

TELL RAD SHAQRAH EXCAVATIONS 1995

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In the fall of 1995, the fifth campaign of Polish excavations took place at Tell Rad Shaqrah, a small mound situated within the Hassake Southern Dam Basin in northeastern Syria.¹

The primary aim of our investigations on Tell Rad Shaqrah this year was to establish the full stratigraphical sequence of the site and, particularly, the 3rd millennium BC settlements on the tell. The problem of correlating the stratigraphy of particular sectors of the site was also to be addressed. Two secondary goals included the exploration of the western slope of the mound in search of remains of the Early Dynastic period defense wall and an extensive study of the spatial organization of the 3rd millennium settlements near the centre of the site (Fig. 1).

¹ The season started on August 28 and lasted until October 11, 1995. The staff of the mission, more numerous than usual, comprised the present author (who headed the mission), Mrs. Dorota Bielińska, Miss Dorota Ławecka, Mr. Andrzej Reiche, Mr. Rafał Koliński and Mr. Dariusz Szeląg, all archaeologists, and two archaeology students from Warsaw University: Mrs. Irena Kolińska and Miss Agnieszka Zysek.

We should also mention here our Syrian colleagues and collaborators from the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums. We owe special thanks to Director General, Dr. Sultan Muhessen, for his friendly interest and encouragement, as well as to Dr. Adnan Bounni and Mr. Nasib Saliby for their constant support and organizational help. We are also indebted to Mr. Jean Simon Lazar, Regional Director of Antiquities in Hassake, and Mr. Abd el-Messih Bardo, who actively collaborated with us in the field as representative of the Directorate General. We greatly appreciated his competence in field archaeology. We owe special acknowledgments to Elektromontaż Export of Warsaw and its President Mr. Jerzy Lewandowski for financial support of the mission's work this year.

 - MODERN HOUSES

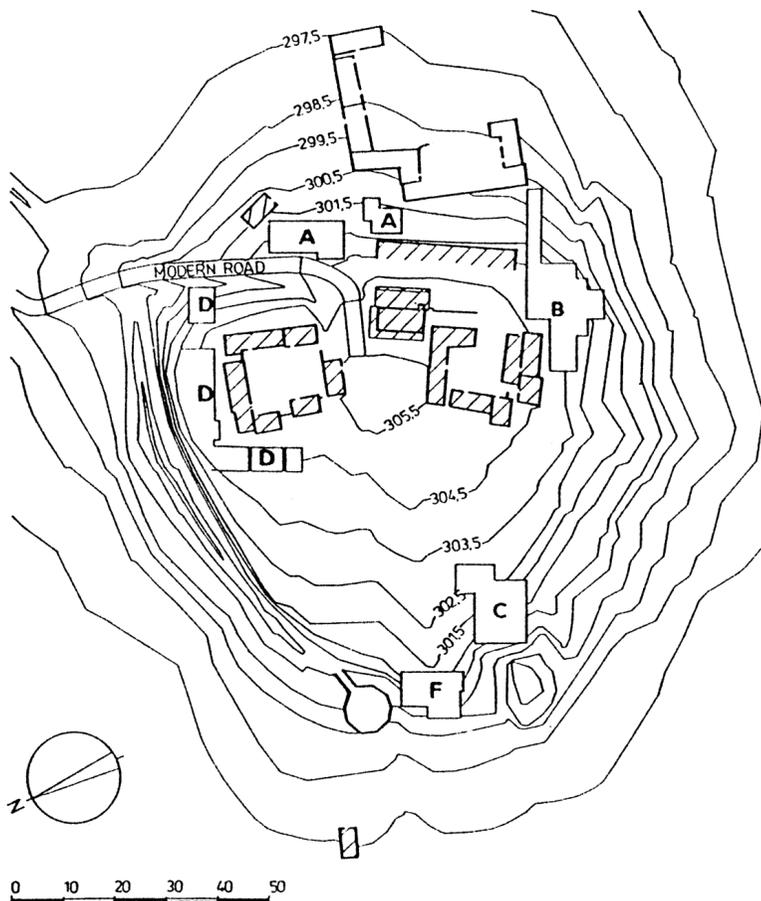


Fig. 1. Tell Rad Shaqrah. General plan of the trenches.
Drawing D. Ławecka.

