

Newcomers and autochthons

The 2016–2017 UGZAR survey in the Kurdistan Autonomous Region, Iraq. Settlement pattern in the Ninevite 5 period (2012–2017)



Abstract: The paper presents the results of the last two field campaigns (autumn seasons of 2016 and 2017) of the “Newcomers and autochthons” project, conducted since 2013 within the framework of the UGZAR (Upper Greater Zab Archaeological Reconnaissance) project in the Upper Greater Zab area of the Kurdistan Autonomous Region of Iraq. A short preliminary account on the sites found during this period is followed by an overview of the Ninevite 5 settlement pattern based on data gathered over the course of six seasons of prospection within the research area.

Keywords: Late Chalcolithic, Ninevite 5 period, Kurdistan Autonomous Region, archaeological survey, settlement pattern

The present article is the third in a series of preliminary assessments of the fieldwork results in the “Newcomers and autochthons” project supported by the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, conducted since 2013 within the frame of the “Upper Greater Zab Archaeological Reconnaissance” (UGZAR) project directed by Assist. Prof. Rafał Koliński (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań; for the first and second report in this series, see Ławecka 2015; 2016). The main goal of the project is a study of archaeological remains belonging to the Late Chalcolithic (LC) and Ninevite 5 periods (approximately 4500–2550 BC) found on sites located during field prospection undertaken in the UGZAR region.

During two field campaigns in 2016 and 2017, the remaining, southeastern part of the project area was

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explored [Fig. 1]. As in previous seasons, several selected regions were thoroughly and systematically investigated, while the identification of other sites was based mainly on a non-systematic survey, interviews with local inhabitants and analysis of satellite imagery. A considerable part of the landscape was hilly or mountainous, especially in the southern part, but it also consisted of the relatively flat southern bank of the Greater Zab and the large Harīr plain region (Dašt-ī Harīr).

Despite a seemingly favorable environment, Late Chalcolithic settlements

were extremely rare in the region. Minor collections of pottery were identified on five sites [see Fig. 1].¹ LC1–2 material was found on sites S207, S245, S248 and S258. These assemblages included inwardly beveled-rim bowls, which are diagnostic of the LC2 period, but were still in use in the LC3 period (Peyronel and Vacca 2015: 113), but also, among others, a few neckless flaring-rim jars and early internally hollowed jars. Perhaps the most interesting site is S248, which yielded pottery showing a clear continuity between late Ubaid and LC1, including two bottom

