DONALD P. HANSEN

AL-HIBA, 1968–1969, A PRELIMINARY REPORT

In the fall and winter of 1968–1969 the expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art with the collaboration of the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University undertook its first season of excavations at Tell al-Hiba in southern Iraq. The excavations were made possible through the generosity and cooperation of the Lester and Kathlyn Wolfe Foundation, the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University. Generous assistance for the travel of faculty personnel was provided by Mr. John Clark of Binghamton, New York, and for the travel and maintenance of students in the field by the Ford Foundation.

After a preliminary period during which the camp was erected, the digging took place from November 7, 1968 to January 21, 1969. The staff for the first season was as follows: Vaughn E. Crawford, Project Director; Donald P. Hansen, Field Director; Robert D. Biggs, Epigraphist and Archaeologist; and Archaeologists Florence Karasek, Suzanne Meek, and Edward L. Ochsenschlager. The representatives of the Department of Antiquities were Ismail Husein Hijara and Majid Mehsin Haddou. We should like to acknowledge their friendly helpfulness.[1]

The mound of Al-Hiba is located in southeastern Iraq in the province of Nasiriya approximately fifteen miles east of the modern town of Shatra. Due to the canal systems and because the mound is situated on the edge of one of the great marsh areas of Iraq, Al-Hiba is completely surrounded by water. Access to the site is by car from Shatra to the canal called Abu Simach and then by a journey of one and a half hours by boat.

Al-Hiba is one of the largest mounds, if indeed not the largest, in southern Iraq. Unfortunately it was not possible during the initial season to undertake a contour survey of the site. We estimated that its size is over two miles long and a mile wide. Others have suggested that the mound covers 480–500 hectares. Though large, it is not high. Only at one point is the surface some seven meters above the plain level; most of the mound rises about two meters. One high section is located at the extreme northern end of the mound. This is separated from the rest of the *tell* by a sherdless low depression which cuts diagonally across the site, undoubtedly the bed of the river or a large canal which ran through the ancient city. The central western part of the site is the highest with a sharp drop off to the remainder of the mound which maintains a low general level. On the east side of the *tell* there is evidence of an extensive cemetery of the Early Dynastic period. Visible on the surface are the tops of vaulted tombs built of baked plano-convex bricks. There is little to distinguish the nature of the ancient remains on the low southern part of the *tell*. A small modern village encroaches on the southwestern edge of the mound.

[1] We were pleased to welcome the following colleagues and friends: Dr. Isa Salman, Director-General of the Iraq Department of Antiquities; Sayid Fuad Safar, Director of Excavations; Professor and Mrs. Giorgio Buccellati; Professor Robert Dyson; Mr. Jeffery Orchard, and Mr. and Mrs. Hans J. Bielefeldt and family.

No detailed study of the surface material was possible during the first season. An Ubaid sherd, an Ubaid sickle, and a Jamdat Nasr stamp seal indicate some early occupation though it is impossible at this point to ascertain the extent of the settlement.[2] By the Early Dynastic III period, the ancient city reached its fullest size, probably the largest early Sumerian city. At the end of Early Dynastic III B or sometime during that period, occupation apparently ceased, and the city contracted to what is now the high central portion of the mound, an area perhaps one ninth that of the Early Dynastic city. This was a drastic change in the topography of the city and may have occurred with the rise to power of the Akkadians. In the central portion occupation lasted into or through the Old Babylonian period[3].

Two other important sites are in the immediate vicinity of Al-Hiba. Tello lies some fifteen miles to the northwest, and Surghul to the southeast is visible from Al-Hiba. Our ideas for the ancient names of these sites have changed recently due to the work of T. Jacobsen and A. Falkenstein. Tello was undoubtedly ancient Girsu, Surghul was Nina, and Al-Hiba was ancient Lagash of which a part was probably Uruku[4].

Archaeologically the mound is relatively untouched. An expedition of the Königlich Preußischen Museen under the direction of Robert Koldewey excavated at Al-Hiba from March 29 to May 11, 1887, an undertaking of just over six weeks[5]. Koldewey concentrated his efforts on the high westcentral portion of the mound where he found a double terraced circular structure. As will be discussed below, our finds in an immediately adjacent area would indicate a date in the Old Babylonian period for the upper levels[6]. Koldewey's work will have to be re-excavated; however, it was not thought to be a profitable undertaking for our first season.

Our major efforts were concentrated at the extreme southwest edge of the mound, Area A, near the modern village. Here a small sounding was made on November 7 as a preliminary probe before excavating in the central part of the site. However, we immediately encountered a podium built of baked plano-convex brick with some 15 cm. of mud plaster on the exterior. Such a podium would have to belong to a monumental Early Dynastic building. It was decided immediately to undertake large scale excavations, and a north-south ten meter grid with x and y coordinates was established over the area termed Area A[7].

The podium (Fig. 14) proved to belong to a building of the second level. In Fig. 1. it is located in the gap of the Level I brickwork at x 1118, y 1138. Upon excavation Level I was established

[2] The stamp seal was found out of place during the excavations of Area B. See below p. 249.

[3] Telloh also became unimportant at the same time. A. Parrot, *Tello* (Paris, 1948), p. 295.

[4] The evidence gathered from a survey by T. Jacobsen, Fuad Safar, and V. Crawford along with a study of the relevant textual material by Falkenstein is presented in the latter's *Die Inschriften Gudeas von Lagaš I*, *Analecta Orientalia* 30 (Roma, 1966), p. 17 ff.

