan known to date, characterized by such an official block, is probably the one corresponding to the ancient phase of the building called “Northern Palace” at Tell Asmar, dating, in the excavators

opinion, to the Akkadian period. The plan of the 1<sup>st</sup> phase – EJ IIIb building of Tell Beydar is remarkably close to it.

It is thus possible that the Tell Beydar building represents one of the earliest palaces of this type, dating back to the Early Jezirah IIIb period, that is, to the Early Dynastic IIIb, with a suite of reception rooms composed of one courtyard and two central spaces.

## **Temples**

The site is built on terraces up to the centre of the acropolis. The progression of these terraces is mild in the N half of the upper city plateau and sharper in the S part of it. Several buildings are built on the upper terrace, in the centre of the upper city, the main one being the palace. On this same terrace, leaning to the S side of the palace, stands an imposing building, Temple A with its annex consisting of a series of storerooms. Towards the SE, the palace is flanked by another rectangular building consisting of a sequence of four rooms, the function of which is uncertain. It may be an administrative building, a kind of warehouse where the goods were checked and registered. Along the W side of the Palace, stands another building whose function is to be ascertained as well.

S of this upper terrace, a building faces Temple A. It is much damaged by the Akkadian restructuring and by Hellenistic conical pits. It consists of a series of storerooms, associated to Temple A and separated from it by a small street equipped, lengthwise, by a large stone canalisation.

More to the S and onto an intermediary terrace (about 2m lower than the level of the upper terrace), a series of buildings are located on the same axis, from W to E: a sort of bakery consisting of a small grinding workshop and two rooms with domestic ovens, followed by two more temples, Temple B and Temple C. Eastwards, on the other side of the street connecting the S gate to the entrance room of the Palace, stands Temple D. On this same terrace and facing part of Temple B and the S façade of Temple C, a long building, divided in five sections separated by common walls, seems to constitute a series of workshops in close relation with the aforementioned temples. This building has been fired up and has given a considerable inventory of complete ceramics, a majority of which are storage jars. The street that separates these workshops from Temples B and C is narrowed at two different spots by what were probably checkpoints. The passage to this intermediary terrace is marked in the main street by a monumental basalt stairway.



The four remarkable buildings that we identify as temples share many common points. First they are all accessible through a recessed door and by a staircase, either made of stone or of baked bricks. In the case of two of them, low walls border this entrance staircase. Then the outer space close to the entrance of these buildings is emphasized either by a free space, a kind of square (in front of Temple A), either by an enlargement of the stone-paved street (in front of Temples B, C and D). The space preceding the access to these buildings are by these means underlined and amplified. Two of the temples include an entrance room paved with baked bricks arranged in a herringbone pattern and a narrow, long rectangular passageway precedes this paved room.

The three buildings which have been fully excavated have two (or more) bathrooms each. These bathrooms are equipped with toilets, the benches of which are in most cases delimited by a screen wall.

The central space is invariably characterized by the following elements: a high mud-brick block applied against the inner face of one of the walls, decorated with a series of niches and recesses, a low plastered bench running at the base of the decorated block and a large low podium on the floor at the left side of the mud-brick block. We do not know if the block was reaching the ceiling of the room. At the best preserved point, it reaches about 2.10m, a height comparable to the height of the wall against which it was standing. No upper surface has been observed. The height of this block does not allow to identify it as an altar, even if its decoration could lead us to think about it. Its orientation is not constant: it is placed to the N in Temples B and C, to the E in Temple A and to the W in Temple D. However it is always located to the right when one enters into the central space from the entrance room and it is visible only after the door has been passed. In order to reach it, a change of direction is needed. This fact cannot be fortuitous. In all cases, simple or double recessed doors or passages underline the access to the central space.

The central space gives access to two rooms, one of which is a bathroom, located in the part of the building that is the most distant from the entrance. The second room accessible from the central space is the *cella*.

Temple C has two outer façades decorated with niches and recesses (10 niches for the S façade, 2 for the E façade). The S façade of Temple B is ornated with one niche only. The outer face of the W façade of Temple D is ornated with deeper niches. On the other hand, none of the Temple A façades seem to have included niches. It must be noted however that the S façade

is preserved on a very small height, which makes it impossible to detect any niches that did not reach the base of the wall.