To accomplish the main goal, a deep test trench was excavated in Area B on the southeastern part of the tell. In 1993, a long section had been cut here through the huge 3rd millennium defense structure. A stratigraphical trench, 5.50 m long and c. 3 m wide, was explored presently to the basalt bedrock, culturally sterile soil in this case, reached at nearly 10 m below the mound surface. Of the at least nine occupational strata that have been distinguished in this area, the two uppermost seem to represent the Akkadian and slightly pre-Akkadian ("Late ED III") periods in the site's occupation, while the at least six lower layers belong to the successive Early Dynastic settlements on Tell Rad Shaqrah. The lower strata can be more precisely dated to the Early Dynastic III phase. There is clear evidence of occupational continuation within these six layers, particularly obvious in the case of layers B/IV, B/V and B/VI where the foundations of upper layer mud-brick walls were erected directly on the top of older ones (Fig. 2). The lowest stratum discovered in the test trench contained only remains of a poorly constructed mud-brick wall with adjacent floors; the accompanying ceramic material was very modest with few diagnostic sherds. For this reason, the precise chronological attribution of this layer remains unclear and will need further examination of the collected material. Nevertheless, after preliminary analysis, it would seem the most probable that this lowest stratum is of nearly the same date as the successive ones and may represent the first Early Dynastic settlement on the tell. To complete the stratigraphical picture of the site provided by the exploration of the Area B test trench, two painted Halaf sherds should be mentioned; they were found in the rubbish fill in some of the later Early Dynastic III period rooms. Their presence suggests that the series of successive 3rd millennium settlements on Rad Shaqrah was preceded by a Halaf period settlement situated outside the limits of our trench, probably closer to the center of the mound. It is noteworthy that another painted Halafian sherd was found this

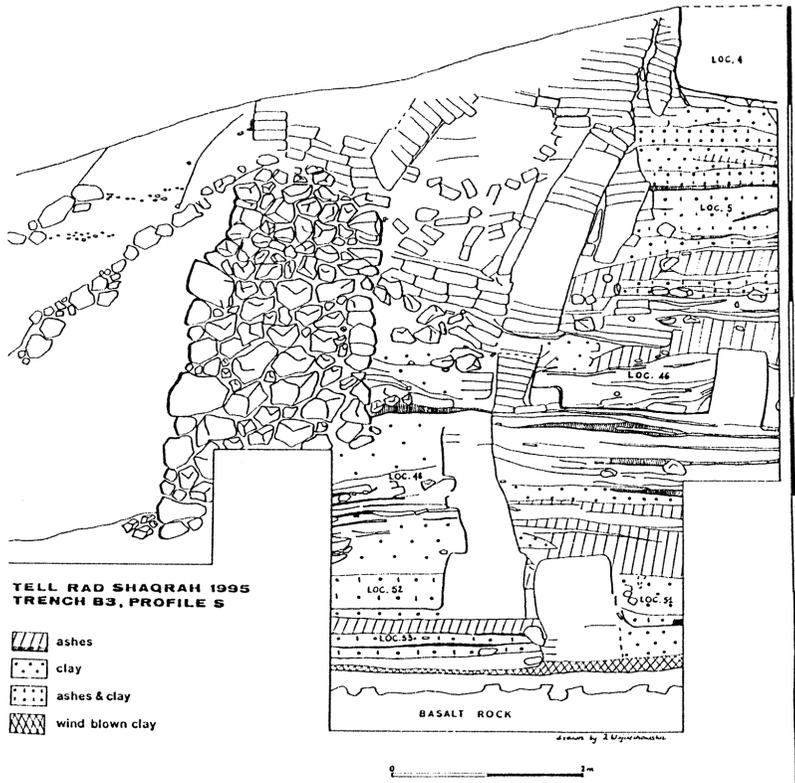


Fig. 2. North section of the test trench in Area B. Original drawing I. Kolińska, ink drawing D. Ławecka.

year in the northern part of the tell (Area D), in the topmost layer which represents leveling in the Assyrian period. It seems that the uneven surface of the tell was leveled using earth taken from

Some deep pits, one of which may have reached the level of the Halafian settlement.

As already mentioned, the organization of space inside the small 3rd millennium township on Rad Shaqrah, as well as the domestic architecture were the next two problems to be investigated in more extensive fashion during the present season. With these goals in mind, the mission enlarged the old trenches in Area C (in the west-central part of the site) and the trenches in Area D near the northern slope of the tell.

In Area C, whose total excavated area is now almost 170 m², a new test trench measuring 8 x 6 m was opened in the northeastern corner of the area. The topmost layer exposed there revealed a fragment of huge stone foundations (over 1 m wide) which certainly belonged to the Neo-Assyrian period, as suggested by potsherd finds. It is the first Assyrian construction of some importance unearthed on Tell Rad Shaqrah so far. Immediately below these foundations, there were badly eroded remnants of two Early Dynastic strata containing only some fragments of stone foundations (much narrower than the Assyrian ones) with a few mud bricks resting upon them. Only the third ED layer explored in this area contained remains of a much better preserved structure. It is a fragment of a larger house, composed of at least two rooms connected by a very narrow doorway. The walls of this house, designated as locus 48/C, were constructed of two rows of mud-bricks and preserved nearly 2 m high. The nearly completely excavated northern room (2.50 x 2.50 m) had four arched buttresses, each in the middle of a wall, intersecting in the centre. A doorway with plastered steps in the northwestern corner led to a narrow street, while another doorway leading to the neighboring southern room was situated in the southwestern corner. Inside the northern room there were remains of some installations such as a small *tannur*, two plastered basins made of mud bricks and two banquettes. The modest dimensions and equipment found seem to exclude its function as an ordinary living room. Nearly the same can be said

