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## ARCHITECTURAL PATTERNS DURING NINEVITE V PERIOD IN THE KHABOUR BASIN

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### ABSTRACT

The period between the end of the fourth millennium BC and the beginning of the third millennium BC witnessed the transition from the Prehistoric Age to the Historic Ages, before the founding of the Akkadian Empire. In general, when moving from one age to another, there must be a short transition period that bears some of the characteristics of the previous age as well as some rudimentary features of the successive period in order to prepare for the coming period. And this is clearly noticeable during Ninevite V period, dated from 3000-2500 BC, which bore the same architectural patterns and forms that had appeared in the previous period LC5 i.e. Late Chalcolithic, such as the simple small temples in the shape of shrines and the Tripartite houses. As for the features that paved the way for the subsequent period, they were characterized by pottery with the paste, shape, and distinctive decoration which appeared for the first time during this period in large quantities, unlike the former production in LC5 period that was based on the simplicity of forms, manual processing, and mass production. Besides the pottery, a type of economic specialization and work organization was discovered in the Khabour Basin sites, where storage facilities appeared in the Middle Khabour Basin and that adopted storage of agriculture products which was harvested from the Upper Khabour Basin sites, this along with many other aspects which will be discussed in detail through this research.

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**KEYWORDS:** *Ninevite V period, The Khabour Basin, specialization, storage, structures, architectural patterns, rural sites.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The period between the end of fourth millennium BC (the Chalcolithic Age), and the beginning of third millennium BC (the beginning of the Early Bronze Age), was characterized as being a transitional period that had not exceeded 500 years, and it is called Ninevite V (3000-2500 BC). The name comes after the sounding conducted by Campbell Thompson and Max Mallowan in 1930 in Tell Kuyunjik, one of the two Tells in Nineveh city to the north of Mossul in Iraq. The main purpose of Thompson was to discover Cuneiform tablets, however Mallowan was more intrigued by pottery and he believed that if a deep sounding had been dug into the virgin soil, each sample of the pottery sherds found in each level would have helped to establish a chronological order for north Mesopotamia (Christie, 1970). Through that sounding they discovered five distinctive periods named Ninevite from Ninevite I on the top to Ninevite V in the bottom.

*Ninevite 1* which goes parallel with Hasouna Period (6500-5500 BC) by the plain not-masterly-made pottery.

*Ninevite 2* (5500-4500 BC) which goes parallel with Samurra and Halaf period.

*Ninevite 3* which goes parallel with Obeid period (4500-3500 BC) where it included good handmade potteries.

*Ninevite 4* (3500-3000 BC) where red potteries were found as well as crimson pottery that bears the characteristics of Uruk and Jemdet Nasr period (Jemdet Nasr that sometimes coincide with Ninevite V period).

*Ninevite 5* (3000-2500 BC) which provides refined and unique potteries never found anywhere else in that abundance and before this period (Layard, 1850). Besides the aforementioned layers, other six layers were found above them which referred to the Islamic, Roman, Sassanid, Greek, Persian and Assyrian ages respectively. Later, and through the excavations carried out in many sites, Ninevite V period was divided into three stages:

- The early stage (3000-2700 BC) where only the Painted Ware prevailed (Fig.1).

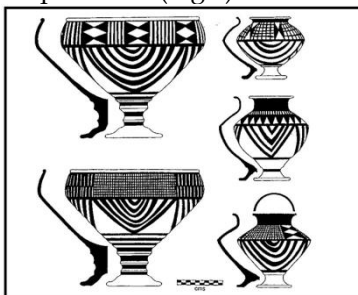


Figure 1 Painted Ninevite V Ware (Zaitchik et al 2002)

- The middle stage (2700-2600 BC) where the Incised Ware replaced the Painted Ware and
- The late stage (2600-2500 BC) where the Incised Ware and Excised Ware co-existed (Fig.2).



