

Early Chalcolithic in Mesopotamia: the Ubaid period

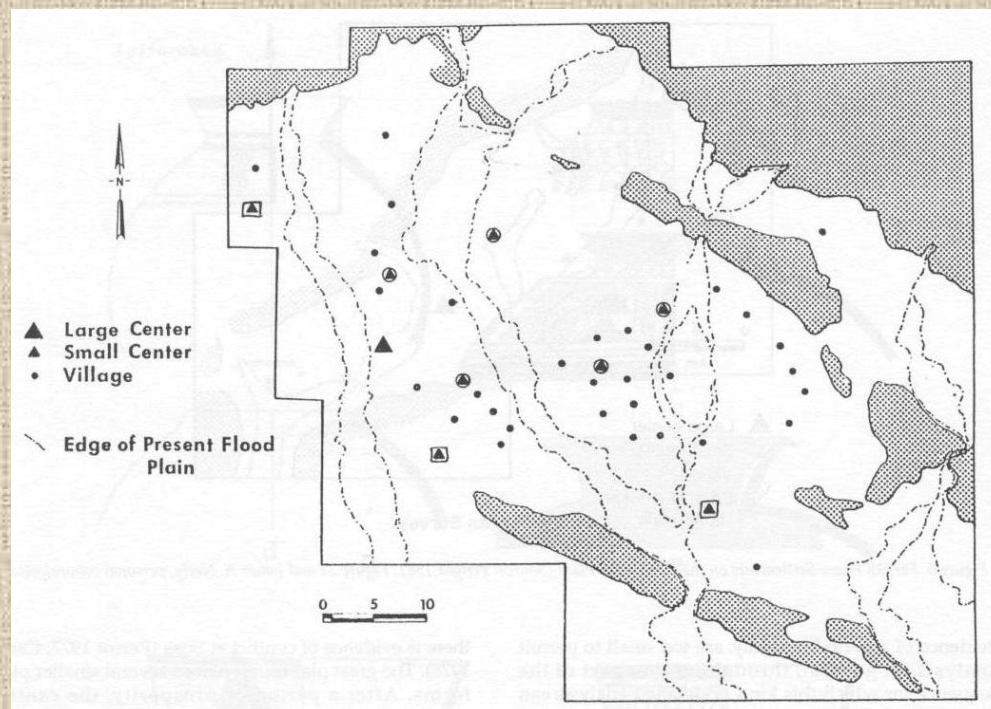
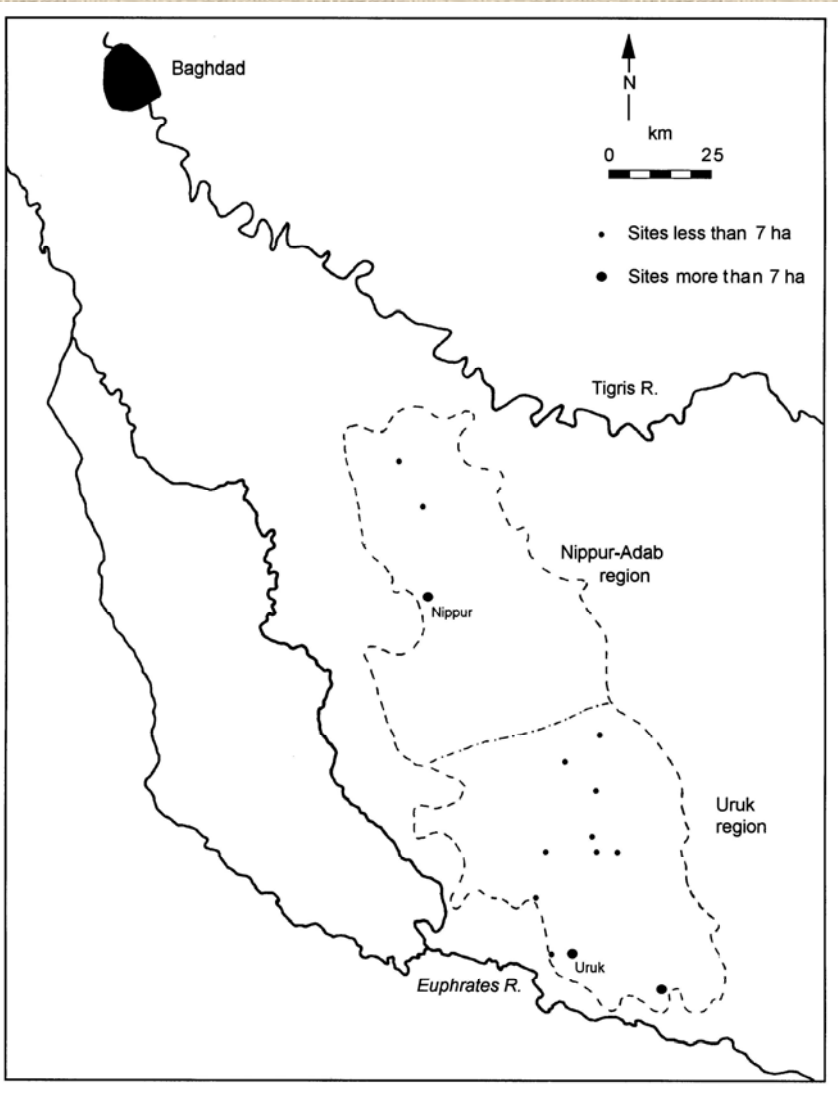
Topic 2: Politically and socially
egalitarian or hierarchical?