[5] A preliminary description of the expedition by Koldewey appeared the same year, "Die altbabylonischen Gräber in Surghul and El Hibba," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 2 (1887) p. 403 ff. Professor K. Bittel has kindly made available to our expedition an unpublished manuscript of A. Haller with a contribution by B. Kiehast describing Koldewey's excavations with a catalog of the finds, "Nina and Urukug (Surġul und El-Hiba), Die Ausgrabung Robert Koldeweys 1886/87".

[6] See also the dating analysis of Haller, *op. cit.* P. Delougaz in *The Temple Oval at Khafajah* OIP 53 (Chicago, 1940) p. 143 suggested that the terraced building might be another temple oval of Early Dynastic times. Considering the late date of the structure this could hardly be true. In light of Delougaz' remarks, it is of interest that over a mile to the south of Koldewey's excavations an Early Dynastic temple oval was found and excavated during our first season.

[7] The grid was established on November 7 using magnetic north. The x coordinates are north-south and the y coordinates are east-west. Point x 1100, y 1100 is also point B of the north-south baseline AB. Triangulations in Area A are based on baseline AB measured at 78.60 m. See Fig. 1.

to be the foundation system of an enormous ED III B temple oval built of plano-convex mud bricks.

Although the foundations are only partially preserved, it is still possible to gain some idea of the nature of the temple. The method of constructing the foundations was complex and precise. The rooms of the building which existed on the site before the temple oval was built, i.e. Level II, were methodically excavated. Only rarely was the original floor of Level II preserved; rather the practice was to excavate the rooms well into the foundations and then to refill the rooms with a layer of densely packed earth and clay. This sub-foundation fill can be seen in the balks of Figs. 2 and 3 and in the section drawing (x 1120 y 1140–y 1150) of Fig. 4. So careful was the work that almost everywhere the mud plaster of the walls was removed but the brick faces of the wall were not destroyed. One can be sure that the ancient builders possessed the skills of our highly trained modern workmen. It is difficult to see any architectural reason for this precision. The answer may well lie in the elaborate ritual practices connected with the contruction of a Sumerian temple[8].

Almost everywhere a thin layer of sand separates the sub-foundation filling of Level II and the massive foundation platform of the temple oval proper. Unfortunately, it was not possible to recover the entire foundation as in many areas, particularly in the south, it had completely eroded away. In other areas, however, over ten courses of bricks of the platform had been preserved (Fig. 5).

The foundation platform was not solid. Open rectangular areas of various sizes were built into the platform (Fig. 6). These spaces were filled with broken pieces of alluvial mud and layers of sand[9]. Towards the top of the foundation the mud and sand was capped with one or more courses of mud brick, so that when the foundation was completed the platform appeared to be a solid one of mud brick. The method of construction can be seen in Fig. 2, 3, 4. The open areas in the foundation are indicated on the plan (Fig. 1) in white and would seem to be indications of the arrangements of the rooms which were to be built in the temple proper. In the southern part of the temple, doorways and passages are suggested while in the northern part only the rooms are indicated. Since the reasons for building the rooms into the foundations are obscure — if indeed this was the intention of the builders — it is virtually impossible to explain several small openings filled mostly with sand; e.g. the opening in the southern part of square x 1100–x 1110, y 1140–y 1150). They are too small to be rooms, and it is doubtful that they served any architectural purpose.

The temple was built into the southern part of the oval which is ninety meters wide. Excavations in the northern part of the oval revealed no traces of foundations so that it is clear that this area was a large open courtyard. Of what remains of the building it is impossible to suggest where the main shrine was located. The only "living" part of the building preserved were two curving steps plastered with mud which led up to the temple on the foundation platform (square x 1120–x 1130, y 1120 — y 1110) (Fig. 7). In the foundation of the steps broken alluvial mud was placed along the edge of the mud brick foundation platform. In this case one might surmise a reason for the use of the broken pieces of hard mud. It could reasonably facilitate the drainage problem on

[8] See the discussion of the various building rites and practices in R. Ellis, *Foundation Deposits in Ancient Mesopotamia* (New Haven and London, 1968) p. 5 ff.

[9] Broken pieces of alluvial mud were used elsewhere in the foundation systems of Early Dynastic buildings; e.g., they have been found in the foundations of the palace at Kish. E. Mackay, *A Sumerian Palace and the "A" Cemetery at Kish, Mesopotamia*, Part II, Field Museum of Natural History, Anthropology Memoirs, Vol. I, No. 2 (Chicago, 1929) p. 110.

the exterior of the platform, for the water would pass quickly through the hard broken mud, thus helping to keep the edge of the platform dry.

The irregularity of the curve in the nothern portion of the oval wall is similar to the curve of the eastern inner oval wall of the Early Dynastic II temple oval at Khafajah, only in reverse[10]. The relationship may be completely fortuitous, for in the contemporary Early Dynastic III B building (Temple Oval III), the oval wall was apparently straightened[11]. If one were to assume that the proportions of the Al-Hiba and Khafajah ovals were similar, the length of the Al-Hiba oval would be approximately 130 meters.

A test was made to the east of the oval wall in order to determine whether the temple had a second outer wall like the Khafajah oval. No traces of the foundations of such a wall were found. This is not really conclusive as tests in other areas need to be made.

The Khafajah and Tell al-Ubaid temple ovals were both planned with the shrine placed on the top of a free-standing platform within the oval wall[12]. The Al-Hiba oval adds a new dimension to our knowledge of the architecture of Early Dynastic temple ovals in that the shrine was incorporated into a building that filled the southern part of the oval.

