

# LES ANNALES ARCHEOLOGIQUES ARABES SYRIENNES

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## PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION IN TELL SCHECH HAMAD / DUR-KATLIMMU IN 1985

*Hartmut Kuhne, Berlin*

The seventh season of the excavation in Tell Schech Hamad was again sponsored by the Freie Universital Berlin and financed by the German Research Foundation. It was carried out between July 21st and October 14th. The representative of the Syrian Antiquities Department was again our friend and colleague Mr. Asaad Mahmoud, Director of the National Museum Der az Zor. The General Director of the Department of Antiquities, Dr. Afif Bahnassi, has supported the project once more most generously.

After the recovery of the middle assyrian archive on the citadel mound had been completed in 1983 (cf. H. Kuhne, Tall Seh Hamad / Dur -Katlimmu 1978-1983, in : AAAS XXXIII : 1, 1983, 239 - 248) the aim of the project was newly defined. Considering the most favorable local conditions in the Lower City II (see fig. 1) it was decided to concentrate all efforts in the next seasons on that part of the ancient settlement ground. Excavation here so far had demonstrated that the ruins of the neoassyrian city of Dur Katlimmu are preserved almost up to the surface and that no later overall occupation had taken place. We had often made the experience that by scraping and sweeping the surface we had already touched the upper most layers of neoassyrian mudbrick walls. It therefore seemed to be very promising to try to excavate here on large scale in order to recover as much of the neoassyrian town plan as possible to be able to analyse the function of this large Lower City of more than 32 hectares.

The usual excavation methods seemed to be rather inappropriate for these plans because, in comparison with similar projects, it had never been possible to excavate more than a very small section of such a large area and in most cases only a very faint idea of the town plan was received on the grounds of which a true functional analysis was little more than a guess. Therefore to excavate more efficiently, a machine has been imported, called an excavator with several devices, a true excavator, a shovel, and a broom. The idea was to sweep the surface in order to detect the walls faster and thus be able to get an outline of the town plan in a shorter time. In order to keep up with the mapping of the walls and buildings photogrammetry has been incorporated in this system, taking pictures from the ground as well as from the air with the help of a balloon. This combined system has first been enacted in 1985 and it has proven to work very well.

As general precautions test trenches are dug before the machine is used; before the broom is used in a given area, the surface is systematically sampled; if using the shovel the debris are always sifted out, the sieve being a special construction with a size of one square metre and a network of one square centimeter; the excavator is the smallest one on the market and is used often in connection with conventional manual labor. A more complete description of these new working techniques will be presented later.

Work was concentrated on the two former excavation areas in the Lower City II, Building G in the middle part and Building F in the northeast corner of the Lower City II (see Fig 1) . The results are the following.

#### **Building G (Fig 2 & 3)**

In Building G an area of about 1000 sqm was excavated. Technically the area was first sampled then swept and then the surface layer was taken off with the shovel (see above); the final stage was reached using a combination of conventional and mechanical working techniques.

The building is oriented northeast /southwest. Presently it seems to consist of three parts. On the western edge a courtyard O was discovered paved with burned bricks and leading to rooms N & M (Fig 4) . East of this wing a number of rooms (K,G,F,D,H,I) is centered around the large room L, the function of which is possibly an inner court of a living quarter.

East of this wing, rooms A through D certainly had an official function (Fig 5) . It was in these rooms that we made our most important discovery : the wall paintings, already touched in a test trench last year are covering a larger part of the walls of room B . Underneath a frieze of lotus flowers various trees are rendered in metope-like fields (Fig. 6) and extending from the northern wall to the western wall of room B . On that wall a painted cuneiform inscription was discovered (Fig. 7) . The area underneath the inscription is unfortunately destroyed, but to the south of it various plants and trees are again represented. In this part of the wall a window is integrated , almost completely preserved, built in an arched manner. In room A, north of room B, the upper part of the wall was painted with a geometrical design (Fig 8) belonging to an older phase and covered by a younger plaster which had been painted as well but in a more simple fashion. A part of this geometrical design (75 by 35 cm in size) was taken off to be restored for the museum later on. Because of lack of time it was not possible to excavate rooms A and B completely; to judge from the outline, their dimensions seem to be very large .

Room A yielded the first clear indications of two using stages of the building. Similar indications have been found since in the other rooms so that one major renovation or reconstruction of the building must have taken place.

No entrance to the building and not even an outer wall have been discovered so far. To judge from topography, the extension of the building seems to have covered an area at least three times as large as has been excavated so far, that means more than 4000 sqm .

The function of the building may be indicated by the inscription on the wall paintings (Fig. 8) . According to Prof. Rolig it reads "garden house". It reminds to the "hanging gardens" of Semiramis, and the dating of our building would be about one hundred years later than the time of queen Sammuramat. In any case, the function seems to have been rather a summer residence of the assyrian governor of Dur-Katlimmu than a temple as was suspected last year.

#### **Building F (Fig. 9-10)**

The aim of the work in this excavation area was to complete the ground plan of the building. As it turned out though, the building was not limited on the northeastern side as had been expected from the results of last year. Instead a connection with the structures north of it , excavated in test trenches last year, seems to be very likely.

First the extension of the building to the west was investigated. Room K extends to those walls in the west which had been investigated in trenches during the last year. It proved to be one large room (Fig. 11) of almost 30 m length which had been vaulted and possibly been divided up into three chambers by smaller walls. One of the walls had been plastered with gypsum, thus proving once more that the whole room has served as a cistern.