Figure 2 Incised and Excised Ninevite V Ware (Forest, 1996)

As for the geographic expanse to Ninevite V period, it is mostly defined through detecting the pottery shapes that distinguished Ninevite V. The geographic borders stretch from Al-Jazireh Plains in Iraq where Tell Baradasti is the farthest reach to the east, while Zarqan valley, the seasonal tributary of the Khabour River, represents the western border. As for the south, both Sinjar and Abd-al-Aziz Mountains form the border (Fig.3). It is well noticed that the farther west we go, the less the Ninevite V influence on that area is detected until it totally vanishes in Al-Balikh basin on the Euphrates. The Khabour Basin (Fig.4) is considered one of the most prosperous centers in Syrian Jazireh during Ninevite V period (Wilkinson 2004).



Figure 3 The areas over which Ninevite V had spread (Forest 1996)

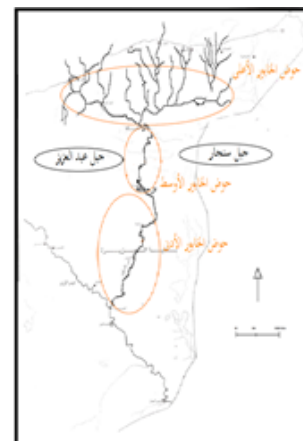


Figure 4 Upper, Middle and Lower Khabour Basi

Radical changes had happened during that period, before shifting to build megacities in the succeeding period, during the reign of the Akkadian Empire around 2500 BC. After the Urukian expansion at the end of the fourth millennium BC, extended from south Iraq to north east of Syrian Jazireh, settlement was retreated and the number of sites decreased by nearly 30%, except for some small rural sites in north of Iraq and north east of Syrian Jazireh, particularly in The Khabour Basin. Those small rural sites were characterized by having organization, functional specialization, and work division to serve a specific purpose, in addition to having unique pottery, parts, and ornaments. These civilized features had distinguished Ninevite V in spite of its relatively short period.

## 2. THE ARCHITECTURAL PATTERNS DURING NINEVITE V PERIOD

The search work for Ninevite V period began in Syria in 1980s in the Khabour Basin. That search provided new information about the existence of that period in several sites of the Khabour Basin. For example, Tell Leilan, which provides the most integrated chronological sequence about the Ninevite V period, Tell Mozan, which contains graves, included pottery from Ninevite V period, Tell Barri, which provides evidence for the existence of that period through the discovery of two shrines, Tell Arbid, which reveals an important structure that might be the administrative building of this area. In addition to other buildings discovered at Tell Chagar Bazar and in Tell Khazna where a circular large structure was found, which the excavators believe it was Ziggurat Temple -a big structure built on circular terraces and resembles the temples which were built in Iraq. As well as a number of residences found in several sites. Overall, this was large scale sites featuring residential, religious and administrative structures. Whereas in the Middle Khabour Basin several sites were discovered which, by their relatively small sizes, and by their architecture, walls and equipment, indicate that they were used for certain functions like the treating, cleaning and storing of grains in private places, as in Tell Gudeda, Tell Raqai, Tell Atij and Tell Ziyadeh (Weiss, 1993).

Despite those discoveries, archaeologist have not pinpointed a precise architectural pattern that sets Ninevite V period apart from others, because the excavation work has not reached conclusive findings related to that period, either due to focusing on other periods or because other periods have completely obliterated Ninevite V level. However, some architectural highlights were defined and led to giving an idea about Ninevite V building structures.

### 2.1 Residences

Simple residences appeared at the end of the Late Chalcolithic Age and it went parallel with the Urukian expansion to the north of Mesopotamia. At the early stage of Ninevite V period, the use of that residential pattern continued, which consisted of one or two rooms. Those residences scattered across the settlement, and it seems that they were only used for lodging families and not for any other purposes or functions. This conclusion was reached after examining the types of pottery sherds discovered there and they referred to Ninevite V period early pattern of Painted and Incised Ware used mainly for daily functions such as cooking. This type of homes is found in Tell Abou Hafour and Tell Mashnaqa (Fig.5), also individual homes were discovered in Tell Raqai' and consisted of two small rooms. Moreover, other residences were found in Tell Leilan at the low-land of the village which also has two small rooms. In addition, simple small dwellings were discovered in sector B in Tell Ras Shaqra.