Since the Al-Hiba oval was badly eroded and only a few courses of brick were preserved in many areas, ten foundation deposits were readily discovered. Seven deposits consisted of a copper figurine and an inscribed stone; three contained only the stone[13]. During the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur foundation deposits were placed in an orderly fashion; e.g. at the corners of the building or beneath the buttresses of the main doors. However, there seems to be no discernible order for the placement of these Early Dynastic deposits, which are indicated as black dots in Fig. 1. The most that can be said is that they tend to be placed in the middle of the wall. Only one deposit was found in the oval wall; it was located on the eastern side[14].

All the deposits were placed in the foundations in the same manner with only minor variations The figurine was placed upright with its point touching the ground[15]. It was gradually concealed by the successive courses of the mud brick foundations. On the top of the third course the inscribed stone was placed behind the head of the figurine (Fig. 9). When the first figurines were found it was thought that they faced in the direction of the main sancturay. This proved to be not the case, for the figurine found in the east oval wall also faced east; i.e. away from the temple. The idea must have been that the figurines faced the rising sun.

Fig. 10 shows one of the better figurines. They have all suffered from the extreme salinity of the soil and could not be cleaned in the field. The horned figure is a male deity who holds his clasped hands in front of his chest, a gesture usually thought to be one of prayer. Neatly executed plaits of

[10] P. Delougaz, *The Temple Oval at Khafajah*, Oriental Institute Publications LIII (Chicago, 1940) Pl. III.

[11] *Ibid.*, Pl. XI.

[12] For a plan of the Al-Ubaid oval see Delougaz, *ibid.*, p. 141, Fig. 124.

[13] Some of the deposits were only a few centimeters below the present surface of the mound. One deposit must have washed out some time ago, for a figurine and stone clearly from this temple are in a European private collection. M.-L. Erlenmeyer and H. Erlenmeyer, "Über einige verwandte sumerische, syrisch – anatolische und ägaische Darstellungen", *Orientalia* N.S. 24 (1955) pp. 20–21, Pl. I, 1. The inscribed stone is published by E. Sollberger, "Le Galet B d'Enannatum Ier", *Ibid.*, pp. 16–19.

[14] There may well be more deposits for not all of the Level I foundations have been removed. Furthermore, most of the one meter balks are still intact. A deposit could well be located in one of the balks.

[15] In one case the figurine was stuck through the middle of the first brick thereby literally pinning down the foundations of the building (Fig. 8).

hair fall down the back (Fig. II). The lower part of the body is in the form of a peg or nail. Each of the seven figurines was individually modelled and shows slight variations in size and quality (Fig. 12). All are inscribed with the same inscription which appears on the stone placed behind the head of the deity (Fig. 13). Following is a transliteration and translation of the inscription by Professor R. Biggs:

ᵈInanna	For Inanna, goddess of all the
nin.kur.kur.ra	lands, Enannatum, the governor
En.an.na.túm	of Lagash,
$ensi_2$	the one who was chosen in the
$Lagaša^{ki}$	heart of (the goddess) Nanshe,
šà.pàd.da	the great governor for (the god)
ᵈNanše	Ningirsu, the one given a good
$ensi_2$.gal	name by Inanna, the son
ᵈNin.gír.su.ka	begotten by (the god)
$mu.du_{10}$ sa_4.a	Lugal-...,
ᵈInanna	the son of Akurgal, the
dumu tu.da	governor of Lagash, the beloved
ᵈLugal.URU×KÁR^{ki}.ka	brother of Eannatum, the governor
dumu A.kur.gal	of Lagash—for Inanna he constructed
$ensi_2$	the temple oval (Ibgal); for her
$Lagaša^{ki}$.ka.ke_4	he made (the temple precinct) Eanna
šeš ki.ága	better (than any other) in all
É.an.na.túm	the lands; he furnished it with
$ensi_2$	gold and silver; he put (this)
$Lagaša^{ki}$.ka.ke_4	in place so that his god, Shul-
ᵈInanna.ra	utula, might pray forever to
ib.gal mu.na.dù	Inanna in the Ibgal for the well-
É.an.na	being of Enannatum, the one with whom
kur.kur.ra mu.na.diri	Inanna communicates, the governor of
	Lagash. The governor who keeps it permanently
	in good condition will be my friend.
guškin kù.babbar.ra	
šu mu.na.ni.tag	
mu.ni.gub	
En.an.na.túm	
lú.inim.ma sì.ga	
ᵈInanna.ka	
dingir.ra.ni	
ᵈŠul.utula	
nam.ti	
En.an.na.túm	
$ensi_2$	

Lagaša^{ki}.ka.šè
u_4 ul.la.šè
^{d}Inanna.ra
ib.gal.la
sub_x (KA × ŠU) ḫé.na.šè.gál
u_4.ul pa.è.a
$ensi_2$.bi
ku.li.mu ḫé

The inscription nicely identifies the praying divine figure. It is the personal god of Enannatum I, Shulutula, who is depicted praying to the great goddess Inanna on behalf of the king. We can assume that other divine foundation figurines from other sites in the Early Dynastic period represent the personal gods of the royal builders.

The temple oval constructed by Enannatum I must be the Ibgal of Inanna mentioned in the inscription, and the Eanna may well be the entire temple precinct. It is curious that approximately a mile to the north, fragmentary inscribed baked clay cones have washed out of a *wadi*. These cones give the name of Enannatum I as a builder of the Ibgal and Eanna. Considering the great distance between the find spot of these cones and the excavated temple oval it is difficult at this time to understand their significance.

From other inscriptions it is known that the Ibgal was a temple located in Lagash[16]. Since we have now found the Ibgal at Al-Hiba, the identification of Al-Hiba as Lagash is virtually certain.

