

## TELL JEBEL KHALID

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### THE SITE: BRIEF GENERAL DESCRIPTION\*

Jebel Khalid<sup>1</sup> (*Ġabal Ḥalid*) situated on the Euphrates between Carchemish and Emar (Meskene), lies approximately 3 km downstream from the rocky prominence known as el-Qitar where a Bronze Age site defended by massive walls and approached from the Euphrates by an impressive river gate has been excavated by Thomas McClellan and the late William Culican (fig.1)<sup>2</sup>. The village, Qushlat Yusef Pasha (or simply Yusef Pasha), is approximately the same distance north of el-Qitar<sup>3</sup>.

The mountain of Jebel Khalid is long (c.1500 m on the river frontage) and narrow, shaped like a severely elongated ox-head, with fiercely steep sides at the north and for much of the eastern (river) flank (fig.2). The northern side is uniformly steep, its eastern part topped by a deep crown of rock; the wall placed on this height must have looked particularly forbidding<sup>4</sup>. On the western (inland) flank, moving from the rounded north-west corner, site of the North-west Tower, the sides are at first steep, but the slope becomes more moderate approaching the point where the modern track enters the plateau at about the midpoint of the western side. This incline is nevertheless easier only in comparison with the precipitous sides of the north flank. The eastern flank too, south of the acropolis, has a much gentler fall away to the river. Nevertheless a long and hard and totally visible climb from the valley below would not at all have offered an invading force what could be called an easy access.

\* We must, as always, thank the Syrian Department of Antiquities and Museums, and in particular Dr. Sultan Muhesen and Dr. Adnan Bounni.

1. The ancient name of the site is not (yet) known. The elusive Thapsacus, where Xenophon and Alexander crossed the Euphrates, would have considerable traces Achaemenid settlement, which have not so far been evidenced at Jebel Khalid. We thank Professor A.B. Bosworth for his comments (*per lit.*) on the possible location of the (as yet undiscovered) city of Thapsacus. - The following publications deriving from our work at Jebel Khalid should be noted: G.W. Clarke, "Syrian Inscriptions from the Middle Euphrates", *Abr-Nahrain* 23, 1984/5, 73-82; id., "A Funeral Stele in the District of Membij: A Preliminary Report", *ibid.* 96-101; T. Muraoka, "Two Syriac Inscriptions from the Middle Euphrates", *ibid.*, pp. 83-89; G.W. Clarke - P.J. Connor, "Inscriptions, Symbols and Graffiti near Joussef Pasha", *Abr-Nahrain* 25, 1987, 19-39; G.W. Clarke, "Funerary Inscriptions near Joussef Pasha, North Syria", *Abr-Nahrain* 16, 1988, 19-29; E.C.D. Hunter, "Syriac Inscriptions from a Melkite Monastery on the Middle Euphrates", *BullSchoolOriental and African Studies* 52, 1989, 1-17; P.J. Connor, "A Fortified Macedonian Military Settlement at Jebel Khalid, North Syria: Excavations 1986-1987", in A.M. Tamis, ed., *Macedonian Hellenism*, Melbourne 1990, pp. 11-16; E.C.D. Hunter, "An Inscribed Reliquary from the Middle Euphrates", *OrChr* 75, 1991, 147-165; G.W. Clarke, "Greek Graffiti from North Syria", *MedüArch* 5/6, 1992/3, 117-120; G.W. Clarke - T. Hillard, "A Limestone Altar from North Syria", *ibid.*, 111-115; E.C.D. Hunter, "The Cult of Saints in Syria during the fifth century AD", *Studia Patristica* 25, 1993, 308-312; G.W. Clarke, "Jebel Khalid: the Acropolis Building", *MeditArch* 7, 1994, 69-75; P.J. Connor, "Terracottas from Seleucid Jebel Khalid", *ibid.*, pp. 77-81.

2. W. Culican - T.L. McClellan, *Abr-Nahrain* 22, 1984, 29-36; D. Snell, *ibid.*, pp. 159-170; T.L. McClellan, *Abr-Nahrain* 23, 1985, 39-72; id., *Abr-Nahrain* 24, 1986, 83-106; id., *National Geographic Research* 2, 1986, 418-440; A.G. Sagona, *Abr-Nahrain* 24, 1986, 107-119.

