

Gre Amer, Batman: a brief overview

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Eight seasons of rescue excavation at Gre Amer, Batman, in southeastern Turkey were carried out jointly with Batman Museum, with Gül Pulhan as scientific director and myself as co-director (fieldwork in 2009–2015 and 2017, plus study seasons in 2015 and 2019). The site lies on the east bank of the Garzan river, a tributary of the Tigris, about 25km due north of Hasankeyf and approximately mid-way between the cities of Batman and Siirt. It has been partially flooded by the lake of the Ilisu Dam in 2019–2020. The name is a compound of ‘Gri’, the Kurdish word for ‘mound’ (thus the equivalent of ‘Tell’ or ‘Höyük’), and the personal name Ömer.

The site had occupation 5–6m thick at its greatest, spanning the early third to the late first millennium BC. Access to the lower levels was constrained by extensive Iron Age occupation and by deep layers of colluvial soil. Remains of five main periods of occupation were identified.

Level 5, of the early third millennium BC, was represented by stray sherds of Ninevite 5 incised decorated pottery, by standard simple and metallic wares, and by traces of buildings in a single small trench that we were able to dig down to reach this level in 2015.

Level 4 comprised Middle Bronze Age occupation and architecture (eighteenth to sixteenth century BC), with well-preserved buildings, rich in pottery and objects, which had largely been destroyed by fire. This level is characterised by ‘red-brown wash ware’ and by Khabur and Nuzi-related painted pottery. The realisation that these were made locally alongside the indigenous painted ceramics, and have a degree of cross-over with them, is one of the major results of our work at Gre Amer. The occupation of the site seems to have reached its greatest extent at this time, perhaps significantly in excess of 4ha, and never again attained a similar area.

Level 3 consisted of extensive Early Iron Age (tenth- to eighth-century) occupation spreading around the lower slopes of the site but not onto the river terrace. This level is characterised by very well-preserved stone architecture, associated with a range and quality of ceramics far in excess of the handmade grooved pottery which (rightly or wrongly) has come to be seen as typical of the Iron Age in the area. Many of the buildings were again destroyed by fire.

Level 2 survived as architecture in a small area of the site, but elsewhere there were pits and other features stratified between Levels 1 and 3 which were characterised by Neo-Assyrian (eighth- to seventh-century BC) pottery and other materials, but which were not directly associated with surviving architecture.

Level 1 consisted of extensive building plans to the north and south of the road of the mid- to late first millennium

(originating in the Persian period and with occupation continuing into the early Hellenistic); a cemetery on the southeastern slopes of the site was coeval with the earlier part of this occupation. The cemetery, of course, lay outside the dwelling area, and this had contributed to the preservation of the architecture of Levels 3 and 4 in this part of the site.

The periods enumerated here clearly do not form an uninterrupted sequence and it remains a matter for debate whether they were truly separated by hiatuses or whether the sequence saw periods when the settlement contracted or may have been located elsewhere, in parts of the site not examined by excavation. Nevertheless, Gre Amer looks to be the site in the Garzan/Tigris area with the best stratigraphic and architectural sequence for the second and first millennia BC, supported by fourteen radiocarbon determinations to date, and the potential of more to come. The extensive excavation (about 7,000m² of the 4ha site) and the high-quality of preservation of the architecture provide us with really extensive architectural plans for Level 1 and very well-preserved buildings for Levels 3 and 4, the houses sometimes standing almost to roof height. These permit reliable conclusions about the nature of the settlement. Moreover, the architecture is accompanied by plentiful in-situ artefacts: some 540 complete vessels in total and a varied collection of supporting material, including a number of sealings from the third- and second-millennium levels.

Long-term, perhaps one of the most notable results will be the Level 1 occupation and contemporary cemetery of the Achaemenid period. Grave goods show that this is broadly contemporary with the well-known fifth-century cemetery of Deve Hüyük west of Carchemish, salvaged by Leonard



Gre Amer in October 2015, looking northwest, with the Garzan river upper left and the basalt plateau of Kıradağ on the left horizon. The trenches in the centre show the stone architecture of Levels 3 and 4, beneath the Level 1 cemetery.

Those to the rear show mainly Level 1 architecture either side of the road (photo by İhsan Çakır/Hüseyin Kaymakçı).