of the adjacent southern room of locus 48/C, which was only 2.10 m wide and at least 2.90 m long. Its southern end was outside the limits of the trench. There was one arched internal buttress which seems to have been connected with a nearly square pilaster set in the opposite wall. It is possible that this room was much longer and contained at least one more pilaster and arched buttress. In the western wall of this narrow room, there was a finely plastered window opening giving on the street nearby. The southern room did not contain domestic installations, such as its northern neighbor except for the remains of a fireplace.

The exploration of a large mud-brick house partly unearthed last year in Area C was currently completed. This structure (locus 40/C), also belonging to the third ED layer, was slightly trapezoidal in shape and turned out to be 5.60 m long. At its western end, locus 40/C was about 3.50 m wide, while at the other end its width was only c. 2.30 m. There were two pairs of internal buttresses regularly set along the longer walls, but of the shorter wall only the western one was reinforced with a buttress. Remains of two doorways leading to this house have been found. Both of them were situated in its western wall. Inside locus 40/C, beside the two finely plastered basins described already in our 1994 report, there were also two long benches made of plastered mud brick along with another oval basin. On the west, locus 40/C is adjoined by a small structure composed of two nearly square rooms (loci 33/C and 38/C), measuring each about 1.50 x 1.00 m. It seems that the two of them were used as storerooms or "workshops". This small house bordered on the west with a stone paved street and was connected with the larger 40/C building by a doorway which was blocked later. On the other side of this street, some further ED period houses were cleared and found to be badly destroyed by slope erosion. From this part of Area C comes a clay model of a four-wheeled wagon fitted with a tilt (Fig. 3).

In order to ascertain whether the same continuity of Early Dynastic occupation and building tradition, seen in Area B, is to

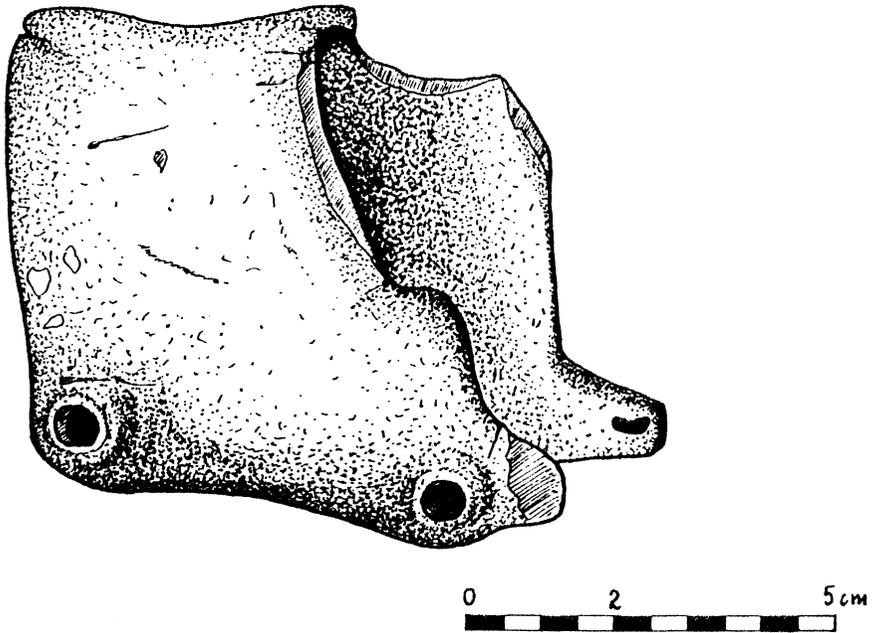


Fig. 3. Clay model of an ED III period wagon found in the western part of Area C. Drawing D. Bielińska.

be observed in Area C, a small test trench was opened in one of the corners of the house locus 40/C. Two finely plastered mud-brick walls were exposed, each of them situated directly below the corresponding wall of the third ED layer. The floor of this new structure was not reached; it presumably represents the fourth Early Dynastic layer of Area C, but it seems that its walls may have been preserved even as high as 2 m. This trench ended investigations of the stratigraphical sequence in the west-central

part of the site. The sequence thus comprises one Neo-Assyrian stratum and four consecutive ED III layers.