Although the temple oval at Tell al-Ubaid may well date to the time of Aannepada of the First Dynasty of Ur, the foundation tablet from Tell al-Ubaid was found loose in the debris; hence, the evidence is inconclusive. Now for the first time we have architecture of monumental proportions in the third millennium which can be linked to a known ruler.

As stated earlier most of the floors and the walls of the Level II building were removed when the subfoundations of Level I were prepared by Enannatum's builders. Some plaster was preserved on one of the walls of the courtyard and on the walls of two rooms in the southern portion of the partially excavated building (Fig. 15). Due to a deep slope of the level, the building was completely destroyed in the northeastern part by the Level I foundations. Here beneath Level I were walls of Level III.

The well constructed podium of baked plano-convex brick stood in the corner of the large courtyard (Fig. 14). It was repeatedly plastered with mud so that the final accumulation of plaster was 15 cms. Nothing was found which might have given an indication of the ancient use of the podium, and it was not possible to calculate the original height. A small mud brick bench was constructed against the west wall of the court. A single step was found in this wall suggesting that the temple in the northern part at least, was raised up on a low platform. The inner face of the wall was irregular without a smooth face, indicating that the long space created by the west court wall and the next wall which was only partly preserved, was probably not a room but was filled with earth like a foundation platform[17] (Fig. 15).

[16] A. Falkenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 160ff.

[17] A similar arrangement might account for the extraordinary thick foundation wall in the north western part of the building in the oval of Level I.

The exterior straight buttressed wall on the south and the outside square corner suggest that the Level II building was not a temple oval; however, further excavation is needed to determine the true nature of this building. Since the Level I temple in its basic form differs so completely from the two previously known temple ovals, this Level II temple could conceivably have been built within an oval wall. Certainly there is an architectural relationship between both temples, for the walls of Level I forming the large court at x 110—x 1130, y 1130—y 1140 are practically on top of the court walls of Level II.

There were few finds from Level II.

In order to get some idea of the nature of this enormous mound, several soundings were also made in Area B, i. e., the higher central portion of the mound well over a mile to the north of our camp. Trenches A, B, and C were opened. Trench A was located on a gentle rise to the south of the highest point of the mound close to a *wadi* where the cones of Enannatum I were found on the surface. The trench, three meters wide and nine meters long, was excavated to a depth of over 75 cms. The earth was heavily striated and showed signs of extensive seepage of water. No walls appeared in the trench, but a floor with some burned areas indicated a change of level. A small area was opened to test the fill below the floor. Since this lower earth appeared most unproductive for obtaining good habitational remains, the trench was abondoned, and it was decided to try a higher area to the east where a badly preserved small limestone lion statue was found on the surface.

Trench B was soon widened into an area excavation, and a base line and a north-south grid with a and b coordinates were established. Here the stratigraphy proved most difficult with one series of walls cutting another series of walls and floors. After rather taxing work some four or five levels were determined. The most important was Level III which unfortunately was preserved only in part. The deeply niched and rabbeted façade of the building proved that it must have once been an important temple (Fig. 16). Some of the niching was preserved on either side of a large doorway which strangely enough was provided with doorsockets made only of broken brick. In what was a court in front of the façade, three solid phases of occupation have been distinguished. No particular features were found on the floor of the court during the final phase of the temple's history, but during the intermediate period, two large circular ovens or fireplaces were constructed in the court. The floors of each were heavily burned, but nothing was preserved to give an indication as to what was baked in them. During this same phase a small altar or podium built of mud brick and baked bricks was placed near the door. A tall limestone "mortar" approximately 40 cm. in diameter was set to the left of the door very close to the niched façade. The "mortar"s base rested on the floor of this second phase, but since the object was exceedingly tall it continued to be used during the final phase of occupation of the temple. By analogy to objects used today we have called this stone vessel a mortar, but why such an object should have been placed beside the temple door is not known. To the west of the façade only foundations are preserved; little remains of the living structure of the building.

Within the foundations several burials were uncovered, most of which were infant graves. One child was placed in a shallow dish, another was buried in the soil and accompanied by two vessels, and a third was placed inside a steep walled bowl (Fig. 17). Although it is not completely certain, it appears as if the shallow bowl burial was partially cut by the Level III foundations. This is of interest because beside the burial was a bowl which was probably intended as a grave gift.

It contained three tablets of the contract type, one of them bearing a date formula for King Sin-iddinam of Larsa (1849–1843 B.C.). This may well provide us with a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the Level III temple. The pottery from the various levels in the area clearly falls into the Isin Larsa — Old Babylonian range.

Of interest was the find of an almost life size terracotta foot in the top fill of Trench B. It is a handsome, well modelled foot of large scale terracotta sculpture (Fig. 18). Rather than belonging to a statue, the foot was probably a votive object.

A third trench, Trench C, was cut through a portion of a high mound almost due east from Trench B. The top layer consisted of almost two meters of wind and water deposited sand and was followed below by a thick layer of fragments of hard pure clay. From experiences with the foundation system of the Ibgal of Enannatum I, we know how popular was the use of broken bits of pure clay in the foundations of the buildings at Al-Hiba. Profitable results here would necessitate large scale earth removal and the trench was abandoned.