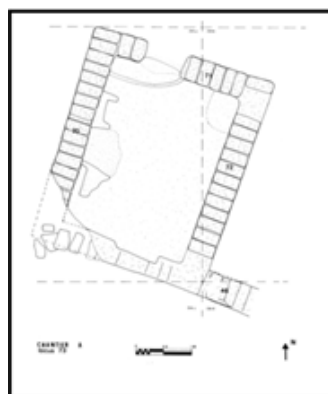


Figure 5 Individual simple home with one room in Tell Mashnaqa (Forest, 1996)

As for the later stage of Ninevite V, multi-room residences appeared and they were called "specialized residences" where they had different patterns and they were used for various activities, like storing grains in small individual warehouses or in boxes, processing the grains, and making pottery. Those "specialized residences" were discovered in Tell Bderi in the sounding opened in the southern slope and in Tell Abou Hafour in the 20<sup>th</sup> layer [6]. What really distinguishes Tell Abou Hafour residences was that they were unified and built at a standardized scale on the both sides of planned streets. Furthermore, P. Pfälzner concluded that the facades of those homes were unified too (Pfälzner, 1996). This model of architecture also appeared in Tell Chagar Bazar where it seems that the interior walls of the homes were painted more than once in plaster. In sector W in Tell Arbid a big residential structure was found which was surrounded by many rooms from

three sides. In sector SD in Tell Arbid as well, a home called the “Rich House” was discovered and it consisted of many rooms that have plastered floors. Finally in Tell Khouera, a big central square was found that has spacious homes surrounding it. Moreover, in Tell Bderi multi-room residences were discovered as well (Fig.6) (Sanchez, 2011).

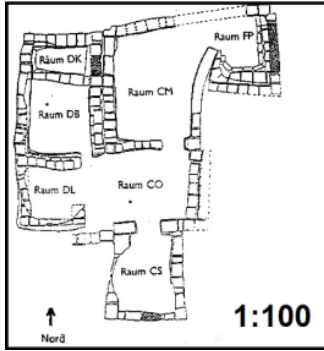


Figure 6 Plan of multi-room home from Tell Bderi (Pfälzner 1996)

2.2 Administrative buildings

It is noticed that Ninevite V sites along the Khabour Basin tend to have rural lifestyle rather than an urban one where the prevailing ruling system was Chiefdom, The settlements were governed by one chief, usually the most senior member of the ruling family or the aristocrats, but the excavations conducted have not reached concrete evidence about the administrative buildings there, however, they found some structures that can be described as administrative buildings or facilities, used for producing grains. In Tell Arbid sector S, a walled structure was discovered proved to have some trace of administrative activities like a cylinder seal and the remaining of a sealed jar which was mostly prepared for exportation.

In Tell Gudeda, the remainder of an architectural structure was found in the sounding conducted in the northern slope, which is a chain of rooms with stone foundations, separated by a courtyard equipped with ovens, basins, and a plastered channel which indicated a productional function (Fig.7) (Ristvet, 2005).



Figure 7. Building 500 in Tell Gudeda (Beyer 1992)

2.3 Temples

Besides residences and administrative buildings, temples were a must. Despite not numerous or big, all temples had shrines with one room containing the altar, a place for burning incense, and some niches and seats (Fig.8). That pattern of architecture appeared during Ninevite V period. Only three temples broke the rule of the small size: the southern temple built on a big brick platform in Tell Arbid, sector W (Fig.9), the oval temple in Tell Kaskhashouk III that has five rooms (Fig.10) (Merpert, 1999), and the complex temple in the southern side of Tell Khazna that consists of many buildings constructed on circular platforms that resemble Ziggurat temple of Iraq, The later temple was surrounded with a wall containing many towers, and we can detect the trace of ritual and productive activities (Fig.11) (Ristvet, 2005).