The walls of these buildings are made out of bricks light orange in colour; they have identical thickness and dimensions. The façades are generally covered with the same kind of plastering: a rather solid white chalk layer covered by a thin orange soil plaster.

Moreover, a variety of other equipments or installations, either on the floor or at the base of the walls, are either identical, or very similar in each of the temples. They can be described as follows:

- The remarkable association of an ornated block, a low bench and a low podium, inserted between the lefthand limit of the block and the wall.

- A large plastered basin is installed in the NW corner of the ceiled room paved with baked bricks in Temples B and C.

- Bathrooms of all temples are equipped with benched toilets provided with a screen wall (except for Temple A). These equipments have in all cases a double drain system: a vertical one, consisting of a very deep pit equipped with a series of jars embedded the ones into the others, and a sub-horizontal one, slightly sloping, that runs through a step at the base of the bench and is connected to the vertical drain. This system allows the evacuation of water coming from the ablutions that could have been accumulated in the bathroom.

- In addition to these benched toilets it is worthwhile to notice the presence of large open basins embedded in pits dug in the floor, which it is tempting to identify as shower basins. An almost cylindrical ceramic container has been found smashed on the floor, in one of these bathrooms. It was pierced near the base by a small hole, in which a clay stopper was still inserted. These bathrooms are all accessible by one door only, which could be closed from the inside, as attested by the location of the door sockets.

- Another room accessible from the central space, the *cella* of Temples A, B and C, is equipped with an installation that could have served as a stand or the base of a platform.

- All the temples are equipped with baked brick canalisations that allow to evacuate either the waste waters from the bathrooms (in case the above mentioned small canalisation connected to the vertical drain would not suffice), or the excess of water used in the entrance paved rooms.

- Except for the paved baked brick rooms, all the floors were covered with a white plaster. In some of the bathrooms, this plaster covers a baked brick paving.

- Only Temple A seems to have had an upper floor, accessible through a double-flight staircase. The existence of this staircase, which starts N of the entrance room, can be inferred from the plan of the building. The steps have been destroyed during the reoccupation of the building at the Akkadian time. In Temple B, however, some steps belonging to a mud brick stairway have been preserved, but in this case it did not lead to the roof of the building or to a second storey. It is possible that the staircase gave access to the upper terrace of the site. One room of Temple C was probably equipped with a double-flight staircase leading to the same terrace, but the bad state of preservation of the walls in this area does not allow any safe interpretation.

Temple A: Temple B : Temple C : Temple D :

The plans of the four temples excavated so far at Tell Beydar seem, at a first sight, to belong to a new morphological type, but this impression is to be slightly corrected. The plan of these sanctuaries is to be compared with the most frequent type of plan adopted in Mari and also widely attested in the Diyala valley, associating a central space to a *cella*. An *ante-cella* is also often present in the Diyala sanctuaries, as well as in Tell Brak. The type of floor in the entrance rooms of the four temples and in Temple A courtyard, characterised by a baked brick herringbone pattern, seems to be a trade mark of the Nagar Kingdom, as we find it in Brak as well as in Beydar. Some elements of the monocellular Syrian temples with pseudo-antes (Halawa: Tell B; Hariri/Mari: Temple of Dagan of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, Temple of Ninhursag) seem to be present as well at Tell Beydar, as for instance the two small low walls on each side of the entrance stairways of Temples A and B and the plan of the entrance room in Temple A. The presence of two bathrooms, equipped with benched toilets, seems to be a characteristic of the Beydar buildings, the presence a second bathroom reducing the dimensions of the *cella*.

### **Storerooms and workshops**

Most of the Beydar temples are built in front of less monumental buildings, the function of which is most probably complementary. These are storerooms and workshops related to the temples.

A street equipped with a canalisation separates Temple A from a rectangular mud brick building of at least seven rooms. Its dimensions are 19.70 x 9m. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of rooms, and this for two reasons. The first one is the bad state of conservation of this area, heavily damaged by a number of Hellenistic pits. The second reason is that

portions of only two floors have been preserved. The other floors have been either completely destroyed by later perturbations, or they are not detectable anymore. As a consequence, the plan proposed here is at the same time the plan of the foundations and, even if only partially, the plan of the elevation (e.g. the entrance room with its baked brick floor). The plan shows a juxtaposition of elongated rectangular rooms, sometimes divided in two. This subdivision may be the rule, but this is far from being sure. It could even represent the mere grill structure of the foundation system. The E limit of this block of storerooms leans to Main Street. It must be noted that at the W limit of the building, in front of Temple A, is an outer free space. The S wall of this series of storerooms stands on a wider wall providing the limit of the upper terrace of the acropolis. It lounges the N face of the N wall of Temple C.

