

THE THIRD SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS IN NORTHEAST SYRIA, 1990

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In 1988 a team from the PCMA started excavating two sites situated within the Hassake Eastern Dam Reservoir Area. One of these was Tell Djassa al-Gharbi, the other Tell Abū Hafur.¹ Our explorations in this region were part of the International Salvage Program of the Hasake Dams Area, which is organized and supervised by the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums. In 1990 the third season of these excavations took place. We wish to express here our gratitude to the Directorate General of Antiquities for the help and constant support offered us throughout the campaign. In particular we owe sincere thanks to Dr. Adnan Bounni, Director of Excavations, Mr. Jean Simon Lazar, Director of Antiquities in Hasake, Mr. Hussein Youssuf who was working with us as a representative of the Directorate, and finally Dr. Antoine Suleiman.

The campaign started on September 22 and lasted until November 6. This was our last season of digging since the water from the Khabur began filling the Hasake Eastern Dam basin on the day we finished excavations and by now both sites have been covered by the waters of the new lake. The mission was composed of four archaeologists headed by Dr. Maria Krogulska at the beginning of the season and later on by the present writer.²

TELL DJASSA AL-GHARBI

The investigations on this site were carried out in four separate sectors. Two of these: the so called step trench (squares A-J) and

¹ See *PAM* 1, 1990, pp. 17-25.

² The members of the staff were: Mrs. Dorota Bielińska and Messrs Andrzej Reiche, Rafał Koliński and Tomasz Skierniewski. For the last week we were aided by Dr. Franciszek M. Stępnowski who was a member of this team in the 1988 season as well.

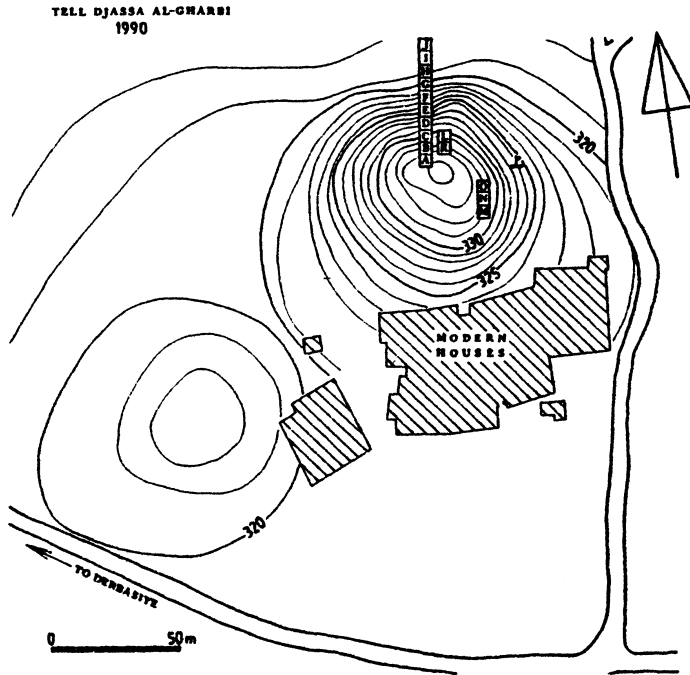


Fig. 1. Tell Djassa el-Gharbi. Plan of the site.

trench K-L (squares K-L), situated on the northern slope of the tell, were already the object of explorations during previous seasons. (Fig. 1) The two new trenches (squares M-N-0 and sounding P) were opened in the eastern part of the site.

Within the long step trench (squares A-J) this year's main effort centered on further exploring layer II. In this layer, which is of Early Dynastic III date, we continued the exploration of some mud-brick structures discovered last year. The eastern architectural unit, called Building I, was the object of our particular interest. (Fig. 2) There, inside a large room with two false arches (locus 5), some limited soundings were dug. It was established that originally this

room was nearly 4 m high and that it was rebuilt at least once. A thick deposit (0.80 m) of floors and accumulated debris suggests that this room was in use over a long period of time. Another room, most probably also belonging to the same Building I, was excavated this year south of locus 5. This new room, labeled locus 6, was very similar to the adjoining locus 5. It was of similar dimensions and had two intersecting arches arranged similarly. It seems now quite evident that the part of Building I described above must be at least partly contemporary with the huge platform of mud brick exposed already in 1968 on the northern slope of the tell. The results of a careful examination which took place during this season suggest that this large platform, over 10 m wide, was not a homogenous structure, but that it was composed of at least three parts. (Fig. 2) It seems also that the innermost part of the platform may be slightly younger than the rest of it. The inner face of the platform was found this year near the northern limits of trench K-L and another fragment of this strange structure was unearthed in a small sounding on the eastern slope of the mound (trench P). The remains discovered there have confirmed the supposition that the platform protected not only the northern slope of the tell, but the eastern one as well. It seems that this structure as a whole had a rather irregular character and was composed of several separate segments made of mud bricks and loose clay.