Figure 8. Simple shrine from Tell Khouera (Weiss 1994)



Figure 9. The southern Temple in sector W in Tell Arbid

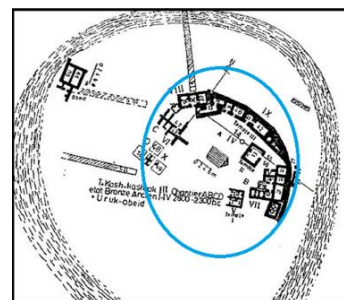


Figure 10. The oval temple in Tell Kaskhashouk





Figure 11. The complex temple in Tell Khazna

## 2.4 Storage facilities

What has been discovered during the Ninevite V in the Khabour Basin clearly indicates the existence of trade relationships among different sites. That means a kind of administration had supervised the organization and specialization of functions. Since most of Ninevite V sites were rural in their type, the common characteristic among them was of horticultural mutual interests, and the ruins found in the Khabour Basin suggest that. Excavations revealed that in those sites a network of storage facilities that are traced back to the beginning of the third millennium BC and it was concentrated in the Middle Khabour Basin.

In the early stage of the Ninevite V period these storage facilities were of grid small structure used as grain silos (Paulette, 2007). In Tell Ziyadeh (Fig.12) for example, a building that consists of several terraces of clay which form separate parallel rows, and in each row big jars containing grains was found.

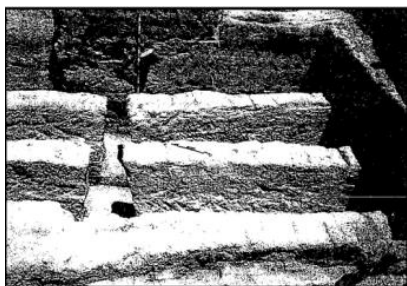


Figure 12. Grid storage facility in Tell Ziyadeh (Forest 1996)

This pattern was repeated in other sites like Tell Kneidej where several rooms at levels 5-17 with a grid pattern that do not contain doors were located, and the entrance often was from a hole in the roof. Those patterns existed also in Tell Raqai in levels 5-6-7 of the circular structure where several rooms with a grid pattern were discovered and bore the function of storing grains. In the Middle and Late stage of the Ninevite V period the size of these storage facilities and silos increased and vaulted building came into existence as well as the semi-vaulted

ones besides the grid structures. Some of these structures were surrounded by walls to protect them which indicated the important role they played in that area during that period. In Tell Atij two types of storage facilities, the grid building and the vaulted and semi-vaulted silos were discovered to the north of that Tell (Fig.13), all the interior walls were plastered and many of the vaulted silos were accessed from a hole in the roof through a huge terrace built around and near of the structures.



Figure 13. The vaulted silos in Tell Atij (Fortin 1990)

One explanation of having the access from the roof is that to protect the grains from humidity. In the middle part of the Tell, rectangular grid structures built of mud and coated on the inside with plaster were found, inside this rectangular buildings an in situ set of large jars containing some grains were discovered. All the structures in that Tell surrounded by walls served as protection (Schwartz 1992). At the fourth level of the circular structure in Tell Raqai (Fig.14), several rooms were discovered; some of them served as administrative purposes according to the mural which was a piece of plastering above the clay located in one of the rooms and which depicts a man standing up wearing a short skirt and carrying something in his hand, in addition to a few broken prints of clay seals and parts of the animal figurines. Some other rooms used for storing where some big storage jars were found in the vaulted silos.



Figure 14. The circular building in Tell Raqai'

The Middle Khabour Basin at the beginning of the third millennium BC was a complex of small sites shared a single function which is storing and processing grains in order to be used later either inside the Khabour Basin or to be traded with other areas.

### 2.5 Walls and fortifications

The excavation conducted in the Middle and Upper Khabour Basin during Ninevite V period revealed the existence of walls and sand berms surrounding those sites or specific buildings inside the sites, and this is an evidence of the crucial roles played by the walls and sand berms in protecting those sites.

What is unique about the walls and sand berms is that they were not constructed around big cities or kingdoms but around small-sized rural sites (Fortin 1995). M.Fortin sees that the site function in Tell Atij, an island and a commercial port, dictated the need to build walls because it served as a facility to store grains (Fig.15). In addition, a 2.40-meter-thick wall was discovered in Tell Kneidej, and a 6-meter-thick wall was found in the northern part of Tell Abou Hafour which might have been built as a barrier to stop the water from rising up during the flood season.