Egalitarian or hierarchical?

- Evolutionary assumptions behind the formulation of the question: 1960s-70s Processual Archaeology
 - chiefdoms must precede (Uruk-period) states
 - chiefdoms should have specific kinds of features, including differential burials, hierarchical settlement patterns, distinctions in architecture and/or goods consumed
- But (most) Ubaid societies do not show many obvious signs of hierarchy

Settlement patterns

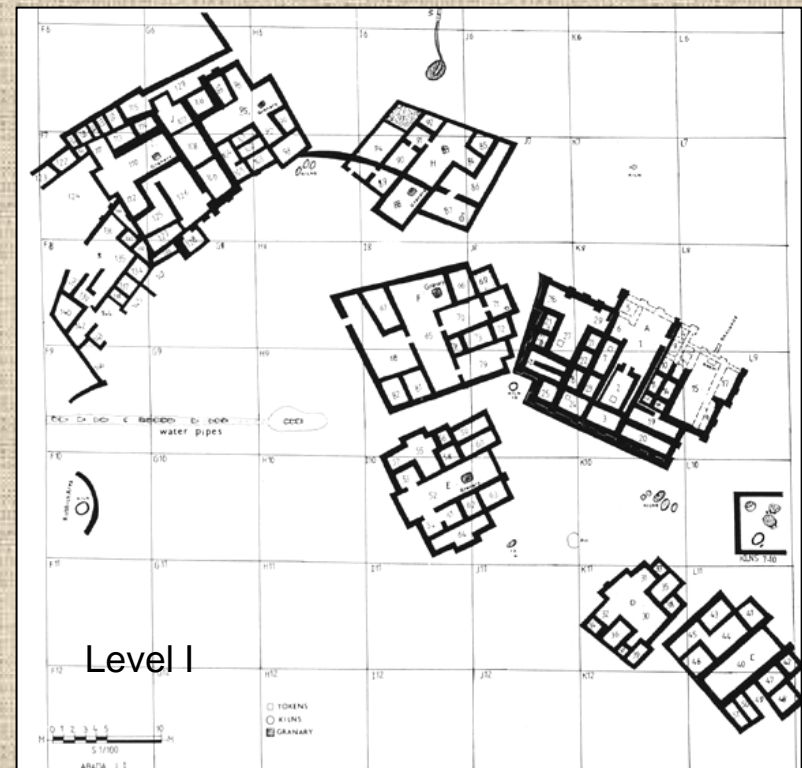
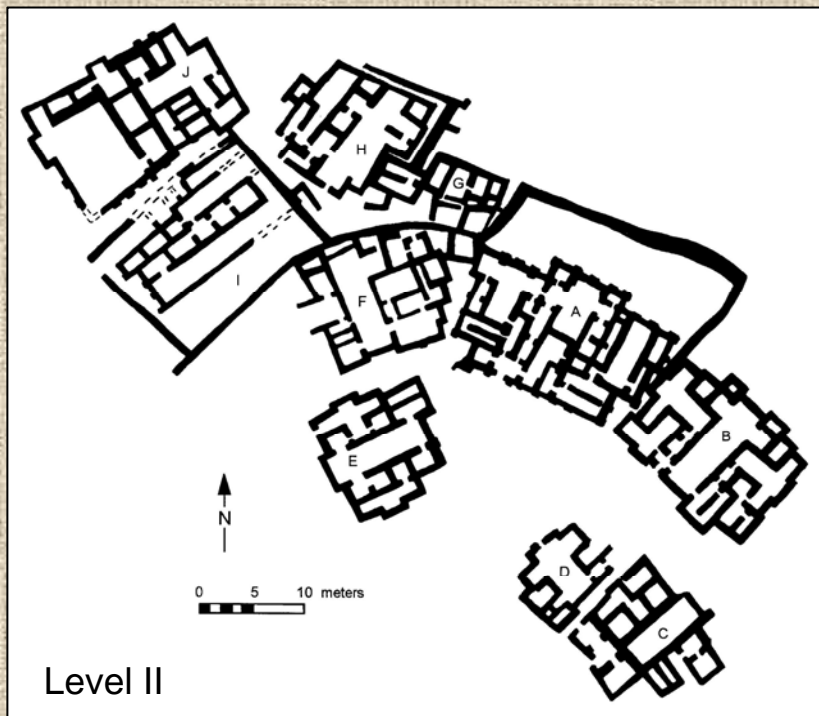
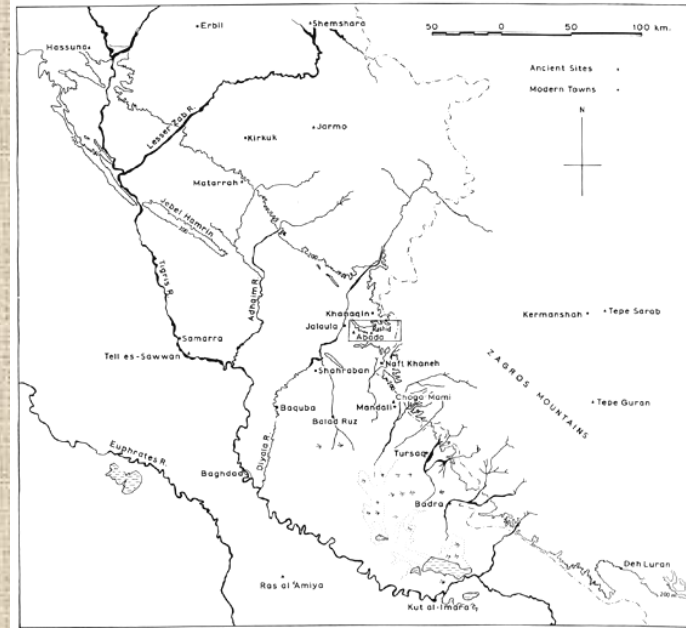
- Sites more commonly settled for longer periods – build-up of mounds
- Settlement density appears higher in northern than southern Mesopotamia
 - perhaps due in part to geomorphological issues as well as survey methods
- Most sites small: 1 ha or less
- In some areas, a few large sites (c. 10 ha):
Ur, Eridu, Oueili, Nippur, Uqair, Susa
 - with temples, cemeteries



