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## Tell Rad Shaqrah 1992 - The Fifth Season of Explorations in Northeast Syria

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## TELL RAD SHAQRAH 1992 – THE FIFTH SEASON OF EXPLORATIONS IN NORTHEAST SYRIA

**Piotr Bieliński**

In 1991, we started to excavate Tell Rad Shaqrah, a small site situated within the Hassake Southern Dam Basin. Those excavations are part of the International Salvage Program of the Hassake Dams Area, in which the mission is participating since 1988.<sup>1</sup> The second season of excavations on Rad Shaqrah was rather short and lasted from August 29 until October 1.<sup>2</sup>

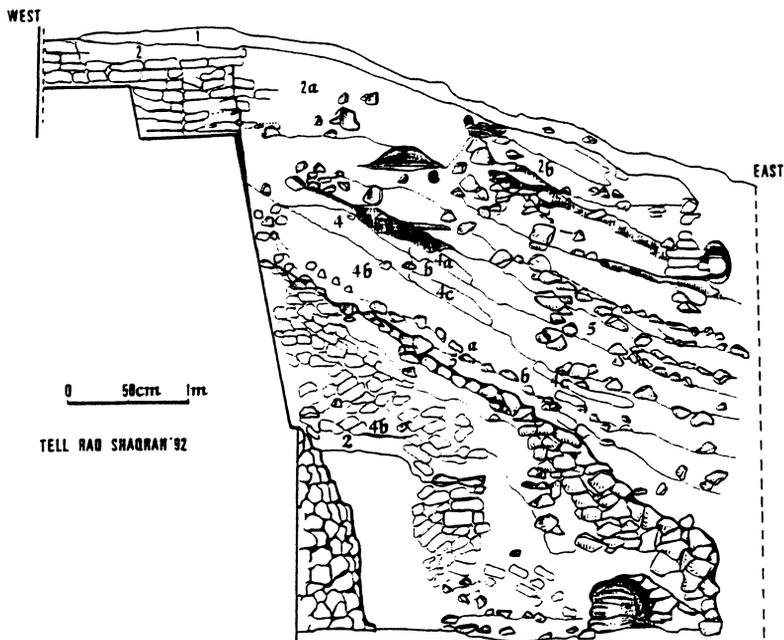
During the 1992 campaign the main object of our investigations on Tell Rad Shaqrah was a huge structure of the 3rd millennium BC discovered last year on the eastern slope of the tell. This structure which is composed of a substantial mud-brick wall nearly 4 m wide and an outer glacis with stone revetment (Fig. 1) gave the impression of being a city wall or an

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<sup>1</sup> See Bieliński, *PAM I*, 1990, pp. 17-25; idem, *PAM II*, 1991, pp.94-101; idem, *PAM III*, 1992, pp. 77-85.

<sup>2</sup> The staff included Dr. Piotr Bieliński, head of the mission, Dr. Barbara Kaim, Mrs. Dorota Bielińska, Mr. Rafał Koliński and Mr. Leszek Talko, archaeologists, and Miss Anne Schneider (Geneva University), architect.

The effective operation of our mission was possible thanks to the usual organizational help and encouragement offered by the Direction General of Antiquities and Museums of the Syrian Arab Republic. We are particularly indebted to Director of Excavations Dr. Adnan Bounni and Regional Director of Antiquities in Hassake, Mr. Jean-Simon Lazar. We owe special thanks also to Miss Fahima Hassan, who accompanied us as a representative of the Direction General and helped us very much in the course of the fieldwork.



*Fig. 1. Section through the rampart.  
Drawing D. Bielińska.*

outer wall of a single architectural complex of considerable size. Resolving this problem was one of the objectives of this campaign. The other goal was the further exploration of the ruins of a building, which adjoined the just described wall and was dated to the same, i.e., Early Dynastic period.

To achieve both these tasks two trenches from the previous season were enlarged and four new ones were opened. In Area A on the eastern slope of the mound, the old trench A was slightly enlarged towards the west and south (Fig. 2) and two new

trenches were marked out. The trench designated as A-2 measured 6 x 5 m and was extended by 2 x 1.50 m to the north-east, while A-3 measured 4 x 5 m. The A-2 trench is situated 5 m to the south of the old trench A and A-3 about 10 m to the west of it (Fig. 2). Since the northern part of Tell Rad Shaqrah was designated as Area D, the 1991 test trench A-1 on the slope was renamed D-1, and enlarged considerably to measure 5 x 7 m. To the west of it two new trenches labeled consecutively as D-2 and D-3, each 5 x 6 m, were opened at a distance of 5 m from each other.

In trench A exploration of locus 1/A, a large room partly uncovered last year, belonging to the ED period building mentioned above, was completed. Its original dimensions were 5.80 x 4.20 m. Pairs of fairly regularly spaced inner buttresses were recorded on the northern, eastern and southern walls, but only one such buttress on the western wall. Instead, there was an entrance with a stone door socket. Along the north and east walls, between the buttresses, ten storage jars were found; none were uncovered against the south and west walls of the room.