3. The coordinates of Yusef Pasha are 36° 23' North, 38° 11' East. See Culican-McClellan *art. cit.*, p. 62 n. 2.

4. Cp., for example, the reconstructed view of towers and walls of Siphai: E.L. Schwandner, *AA* 1997, 526f. figs. 14a, b.



Figure 1.- Sketch map showing location of Kebel Khalid on the Euphrates.

The top of the mountain is difficult enough terrain<sup>5</sup>. Running in a generally W/E direction are two gullies and two lofty ridges, both of which have a higher altitude than the high North-west Tower. The traveller aiming to cross the river<sup>6</sup>, or travel along it and approaching Jebel Khalid from the landward side, from Hierapolis (Membij), by the obvious low passes through the mountains to the Euphrates, along a route taken by the modern road, would have caught sight of the fortified Jebel with the highest prominence of the acropolis framed by the North-west Tower. Today the peaks are conspicuous enough even without the man-made extra height of the fortifications. They would once have been especially formidable.

It is highly likely that at Jebel Khalid the river was furnished with regular ferries as it narrows between the Jebel and Jebel es-Soda which lies opposite. Here the river scarcely varies in width (at most a couple of hundred metres broad) even when the river is in spate, whereas in time of flood (a season when military campaigns might begin) it spreads out immediately to the north and south up to 10 to 12 km in width. A pontoon bridge could have been regularly maintained at this point<sup>7</sup>.

Neither of the gullies carries right to the western flank, but from the northern edge of the plateau the ground quickly falls away to the northern-most gully. Immediately after this gully, the ground rises

5. Geology of the area: E.B. Joyce in R.W. Le Maitre, ed., *Pathways in Geology. Essays in Honour of Edwin Sherbon Hills*, Melbourne 1989, 123-139; E.B. Joyce, C. Ogleby in *7th Australian Remote Sensing Conference Proceedings 3*, Canberra 1994, pp. 85-90. -Note also: N.N. Ambrasays in G.J.H. McCall *et alii*, eds., *Geohazards, Natural and Man-made*, London 1992, pp. 83ff.; M.R. Degg, *ibid.*, pp. 93ff.

6. For the *diabasis* of the Euphrates in the vicinity of Hierapolis, see *RE Suppl.* IV. (1924), s.v. Hierapolis, pp. 735f. (Honigmann); G. Goossens, *Hierapolis de Syrie. Essai de monographie historique*, Louvain 1943, pp. 94, 120f., 195ff.; G.W. Clarke, *Abr-Nahrain* 23, 1985, 75.

7. For the technique involved, with specific reference to the Euphrates, see Dio Cass. LXXI 3. Even at Zeugma the Euphrates was crossed by pontoon-bridge. For a medaillon of Gordion III which depicts him crossing the Euphrates with his retinue over a bridge of boats, with the legend TRAIECTUS AUG, see F. Gnecci, *I medaglioni romani*, III, Milan 1912, pl. 153:15, and J.M.C. Toynbee, *Roman Medallions*, New York 1944, pp. 105f. See also, more generally, J.P. Adams, *Logistics of the Roman Imperial Army: Major Campaigns on the Eastern Front in the First Three Centuries AD*, Ann Arbor 1976, pp. 158ff.