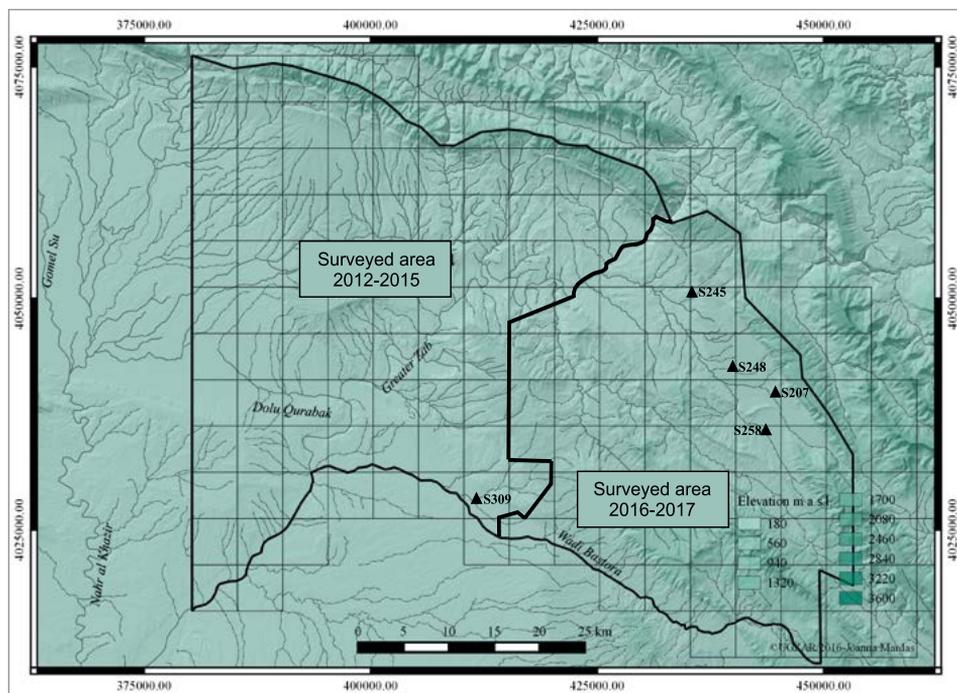


Fig. 1. Map of the UGAR area with Late Chalcolithic sites found in the 2016–2017 seasons (© UGAR/digitizing J. Mardas, D. Ławecka)

- 1 After a detailed study of the pottery, a few Late Chalcolithic sites were redated compared to the preliminary assessment (Ławecka 2015; 2016). Although most identifications and the overall picture and conclusions have stayed the same, for detailed information on particular sites readers are requested to consult respective chapters on Late Chalcolithic settlement in the final publication of the UGAR project (in preparation).

fragments of a northern variety of Coba bowls typical of Tepe Gawra XII (Rothman 2002: 55 and Pl. 5, two upper rows). No key diagnostic LC3–5 sherds were found, but the pottery analysis is still in progress. A fragment which looks very much like an Uruk beveled-rim bowl, found on S309, was quite astonishing. This is a solitary Late Chalcolithic sherd found on a site, which otherwise did not yield any pottery earlier than the Late Assyrian period.

The last century of the 4th millennium BC in northern Mesopotamia was a short, post-LC period referred to as Terminal Uruk [Fig. 2]. It is characterized by pottery still related to or derived from the

typical Late Uruk assemblages, but with some new, distinctive traits prefiguring later developments (Roaf 2000: 435–436; Rova 2014). Only one sherd found on So26 may be tentatively ascribed to this period, which is otherwise absent from our collections.

Several sites yielding Ninevite 5 were found in the recent two seasons, primarily in the Harir plain, and since preliminary reports from the survey so far have failed to present anything with regard to the period, the following reviews in brief all of the Ninevite 5 period sites discovered in the survey region to date.

Most of the first half of the 3rd millennium BC in northern Mesopotamia is referred to as the Ninevite 5 period (about 3000–2250 BC, see Fig. 2), after the fifth stratum in a deep test trench at Kuyunjik (one of the tells located within the ancient city of Niniveh), where Max Mallowan found characteristic painted pottery. A distinctive, local cluster of Ninevite 5 pottery styles evolved from the Terminal Uruk background, through the Transitional and Intermediate phases. After a period of coexistence of painted and incised ware, painted decoration disappeared, replaced by the late incised and excised variety of pottery (for an overview of the Ninevite 5 period, see Roaf 2000; Rova 1988; forthcoming; Rova and Weiss 2003, all with further reference; for the pottery, see recently Grossman 2014 and Arrivabeni forthcoming).

The survey assemblage of Ninevite 5 pottery consists of nearly 300 sherds. The only intact vessel [Fig. 3:16] was shown by villagers at the very first site we came across at the beginning of the 2012 campaign. It was found digging a cesspit, and

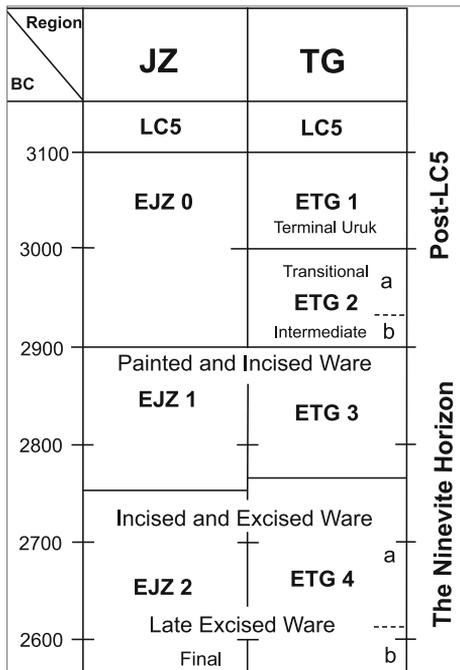


Fig. 2. Chronological chart of the post-LC5 and Ninevite 5 periods; ETG – Early Tigridian, JZ – Jezirah, according to ARCANE terminology (based on Grossman 2014: 89, Fig. 2 and Arrivabeni forthcoming)