The center of locus 1/A was occupied by a large nearly rectangular fireplace, while another, much smaller, one was found near the northeastern corner of the room. In the northern part of this room there was a shallow, gypsum-plastered basin. It was rectangular and measured c. 1.10 x 1.10 m. On the floor and near the storage jars an interesting set of complete vessels ranging in shape from cups to jars was discovered. Numerous fragments of wall plaster were scattered over them, having evidently fallen from above. One such fragment, about 1 m long, was decorated with a series of small rectangular niches c. 10 cm deep.

 MODERN HOUSES

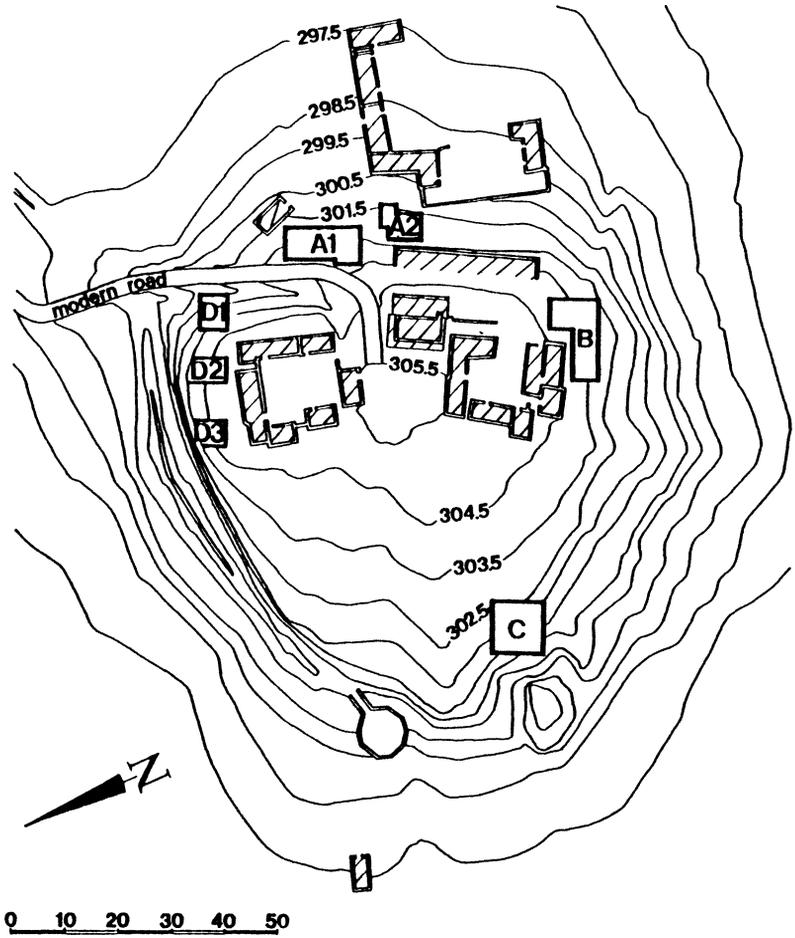


Fig. 2. Contour plan of Tell Rad Shaqrah.  
Drawing A. Schneider.

Another entrance leading to locus 1/A was cleared near the southeastern corner of the room in its south wall. It was c. 60 cm wide and led to another room, locus 3/A, adjoining locus 1/A from the south and belonging to the same building. A larger part of it was cleared during this season, revealing that it was only 1.70 m wide and at least 3.80 m long. In its western part the room contained a very carefully made and lime-plastered basin installation. The roofing of the room was destroyed by fire and thus on the floor there were numerous charred fragments of wooden beams, as well as other burnt fragments of the ceiling. Excavations of the rest of the building will be continued.

The substantial rampart with its stone glacis was found again only in trench A-2. The newly uncovered fragment has a slightly different orientation than the fragment excavated last year, which ran along a NNW-SSE axis. The wall investigated in trench A-2 follows basically a N-S axis, meaning that somewhere in the rather restricted area between trenches A and A-2 it changes direction. The part of the wall unearthed in trench A-2 reveals new data on its construction; it is not homogenous and does not have a straight facade like the previously discovered fragment. There is an angular recess about 2 m deep at the junction of two separate wall segments. The stone glacis which follows the facade protected this sensitive spot especially well. To the south of this recess, the wall was 2 m wide, much less compared to the northern fragment, which is of the same width as the fragment explored earlier in trench A, that is 3.90 m. On the inner side of the narrower segment of the big wall, a fragment of a very narrow room was exposed. This room (locus 4/A) was only about 1 m wide and at least 2 m long. Its well