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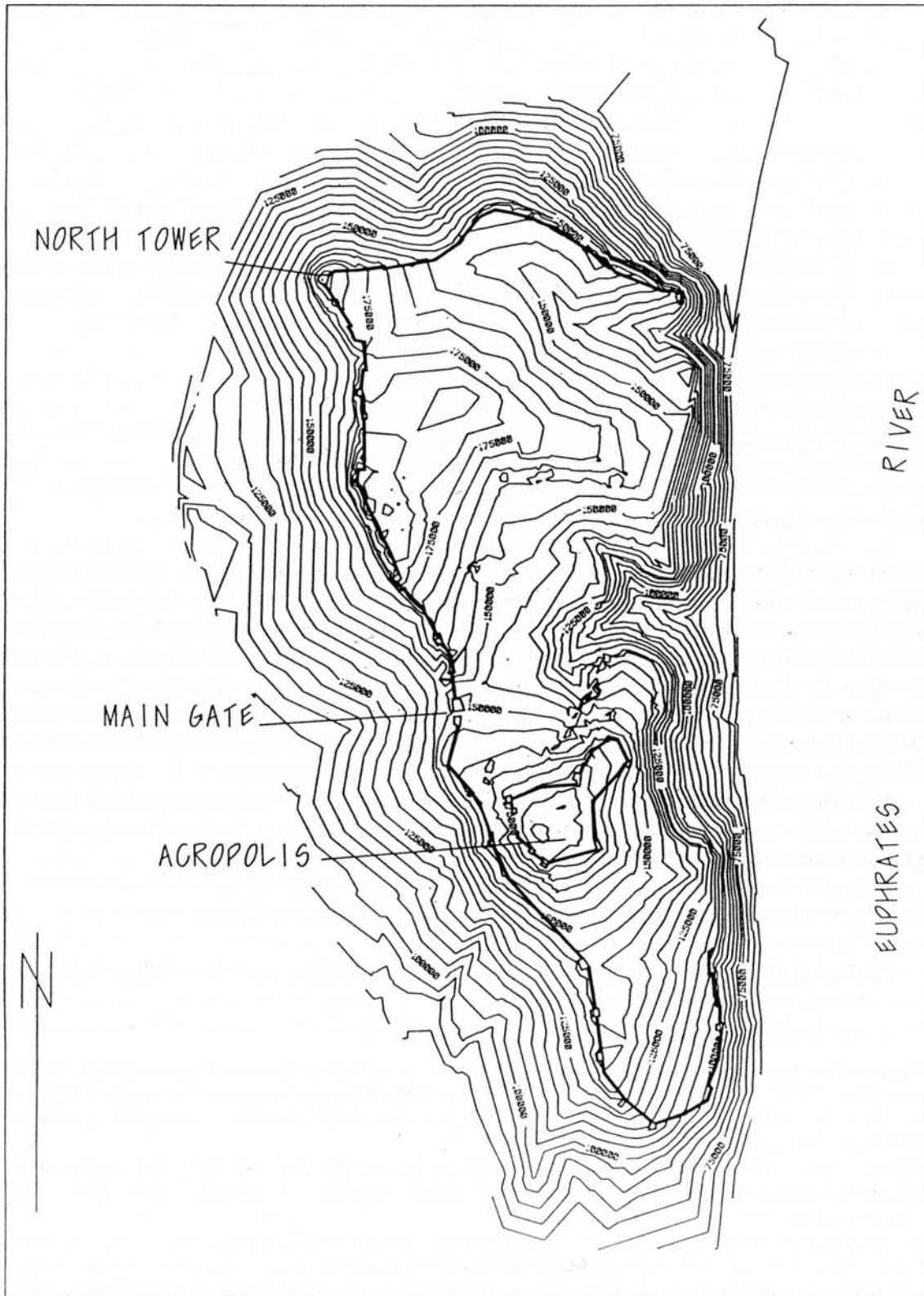


Figure 2.- Jebel Khalid (c. 1:10 000).

until it becomes a quite steep approach to the northern ridge. The gully itself descends eastwards to the river, gently at first but becoming increasingly deep and rocky and steep at the mountain's eastern edge. A section of rock-cut road indicates traffic to the river even from this uninhabited part of the Jebel--the means no doubt of transporting rock from the quarrying operations clearly visible on the river flank of the Jebel in this area<sup>8</sup>. Just before the rocky surface falls away quite sharply, on the northern side of the gully, a roughly level surface has been hewn out in an E/W direction. Its beginning is quite abrupt and the surface almost inconsequential; but as it turns sharply north the track becomes unambiguous; it is framed by a high wall of rock on the west and a slender free-standing rock-cut balustrade on the east. This short stretch of road, about 20 m long, turns a U-bend to proceed in a southerly direction. At the turn and along this last stretch of road the passage was protected by walls of limestone ashlar, as can be seen from the stepped foundation course still evident at these points. The protection must have been motivated primarily by the need to keep both travellers and pack-animals from tumbling over the edge.

On the rise from the smaller gully towards the north ridge are several caves cut into the rock. The surface rock exposed to rain, wind, and frost is case-hardened and softer rock, more readily split and worked for building construction, is to be found below ground. Hence the characteristic quarrying in the area, which leaves an overhanging roof of dolomite and a hollowed-out cavern beneath, from which the limestone blocks have been extracted. The original purpose of the caves, then, was very likely the quarrying of stone for the fortification wall. However, some have been cut into residences for either humans or animals; one cave has a long lintel carved into metope-like shapes.