might attest to the presence of a Ninevite 5 cemetery. No other vessel shapes could be reconstructed from the fragments that were collected.

The dating of the period was based solely on the most distinctive sherds:

Painted ones, usually fragments of bowls on pedestal bases (wherever the attribution to a particular kind of vessel was possible), and body sherds, as well as fine wares with ribbed, incised/impressed or excised decoration [see Fig. 3]. In this



Fig. 3. Ninevite 5 pottery from sites S001 (16), S029 (14), S033 (2, 9), S037 (18), S079 (13), S120 (4, 11, 12), S142 (10), S151 (15), S218 (1, 7, 8, 17), S248 (5) and S253 (3, 6) © UGZAR/photos D. Piasecki, M. Szablowski [14, 16] and S. Tlili [6]

last group, early incised decoration predominated and excised specimens were altogether rare. Among the undecorated pottery fragments of pedestal bases, fine ware cups (especially those with ribbed walls and/or in Grey Ware fabric), as well as Cooking Ware pots with crescentic lugs proved to be useful. Undecorated Common Ware vessels both from Ninevite 5 and the subsequent mid-to-late 3rd millennium BC are still rather poorly known, therefore no attempt was made to use such specimens as chronological markers.

On 16 sites, located mainly on the Harīr plain in the southeastern part of the survey area, a specific, previously unknown local kind of fine ware pottery was found, dubbed “Harīr Purple Painted Ware” after the area of its concentration.

This assemblage consists mainly of high quality, thin-walled small footed cups and probably also small jars, usually with a simple purple or plum painted banded decoration against an orange or creamy background [Fig. 4:1,3,5,7–9]. In some cases the surface of the whole fragment is painted or the pattern is slightly more elaborate; a few examples show geometric decoration in the form of hatched areas and curved bands [Fig. 4:2,4,6]. The fragments collected were for the most part small body or rim parts, hence no shapes were fully restorable. Even so, few footed bottoms seem to belong to this class of pottery.

Although the age of this particular kind of pottery cannot be established without excavation, its coexistence with