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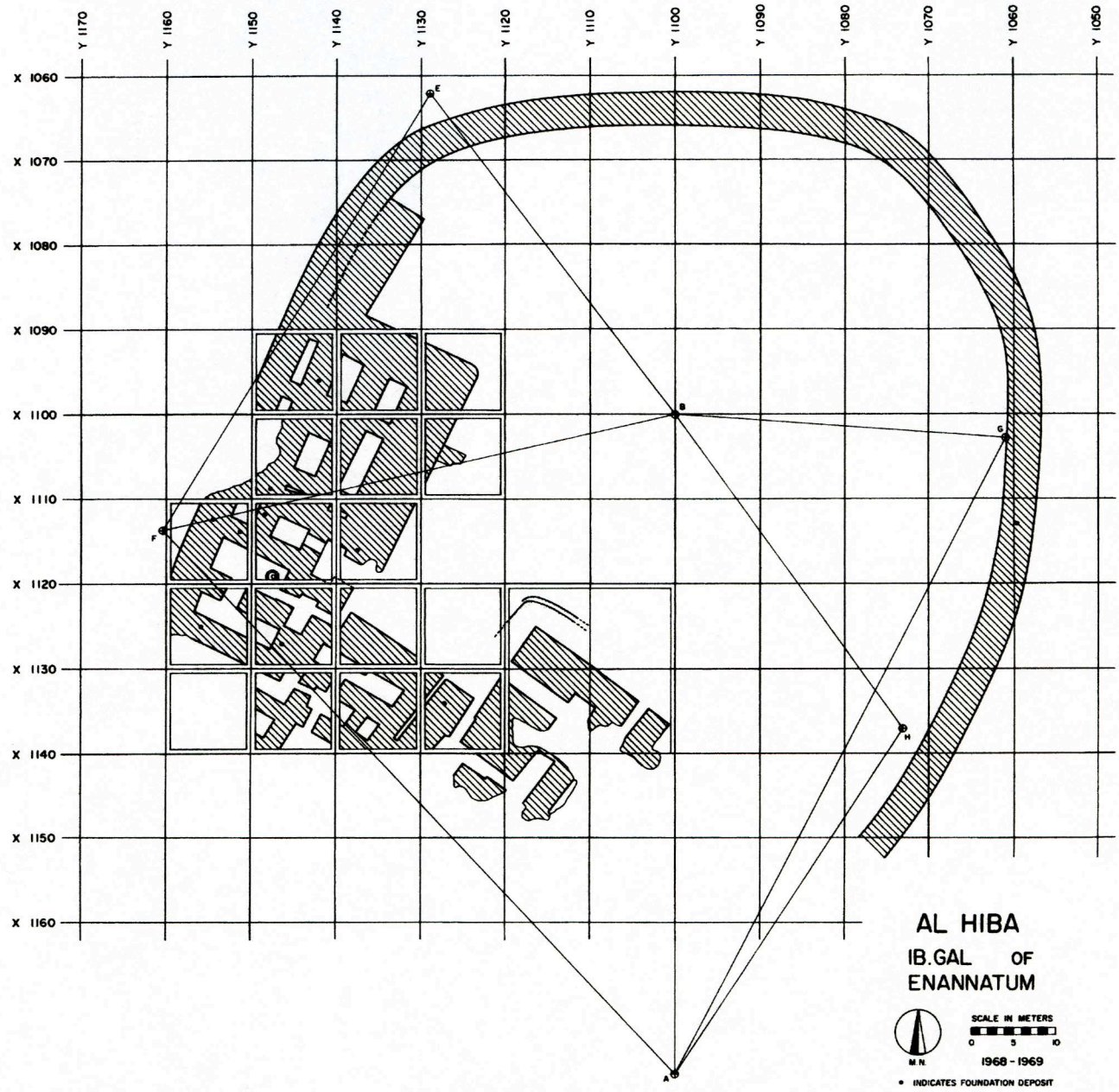