Immediately over the ridge, on the south-facing slope that runs down to the large ravine and looks towards the acropolis, is situated the domestic quarter: an area littered with stones, in situ door posts, and the clearer patches of streets and courtyards. In the right light, the view from the acropolis northwards to the facing slope of the domestic quarter reveals that the streets are laid out in a grid-pattern roughly oriented N/S and E/W. At the eastern end of this ridge the signs of habitation encroach a little to the north over the brow of the slope. On the whole, however, the area of the slopes that cradle the smaller, north gully are devoid of signs of habitation, except for the quarry-caves. At almost the western edge of the domestic quarter, at the point of entry if the approach is made by the easiest route which continues from the modern path from the village, is an ancient rubbish dump, one of several dotted around the site; one most conspicuously lies off the path just outside the main gate. Several mounds in this area are distinguishable by the sparse vegetation on them; these have proved to be heaps of limestone debris cleared out as the caves were quarried.

The upper areas of the domestic quarter lie between the ridge and numerous quarry-caves which stretch out from west to east. One particular cave, towards the east, has a barrel-vaulted roof carved out of the rock, now smoke-blackened.

In a line from the Domestic Quarter towards the west fortification wall is another set of quarries. The rock has been removed in an open-cut drive and the caves on the eastern side are quite shallow. The bedding from which wall blocks have been extracted in measured lengths can be clearly seen; on the

8. For roads specially built for the transport of stone see S.C. Bakhuizen, *BABesch* 69, 1994, 204. The first fortification systems made of massive and cut-stone blocks were those at Siphai, Gyphokastro and Messene, as suggested by F. A. Cooper *AJA* 90, 1986, 195.

surface is a line of vertical cuts at regular intervals defining the wall blocks<sup>9</sup>. Immediately to the east of these quarries are caverns which very likely functioned as cisterns.

At the head of the large ravine, between the main gate and the point where the ground begins to fall steeply away towards the river, traces of what seems to be a large public building can be seen on the surface. Our test-excavations at this point suggest a small temple. Close to the sondages, at the head of the ravine, is a flight of steps cut into the rock, descending beneath an overarching roof of rock<sup>10</sup>. Below this all is a turmoil of uneven, steep ground with much broken rock lying loose on the surface, and here and there traces of walls in situ.

A track, which starts in the village -situated at the foot of the northern flank of the mountain- and skirts the western side of the Jebel rising gradually as it goes, gives entry to the plateau at almost the midpoint of the mountain's western side. The path then divides either right to the acropolis or left, towards the domestic quarter. Our discussion of the fortification wall showed that this track enters at a point which subsequent excavation has confirmed was the main gate of the ancient defences.

The southern portion of the Jebel begins with a precipitous rise from the large ravine in which, at the north and east, are numerous rock-cut quarry-caves, some of which were perhaps used as tombs<sup>11</sup>. The large cave with the adorsed columns cut from rock would probably date from Hellenistic times, if the known parallels for this column-type can be used as a specific dating base<sup>12</sup>. There are clearly other signs of late occupation by Christian hermits<sup>13</sup>.

The acropolis rises higher still; its shape is roughly rectangular with a long tongue protruding to the north-east. The shape is defined by the walls of the citadel which hold their position round the highest point of the contour. Polybius (VI 42) commented on this practice: "The Greeks in encamping think it of primary importance to adapt the camp to the natural advantages of the ground, first because they shirk the labour of entrenching, and next because they think artificial defences are not equal in value to the fortifications which nature provides unaided on the spot". On the northerly slope of the acropolis, it is possible that there are remains of streets and buildings. Such at least is the impression gained in certain lights from the opposite slope of the domestic quarter.

To the south of the acropolis, there are few quarries and no obvious signs of habitation, thus paralleling the slopes that surround the smaller northern-most gully. The ground dips away swiftly to both south and east until at the southern tip and to the east there is little to distinguish the plateau from the slope that rises from the river.

