



II Workshop on Late Neolithic Ceramics in Ancient Mesopotamia: pottery in context

Edited by

Anna Gómez-Bach Jörg Becker Miquel Molist

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Museu d'Arqueologia de Catalunya

II Workshop on Late Neolithic Ceramics in Ancient Mesopotamia: pottery in context



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antoni.palomo@gencat.cat

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II WORKSHOP ON LATE NEOLITHIC CERAMICS IN ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIA: POTTERY IN CONTEXT

BARCELONA 2018

Edited by

Anna Gómez-Bach Jörg Becker Miquel Molist

Collaborators

Adrià Breu Sílvia Calvo

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NEOLITHIC POTTERY FROM TELL NADER (ERBIL)

Claudia Beuger*, Konstantinos Kopanias**

Tell Nader (Erbil, Kurdistan Iraquí) fue excavado por la Universidad de Atenas (Grecia) del 2011 al 2013. Los niveles principales del yacimiento pueden asignarse a los periodos Ubaid y post-Ubaid y con fragmentos Halaf en estos estratos calcolíticos. La enorme cantidad de cerámica con inclusiones vegetales permite también proponer una ocupación proto-Hassuna extensa.

Norte de Irak, Hassuna, Halaf, Ubaid, post-Ubaid.

Tell Nader (Erbil, Kurdistan Iraq), was excavated by the University of Athens (Greece) between 2011 and 2013. The main levels of the site so far can be assigned to the Ubaid and post-Ubaid periods. Some Halafian sherds are known from these chalcolithic layers. Finally, the huge amount of plant coarse ware sherds lets us assume some more extensive Proto-Hassuna presence.

Northern Iraq, Hassuna, Halaf, Ubaid, post-Ubaid

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, the University of Athens (Greece) in cooperation with the Directorate of Antiquities of Erbil conducts excavations in Tell Nader (Kurdistan Region Iraq). The site lies on the outskirts of the city of Erbil (36.173148°, 44.075490°), approximately 6,3 km E-NE of the citadel. It is c. 1 hectare big and c. 5 m high. Prior to its discovery it was partially destroyed by a bulldozer during construction works. Preliminary reports about the finds from the excavation seasons 2011-2013 have already been published (Kopanias *et al.* 2013; Kopanias *et al.* 2014) and a series of more detailed papers appeared in the Conference Proceedings “*Archaeological Research in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the Adjacent Areas*” (Beuger 2016 [pottery]; Fox *forthcoming* [human remains]; Hadjikoumis 2016 [animal remains];

Kourtessi-Philippakis *forthcoming* [lithics] and Kopanias 2016 [Burials]).

The youngest finds in the site date from the Late 2nd or Early 1st millennium BC but those levels are completely eroded. The prehistoric levels, in contrast, lie directly under the modern surface. The excavation so far revealed three undisturbed stratigraphic layers. *Layer 4* includes a number of pyrotechnic constructions (mainly ovens and kilns) with pottery and characteristic small finds (e.g. clay nails) from the Late Ubaid period (Fig. 1). Shortly after the abandonment of the kilns and ovens the area was used for the disposal of sherds, animal bones and various items (*layer 3*, Fig. 2). Tell Nader must now be added to the growing list of Ubaid period sites demonstrating a circumferential form of headshaping, since a skeleton with such a feature was buried rudely in one

* Faculty Member, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Seminar für Orientalische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte, Universitätsplatz 10, 06108 Halle (Saale), Alemania, claudia.beuger@orientarch.uni-halle.de

** Assistant Professor at the Department of History and Archaeology of the National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, University Campus, GR 157 84 Athens, Grècia, kkopanias@arch.uoa.gr



Figure 1. Tell Nader, Layer 4: pyrotechnic constructions.