As can be noticed on Figure 11, the mudbrick walls are preserved almost up to the surface. In the fill next to wall 11 a tiny statuette of an egyptian god was found.

In the area north of room K a similar structure (another cistern) was discovered in a test trench; traces of vaulting have been noticed as well. Further work was postponed in favor of the other areas in the northeast.

According to the results of 1984 it had been suspected that the entrance of the whole building was situated north of rooms C and H. As it turned out, it seems that we have touched a large courtyard R around which more rooms are situated in the west and in the east (Fig. 12 & 14). In the west rooms Q and W were discovered (Fig. 12) of which room Q was investigated more thoroughly. It has a small entrance in the southeast and another door in the west which is doomed by a still completely preserved arch (Fig. 13)

The walls of room W, in a row with the walls of room Q, are extending to the north and to the west, partly taking up the direction of walls excavated in test trenches last year farther to the north. Thus it seems fairly certain that the building is extending to the northeast and most probably covering the whole corner within the city wall, an area of more than 4000 sqm.

In the eastern part of court R rooms S and V were excavated. With room V a kind of limitation of the building has been touched, which does not correspond to room Q in the west. In any case, it was found here, too, that the building is extending to the north, although the adjoining wall is taking up a little different direction.

The outer wall 7 is now uncovered over a length of more than 40 metres. It contains air vents in regular distances along rooms P, T and V. Traces of a single air vent had been discovered during a former campaign in wall 7 of room A; therefore it seems justified to assume that rooms A and C originally had been ventilated regularly, too.

While room P is positioned in the east like room D in west, room T has a corridor function connecting the main room C via P with room V. The latter must have had a special function because of the double niches in its northern wall (a private shrine?) the western wall of room V is equipped with air

vents, too. A doorway connects room T and room S; the western limitation of room S has not yet been discovered, but because of the recess formed by the walls 17, 16, and 4 a wall in the west, dividing rooms S and R, has to be postulated.

Work was also continued in rooms H and C. Room C was excavated to the second using stage of the building, about 30 cm above the third and original using stage. The size (6 by 20m) and the position of room C confirm its official function. In the northern part of room C, north of the main balk, excavation began on the level of the first using stage; removing one of the minor balks we discovered an aramic ostrakon the position of which had been in the ashy debris immediately above the first floor and latest using stage of the building. According to the preliminary remarks of Prof. W. Rollig, the aramic inscription should be dated to the 6th century B.C. more closely to around 500 B.C. This provides us with a very welcome criterium for the date and the accompanying pottery of the latest using stage of the whole building, perhaps even for the whole Lower City II

The ante-room H had been discovered in former campaigns but never been fully excavated. It has now been fixed in its outline and function and excavated to the level of the second using stage of the building.

It remains to be stated that the results of this season confirm our impression that the function of the building is that of an arsenal, an assyrian "ekal masarti", with an official wing, here in the southern part of the building, and an economic wing, here in the western part of the building, and perhaps a military wing yet to discover.

### The City Wall (Fig. 14-16)

A part of the city wall with one bastion, mainly situated in area 9173 (see Fig. 9), had been excavated in former campaigns. Accompanying the excavation of the outer wall 7 of Building F a 40 m long part of the parallel running city wall was exposed in 1985 (see plan Fig. 9 and Fig. 14). This

was executed mainly with the mechanical broom, since the uppermost layers of mudbrick are preserved right underneath the surface.

Following the wall to the north, the areas in question were swept as well. It was possible to trace the wall up to the northeastern corner and to expose a number of bastions. Although we did not succeed in exposing the corner bastion, the bastions were numbered from north to south beginning with the corner bastion. Thus the originally excavated bastion became no. 5 (see plan Fig. 9). The curtain between the bastions is generally 18 m in length.

To the south, the continuation of the city wall was exposed for another 140 m with bastions no. 6 to 9 (see Fig. 15). This work again was executed

with the mechanical broom. The mudbricks were showing up so clearly that it was possible to draw a detailed plan of the uppermost mudbrick layer (Fig. 16) from the photogrammetrical pictures without having any worker to clean the wall.

### **It is hoped to continue our work in 1986.**

The staff members of the 1985 - season have been : Hans - Dietrich Beyer, Norbert Grundmann, Hinz-Holger Hirth, Jürgen Heckes, Dorothea Issel, Helga Kosak Prof. Dr. Hartmut Kuhne, Gunnar Lehmann, Dieter Martin, Michael Meichsner, Peter Pahlen, Beate Pongratz, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Rolling, Ina Schubert, Hans Steuerwald, Bernhard Strackenbrock, Christian Velde.