Work to date has concentrated in four main areas:

9. Quarries: J. B. Ward-Perkins, *ProcBritAc* 57, 1971, 137ff.; J. C. Fant, ed., *Ancient Marble Quarrying and Trade*, Oxford 1988, esp. 31ff. (T. Kozelj), 81ff. (M. Waelkens et alii); H. R. Reinders, *New Halos. A Hellenistic Town in Thessalia, Greece*, Leiden 1988, 60ff.; A. Peschow-Bindokat, *Jdl* 96, 1981, 157ff.; P. Varene, *Sur la taille de la pierre antique, médiévale et moderne* (Université de Dijon, Centre de recherches sur les techniques gréco-romaines), Dijon 1974; J.-C. Bessac, *JRA* 1, 1988, 57ff.; id., in Leriche-Tréziny, pp. 273-82; G. Halier *ibid.*, pp. 251-71; C. H. E. Haspels, *The Highlands of Phrygia*, Princeton 11/1971, fig. 237; J. J. Coulton, *Greek Architects at Work*, London 1977, p. 45 and n. 59.

10. V. Chapot, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe*, Paris 1907, p. 282 n. 3: 'Après Hâchlé, pendant une bonne demi-heure, une série de grottes taillées, la plupart rectangulaires; très peu présentent des formes courbes et arrondies. A deux ou trois d'entre elles conduisent des escaliers, également pratiqués dans le roc. Même en un endroit, on reconnaît des soubassements de murailles.' For rock-cut steps at Seleucia in Pieria, see R. Stillwell, ed., *Antioch on the Orontes III: The Excavations 1937-1939*, Princeton 1941, 5 fig. 4; J. D. Grainger, *Cities of Seleukid Syria*, Oxford 1990, p. 70 and n. 6.

11. G. W. Clarke, *Abr-Nahrain* 23, 1984/85, 73-82, pls. 6b, 7, 8a, especially 82 n. 11; Muraoka, *art. cit.* (n. 1); Hunter, *Bull. School Oriental and African Studies* 52, 1989, 1-17. See now also below, J. Littleton et al., pp. 187ff.

12. Clarke, *art. cit.*, p. 77.

13. *Ibid.*; Clarke, *Abr-Nahrain* 25, 1987, 33ff.