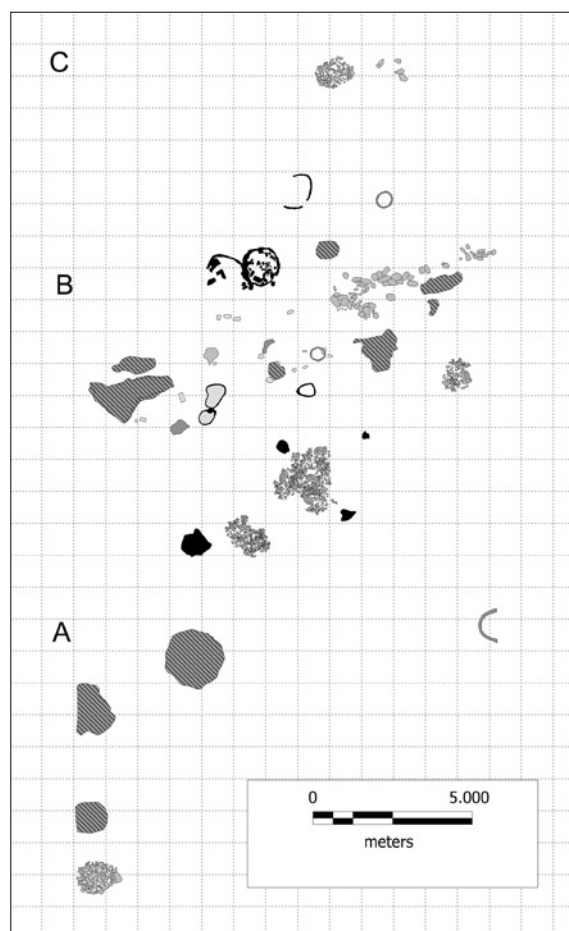


Figure 2. Tell Nader, Layer 3: pyrotechnic constructions used as dumps.

of the earlier kilns of *layer 4* (Kopanias/Fox 2016)¹. The excavation season 2013 brought to light a deeper layer (*Layer 5*) of slightly older pyrotechnic constructions; one of them had a particularly complex design and was not used for pottery production, but for other small objects (Fig. 3), Kopanias *forthcoming*.

We do not comment the pottery on the Chalcolithic periods in detail since this aspect of Tell Nader was recently published within another conference volume (Beuger 2016).

DISCUSSION

For the Neolithic period at Tell Nader we still lack any stratigraphic context, but it is well presented by several sherds, which have been found on the surface or in later layers. The earliest Neolithic material of Tell Nader has good parallels with the well-known Proto-Hassu-

na sites (summarizing: Nieuwenhuyse 2007: 177). The undecorated carinated shoulder fragments, (Fig. 4a-d) which are frequent in some more or less homogeneous collections, are reminiscent of vessels for example at Tell Sotto or Yarim Tepe I (Bader 1993, 48, Fig. 3.5; Merpert/Munchaev 1993, 106 Fig. 6.18 type I). Even the coarse fabric with a high amount of organic temper and the often brownish or greyish colour is the same (Merpert/Munchaev 1993, 105). Other candidates for a Proto-Hassuna date are fragments with an application (Fig. 4e-f; Bader 1993, 49-50 Fig. 3.6-7). However, such decoration at Sabi Abyad seems to be more associated with the slightly later transitional phase Pre-Halaf/ Early Halaf IIIA around 6000 BC (Nieuwenhuyse 2007, 174). Unfortunately we cannot provide a new clue to a more accurate date of this material at this stage of the excavation.

The bitumen painted rim sherds are of some interest. This kind of decoration, mainly on coarse plant tem-

1. For other cases of headshaping in the Ubaid period, see Lorentz 2010.

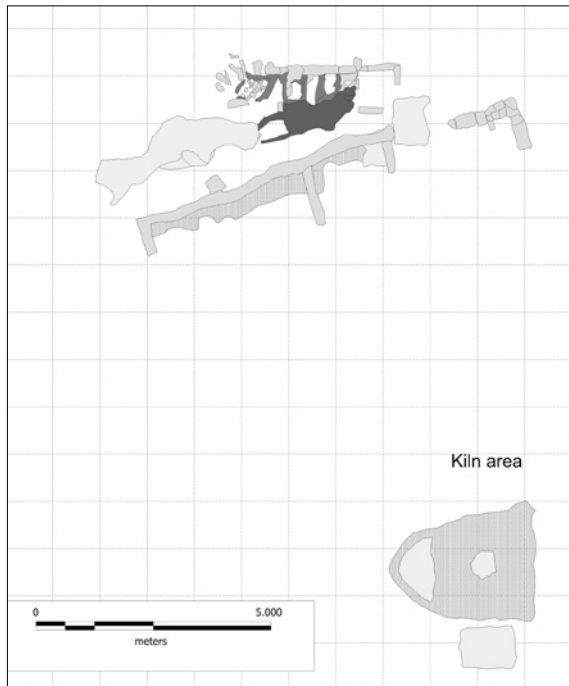


Figure 3. Tell Nader, Layer 5: pyrotechnic constructions.