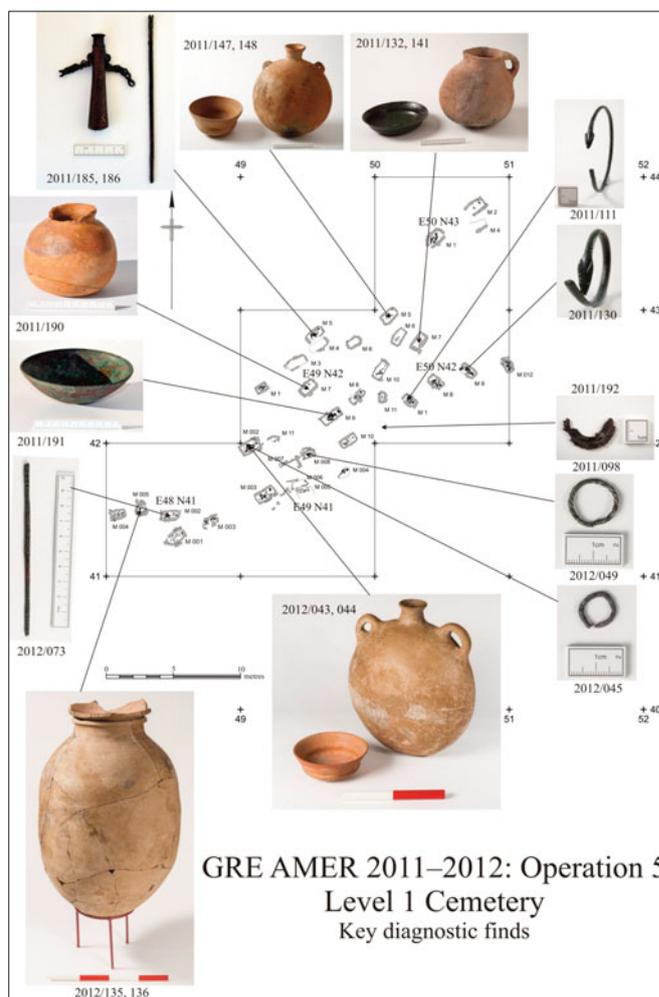
Woolley and T.E. Lawrence in 1913 and published by Roger Moorey in 1980. The association with a contemporary settlement provides the (so-far unique) opportunity to provide new analysis of this little-known (and still less-investigated) period in the Upper Tigris, as well as northern Mesopotamia more generally. There are also data on the emergence of Hellenistic ceramics out of those of the preceding period (provisionally characterised as ‘proto-Hellenistic’).

We did our best during the excavation seasons to keep up to date with the cataloguing, drawing and photography of the major finds (i.e. inventoried whole pottery and objects), but not everything can be done during busy excavation seasons, and the study of supporting sherd material is one area in which work remains to be done. Although the vast majority of this material was drawn in the field, further work is needed to identify material for publication, to draw-up and assemble digital illustrations, to write catalogue descriptions and carry out some further photography.

In the face of strong pressure to discard all non-inventoried material, with the permission of Batman Museum we were able to ship the sherd material to the British Institute at Ankara in November 2019, where it is stored temporarily against completion of publication work. In June 2020 I was awarded a research grant by the BIAA to process and prepare for publication the pottery from the later levels of the site (Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid/early Hellenistic: Levels 1 and 2 of the sequence outlined above). At the time of writing in October 2020 this work has yet to take place, because of the disruption of this extraordinary year. It is hoped that it will be possible to carry out the work early in 2021.

Although this is only a small part of the work needed towards publication, it will represent a significant step forward in getting the work off the ground. It is intended to continue work on the remainder of the pottery from earlier levels in years to come. At the same time, the preparation of architectural plans, plates for the whole pottery and objects, and the composition of the text will proceed in parallel. All being well, we hope to have broken the back of this work by 2025 or thereabouts, although the amount of time we can devote to this (and therefore the speed and continuity of this process) will depend on other commitments and our ability to attract funding from elsewhere.

The final publication will make a significant contribution to understanding the chronology and archaeology of this little-known region of northern Mesopotamia as well as to the documentation of local archaeology and as a systematic resource for understanding the collections of Batman and (the newly opened) Hasankeyf museums. There is also a real demand for accessing and consuming the results of archaeological work in the region, as we have seen in the reception of the museum displays created to date and of a documentary film on Gre Amer (*Katman*, directed by Melek Ulagay Taylan, 2017).



GRE AMER 2011–2012: Operation 5
Level 1 Cemetery
Key diagnostic finds

Composite plan of the Level 1 Achaemenid cemetery, with key diagnostic finds (graphic by Stuart Blaylock).

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