Fig. 1 Plan of Ibgal of Enannatum, Level I

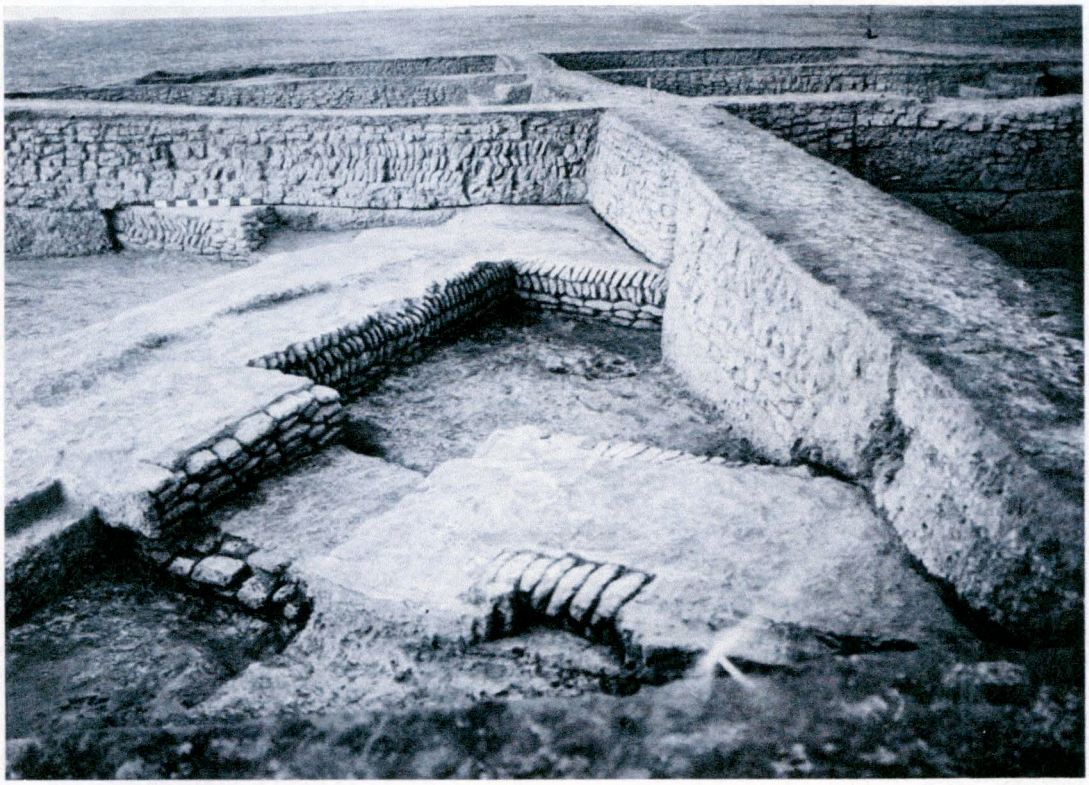


Fig. 2 x 1120 – x 1130, y 1140 – y 1150, Levels I and II

Fig. 3 x 1120 – x 1130, y 1140 – y 1150, Levels I and II

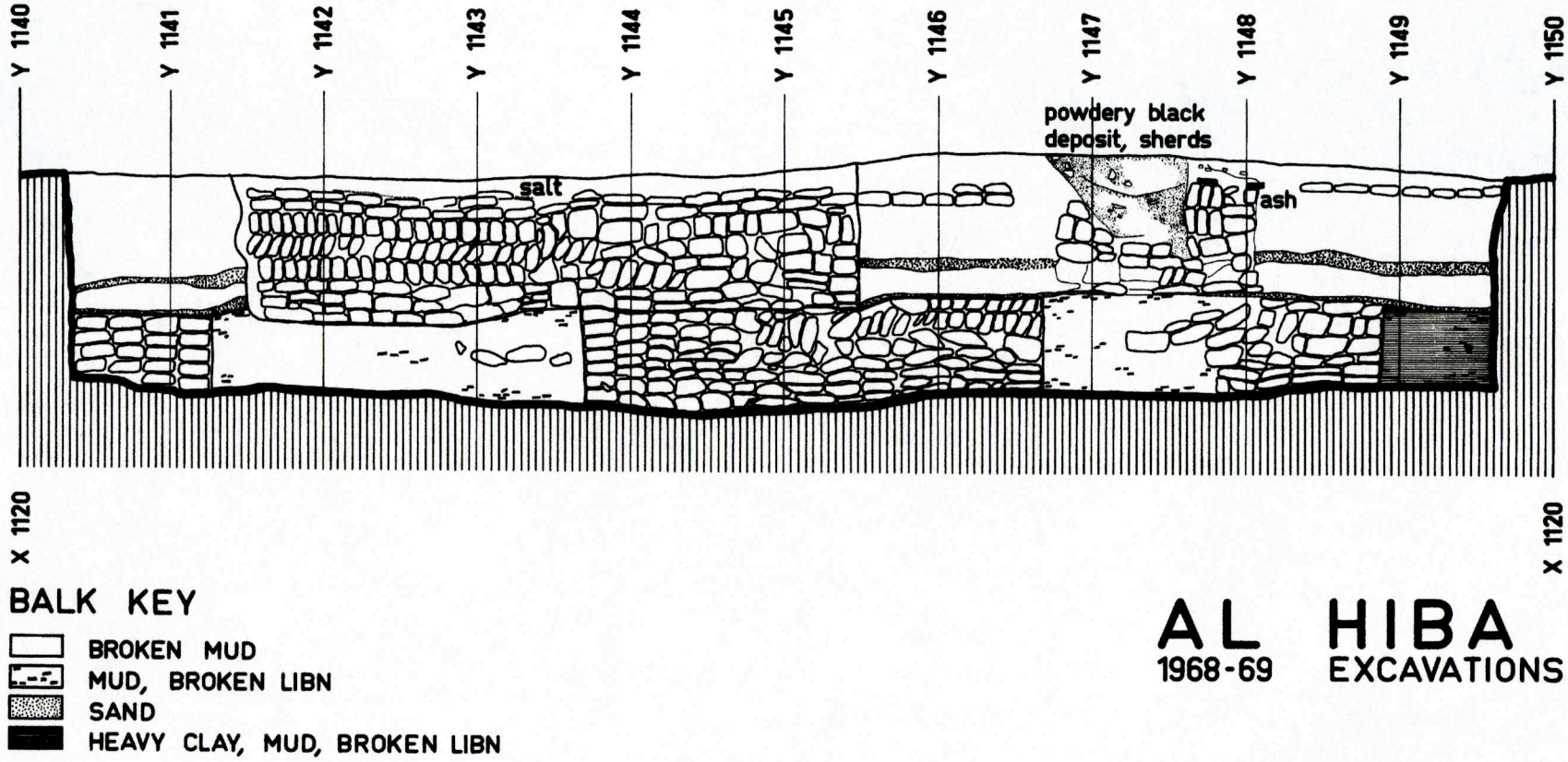


Fig. 4 Section drawing of balk at x 1120, y 1140 – y 1150

Fig. 5 x 1100 – x 1110, y 1120 – y 1130, Level I

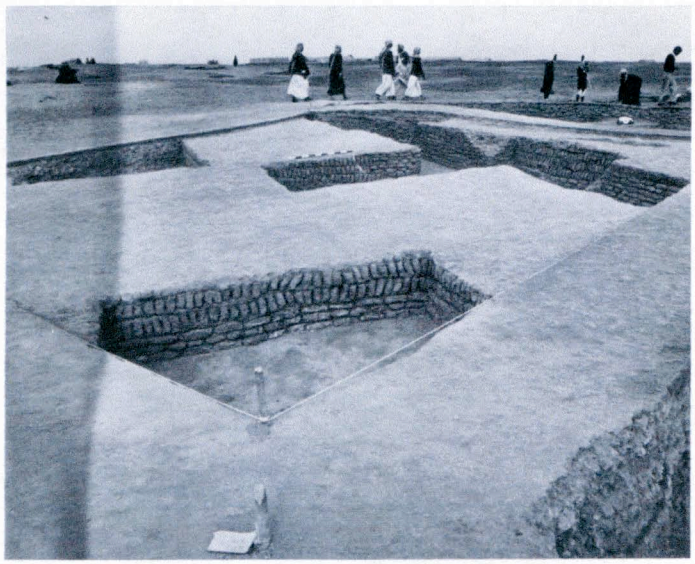