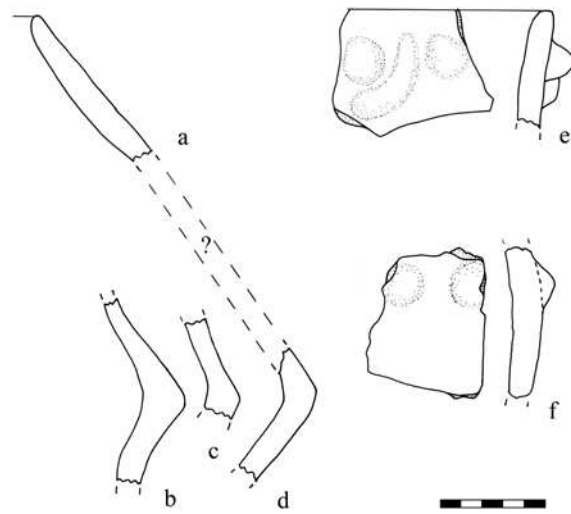


Figure 4. Tell Nader: sherds dedicated to the Proto-Hassuna period.

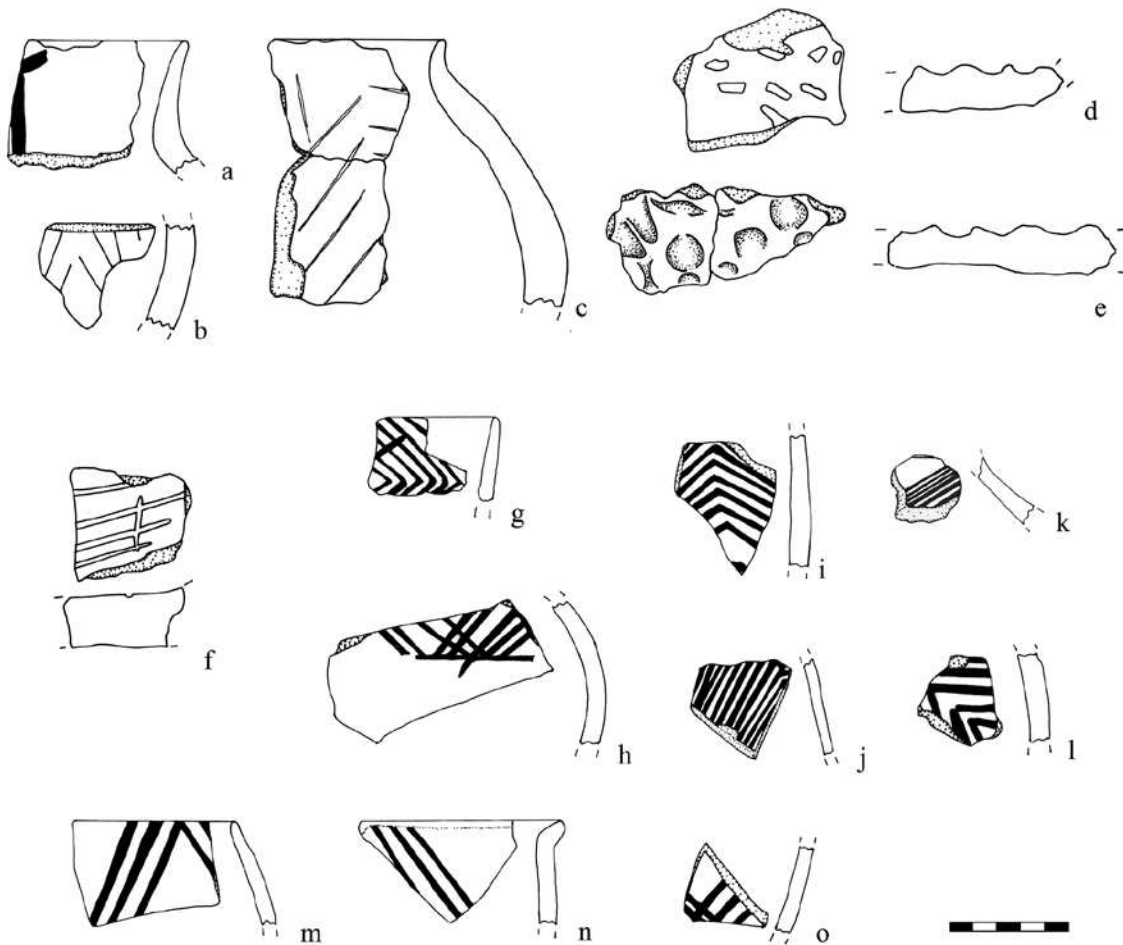


Figure 5. Tell Nader: sherds dedicated to the Pre-Halaf period.

