

# Piotr Bieliński

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## Tell Rad Shaqrah 1993

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## TELL RAD SHAQRAH 1993

**Piotr Bieliński**

The third season of excavations on Tell Rad Shaqrah, (Hassake Southern Dam Basin Salvage Program) began on August 28 and lasted until October 12.<sup>1</sup> Activities were concentrated on the eastern slope of the mound (Area A) and in its southeastern corner (Area B).

This year the only remains of occupation later than the Early Dynastic period were found in trench A3 situated in the highest part of the eastern sector of the site (Area A). In the southern part of the trench, where numerous graves of the Islamic period had been discovered in the previous season, we now exposed part of a large pit containing many Neo-Assyrian potsherds. The pit was at least 1.50 m deep and its diameter must have exceeded 5 m. Part of its filling had been badly disturbed by the

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<sup>1</sup> The mission led by the writer included: Mrs. Katarzyna Meyza, Mrs. Dorota Bielińska, Miss Dorota Ławecka, Miss Valeria Patocchi, Mr. Andrzej Reiche, Mr. Mirosław Olbryś and Mr. George Yacoub, archaeologists, as well as a student of archaeology, Mr. Daniel Achi.

We gratefully acknowledge the support and encouragement of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic with particular thanks to Dr. Sultan Muhessen, Director General, and Dr. Adnan Bounni, Director of Excavations. We would also like to express our warm thanks to Mr. Jean-Simon Lazar, Director of the Regional Department of Antiquities in Hassake, as well as to the whole staff of the Department. The mission is especially grateful to Miss Nuha al-Kabbani and Miss Marian Safari, who worked with us as representatives of the Directorate General. We owe a great deal to both of them.

modern graves mentioned above. The pit itself was dug deep into Early Dynastic strata.

In Area A we continued to explore a massive 3rd millennium BC defense wall, discovered in our first season at Shaqrah.<sup>2</sup> One of our objectives was to locate the point where this huge mud-brick structure changed its orientation from NNW-SSE (section excavated in 1991) to nearly N-S (part cleared in 1992) and to see how the two segments were connected. We also planned to carry on the exploration of some structures adjacent to the inner face of this defensive wall, an Early Dynastic period building in particular, already partly excavated in previous seasons. With these objectives in mind, we started a new trench (A4) connecting the two old trenches A1 and A2 (Fig. 1). Trench A4 measured 6.50 x 9 m with a 4 x 3.50 m extension in its southeastern corner.

About 6.50 m of the massive 3rd millennium BC defense wall was exposed in trench A4. The wall was indeed found to change its course along this distance. The slight bend was achieved by the builders by increasing the spaces between particular groups of bricks towards the outer face of the wall and alternating the position of the widest gaps in successive courses of bricks. This would indicate that the two earlier discovered segments of this defensive structure, which differed in orientation, were nevertheless erected simultaneously.

The defensive wall was also one of the objectives of investigations in Area B. We hoped to identify the course of the wall and to explore its full width including the accompanying outer glacis. The section through the wall was possible practically only

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<sup>2</sup> See Bieliński, *PAM* III, 1991 (1992), pp. 77-85; idem, *PAM* IV, 1992 (1993), pp. 119-127.