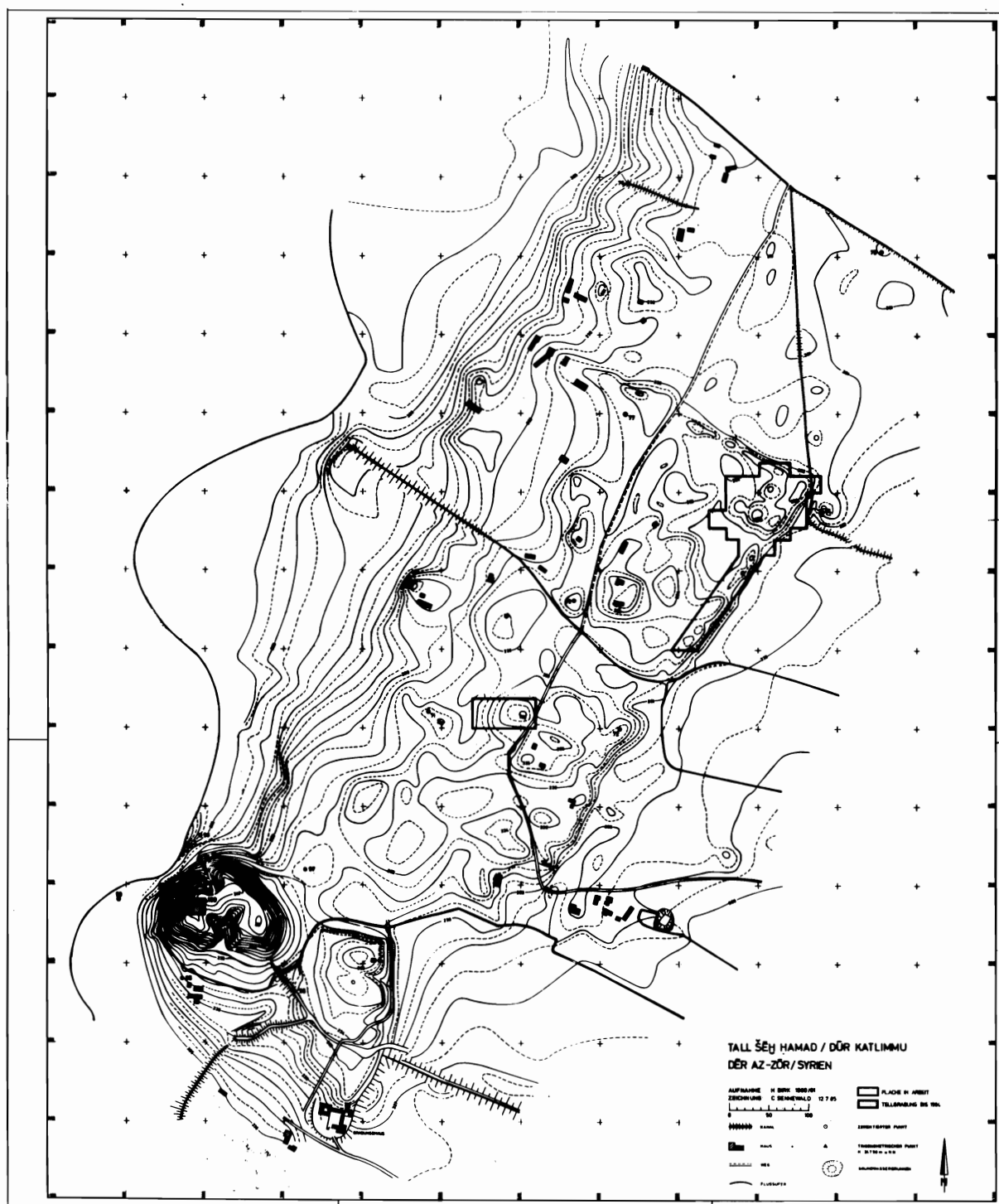
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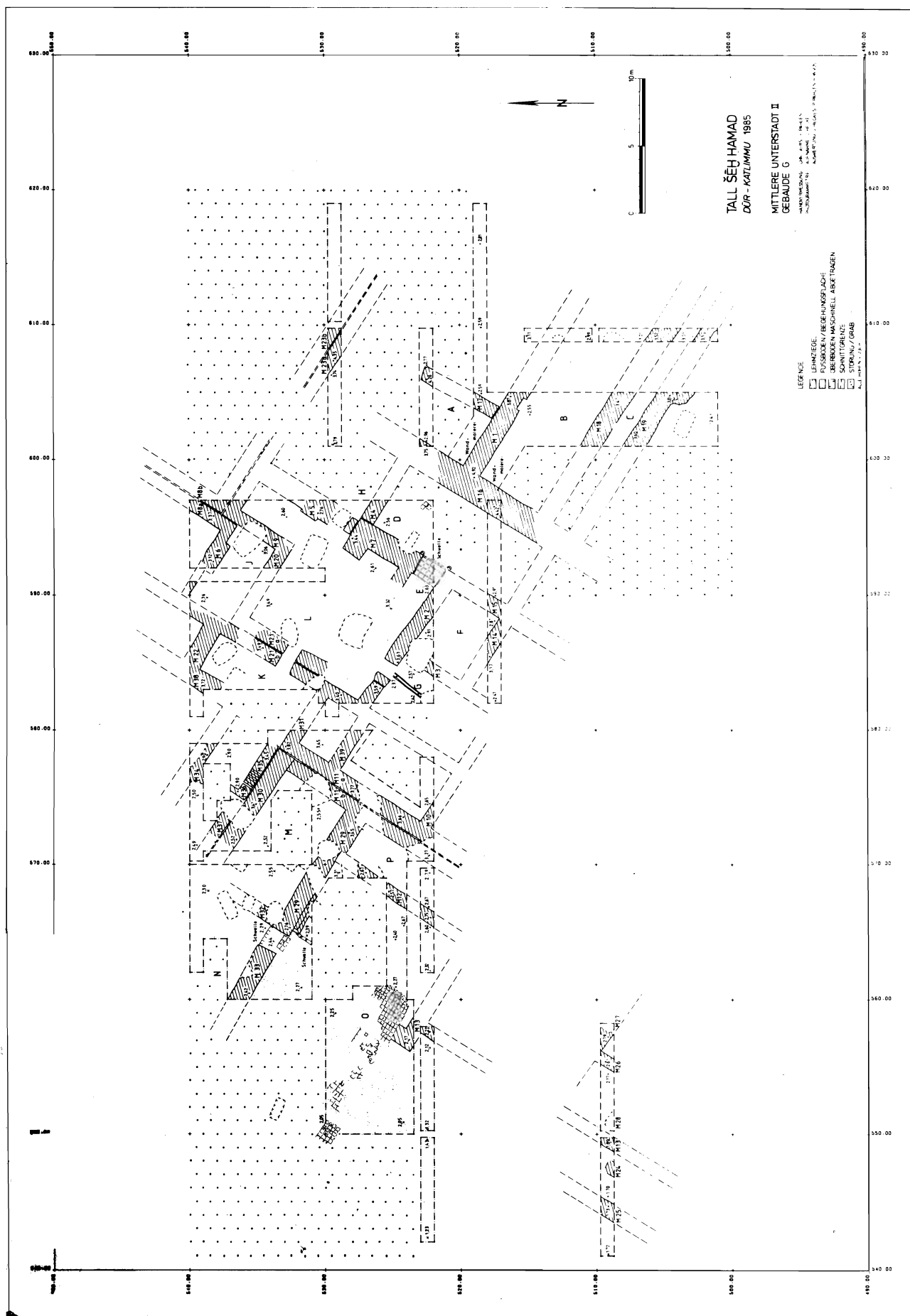
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- 3 Building G; air photography taken with the balloon by GEFA Flug, Aachen, and Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.
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- 15 Schematic plan of the southern part of the eastern city wall; photogrammetrical work: J. Heckes, P. Pahlen, and H. -W. Voss, Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.
- 16 City wall; Detailed plan of surface layer of mudbrick of bastion 8; photogrammetrical work: J. Heckes, P. Pahlen, and H. -W. Voss, Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.