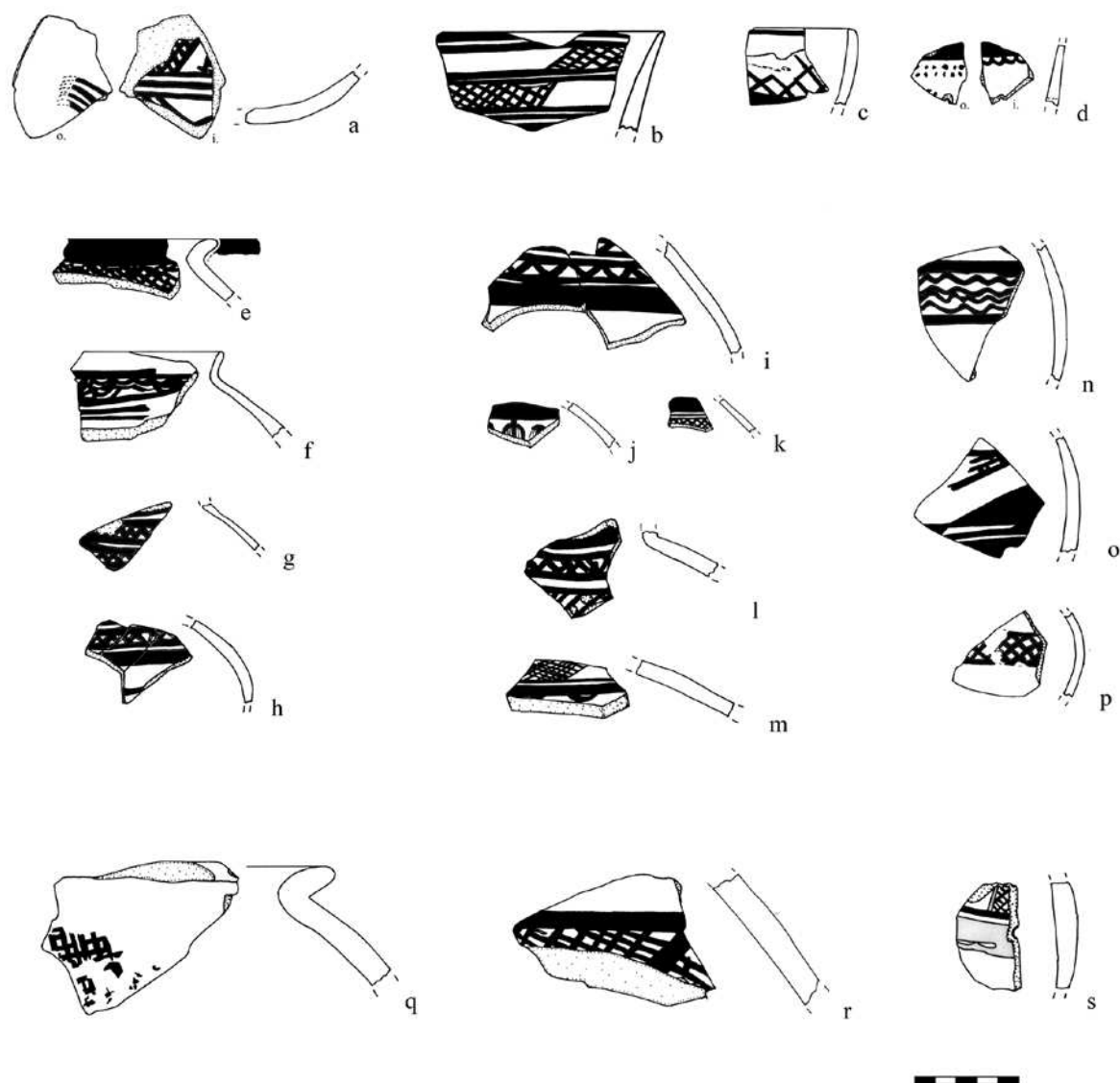


Figure 6. Tell Nader: sherds dedicated to the Halaf period.