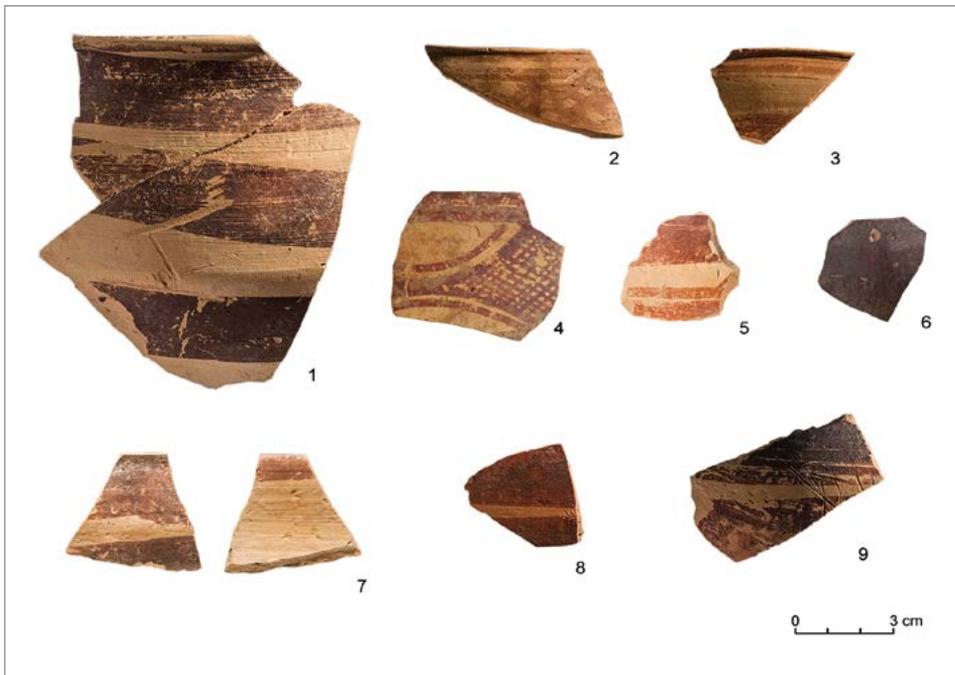


Fig. 4. Harīr Purple Painted Ware from sites S218 (5, 7), S245 (6), S252 (8), S253 (1, 2, 3, 9) and S304 (4) © UGZAR/photos D. Piasecki [5,7], A. Stefanski [4] and S. Tlili

Ninevite 5 sherds on 13 sites (including S253, where the only other identified kind of pottery belonged to the Ninevite 5 period, and S218, a site which apart from a large collection of Ninevite 5 sherds yielded only LC₁–2 and late Sasanian/early Islamic pottery) may suggest the contemporaneity of these two types. Their coexistence would further be corroborated by the appearance side by side of specimens displaying features of both Ninevite and “Harīr Purple Painted Ware”. In a few cases it is even difficult to assign a sherd to a particular category, because the shape and/or decoration is typical Ninevite 5, but the orange sur-

face color of the sherd is atypical for the overwhelming majority of the Ninevite 5 assemblage, or the other way round, the decoration is a Ninevite 5 pattern but executed in purple paint, which is otherwise extremely rare in our repertoire. There is also a standard fine Grey Ware sherd with impressed decoration bearing traces of purple paint, a feature clearly in contrast to Ninevite canons of decorating vessels with either painted or incised/excised patterns. These examples point to the Early Painted and Incised Ninevite 5 as the most plausible period for the occurrence of the “Harīr Purple Painted Ware” pottery style.