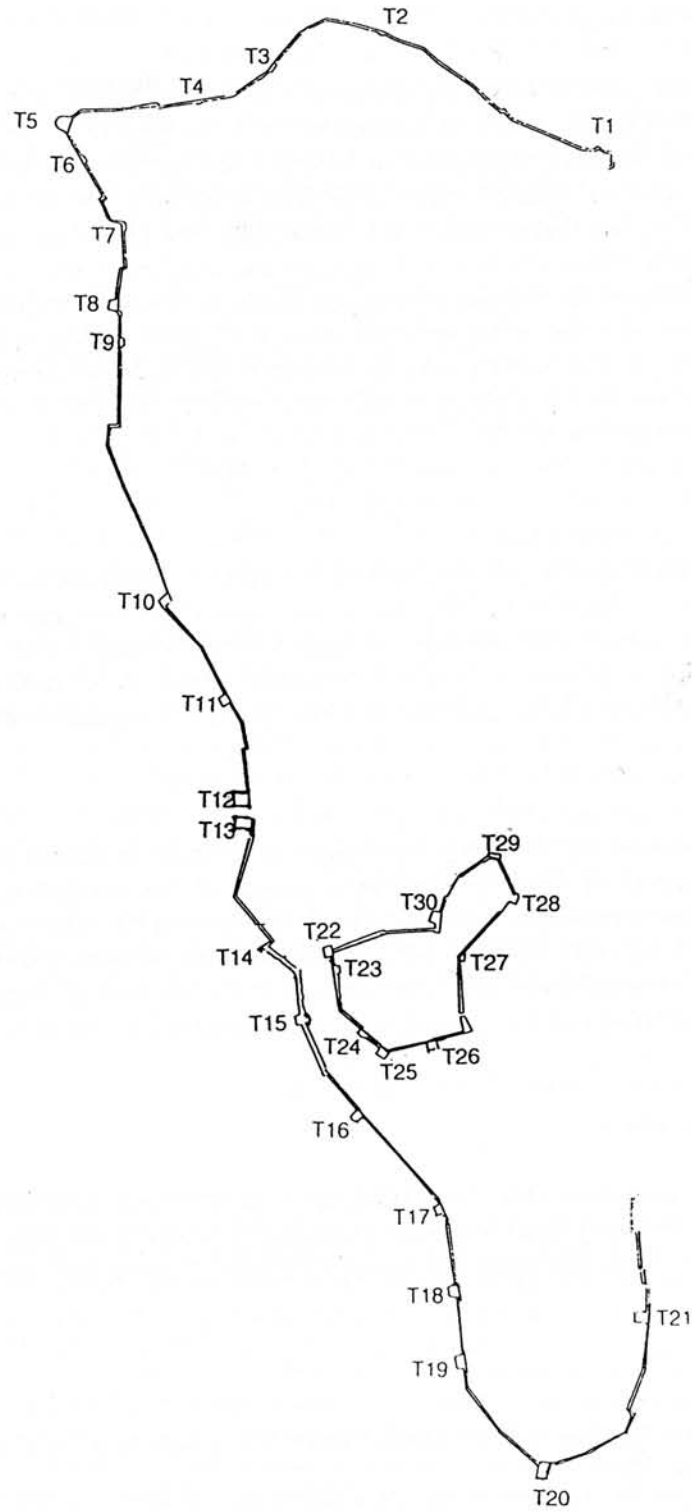


Figure 3.- Jebel Khalid: city wall from field survey 1986 (c. 1:8000).

### 1. *The Fortification System*<sup>14</sup>

Survey has revealed nearly 4 km. of defensive walling on the northern, western and southern flanks of the Jebel, constructed in regular header and stretcher fashion, with some thirty interval towers (varying in style, some forward projecting, some reverse): see fig.3. The river flank was considered protected enough by the natural terrain of rugged cliffs. The acropolis on the highest ground is separately walled, enclosing some 2.2 ha. Most towers are rectangular: the exception is T5, the commanding North-West Tower (17.5 m. in depth) which is semi-circular and which was excavated as a sample<sup>15</sup>. The main gates have also been excavated, consisting of two massive forward-projecting towers (some 16.5 m. square) protecting a narrow (and still paved) double entry<sup>16</sup>. The style of masonry and the defense concept and the material remains recovered from the foundation levels are all Hellenistic. Throughout, the walling is c. 2.8 m. wide and the wall-blocks a uniform c. 1.10 m. long and c. 0.525 m. wide and high i.e. in terms of standard cubits 2 x 1 x 1.

### 2. *The Necropolis*

To the West of Jebel Khalid on either side of the roadway along the valley floor (probably the original Hellenistic route) are extensive burial grounds associated with the population of Jebel Khalid: see fig.4. These have been surveyed with an electromagnetic induction metre and so far excavation has uncovered some fifty Hellenistic burials in order to recover details of mortuary practices as well as information on the nature of the inhabitants (age, sex, biological and cultural relationships etc.)<sup>17</sup>.

### 3. *The Domestic Quarter*

Excavation has been carried out over seven seasons to recover the architecture, room-function and material culture of a block of domestic housing as a sample of the settlement<sup>18</sup>. These houses have proved to have had a complex history of early Hellenistic foundations with subsequent remodelling (still within the Seleucid period) and then abandonment at the end of the Seleucid period followed by a brief period of squatter-type re-occupation. They have produced a rich array of domestic utensils, lamps, figurines, coins, stamped amphora handles, metal objects and pottery (utilitarian as well as imported fine wares).

### 4. *The Acropolis Palace*

Excavation is now complete of the major building of the Acropolis, consisting of a decastyle Doric order internal courtyard surrounded by 21 rooms, most originally plastered, the main rooms with elaborate trompe l'oeil marbling: see fig.5. The entry was through the eastern (river) side into the courtyard which

14. For full analysis, see now P. J. Connor and G.W. Clarke, "Jebel Khalid in North Syria: The First Campaigns", *MeditArch*, 9/10, 1996/97, 151-183 and Plates 31-34.

15. For a report see P. J. Connor in: A. M. Tamis, ed., *Macedonian Hellenism*, Melbourne 1990, 11-26.

16. Full publication of the Jebel Khalid gateway forthcoming.

17. For the first of a series of articles see J. Littleton, B. Frohlich - G. W. Clarke, "Preliminary Excavations of the Jebel Khalid Necropolis", *MeditArch*, 9/10, 1996/97, 187-205 and Plate 35.