Susa A phase

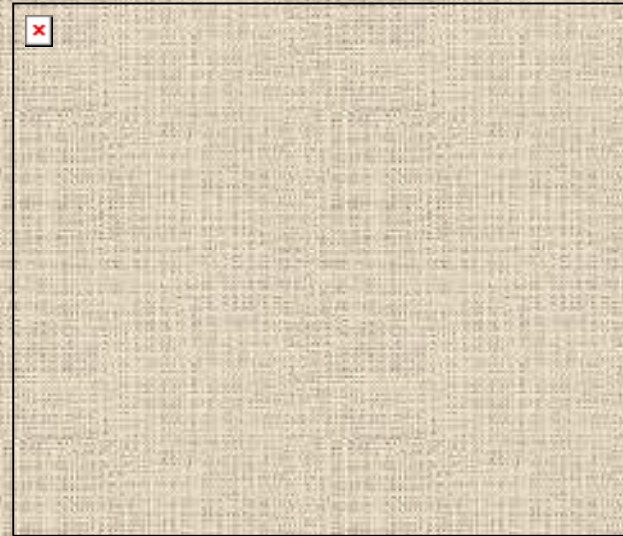
Tell Abada, Hamrin region

- nearly whole village excavated
- Levels I (most recent) to III (oldest)



Tell Abada

- Most buildings have similar array of domestic artifacts – for cooking, food preparation and storage
 - bread ovens in open spaces outside of houses
- Houses range in from 100-200 m² – but nonetheless have similar array of tools and other artifacts, with one exception
- House A: largest house in all levels
 - extra walled in space behind it: L. II
 - thick walls: L. I
 - no domestic artifacts (L. II) other than pottery
 - clay tokens, marble studs and pendants, numerous infant burials in urns below the floor



Tell Abada

- House A distinct throughout all levels – implying some kind of inherited difference
- Otherwise little indication of internal differentiation

Tell Madhhur

- Nearby Abada
- One well preserved house excavated, 170 m²
- Similar array of domestic items, similar plan
 - 78 pottery vessels, from small cups to large storage jars
 - bent clay mullers, grinding stones, stone hoes, spindle whorls
 - hearths, but no ovens or kilns