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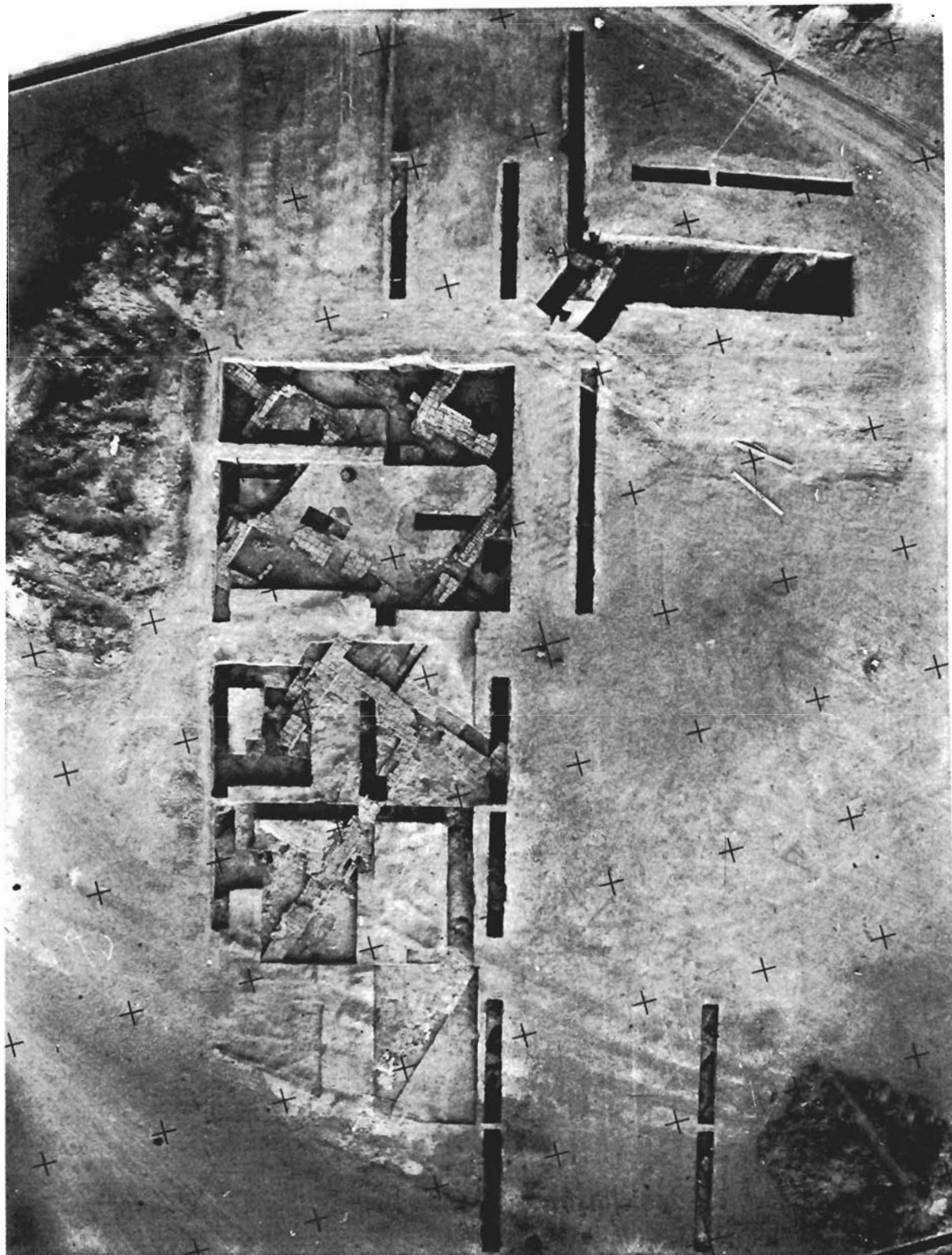






2 Lower City II; plan of Building G; photogrammetrical work by J. Heckes P. Pahlen, H.-W. Voss, Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.