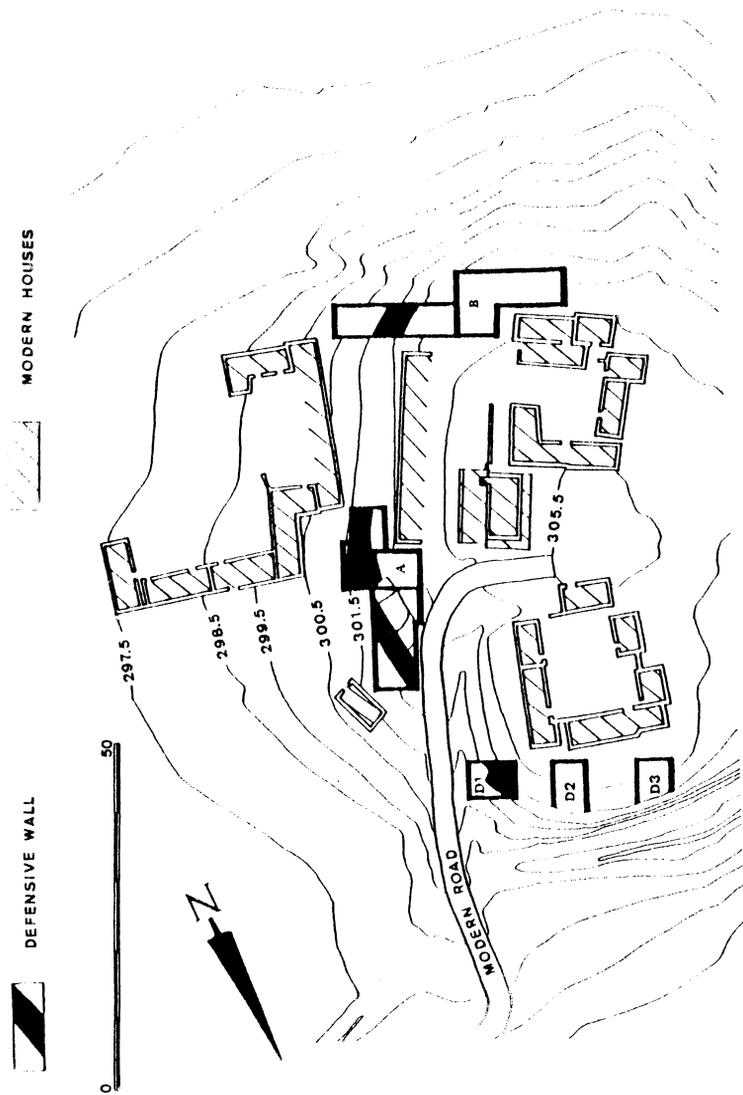


Fig. 1. Tell Rad Shaqrah. Location of fragments of defensive wall identified during seasons 1991-1993. Drawing D. Lawecka.

in this area owing to the fact that the lower slopes of the tell have largely been disturbed by modern water channels.

The new trench in the southeastern corner of the mound (B3) was opened along an E-W axis and measured 17.50 by 5 m. It cut through a part of the defensive wall as well as nearly the whole glacis (Fig. 2). The wall was found to be of mud bricks combined with stone. The mud-brick part was approximately 2.80 m wide, and apparently consisted of three separate segments: the inner one made of large regular bricks, the middle one of large bricks set on end and the outer one, which is in fact a filling consisting of broken bricks. Adjoining this last segment was the part of the wall, which was raised of big rough basalt stones. No traces of any kind of mortar have been observed in between the irregularly laid stones. The average width of the stone wall was about 2 m and it was close to 4 m high with at least one meter of regularly set mud-bricks extending above that. On the outside, the basalt wall was reinforced by the glacis composed of three separate elements. The first of these was approximately 3.50 m high and 3 m thick at the base and consisted of a filling of ashes which was carefully revetted in stone. The top of this part of the glacis was situated about half a meter below the top of the stone wall. The second part of the rampart was c. 1.20 m higher than the first and about 1.40 thick at the base. Its filling consisted of several layers of clay, earth and ashes. The stone revetment of this part is more sparse than the revetment protecting the inner segment of the glacis. Finally, the third and outer segment of this structure, which was only partly exposed in trench B3, appears to have been approximately 1.70 m. wide and as high as the second one. Of particular interest is its stone revetment which is composed of very large basalt boulders, some of them nearly