pered vessels like (Fig. 5a), is known at Sabi Abyad especially from levels 6-7 (Pre-Halaf/Early Halaf IIIA; Nieuwenhuyse 2007, 36, 177; Connan *et al.* 2004). They might be more or less contemporary² with the painted sherds of the Hassuna (Fig. 5g-l)³ and Samarra style (Fig. 5m-o)⁴. The latter pieces show the typical cream-coloured slip with a reddish brown paint. Sherds with a roughly shaped but often very fine incised her-

ringbone pattern (Fig. 5b-c) should be assigned to the Early Hassuna as the best parallels can be found in Nineveh 1.⁵ Additionally, we observed several fragments of the so called husking trays (Fig. 5d-f).⁶ The style of the inner surface with finger or other imprints is still seen as a marker for the Hassuna period, but referring to Nieuwenhuyse (2007, 117) more for the later part.

All sherds which were dedicated to the Halaf-complex

2. Chronological framework referring to Nieuwenhuyse 2007, 10-11, 36, 177.

3. The character of the bundled lines is generally denser than for the Samarra style; for example Gut 1995. The fabric of (Fig. 5g) is more reminiscent of the Halafian material. It was added here because of the herringbone pattern, which seems to be more characteristic for Hassunian bowls.

4. Fig. 4 m: Although the typical 3 or 4 horizontal lines which frame the banded decoration are missing (Gut 1995, 87) we can refer to examples from Nineveh which were dedicated to the Samarra style: Gut 1995, Taf. 25.435-436. Fig. 4 n: shape cf. Gut 1995, Taf. 24.431, 28.462.

5. At Tell Hassuna 80 % of the Early Hassuna sherds were incised (Gut 1995, 183) and Proto-Hassuna is not present at Nineveh (Gut 1995, 80). For references see Gut 1995, Taf. 2.20,21,23; 3.2.

6. Nieuwenhuyse 2007, 116-117: (Fig. 5d-e) cf. level 8 type (End Pre-Halaf), (Fig. 5f) cf. lev. 7-5 type (trans. Pre-Halaf/Early Halaf IIIA).

fig.	description	fabric/technology	color	dm in cm
4a	jar	very fine clay, a lot of organic temper (partly not burned), sometimes pieces of lime, some black mineral temper, rough structure, hand, wet finish, soft-middle hard	o. greyish beige, i. beige, c. grey	i. 34,0
4b	jar, shoulder	like 4a	o./i. light orange-orange, c. beige	i. carin. 18,0
4c	jar, shoulder	like 4a	o./i. beige, c. grey	-
4d	jar, shoulder	very fine clay, a lot of large pieces of chamotte (?), some black mineral incl., lamellar structure, some long pores, hand, wet finish, soft (fragile)	o./i. beige, c. grey	i. carin. 27,0
4e	deep bowl, o. application	very fine clay, a lot of organic temper (partly not burned), often larger pieces of lime, sometimes black mineral incl., rough structure, a lot of large pores, hand, wet finish, middle hard-hard	o. orange, i. beige, c. grey	i. 24,0
4f	body sherd, o. application	like 4e	o. greyish beige, i. beige, c. dark grey	-
5a	bottle, o. bitumen painting	very fine clay, a lot of organic temper (partly not burned), sometimes pieces of lime, some black mineral temper, rough structure, hand, wet finish, soft-middle hard	o./i./c. orange	i. 10,0
5b	body sherd, o. fine incisions	like 5a	o./i./c. light orange	i. 14,0
5c	pot, o. fine incisions	like 5a	o. brownish grey, i. beige/light orange-brownish, c. grey/dark grey	i. 14,0
5d	"husking tray", i. notches	fine clay, a lot of middle organic temper, some larger pieces of lime, sometimes larger black mineral incl. and fine lime, lamellar structure, a lot of larger pores, hand, wet finish, hard	o./i. beige-light orange, c. grey/dark grey	-
5e	"husking tray", i. finger impressions	fine clay, a lot of middle organic temper and fine-middle lime, sometimes larger pieces of lime, rough lamellar, a lot of larger pores, hand, wet finish, middle hard	o. light orange, i. reddish beige, c. greyish beige	-
5f	"husking tray", i. rough incisions	very fine clay, a lot of middle organic temper (partly not burned), some middle-large lime pieces, some black stones, rough lamellar structure, a lot of larger pores, hand, wet finish, soft-middle hard	o./i. beige, c. greyish beige	-
5g	bowl, o. reddish painting (almost disappeared)	very fine clay, no temper, very dense structure, hand, wet finish, very hard	o. light greyish beige i. light beige, c. grey	i. 16,0
5h	body sherd, o. yellowish brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine mineral and lime, some not intended organic temper, dense structure, wheel (?), wet finish, hard	o./i. beige, c. grey	i. 18,0
5i	body sherd, o. brown painting	very fine clay, frequent fine and middle lime, a lot of middle black mineral, some organic temper, dense structure, some fine-middle pores, hand, o. slip (?), i. rough burnish, very hard-hard	o. light beige, i. reddish beige, c. light orange	-
5j	body sherd, o. dark brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine mineral and lime, some not intended organic temper, dense structure, hand, o. slip, i. scratches, hard	o. beige, i. greyish beige, c. grey	-
5k	body sherd, o. dark reddish brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine-middle lime and fine organic temper, fine lamellar structure, some larger pores, hand, wet finish, middle hard	o. light beige, i. reddishbeige-beige c. beige	i. 8,0
5l	body sherd, o. dark brown painting	very fine clay, frequent fine and middle lime, a lot of middle black mineral, some organic temper, dense structure, some fine-middle pores, wheel (?), wet finish, very hard-hard	o./i. light orange, c. reddish beige	-
5m	bowl, o. brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine-middle lime, some larger pieces of lime, dense structure, frequent larger pores, hand, wet finish, hard	o./i. beige cortex, c. reddish beige	i. 26,0