This building, going back to the last phase of the Early Jezirah IIIb, covers a more ancient and very damaged one, which has a different plan and dates to an earlier Early Jezirah IIIb phase.

Parallel to the S façade of Temple C and to part of the façade of Temple B, on the other side of a stone street, stands a long rectangular mud brick building. It is a vast complex of at least sixteen rooms (fourteen rooms at least and two corridors), built as a whole but divided into five sectors. In spite of the many damages occurred in this area, the general plan is however readable.

The maximum length is 33.25m and the maximum width is only 6.25m. This long building had suffered from a violent fire, either of an accidental nature at the end of the EJ IIIb, or of an intentional one, at the arrival of the new settlers of the city at the beginning of the Akkadian period, i.e., at the beginning of the EJ IVa. Contrary to the floors of the storerooms facing Temple A that contained almost no material, the floors of the building in front of Temples B and C revealed a vast ceramic inventory with a number of big storage jars: hence the possibility that this complex building represented a series of workshops tightly associated with Temples B and C, testifying an intense economic activity. From the large number of various installations on the floors or along the walls, it may be deduced that this economic activity consisted probably in the processing of some materials or food products.

There are two accesses to the building on its N façade: two doors allow, from the street, to reach stone floor corridors that were most probably not ceiled. These corridors distribute the circulation inside the building. The five sectors have a comparable plan: a group of three rooms with — in two occasions — the stone floor corridor.

## **Bakery**

We have already mentioned the presence of a bakery close to the temple sector. This bakery consists of three rooms. One of them was devoted to the grinding of cereals, which was practiced on special tables where basalt grinding slabs were placed. The floor was divided into two compartments, a detail that attests to a control of the production. This room was situated at a higher level than the two others, which were equipped with large ovens.

## **Main Street**

Main Street connected, in a S-N axis, the S gate of the upper city to the Palace entrance. Its straight course crosses the town and leads up to the central terraces of the city. Close to the Palace entrance, its upper section is flat and equipped with a canalisation. Towards the S it is continued by two small baked brick staircases that allow to cross a checkpoint sector. Further on, it becomes a monumental stairway made of large basalt steps. The base of this staircase leads to a small stone-paved area opening on Temples C and D. On its continuation towards the south, Main Street crosses a second checkpoint and joins another basalt staircase ending with another area paved with baked bricks.

## **Granary**

Field E was opened in the E part of the tell, close of the steep gully corresponding to one of the ancient ways leading to the upper city. The top of the walls of a large 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium building appeared under a thick Hellenistic level.

One deals with an official building 26m long and 7.50m wide that was, at the end of its existence, purposely filled in with mud brick layers. The building, damaged by several conical Hellenistic pits, is much elongated and consists of a sequence of four square rooms of identical size: 5 x 5m. The entrance is situated to the W, i. e., towards the inner city. These four rooms are interconnected through monumental vaulted openings. They are rather well preserved, even if the elevation is not complete. The bays are 2.50m wide at the base. They are located in the middle of the walls that separate the rooms from each other and are arranged on the same axis, which is rather rare in the large-scale Mesopotamian architecture. The floor was reached. It slopes down to the rear part of the building. An Early Jezirah IIIb private house was discovered along the rear wall, characterised by thin walls and by the small size of its rooms.

The function of the building remained enigmatic for a long time. The dig of 1996 gave us finally a clue for a possible interpretation. Actually, the excavation of the foundation level revealed a grill plan in the first two rooms, that were made for allowing air circulation under

the floor. This grill plan is replaced in the next two rooms by a large terrace in which trenches were dug following an axis different from the one of the building. As a matter of fact, small walls arranged in a grill plan are often linked to cereal storage. The hypothesis of a granary seemed more and more probable, even if we have not found any traces of grains in the building, all the floors having been carefully cleaned before the filling of the rooms.