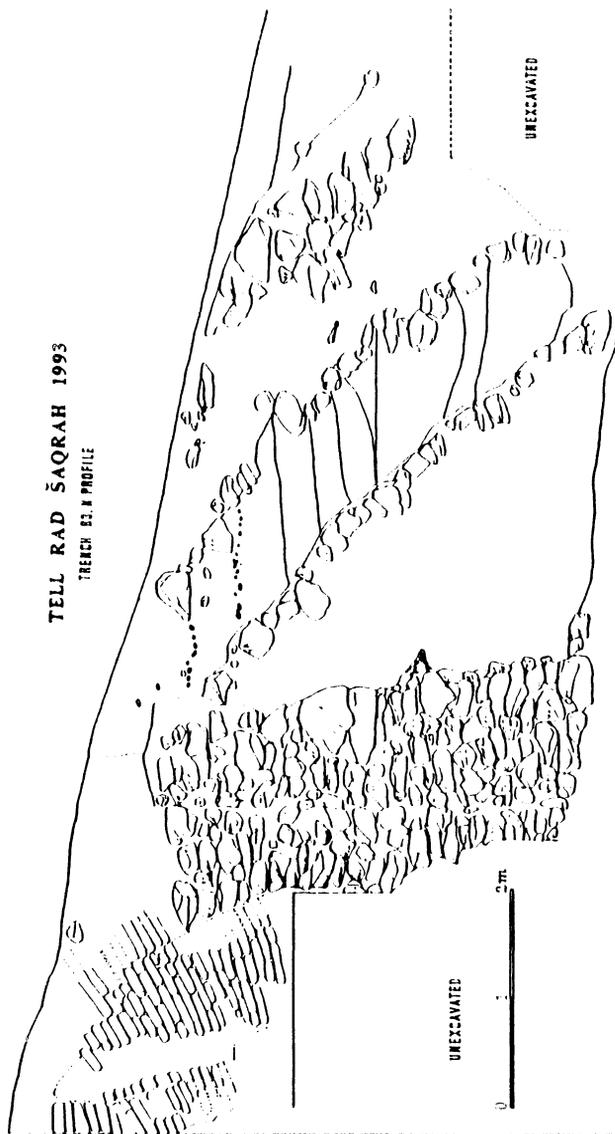
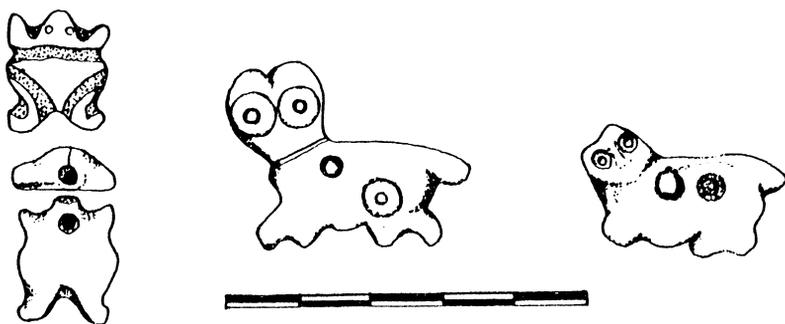


Fig. 2. Tell Rad Šaqrah, trench B3. Section through the defensive wall showing three layers of the glacis.  
Drawing D. Bielińska,

0.80 m in diameter. The total width of the two inner segments of the *glacis* is about 4 m, together with the third, the width approaches 6 m. Consequently, the Early Dynastic defense wall could have been over 10 m wide if measured with the *glacis*. It is still too early to be sure that all the segments of the *glacis* were constructed at the same time, or at least that both outer ones were added later. The part of the *glacis* discovered in trench A1 in 1991 seemed to be made up of only two segments, but taking into account the limited size of this trench and the fact that the outer segment of the *glacis* exposed there was strongly eroded, we are ready to assume that also there the *glacis* was in fact composed of three segments. As far as the northern side of the site is concerned, the situation there is quite different. The rather poor remains of the *glacis* found there during both previous campaigns (trench D1) suggest that the structure was less massive there than on the eastern slope. Erosion and destruction caused by modern irrigation effectively prevents any further verification.

The 3rd millennium BC building complex adjacent to the inner side of the wall continued to be explored this year with the clearing of the southern end of locus 3/A in trench A4. The dimensions of the room were established (3.80 x 1.70 m). It turned out that the longer walls of this narrow room were reinforced on the inside by pairs of regularly spaced small buttresses. In similarity to the previous season, we again found considerable quantities of charred wooden beam fragments from the room ceiling; the pieces were scattered on the floor as well as in the filling which also contained a painted ceramic potstand of ED date. Locus 3/A belongs to the same building as the large locus 1/A investigated in 1991 and 1992, and forms the southern limits of this Early Dynastic period house. West of the building there was

an open space paved with two layers of pebbles. Below them there was a thick deposit of layers of clay and ashes. On the south this space was bordered by a substantial mud-brick wall (c. 2 m wide) erected on stone foundations. The wall is perpendicular to the defense wall and should be earlier than it, although still of ED date. It seems that it was at least partly destroyed when the house composed of loci 1/A and 3/A was erected. A typical Early Dynastic child burial was dug into the top of this wall. The skeleton lay in a box constructed of mud bricks set on end; the furnishings included three jars as well as three pendants (Fig. 3) and numerous beads.