As in previous season, Area C also yielded this year some Early Dynastic period child burials. There were twelve of them and they belonged to at least four different types. Some of them were modest and had the form of simple cooking-pot burials, but there were also some more elaborate forms of graves, such as boxes made of mud bricks with a sort of roofing composed of two slanting bricks or a chamber erected of stones and covered with a large limestone slab. Except for the burials in cooking pots, all other child graves discovered during the present season in the Area C trench contained relatively rich sets of grave goods, composed mostly of pots (from one to five in one grave), numerous beads and amulets. Among them there were many representations of animals such as fish, sheep, cows and different sorts of birds finely carved in mother-of-pearl. The richest set of jewellery, including a pair of bronze bracelets, pair of bronze earrings, some pendants and about 240 beads made of frit, rock crystal, carnelian and other kinds of stone, was found in the stone chamber of grave G5. Child graves of this type (two others were found in Area C in 1991 and 1994) have much richer grave offerings than the ordinary mud-brick box burials and all seem to belong most probably to the first ED layer of this area.

Excessively modest in comparison to our expectations were the results obtained this year in Area D, in the northern part of the tell. In its western part, the old long trench was considerably enlarged toward the centre of the site in order to expose more of the dwelling quarter unearthed in the western sector of Area D in 1994. This new trench ended up measuring 15 x 5 m, which combined with the old one to give a strip over 30 m long, leading from the fortification wall towards the centre of the 3rd millennium settlement. The opening of such a large space would facilitate investigations of the ancient street system and spatial organization, and would permit possible changes in the character of domestic architecture to be traced

between a zone adjacent to the city-wall and the settlement centre. The upper Early Dynastic strata in the new part of the trench were, to our dismay, badly damaged by erosion and by the remains of some Neo-Assyrian constructions in pisé, which served most probably some leveling purposes. Simultaneously with the excavations in the new trench, some additional explorations in the previously explored part of Area D were undertaken. In the western part of the trench, two small houses belonging to the third ED layer in this area were cleared completely. The houses are of similar dimensions and each of them was composed of two rooms, a larger and a smaller one. The southern of the houses (loci 14-20/D and 86/D) was slightly better preserved. Its larger room had walls strengthened with four internal buttresses, two doorways and an interesting installation of plastered mud bricks, which seems to have served as a "drawer". The same room also contained a child burial (most probably from the Akkadian period); the objects accompanying the skeleton included: four pots, a pair of bronze earrings and several hundreds of different beads. To the east of this group of houses and in the same stratum, there was a small lane running perpendicularly to the axis of the fortification wall and on its other side there was another group of small houses preserved in very bad condition.

The exploration of the western slope of the tell, the one nearest to the Khabur river, was also one of the goals of the expedition this year. On this slope, which is seriously damaged not only by erosion, but also by modern canals bringing water from the river to the nearby cotton fields, a new, large trench measuring about 12 x 9 m was opened. This trench, designated as Area F, was situated some 5 m to the northwest of the northwestern corner of the Area C trench and very near to a large modern basin made of stones.

Of the topmost occupational layer not much has been preserved in this trench. Despite near complete erosion and destruction

by a modern pit, the layer was found to belong to the 3rd millennium settlement. The next layer was also partly damaged, particularly in the northern part of the trench, where only some plastered floors and stone foundations have survived. They belonged to two separate houses, both of which had internal buttresses. The southern of the houses adjoined a relatively large street running on an E-W axis. This street, which was about 1.50 m wide, descended slightly towards the west, that is toward the river and toward the city-wall. The five-meter long fragment of the street, which was uncovered within the limits of the trench, was composed of two narrow stone walls bordering it and a filling of ashes, clay and debris in between. On its southern side, there were remains of another house erected of mud bricks laid on stone foundations. The same street existed there also in the next (third) ED layer of this trench. Its original surface was about 1.50 m deeper than the top surface of the street unearthed in the second layer, but the general outline and the mode of construction were the same. The street exposed inside the third stratum was originally paved with stones and it was bordered on its northern side by a mud-brick domestic structure with buttresses. The southern part of trench F revealed the remains of a very large mud-brick wall, extensively damaged by modern earthworks. This wall may well be the defensive wall protecting the settlement on the riverside. It seems highly probable that the street discovered in the third layer led in fact to the city gate, which has been eroded away.

A deeper test trench dug in the northern part of area F revealed remains of some well-preserved mud-brick houses of the ED period, certainly predating the construction of the streets and most probably also of the city wall. Its ruins were later filled with stones and rubbish during leveling works.

The fifth and last season of excavations at Tell Rad Shaqrah helped to establish a nearly full sequence of human occupation on this mound, ranging from the prehistoric Halaf period

settlement, through the huge accumulation of Early Dynastic III Akkadian period settlements, to the very late Neo-Assyrian occupation. This campaign also facilitated the understanding of the structure and spatial organization of the ED township on Tell Rad Shaqrah, which at the time of its flourishing proved to be more complex and developed than most other settlements of its size and date existing in the Khabur valley.