### **Sheepfolds**

Northwards and eastwards, the Palace is separated from the rest of the upper city by a glacis. At the base of this glacis, to the N, stands a building of a peculiar shape. This building consists of large rectangular rooms grouped around an open space crossed by two small stone-paved streets and hosting small workshops. These large rooms are accessible only by the open space. The shape of the building is a sort of crescent formed by elongated rooms of large dimensions and rather thin walls. The rooms have no equipment of any kind and the floor is rough, made of compacted earth. The large rooms, one of which had a curved plan, open all on a small street crowded with small domestic areas bordered by low walls. Some of these spaces include ovens. The function of these rooms remained problematic until the presence of many small round imprints on the floor was noticed. These imprints were compared with those made by sheeps and goats in the modern village of Beydar when raining, before and after drying up. This leads us to interpret this huge building as sheepfolds, which had been located at the base of the glacis of the upper city, close to the Palace, and which were probably controlled by the central administration.

A few tablets and a good number of bullae with short inscriptions and seal impressions were discovered in this area in 1999. This discovery allows us to better understand the functioning of the administration of the city. These documents were most probably discarded pieces, thrown away from the Official Block. They document several handicraft activities, one of them being wool processing.

### **Dwellings**

N of the sheepfolds, Field B allowed us, from the very beginning of the excavations, to investigate a private quarter, consisting of houses of various sizes, in most cases arranged according to a specific cadastral plan. This private quarter is settled on both sides of a sloping stone-paved street equipped with a canalisation. The dwelling pattern is very close to the one attested in other contemporary sites of the region, i. e., very concentrated groups of houses,

forming a compact urban texture, well equipped with stone canalisations. The partial plans of six or seven houses and one complete building have been reconstructed so far.

A group of 141 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium cuneiform tablets was discovered in 1993 and 1994, under the original floor of a three-room building. The archaeological context and the ceramic context in particular are very clear: Early Jezirah IIIb. Recent C14 analyses suggest a date around 2450–2400 BC for the whole corpus.

These documents are contemporary with the tablets found in the Palace and therefore date back to the last occupation phase of the Early Jezirah IIIb Palace.

Written documents continue to be found at Tell Beydar: every new season gives us a set of tablets, fragments of tablets, bullae and tags. The total number of inscribed documents from the site amounts to 210 and they are the most ancient written documents found in Syria, contemporary or slightly earlier than those from Ebla. Our archive dates to the time of kings Iblul-il of Mari, Igrish-halab of Ebla and Mara-il of Nagar.

It is in Beydar that cuneiform presargonic tablets were found for the first time in NE Syria, at this crossroad of trade routes that was indeed the “Khabur triangle”.

Of course, Tell Beydar did not play a primary role in the transmission of cultural elements from Central Mesopotamia to Syria. However it must be admitted that the discovery of these tablets confirms the importance of the region at this period. It was certainly not a cultural desert. Writing, as well as the administrative systems that we know thanks to the Ebla, Mari, Fara and Abu Salabikh tablets, were also spread in the North. We have a sort of “missing link” between Sumer and Ebla.

The tablets of Tell Beydar are difficult to interpret. We know that they are administrative texts, lists of personnel, as well as accounts of animals, oxens and donkeys, to which rations are distributed. They represent the range of activity of the central administration.

### **Early Jezirah IIIb objects**

Besides the pottery, the objects found at Tell Beydar are relatively few. Among them we find terracotta figurines featuring human figures, mostly female, animals, chariot models, metal objects, usually weapons, daggers or axes, or toggle pins, bracelets beads, necklaces made of stones, mother-of-pearl or baked clay, a few amulets figuring animals, weights of hematite, moulds for metallic objects, a few plaster or gypsum objects, this small bull head in marble, this mobile fireplace in clay and this rattle.

## **Ceramic**

Ceramic is by far the most common category of objects found at Tell Beydar. Tens of thousands of common sherds and hundreds of complete vases, patiently restored, drawn and studied, allow us to recognise the pottery used at different periods and to date the archaeological levels encountered during the excavation. The common unpainted ceramic constitutes the most important part of the inventory. Other categories of pottery however appear in a smaller quantity: cooking ware, fine ceramic, storage ceramic, “metallic” ware, “Ninivite 5” ware, “combed wash” ware, “bichrome Jezirah” stands. A few examples of imported ceramic give us very useful information about the cultural and commercial exchanges between the different regions of Upper Mesopotamia.