18. For the most recent report see G. W. Clarke - P. J. Connor, "Jebel Khalid on the Euphrates: 1995 Season", *MeditArch* 9/10, 1996/97, 243-249.

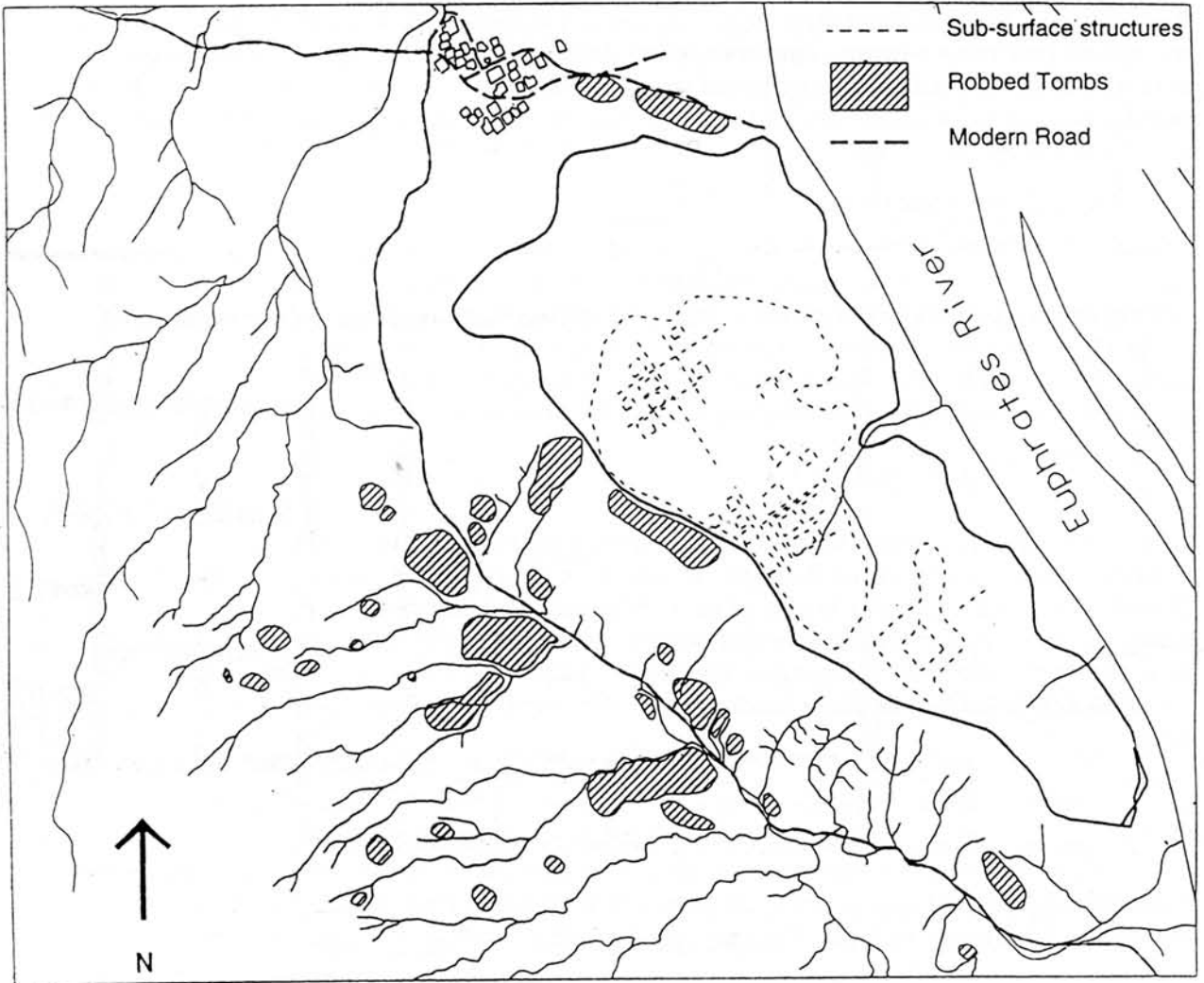
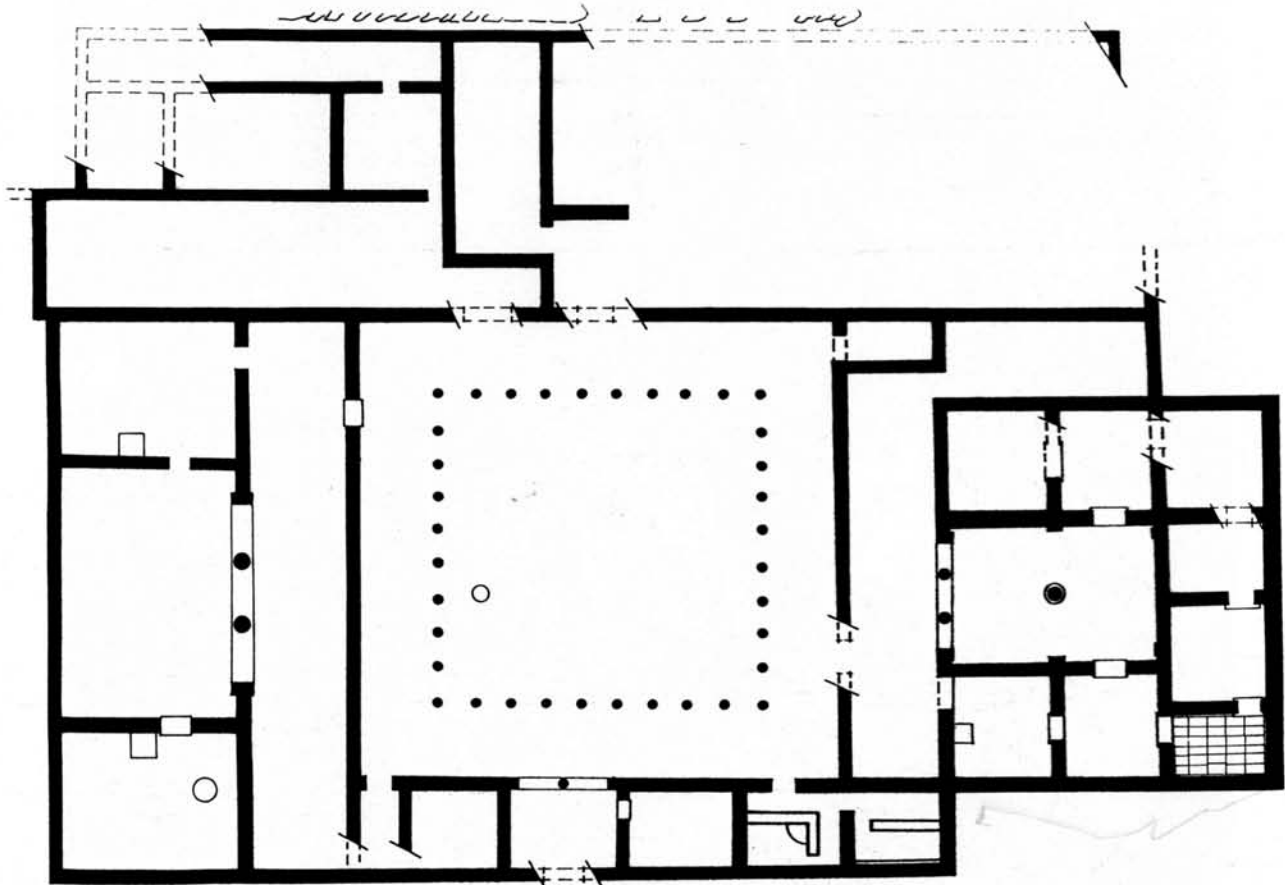


Figure 4.- Jebel Khalid and surroundings: areas with evidence of robbed-out tombs (c. 1:15000).





**JEBEL KHALID**  
**ACROPOLIS PALACE PLAN • RECONSTRUCTION**



Figure 5.- Jebel Khalid. Acropolis Palace Plan. Reconstruction.

also has a very large mortar-lined cistern. The building appears to have been used by the governor of Jebel Khalid largely for administrative purposes and for entertaining in two major rooms his garrison troops (kitchens are located in adjacent rooms): there is little evidence to suggest domestic living although there is a well-preserved bath-room and latrine room on the eastern flank. There is also a courtyard enclosure with drum-altar still *in situ* on the NW corner. To judge from the floor deposit it was abandoned at the end of the Seleucid period, with reoccupation largely confined to two large rooms in the SW sector.



Figure 6.- Aerial Photograph of Jebel Khalid.