Madhhur house

LEVEL 2

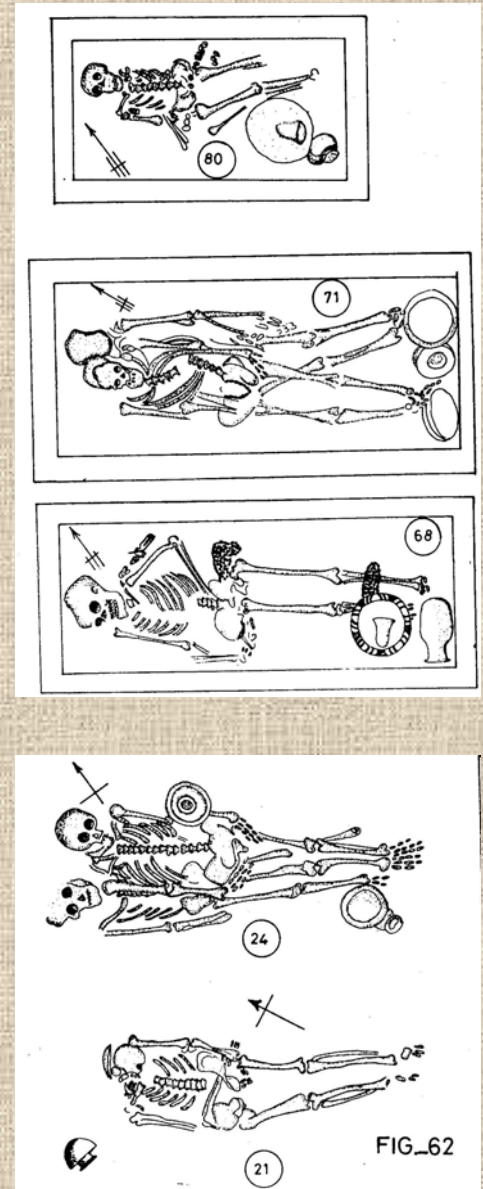
Eridu

- One of the first Iraqi excavations of prehistoric site
- Appears in the Sumerian King List (early 2nd mill. BCE) as the oldest city in the world
- Temple sequence
- 'Hut sounding' – simple reed mat huts plastered with mud
- Cemetery – approximately 200 burials excavated



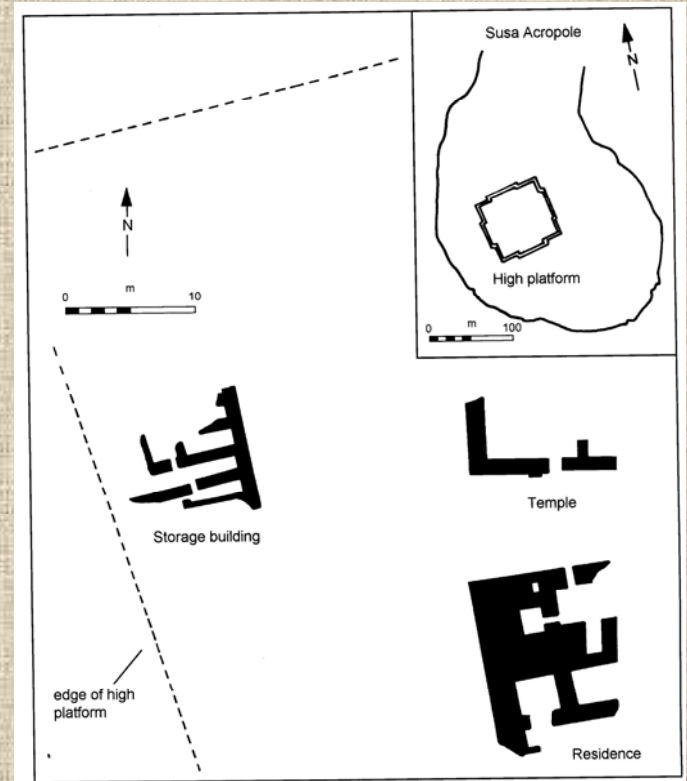
Eridu Cemetery

- Burials in earthen pits or brick boxes
- Extended on back
- Single or double burials
- Relatively standard set of grave goods
 - pottery
 - beads
 - little differentiation in treatment except by age



Susa

- First settled in late Ubaid, locally known as Susa A or Susa I
- Huge mudbrick, stepped platform erected: 80 X 65 m and 10 m high
 - façade decorated with mosaic
 - atop the platform a storage building, a temple and a possible residence
- Variety of seal impressions
- Next to step platform a low platform into which graves were dug



Susa Necropole

- Approx. 2000 burials
- Some primary, some secondary burials
- Standard sets of pottery; many pieces particularly fine
- Copper axes and mirrors for a small number of individuals
- Some with beads
- Exception to lack of differentiation and exotic goods
- Also true for Late Ubaid Gawra



Egalitarian or hierarchical?

- Different approaches to interpretation
 - political and social inequalities: Henry Wright; Susan Pollock
 - largely egalitarian, with short-term leaders/priests: Frank Hole
 - inequalities but egalitarian ideology: Gil Stein
- Recent work points to considerable regional variation
 - one problem with earlier interpretations is tendency to lump evidence from different regions