plastered mud brick walls were preserved to a height of over 1.70 m. There were at least two successive floor levels, also partly plastered. All the pottery collected from the floors was of Early Dynastic period. It seems that after a certain period of use the room was abandoned and its interior intentionally filled with bricks and stones. This led me to suppose that the "narrower" segment of the big wall with the adjoining locus 4/A may represent an earlier phase of the rampart, while the wider segment should represent a later stage. The older fragment was incorporated into the later structure and then, to make it wider and stronger, locus 4/A was abandoned and filled with bricks. It seems that the fortifications of the 3rd millennium BC settlement at Tell Selenkhiye were rebuilt in a similar way and probably at a similar time.<sup>3</sup> In trench A-2 yet another room was found (locus 5/A). It was adjacent to the inner side of the later rampart segment and was evidently later than locus 4/A. Only a part of it, measuring 2.20 x 1.80 m, was excavated during the present season and its filling contained numerous fragments of wall plaster. Some of the fragments could have belonged to some sort of inner arches.

Trench A-3 has not yielded any interesting results as yet. Situated in the highest part of Tell Rad Shaqrah, it contained numerous modern graves sunk to the depth of about 1.50 m. They were so tightly packed that they destroyed the ancient strata in the upper part of the trench almost entirely. Only at the end of the season was the top of an undisturbed 3rd millennium BC layer reached.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf M.N. van Loon, 1974 and 1975 preliminary results of the excavations at Selenkhiye near Meskene, *AASOR*, vol. 44, 1979, pp. 97-112.

The main objective of explorations in Area D on the northern slope of the tell was to investigate further fragments of the rampart. For this purpose, the former test trench A-1 (now renamed D-1) was enlarged, and revealed another section of the substantial mud brick wall found here earlier. But contrary to our expectations the well preserved stone glacis did not continue westward. Instead, there was a substantial mud-brick platform or terrace about 2 m wide and about 1 m lower than the main rampart, also protected by a stone revetment. However this part of the glacis appeared to be on a much lower level than at the main wall. It protected not only the outer face of the mud-brick platform but also its sides. In general outline, the fragment of the rampart explored in trench D-1 resembles the fragment discovered in the A-2 trench.

In trenches D-2 and D-3 some remnants of a huge mud brick wall were also discovered. Taking into account their localization and orientation, it still remains unclear whether they belong to the same defensive structure as the fragment unearthed on the eastern slope of the tell and in trench D-1 or whether they represent another substantial structure of the ED period.

In trench D-2 two architectural layers were exposed above the top of what may be considered a fragment of the rampart. Both layers are dated to the Early Dynastic III period. The upper one was very badly eroded, but much better preserved remains of mud brick structures were present in the lower one. There was a fragment of a spacious room measuring at least 2.80 x 2.60 m with plastered buttresses, niches and a plastered floor.

A similar stratigraphic sequence was found in trench D-3. Two architectural layers, both of them of ED III date, were found to overlie a massive mud-brick structure. The upper

stratum contained fragments of small rooms in mud brick, of which one (locus 17/D) was rectangular and had four buttresses, while the other (locus 11/D) had a very peculiar waterproof floor composed of a layer of obliquely set bricks, a layer of lime plaster, a thick layer of stones and pebbles and finally a thin layer of fired clay forming its surface. It is for the first time that such a composite floor was found on Rad Shaqrah and one may suppose that the building to which it belonged was not an ordinary dwelling house. It is noteworthy that the walls of locus 11/D were much more regular than the walls of other structures unearthed in upper layers of Area D.

The structures explored in the lower stratum of trench D-3 consisted of five rooms, which belonged to three separate units. The first unit consisted of two interconnected rooms (loci 14/D and 20/D). The only discovered room of the second unit (locus 22/D) contained three bread ovens (tannurs). The third unit consisted of two other rooms (loci 16/D and 23/D). Locus 16/D was better preserved; it measured about 2.50 x 4.00 m and had the longer walls decorated with niches situated between pairs of buttresses. On the clay-plastered floor, there was a fragment of a round hearth. Most of the rooms unearthed in this stratum were found filled with carefully stacked mud bricks or mud bricks and stones. This should rather be considered a leveling fill, connected most probably with the construction of a building found in the upper layer, rather than a simple filling of an abandoned ruin.

The second season of excavations on Tell Rad Shaqrah has left us with many unanswered questions, but has helped to solve some others, especially those concerning the previously discovered rampart. It seems absolutely clear that this defensive

structure is not homogenous and that the supposition that it may have enclosed one large building should rather be rejected. It is also evident now that there were at least two consecutive "city-walls" in Rad Shaqrah during the Early Dynastic period: the older one, which was only 2 m thick, and a much stronger, later one, which was 3.90 m thick and protected by a stone revetment. Some parts of the older defensive system were incorporated into this later one with abandoned rooms being used as casemates. The precise dating of the elder rampart remains unclear (ED II/III) but there are no doubts that the later wall is of ED III date. There still remain some other questions to answer, e.g. how and against whom the inhabitants of Rad Shaqrah erected such an impressive construction.