## **Glyptic**

The presargonic glyptic from Tell Beydar deserves a special attention. The Early Jezirah dwellings have provided a few cylinder seals. The style is geometric or somehow naturalistic. On the other hand, a more elaborated glyptic is documented by a large amount of sealings or fragments of sealings of jars or mostly of doors, which belong to palace officials. Some of them have been found in the granary filling, but the vast majority come from floors or from a gap between two walls of the Palace and are to be dated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of occupation of this building. These sealings — no cylinder seal has been found in the Palace so far — speak in favor of a very strict control of the inner circulation inside the official building. Most of them, indeed, have been found near door sockets. Their iconography is refined. The style is elegant, sometimes miniaturist. Scenes are often arranged in several registers and show many features typical of N Mesopotamia. The most frequent themes are banquets, animal combats, and contests between animals and humans. A large number of them represents chariots or wagons pulled by equids, sometimes in combination with the other themes just mentioned. Let us notice the presence of the Boat-god and of monsters so far unknown in the repertoire of S Mesopotamia, like a variant of Anzu — the lion-head eagle — featured at Tell Beydar with a human chest. One can also observe a particular taste for animal head friezes, lions or human headed bulls. Some elaborated scenes go even further and give us a representation of myths and rituals still to be interpreted, like the beautiful sealing showing a combat between enemies with the intervention of chariots and in presence of a sort of procession centred on a triangular object from which three human torsos emerge.



Generally speaking, the glyptic from Tell Beydar is almost identical to the one of Tell Brak, probably the ancient Nagar, which is not surprising since we know from the texts that Beydar fell under the control of Nagar around 2450–2400 BC. In that case are we dealing here with an original glyptic from Tell Beydar or rather with a glyptic from Nagar, used by officials either appointed, or sent by the capital city? Also, when we mention a Palace at the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of its occupation, is it still a Palace, or rather the residence of a governor who would have occupied, after some transformations, the Palace of the Lord of a city formerly independent?

### **Latest season results (2005)**

I would like to add a few words about the latest season activities in 2005, which in many respects brought unexpected results. In Area I, in the N of the Upper City, Italian team excavations discovered what is possibly a further temple and a twenty tablets which appear to be slightly earlier than our main documentation. These documents could date from around 2450 BC. C14 samplings are currently processed and could reveal that they are the earliest tablets ever found in Syria. In Area B, Brussels University teams excavated a complete EJ IIIb house. Our colleague Antoine Suleiman unearthed with his team, W of Temple B, a entire quarter of economic nature, contemporary with the second phase of the Palace. In the S part of Main Street, ECUMS team revealed a very large open area, paved with baked bricks arranged in a herringbone pattern, some square which could be 20m sided, a very impressive feature. In particular, The German Munich team, led by Alexander Pruss progressively explores a large public building, E of the Acropolis, that could be of palatial nature. Its dimensions will probably be very close to the ones of the Acropolis Palace. Much eroded, everything in this building and in the material found on its floors, reminds Nagar, like for instance the herringbone pattern pavement of the courtyard or the Brak style sealings. This building, contemporary with the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the Acropolis Palace, is much eroded and partly destroyed by hellenistic and akkadian pits. It is built E of a large street which was purposely enlarged and it cuts earlier EJ IIIb houses. This new building could be the administrative centre of the city, when Nagar took the control of Nabada. On its floors, were discovered a number of potteries, including many miniature decantation jars, a uninscribed tablet, Brak style sealings, and more important, one complete crucible and fragments of others, which proves that metal was produced in the building. The most striking discovery is nevertheless this small mask in unbaked clay, 9 cm high, which is maybe a model. It could represent the head of the EN, the Lord of Nagar. If it is the case and using cross-references with Mari, Ebla and Nabada, we

could even know his name, mentioned in a statue inscription from Mari: AMAR-AN in sumerograms, to be read Mara-II, who was contemporary with the king Iblul-II of Mari.

### **Environmental program**

A research project on the ancient environment of Tell Beydar was started in 1995, to study the surrounding region through the analysis of flora and fauna remains. Karel Van Lerberghe and Lucio Milano have taken in charge the coordination of this project and several European specialists from Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom have been so far involved in it. Ongoing activities take advantage from the cooperation with other archaeological missions working in the Jezirah. Tony Wilkinson, from the Oriental Institute of Chicago, carried out a few years ago an archaeological survey of the region. An archeometric and technological program were also initiated for the study of metals and ceramic.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the excavations of Tell Beydar illustrate the importance of Upper Mesopotamia in the diffusion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium urban culture. These results should be added to what we already know on the subject from other excavations, such as Tell Brak, Tell Leilan, Tell Mozan and Tell Khuera, not to mention the huge amount of new data from Mari, Terqa and the numerous salvage excavations on the Euphrates and the Khabur.