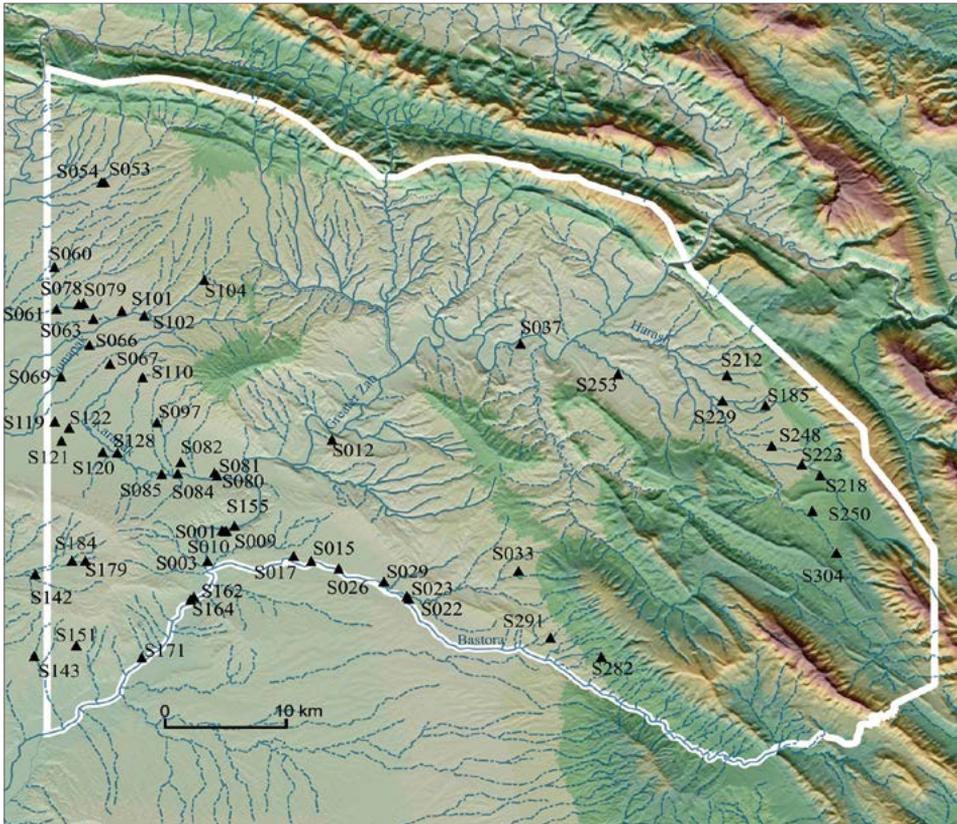


Fig. 5. Ninevite 5 sites in the UGARZAR survey area (© UGARZAR/digitizing J. Mardas)

Ninevite 5 pottery came from 58 sites [Fig. 5], most of them in the western (especially in the environs of the Navkur plain) and the southwestern part of the survey area, along the Greater Zab river and the Bastora Çay Valley, which constitute the southern limit of the concession. Several Ninevite 5 sites were found in the east, mostly in the region of the Harîr plain. On the contrary, the northern and central parts (including most of the Greater Zab valley) were almost devoid of Ninevite 5 settlements, but this area was largely empty or only sparsely populated also in prehistory and throughout the Bronze Age. In general, the Ninevite 5 settlements are located on the plains, in the vicinity of perennial or seasonal streams, and on the shores of the Greater Zab river. Eighteen sites yielded each a single, even if typical Ninevite 5 potsherd, making the period assignment rather weak. A more or less equal number of settlements produced assemblages comprising more than three fragments, including 12 which yielded between 10 and 22 Ninevite 5 sherds.

A finer phasing of painted pottery proved to be difficult. Some motifs characteristic of the mature phase were present already in the Transitional phase. A crucial difference lies in the way in which simple patterns are arranged into complex ones on the surface of a vessel, a characteristic that is difficult, if not impossible, to recognize on small sherds with a fragmentarily preserved pattern. Incised decoration shows more variability in time, but some types of incised designs are present in more than one phase (Rova 1988: 107–109). In her study of Ninevite 5 ceramics, Kathryn Grossman wrote

pointedly: “The successive phases are presented here as clearly bounded units, but their borders are actually relatively porous and indistinct. It is important, therefore, to look at Ninevite 5 ceramic assemblages in aggregate; a single type seldom provides a definite indication of a particular phase” (Grossman 2014: 88).

The density of Ninevite 5 sites in comparison to the LC3–5 period increased greatly. Only 11 sites were occupied in both periods. Few of them were multi-period tells, possibly local centers thriving for a long time, e.g., So63 (Grd-î Rovîa), So80 (Grd-î Çemê Gaûrê) and So33 (Qala-î Dêrê), but since only one site (So26) yielded a Terminal Uruk sherd and very little material may be tentatively ascribed to the beginning of the Ninevite 5 (Transitional period), the continuity of settlement is problematic and cannot be proved. Of the Ninevite sites, 47 (81%)—all but S248 found in the Harîr plain area—were newly established settlements, with no LC3–5 pottery attested. This veritable expansion appears to have taken place in the earlier Ninevite 5 phase, in a period when ribbed, painted and/or painted and early incised vessels were in use.

As shown by the results of the “North Jazira” survey in the area of Tell al-Hawa in northwestern Iraq, signs of a three-tiered settlement hierarchy are recognizable already in the Ninevite 5 period (perhaps later than the early phase, since incised Grey Ware was frequent, but painted sherds rare), the largest town being Tell al-Hawa (at least 24 ha), one-to-three small town-like secondary centers being next in line and numerous hamlets at the lowest level (Wilkinson

and Tucker 1995: 49–50). Although in the earlier part of the Ninevite 5 period, most of the excavated sites (particularly in the Eski Mosul Dam Salvage Project, where several Ninevite 5 sites in the Tigris Valley were briefly examined) were of village size, larger settlements were also in existence. Fragments of painted pottery were found all over the site of Tell Jikan in the Eski Mosul Dam project region, suggesting that by the painted and incised pottery phase, it had already become a town covering an area of at least 20 ha. A few other Ninevite 5 sites might have grown to comparable size, including Nineveh itself. A fourth tier was added to this settlement hierarchy at the very end of the period when sites of truly city size appeared in the Upper Khabur drainage basin (Hamoukar, Tell Leilan, Tell Brak, see Ławecka forthcoming; for Niniveh, see Rova 2017).