*Fig. 3. Stone pendants from a child's grave found in locus 3/A.  
Drawing D. Ławecka*

To the east of the just described wall and to the south of locus 3/A we found the remains of a single-room mud-brick structure – locus 8/A – measuring 3.40 x 1.30 m. Two buttresses reinforced the longer walls on the inside. The fine plastered floor of

locus 8/A was approximately 0.50 m higher than the floor of neighboring locus 3/A. Below this floor another Early Dynastic child burial was discovered. It, too, took on the form of a mud-brick box and contained a well preserved skeleton, three small jars and 730 small frit beads.

The skeletons in both child burials discovered this year in trench A4 were laid on an E-W axis, with heads to the west. Even if locus 8/A is slightly later than locus 3/A, its walls must have been added onto locus 3/A while it was still in use. On the south, locus 8/A was bordered by another room constructed of mud brick (locus 11/A), which certainly belonged to a separate architectural unit and of which only a small part was found this year in trench A4. To turn once again to Area B (Fig. 1), we continued exploring dwelling units discovered there in 1991 in trenches B1 and B2. In the new trench B3 some interesting 3rd-millennium architecture was uncovered on the inside the main wall. It consisted of a nearly square room, 2.80 x 3.40 m, with two intercrossing arches in the middle of its walls. The well plastered walls of this room, designated as locus 3/B3, were preserved to a height of about 1.70 m. An entrance c. 0.50 m wide in the southeastern corner of the room was blocked with bricks at some point when a new entrance was cut in the northwestern end. Remains of a fireplace were found on the floor. This arched structure closely resembles Early Dynastic period constructions discovered by our mission on Tell Djassa el-Gharbi, north of Hassake.<sup>3</sup> Locus 3/B3 apparently belongs to a larger structure

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<sup>3</sup> See Bieliński, *PAM II*, 1990 (1991), pp. 95-96.

parts of which were investigated this season inside the neighboring trench B2 (loci 21/B and 13/B).

Beside the structure discovered in trenches B1 and B2, the mission also investigated two consecutive building levels from the ED period. In the northern part of B1, below a narrow lane excavated in 1991, two *tannurs* were found and in a lower level there was an open space filled with large stones. In the western part of this trench, below the stones, traces of a small channel were discovered. South of the lane there were some remains of mud-brick walls belonging to at least three separate architectural units. At least one of them, situated in the southern part of B1, was composed of two rooms – loci 33/B and 34/B. None of these structures, which seem to have served as simple dwellings, could be completely cleared this year. Fragments of three small rooms, two possibly belonging to the same structure (loci 29/B and 32/B), were also discovered in trench B2. A rectangular basin was dug into the floor of locus 32/B. It is noteworthy that nearly all of the walls discovered in B1 and B2 have stone foundations. Between the houses and below the floors of the rooms in trench B2 three child burials of Early Dynastic III date were found, all of them contained in mud-brick boxes. The first of these burials was discovered in locus 32/B and was exceptionally small, nevertheless it contained a jar and some beads. Another one, found near the northern edge of the trench, contained a skeleton and four jars, some beads and five small amethyst pendants. The third burial, excavated in the western part of B2, included three vessels and some beads. As in the case of the child burials unearthed in trench A4, the skeletons were found generally oriented E-W axis, with heads to the west.

Strata corresponding to the 3rd-millennium occupation of the site were also investigated in a small trench designated as A3 (Fig. 1). Some remains of a mud-brick structure apparently erected against the inner face of the defense wall were discovered in the northern part of the trench. The preserved fragments of at least three rooms may have belonged to the same building. Two of these units are rather small. One, which measured 2.20 x 1.60 m had a mud-brick ceiling consisting of courses of bricks projecting progressively further inward to create a triangular section. The room was nearly completely filled with black ashes. The largest of the rooms exposed in this layer (locus 9/A) was at least 3.50 m long and had two buttresses placed along its longer walls. Remains belonging to what may be considered as the lower ED stratum were reached only in the southern part of trench A3, just below the bottom of the Neo-Assyrian pit mentioned at the beginning of this report. They consist of fragments of three mud-brick rooms with no apparent floor levels. The only nearly completely excavated room was very small and measured 1.10 x 1.00 m. There were no obvious traces of an entrance.

The third season of excavations on Tell Rad Shaqrah helped solve some problems, mostly concerning the fortifications of the 3rd millennium BC settlement on the site. The results of this season's investigations have also thrown some light on the chronology of the ED occupation of the tell.