Fig. 6 x 1120 – x 1130, y 1140 – y 1150, Level I

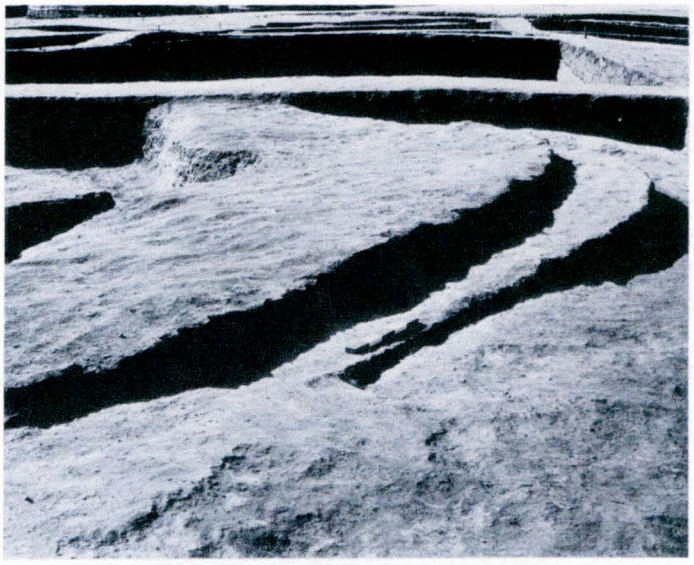


Fig. 7 Level I steps in Courtyard
at x 1120 – x 1130, y 1120 – y 1130

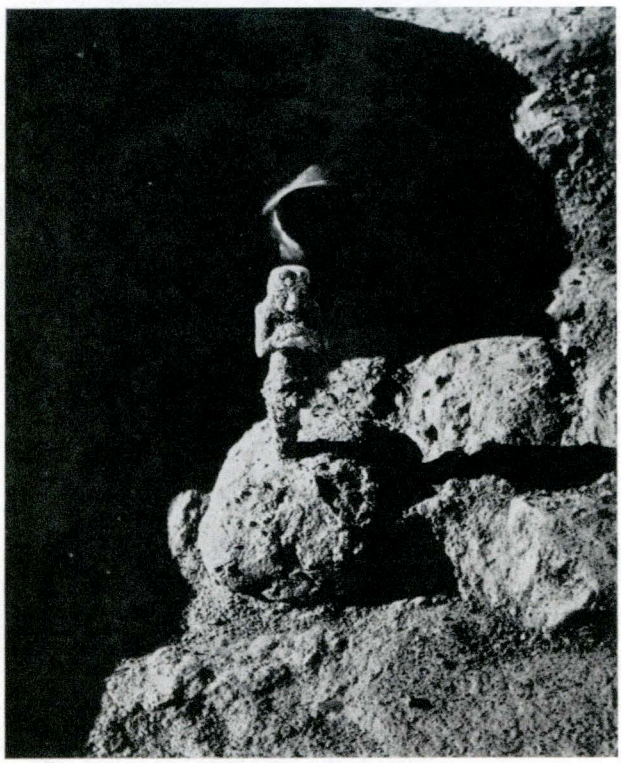


Fig. 8 Foundation figurine stuck through first course of brick

Fig. 9 Inscribed stone placed behind the head of a foundation figurine on top of the third course of brick