fig.	description	fabric/technology	color	dm in cm
5n	bowl, o. aubergine painting	fine clay, mineral incl., frequent fine organic temper, sometimes middle-a lot of fine-middle large lime, dense structure, larger pores, hand, o. slip, i. erased slip (?), hard	o. beige, i./c. orange	i. 24,0
5o	body sherd, o. orange painting	very fine clay, mineral incl., some fine organic incl. (not intended), some fine lime, dense structure, some fine pores, hand, o./i. slip (?), hard	o./i. light beige, c. orange	-
6a	base, o. reddish brown painting, i. light orange brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine-middle lime, some larger pieces of lime, dense structure, frequent larger pores, hand, o. wet finish, i. slightly smoothed, hard	o. beige, i. reddish beige, c. orange	-
6b	bowl, o. reddish brown painting	fine clay, some mineral, mica, organic and lime inclusions, dense structure with some larger pores, hand, wet finish, hard	o./i. light beige, c. reddish beige	i. 40,0
6c	bowl, o. reddish orange painting (almost invisible)	very fine clay, no temper, very dense structure, wheel (?), wet finish, very hard	o. light beige, i./c. reddish beige- light orange	i. 18,0
6d	pot (?), o./i. reddish brown painting, secondary perforation	fine clay, some mineral, organic and lime inclusions, dense structure with some extended pores, wheel (?), o./i. slightly smoothed, hard	o./i. light orange, c. orange	i. 10,0
6e	pot, o. dark brown and transparent black painting	like 6d, but hand, wet finish	o. beige, i./c. reddish beige	i. 12,0
6f	pot, o. brown painting	very fine clay, no temper (some not intended organic incl.), very dense structure with some fine pores, hand, wet finish, very hard	o./i./c. beige	i. 8,0
6g	pot (?), o. brown painting	like 6f, but wheel	o./i./c. beige	-
6h	pot (?), o. brown painting	like 6f, but wheel	o./i./c. beige	i. 18,0
6i	pot (?), o. orange brown painting	like 6f, but o. smoothed, i. wet finish	o./i./c. beige	i. 20,0
6j	pot (?), o. brown painting (partly transparent)	like 6b	o. beige, i./c. greenish beige	i. 22,0
6k	pot (?), o. orange brown painting	like 6f	o./i./c. light orange	-
6l	pot (?), o. black painting	like 6f, but o. slightly smoothed	o./i. light greenish beige, c. reddish beige	i. 8,0
6m	pot (?), o. black painting	fine clay, frequent mineral incl. and organic temper, dense structure, larger pores, hard	o./i./c. light orange- orange	-
6n	pot (?), more or less transparent orange brown painting	fine clay, a lot of fine-middle lime, some larger pieces of lime, dense structure, frequent larger pores, hand, wet finish, hard	o./i./c. beige	i. 22,0
6o	pot (?), o. reddish painting (almost invisible)	fine clay, frequent black mineral incl. and a lot of fine lime, some not intended organic incl., dense but fine lamellar structure, some larger pores, o. wet finish, i. rough burnish, hard	o. beige, i./c. orange	-
6p	pot (?), o. reddish brown painting	very fine clay, mineral incl., some fine organic incl. (not intended), some fine lime, dense structure, some fine pores, hand, wet finish, hard	o./i. light orange, c. orange	i. 12,0
6q	pot, o. reddish brown painting	fine clay, no temper (some not intended organic incl.), very dense structure with some fine pores, hand, wet finish, very hard	o. light beige, i./c. light orange	i. 18,0
6r	pot (?), o. reddish brown painting	very fine clay, no temper, very dense structure, hand, o. slightly smoothed, i. wet finish, very hard	o./i. beige, c. light grey	i. 49,0
6s	body sherd/lid (secondary perforation), reddish brown bichrome painting	like 6a, but o./i. wet finish	o./i./c. beige	-