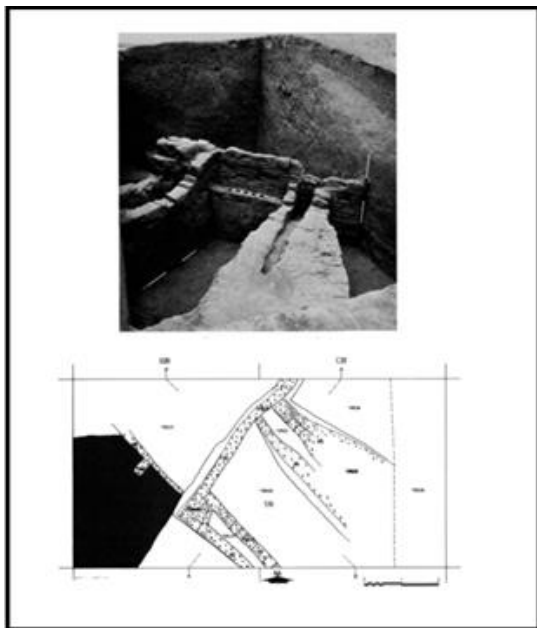


Figure 15. Walls and fortifications in Tell Atij (Weiss, 1991)

Moreover, walls and sand berms were located in Tell Ziyadeh, Melebyie and Tell Bderi, and in the Upper Khabour sites like Tell Arbid, Tell Leilan, Tell Khazna, Abou Hjeira, Rad Shaqra (Fig.16) and Khashkashouk (Sanchez, 2011), and they served as barriers to protect the cities from both floods and the enemy's attacks. What is special about those walls

and berms is the tilted side to protect the facades of the sites.

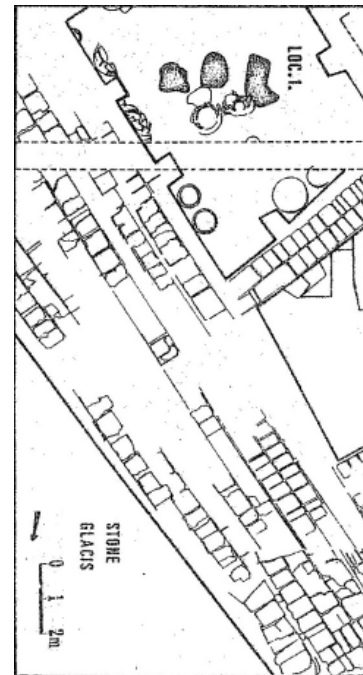


Figure 16. Walls in Tell Rad Shaqra (Fortin, 1995)

### 3. CONCLUSION

By and large, the Ninevite V period was characterized by the simple rural settlement in all sites of the Khabour Basin, and those sites were relatively small compared to the former or next periods. The common characteristic among them was horticulture and storing and processing grains. There is no clear evidence of places or big administrative buildings, except for those of Tell Arbid, where there was not obvious wealth to be transformed into buildings. The governing system depended on the complex chiefdom principle and it concentrated in the Upper Khabour Basin, while Middle Khabour Basin sites were dedicated to work.

Although simple, the architectural patterns were varied in that period where residences, administrative buildings, temples, storing facilities, walls and fortifications were located in that area, and that implies the degree of urbanization they had reached and gives a clear image of the society, the ritual practiced by the population, and other aspects related to their daily lives from the tools they had used to storing facilities they had built.

We can learn from the results of the research, excavations and surveys conducted in that area some major points characterized the city during Ninevite V period at the end of the fourth millennium BC to the beginning of the third millennium BC:

1- The development of urban planning and that is most obvious in the streets.

2- The existence of special function building like storing and processing grains, temples, and residences.

3- Temples almost have a unified pattern of architecture characterized by simple shrines of one room.

4- The walls discovered suggest the fact that they served as a defense system supervised by a special

authority, and they also indicate the importance of those sites and the buildings they include.

This is a brief insight about the most prominent aspects during Ninevite V period, but still there are a lot to be discovered and revealed and that dictates the need of having more excavations and surveys to reach precise and scientific conclusions.

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