Survey pottery collections were made from selected sectors of different sites, hence the impossibility of establishing the area of Ninevite settlement on multi-period sites. Nevertheless, most of them seem to have been rather small villages and hamlets, 37 sites not exceeding 4 ha in area, and the actual settled area in the Ninevite 5 period being probably considerably smaller. On the other sites, Ninevite 5 pottery is confirmed only in very restricted areas (on other large sites, consisting of a tell and a lower town, the sherds occur in exceedingly limited numbers only on the mound), certainly not exceeding 4 ha. There is no obvious candidate for a local town center and the settlement pattern seems to be uniform and simple.

The heartland area of the Ninevite 5 pottery styles encompasses most of

northern Iraq and northeastern Syria, but its borders, as well as an extension of the peripheral zones, are still to be precisely defined. Grossman (2014: 87) defines the core of the Ninevite 5 region as a “... fairly restricted area situated between the Wadi Jaghjagh to the west, the middle reaches of the Habur to the south, the east bank of the Tigris to the east and the Tur Abdin to the north. A few Ninevite 5 sites have also been identified further north in the Ilisu Dam region”. According to this definition the region under discussion here would have rather occupied a peripheral zone. However, the relatively high number of Ninivite 5 sites in the UGZAR area, as revealed by the survey, implies that an extension of the core Ninevite 5 area to the northeast is in order. The results of the “Eastern Habur Archaeological Survey” also indicate the need “to extend the eastern limit of the core region beyond the eastern bank of the Tigris river and its hinterland, and possibly even further north across the Ġebel Biḥair barrier, as far as the second foothills of the Zagros mountains” (Pfälzner and Sconzo 2016: 36).

Daniele Morandi-Bonacossi’s “Land of Niniveh Archaeological Project” (LoNAP, University of Udine), abutting UGZAR on the northwest, during its first two years of survey in the field (2012–2013), found Ninevite 5 pottery on just 29 sites out of 287 from which pottery was collected. In their case, however, the sites were scattered throughout the region, with a stronger concentration in the Navkur plain. Almost all were apparently in existence already in the Late Chalcolithic period (for a synopsis of the Ninevite 5 period in the LoNAP area, see Gav-

agnin 2016: 75–79; Gavagnin, Iamoni, and Palermo 2016: 132–134; Morandi Bonacossi and Iamoni 2015: 20, Figs 8, 23), which stands contrary to the UGZAR results showing a significant number of Ninevite 5 sites, either newly located or uninhabited in the LC3–5 period.

Ninevite 5 sites were listed also in Jason Ur's "Erbil Plain Archaeological Project" (EPAS, Harvard University), abutting the UGZAR area on the south: 24 sites yielding LC3–5/Uruk pottery within the limits of a prospected enclave around Baqrta and Shemamok in the southwestern part of the EPAS area (approximately 400 km²) (J. Ur, paper read at the conference "Current Research on

Assyrian Landscapes", Poznań, May 2017). In the Ninevite 5 period, the number of sites increased to 35. Most of them were small (under 3 ha), with only two larger centers being identified, one in the range of 3–5 ha and the other 5–10 ha.

Intensive prospection work is currently carried out in virtually all parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. Many projects are still under way and only early tentative results are currently available. Although the data referred to above might point to a local variance of development, a broader overall picture of Ninevite settlement patterns must await a detailed publication of the information on all the Ninevite 5 sites surveyed within the Kurdistan region.

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Abbreviations

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