Figure 7. Table with sherd description.

were chosen because of their fine fabric and the more or less buff colour. Indeed some examples show few organic inclusions, although without an intended character. The excavated chalcolithic layers in comparison provided mostly organic tempered, buff material or the typical greenish highly burnt conical bowls of fine fabric. Furthermore, Becker (2012, 126) stressed that the addition of organic temper can be seen as an important criterion to separate Halafian and Ubaidian painted pottery. Only (Fig. 6a, d, i, l, r) have a slight polish, but we are dealing with predominately a wet finish (Fig 7).

The following attempt of a finer chronological placement of the sherds refers mainly to the results of Becker (2012), which were developed on the basis of the Tawila material. The flat bowl (Fig. 6a) might be dedicated to the Halaf Ib in regard to its rounded shape and the dense decoration.⁷ The dots in Fig. 6d are very typical in the Late Halaf (Becker 2012, 169). The general character of this selection (Fig. 6b-c,e-r) is Middle Halaf (Halaf IIa).⁸ The Halaf-Ubaid-transition, which is proved especially at the nearby Tepe Gawra (Becker 2012, 22), so far lacks any support at Tell Nader. Only the decoration pattern of Fig. 6s finds a good reference at Tepe Gawra XIX, which was dedicated to this horizon.⁹ The example of Tell Nader was a lid in secondary use, so we cannot identify the original shape and we should not overestimate this piece.

CONCLUSION

As already mentioned, the excavation at Tell Nader has not reached the Neolithic layers yet. However the large size and high frequency of the coarse Hassuna material lets us assume a more extensive settlement activity for that era. We estimate that below the currently excavated layer of the Late Ubaid/Early Uruk period, there are 2.5-3 m of earlier archaeological strata, which will hopefully enable us to provide a new prehistoric reference sequence for a more precise placement of the earlier excavations at Tepe Gawra and especially the nearby Qalinj Agha.

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7. For the rounded shape and a dense decoration see Tepe Gawra, Area A (Tobler 1950, Pl. CXI, 14-15; CXIII,25). For the Halaf Ib-date of this context see Becker 2016, 22.

8. References in Tell Tawila: deep conical bowl (Fig. 6b) cf. Becker 2016, 144-146 type S7b (because of the large diameter not identified as the earlier "cream bowl" S7a), rounded bowl (Fig. 6c) cf. Becker 2016, 143-144 type S6 (Halaf IIb-Ubaid, but most frequent in Halaf II), rounded pots with a conical rim (Fig. 6e-f,q and probably the body sherds g-p,r) cf. Becker 2016, 151-152 type T[5]-J7 (mainly Halaf IIa/b but also present in Ubaid contexts). Please note that sherd (Fig. 6j) does not show bukrania, but also a known motif of the Halaf period (cf. Mallowan/Cruikshank Rose 1935, Fig. 69 [horizontal]).

9. Tobler 1950, Pl. CXXII,101. For the chronological placement cf. Becker 2016, 22.

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