FIG. 3



Building G; air photography taken with the balloon by GEFA-Flug, Aachen, and Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.

FIG. 4



4 Building G as seen from the west; ,photographer: N. Grundmann

FIG. 5



5 Building G; rooms B and C as seen from the south;  
photographer: N. Grundmann.

FIG. 6



6 Building G; wall 1 in room B; wall paintings with plant motives; photographer: N. Grundmann.





- 7 Building G; painted inscription on wall 16 in room B;  
 photographer: N. Grundmann; drawing and reading of  
 the inscription by W. Röllig.

FIG. 8



8 Building G; wall paintings on wall 1 in room A;  
photographer: N. Grundmann.



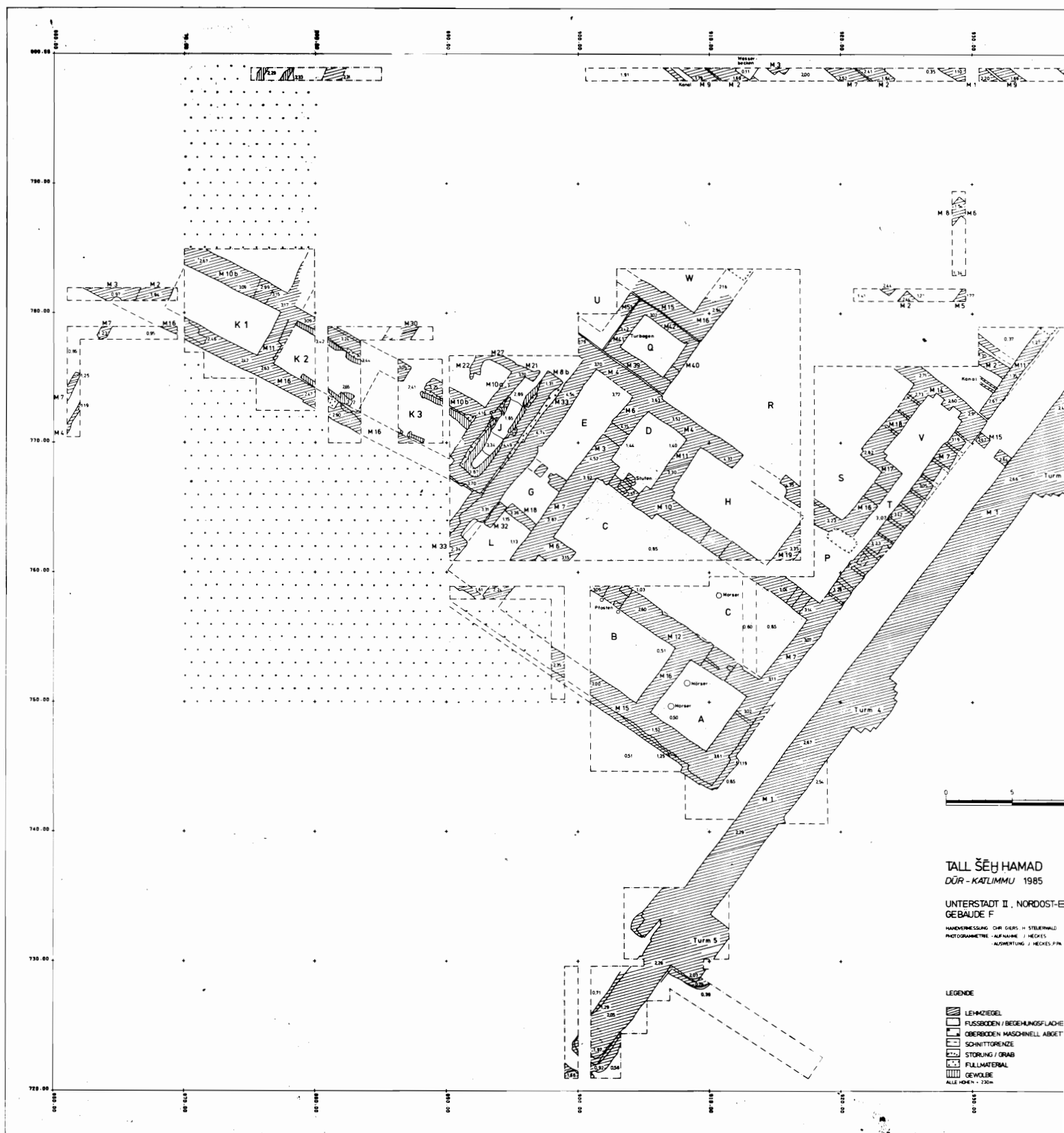
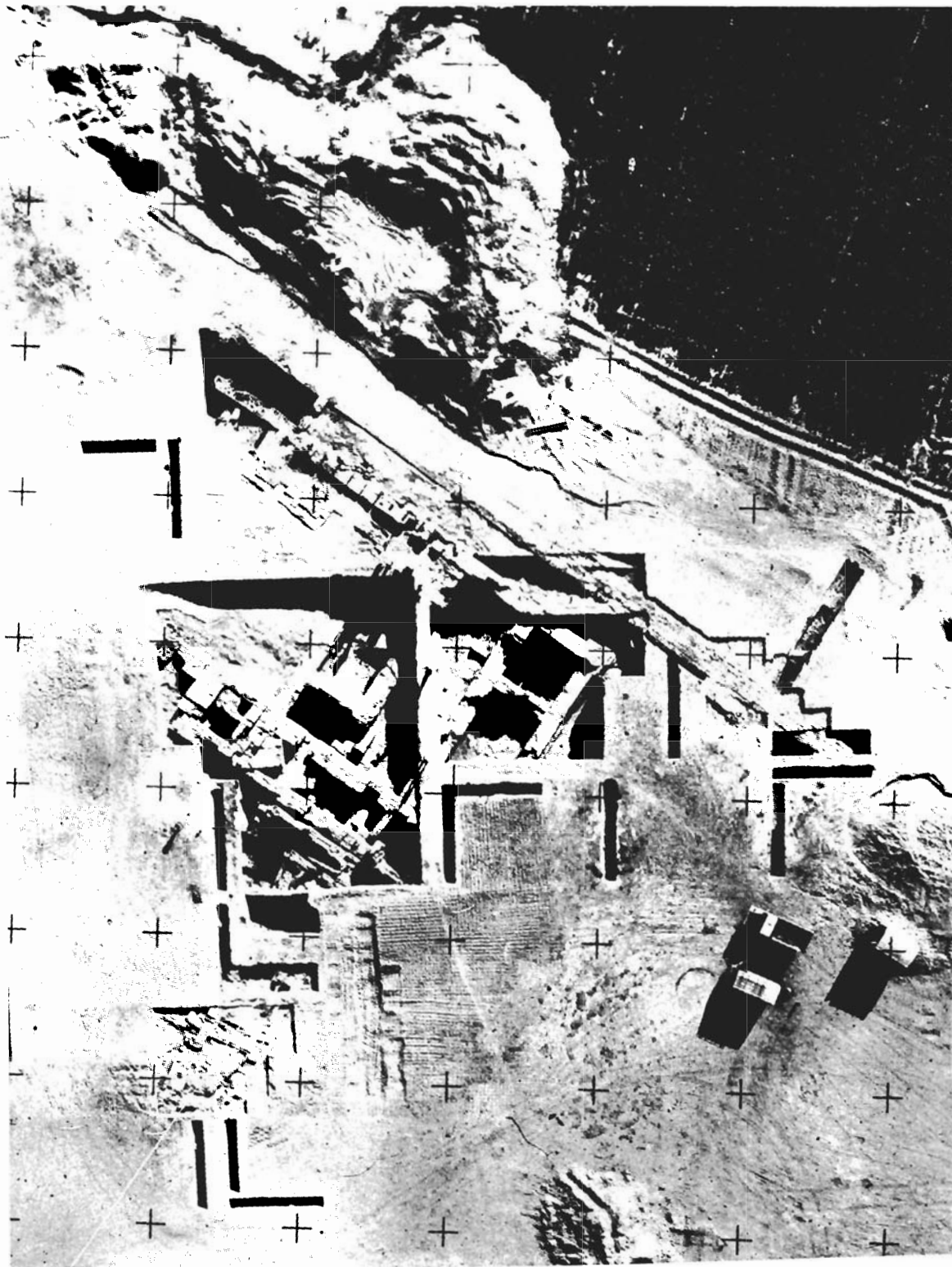
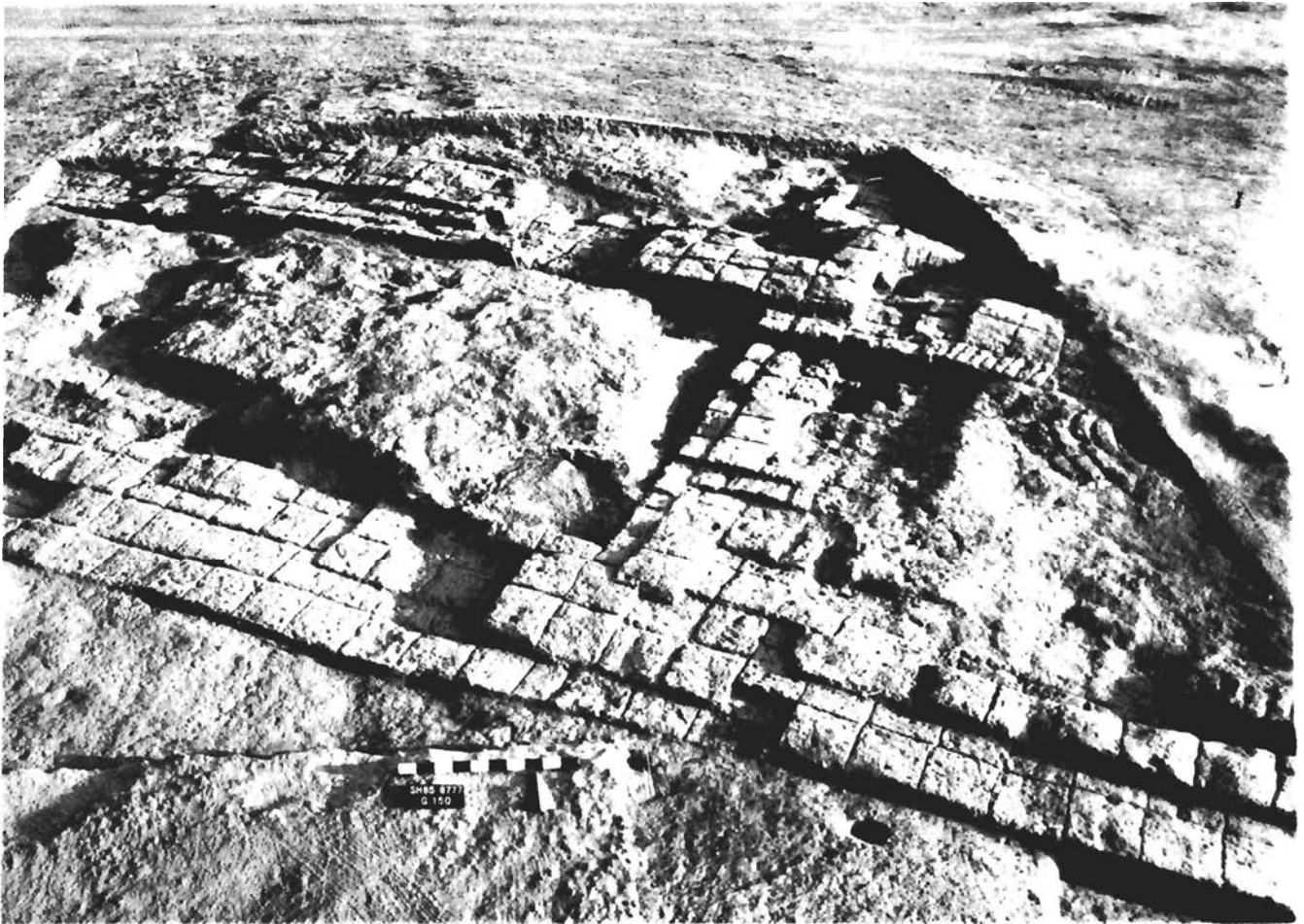