During this season layer I was exposed in the small trench K-L, running parallel to the main step trench. (Fig. 1) Fragments of two large rooms with clay benches, storage jars and fireplaces were found there. At least three main phases of development could be observed here, closely corresponding to the earlier stages of layer I as distinguished within the main step trench. These stages are representative of the late phase of the Early Dynastic III period. Structures belonging to the same stages of layer I were discovered also in the new trench M-N-0, located on the eastern slope of the tell (Fig. 3). They consisted of the remains of at least three separate dwelling

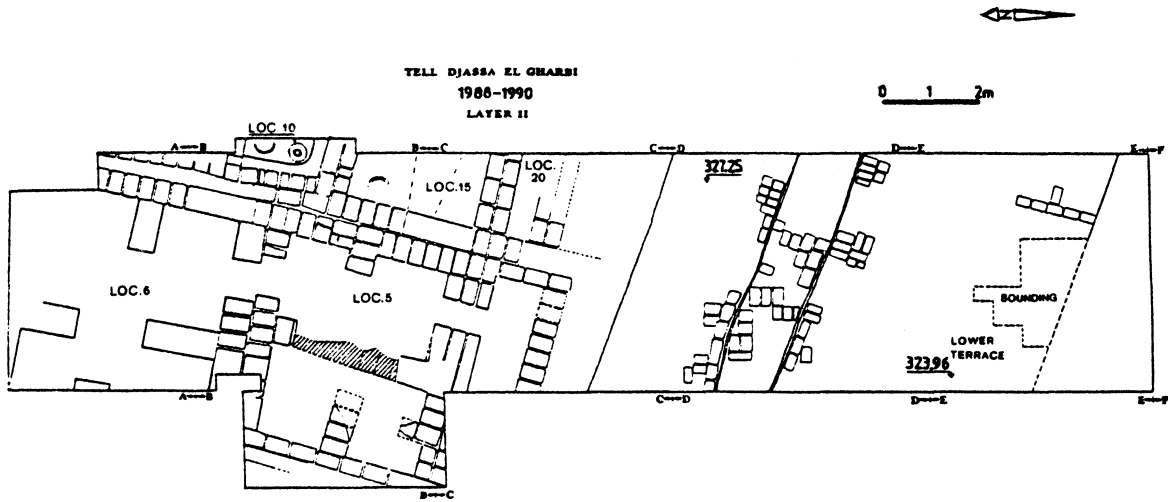


Fig. 2. Step trench (squares A-E). Constructions of Layer II.

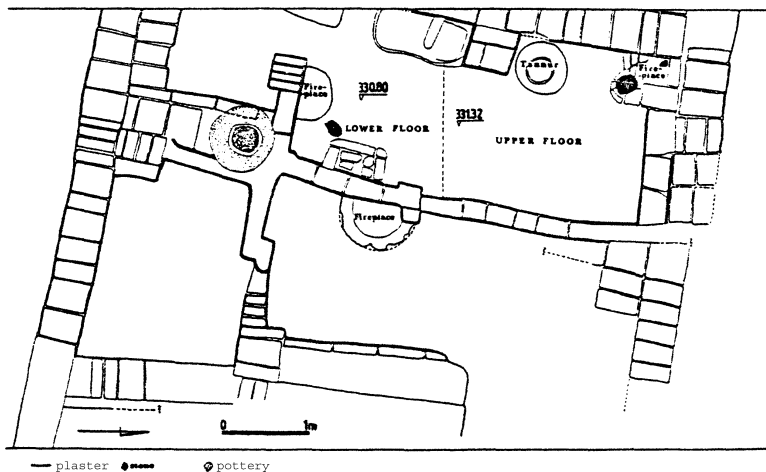


Fig. 3. Layer I house found in squares M-0.

units. The largest fragment excavated within this trench measured c. 7 x 5 m and consisted of four rooms. The rooms contained numerous domestic installations such as: fireplaces, querns, mortars, a storage jar, tannur and small basin. The exterior walls of this house were constructed of two rows of large mud bricks, while the partition walls were much thinner. The walls (preserved to a height of c. 1.20 m) were reinforced with internal buttresses and plastered with a thick layer of white plaster. Of the other dwellings not much can be said as only small sections were exposed within the boundaries of this sector.