That archaeological concentration on the Early Bronze settlements in Upper Mesopotamia demonstrates the significant role assigned to this region, not only for the study of economy and trade, but also for the transmission of cultural trends and the creation of original concepts.

If, on the one hand, Tell Beydar represents the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium most important urban centre of the W part of the “Khabur Triangle”, on the other hand its size is not comparable to that of the most important cities of the region, to the E (Tell Brak/Nagar, Tell Mozan/Urkish, Tell Leilan/Shehna) and to the W (Tell Khuera).

The only real metropolis of Upper Mesopotamia is Mari, extending on 200 ha at the Early Dynastic time. This is the only city, the dimensions of which may be compared to the large centres of central and S Babylonia. Compared to it, sites such as Tell Brak, Tell Mozan, Tell Leilan and Tell Khuera look like important regional powers. Compared to these cities, Tell Beydar seems a rather modest settlement in the Early Dynastic period, with its 25 ha and only the upper city densely inhabited. Like Tell el-Hawa and Hammam el-Turkman, Tell Beydar is a medium size urban centre, of a sub-regional scale, a caravan station dominating on a district consisting of villages, hamlets and rural communities.

May we go further? The importance of equids is apparent in the texts of Tell Beydar, where several species of *anshe* (literally “donkey”) are named. It is also well known that these equids were highly appreciated at Ebla. The god Shamagan, master of the steppe animals, is attested several times. It seems that a sanctuary was dedicated to him. The lord of Nagar comes to Beydar to accomplish sacrifices in his honour. One of the months of the calendar bears also his name. The god Shamagan is presumably one of the main gods worshipped at Tell Beydar.

The mention of professional cartwrights at Tell Beydar and the abundance of chariots and wagons representations, either covered or not, in the local glyptic, as well as the frequent mention of the visits payed by the *en* —i.e., the Lord of Nagar— at Tell Beydar: all these elements suggest that the site had an important function as caravan trade station in an area that was ideal for equid breeding, and at a time very close to the beginning of the horse domestication.

A mixed economy based on the control of small rural centres and on the breeding of particular equid species, a solid position on an important commercial road, and the existence of specialized professions are the main features of an Early Dynastic city of the Syrian Jezirah, which was inhabited by a population that we may estimate to 2000 to 3000 residents.

Walther Sallaberger, one of the epigraphers of our team, identified the name of the city a few years ago: Tell Beydar would be the ancient Nabada. An external reference goes in the sense of this identification. A text from Ebla, published by Alfonso Archi, reckons the names of the cities belonging to the kingdom of Nagar. It mentions some of the most important settlements, i. e., Nagar (Tell Brak), Taidum (probably Tell el-Hamidiye), Kakkaban (a place the name of which was transformed in Kawkab and indicates a city close to the volcano near Hassake) and Nabatium. Nabatium would have had the same status as the cities of Taidum and Kakkaban, most certainly the status of an administrative centre depending on the capital Nagar. It is very tempting to see in Nabatium the Eblaic equivalent of the word Nabada, used in the Beydar texts.

This city was flourishing and probably independent around 2500 BC, then it fell under the control of Nagar at the end of the EJ IIIb, while its economy did not apparently undergo important changes. Around 2350 BC, at the beginning of the reign of Sargon, Tell Beydar was controlled by the Akkadians and that was the beginning of its rapid fall. Its size diminishes considerably, becoming less than 1 ha. Only one temple is reoccupied, the upper Temple. The Palace is abandoned. Temple D is transformed in a residence for the new ruler — a military chief, according to its grave that we had the chance to discover. This grave consisted of several mud-brick chambers, built through two large pits cutting the floor of the central space in

Temple A. In one of these chambers were found the remains of the warrior, surrounded by his toilet tools, bronze vessels, his weapons and a large number of ceramics.

Less than one century later, the upper Temple is completely rebuilt, following a fine rectangular plan. We are probably at the time of Naram-Sin. Still later, around 2100 BC, a small square temple still survives on top of the acropolis, last relict of a long sequence of sanctuaries, the city all around having completely disappeared.