Fig. 9 Lower City II: plan of Building F; photogrammetric  
J. Heckes, P. Pahlen and H.-W. Voss, Deutsches  
Museum, Bochum.

FIG. 10



10 Building F; air photograph by Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum, with a balloon by GEFA-Flug, Aachen.



11 Building F; room K as seen from the south; photographer: N. Grundmann.

FIG. 12



12 Building F; rooms R, Q, W, and U as seen from northeast;  
photographer: N. Grundmann.

FIG. 13



Building F; room Q with an arched doorway in its western  
as seen from the east; photographer: N. Grundmann.

FIG. 14



14 City wall and outer wall 7 of Building F as seen from the north; photographer: N. Grundmann.



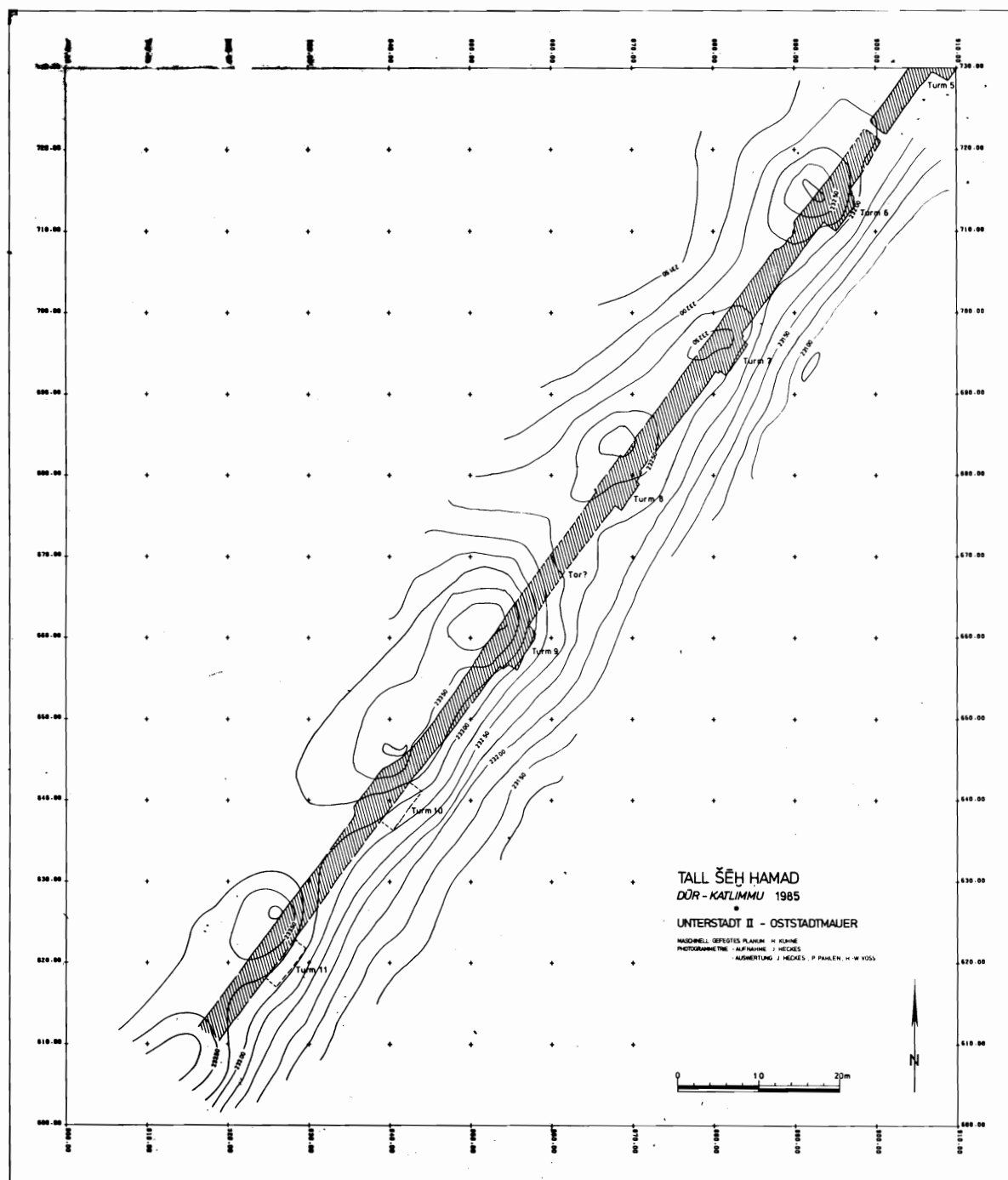


Fig. 15 Schematic plan of the southern part of the eastern city wall; photogrammetrical work: J. Heckes, P. Pahlen, and H.-W. Voss, Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.

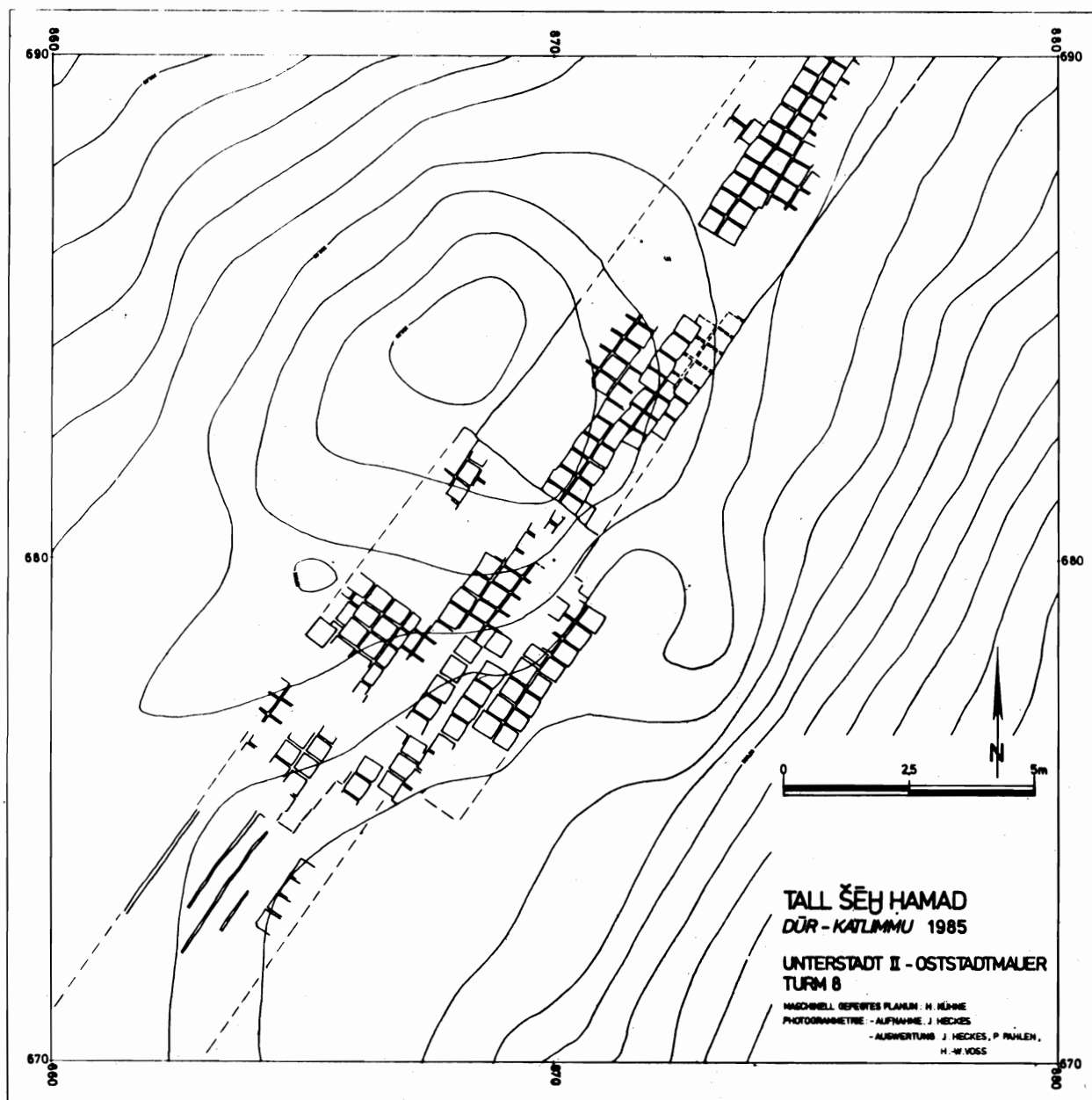


Fig. 16 City wall; detailed plan of surface layer of mudbrick of bastion 8; photogrammetrical work: J. Heckes, P. Pahlen, and H.-W. Voss, Deutsches Bergbau Museum, Bochum.