In the same M-N-0 trench, just below the lowest floors of houses belonging to layer I we found the top of layer II with fragments of the upper parts of an arched mud-brick structure. It closely resembled buildings discovered in layer II of the step trench A-J.

Last year Layer III was found only in the main step trench, where its top was reached immediately beneath the foundations of arched structures belonging to layer II. Our information about this

layer and its dating in particular was fairly sketchy. To gain more data, during the 1990 season we opened a larger sounding within the main step trench. The architectural remains of layer III exposed there consisted of fragments of two rooms with numerous adjacent floors. What was even more important was the pottery found in these rooms for it helped solve the question of the dating of layer III. Like both the lower levels of Layer I and the whole of layer II, also layer III turned out to be of Early Dynastic III date. We were not so lucky with the dating of the lowermost occupational layer found on Tell Djassa al-Gharbi, i.e., Layer IV. In spite of our efforts (sounding in the northern part of step trench A-J), this layer did not yield any diagnostic potsherds which would have allowed us to set a more precise date than the Early Dynastic period in general.

This last season of excavations was important for a more complete understanding of the character of the 3rd millennium BC settlements on Tell Djassa al-Gharbi. The remains discovered in layer II can be considered as particularly interesting. Such elements as the substantial platform and buildings composed of tightly packed arched structures are considerably different from the architecture of other later 3rd millennium BC settlements excavated in this part of Syria. The function of the platform, as well as that of the arched structures, will certainly need further clarification. It is to be noted, however, that similar arched structures have been found on Tell Abu Hadjarat within the same Hassake Eastern Dam Basin³ and on Tell 'Atij where a large platform was also uncovered.⁴

³ Personal communication by Dr. Antoine Suleiman.

⁴ M. Fortin, Rapport préliminaire sur la première campagne de fouilles à Tell 'Atij, *Syria* 65 (1988), pp. 139-71; idem, Rapport préliminaire sur la seconde campagne de fouilles à Tell 'Atij, *Syria* 67 (1990), pp. 219-250.

TELL ABŪ HAFUR

On Tell Abū Hafur the explorations were carried out in all three sectors begun in 1989. The first, designated Area A, is situated on the southeastern slope of the main mound. During this season our investigations within Area A were rather limited. In this sector, where last year a habitation quarter composed of at least five separate dwelling houses was unearthed, this year we made only some minor soundings, verifying some architectural elements and taking some additional measurements. In most parts of this sector we succeeded in uncovering the architectural remains of layer A, which like the three upper layers discovered here before, also represents the Early Dynastic III period. Within Area A we also excavated a fragment of a small lane which existed there in periods represented by layers 3 and 4. This lane was set perpendicularly to both streets cleared in this sector in 1989. This year's investigations in Area A confirmed the continuity of occupation in this part of the site during most of the Early Dynastic period.

In the other sector, the long step trench set on the northern slope of Tell Abū Hafur (Area B), our efforts centered on two problems. The first was continued exploration and more precise dating of structures discovered in layer VI of this trench. The second task was the further investigation of a huge mud-brick wall found within layer VIII of this trench. To achieve the first of our aims we extended the step trench to a width of more than 5 m, making it possible to clear a larger part of the structures belonging to layer VI. Some more small rooms belonging to the same structure were discovered, but what was more important was the diagnostic pottery material discovered in them. It is now absolutely clear that layer VI in Area B of Tell Abū Hafur belongs to the period of ED III occupation at the site. The substantial mud-brick wall of layer VIII belongs to the same period as well. To reconstruct its original position and extent, three small test trenches were opened on the north-

ern side of Area B and two others on its southern side. Each of the trenches measured c. 3 x 2 m. Within three of them the topmost remains of this huge wall were discovered. It would seem that this wall which is at least 6 m wide and c. 10 m high protected the ED III settlement on Tell Abū Hafur against flooding from the nearby wadi, as the remains of this wall were found only on the slope on the northern side of the tell.

The third sector of Tell Abū Hafur subjected to exploration was the small mound called Tell Abū Hafur East. The aim of this season's explorations was to study further the stratigraphical sequence established there last year, when numerous remains of the Mitanni period were found. For this purpose, three small soundings were made on the western slope of Tell Abū Hafur East. Some fragments of a fortification wall erected on foundations made of stone blocks were unearthed. The wall itself was constructed of mud bricks. These fortifications represent a 2nd millennium BC occupation of the site and can be attributed to the Mitannian period. In a layer overlying this, some remains of a Neo Assyrian structure were found, most probably also of a defensive nature. This discovery has extended the stratigraphical sequence of the site, since in the previous year we did not find any layers which could be dated to a period later than the 2nd millennium BC.