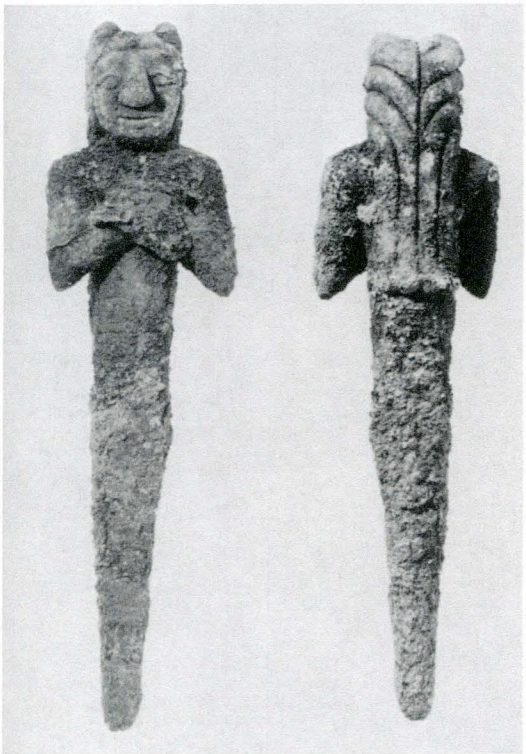


Fig. 10 Front view of foundation figurine

Fig. 11 Rear view of foundation figurine

Fig. 12 The seven foundation figurines

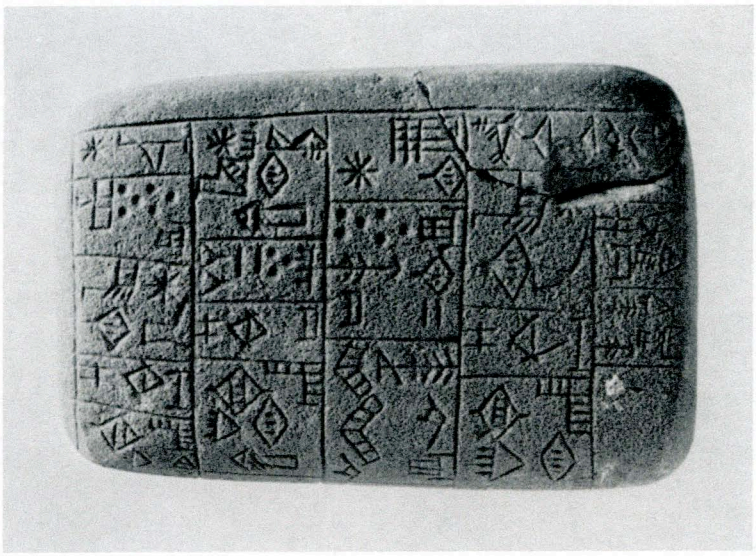


Fig. 13 Inscribed stone from one of the foundation deposits

Fig. 14 Podium and part of courtyard of Level II

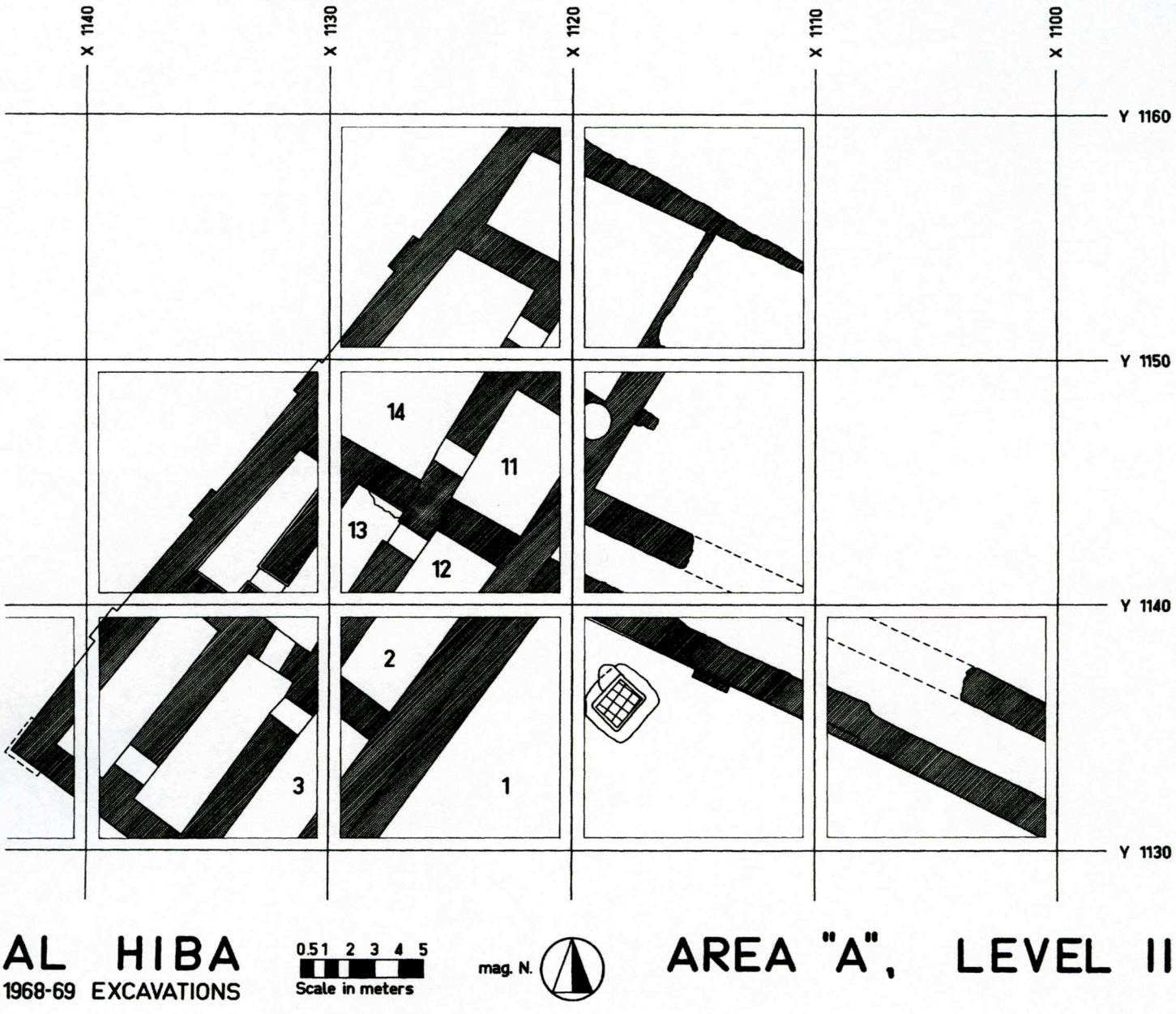
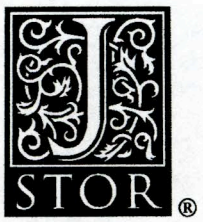


Fig. 15 Plan of Level II

Fig. 16 Courtyard and buttressed façade of Old Babylonian temple

Fig. 17 Child burials and pot with tablets

Fig. 18 Terracotta votive foot



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