

TELL QARAMEL

EXCAVATIONS 2000

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The archaeological excavations on Tell Qaramel are a Polish and Syrian joint project supervised by the Polish Center of Archaeology of Warsaw University and the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus.¹⁾ The project is also partly sponsored by the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University.

Excavations were conducted from April 14 to May 15, 2000.

1) The Mission would like to express its gratitude to Prof. Dr. Sultan Muheisen, Director General of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Damascus, for his continuous help, kindness and friendly support. We also feel much indebted to the staff of the Regional Directorate of Antiquities in Aleppo, especially to the Director, Dr. Wahid Khayyata, and also to Engineer Yusef Mohammad Al Delidie and Mr. Samer Abdel Ghafour, who were working with us on the site. The expedition was directed by Prof. Dr. Ryszard F. Mazurowski and Mr. Nazir Awad. The staff included on the Polish side: Dr. Dorota Ławecka, Ms Katarzyna Januszek, Mr. Grzegorz Kałwak, Mr. Piotr Karczmarek, Mr. Łukasz Rutkowski, archaeologists; assisted by students from the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University: Ms Małgorzata Chacińska, Mr. Artur Domański, Ms Renata Maskowicz and Ms Weseła Wojnarowicz.

GENERAL REMARKS

The chief objectives of the second field season on Tell Qaramel,²⁾ which is a site

situated on the right (western) bank of the River Qoueiq, c. 25 km north of Aleppo

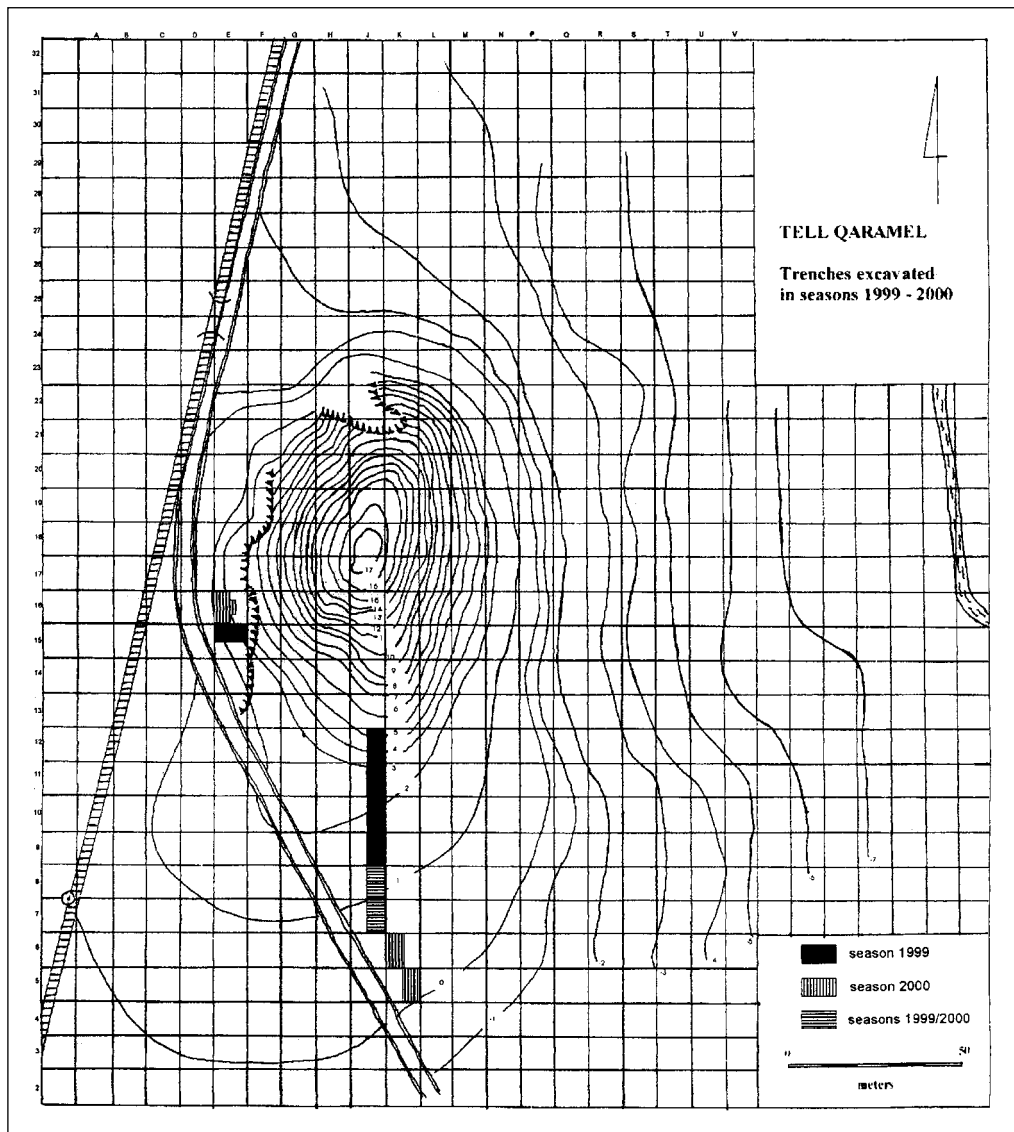


Fig. 1. Tell Qaramel. Plan of the tell with trenches excavated in 1999-2000
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

2) For the first season of work at Tell Qaramel, cf. Ryszard F. Mazurowski, *PAM XI, Reports 1999* (2000), 285ff.

and 30 km south of the Taurus Mountains, included a study of tell stratigraphy and the extent of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlement, including its stratigraphical position.

With this purpose in mind, it was decided to continue excavating trenches J-8 b,d and J-7 b,d located in the lowest part of the southern slope of the tell, and to open two new trenches (K-7 a,c and K-5 b,d, both 5 x 10 m) even further to the south (*Fig. 1*). Together with J-12, J-11, J-10, J-9 excavated in the previous season, the trenches form an 80-m long step-trench, putting the total surface of the area explored on the southern slope at 200 m² (*Fig. 1*).

Excavations were also continued in the lower part of the western slope, where in the spring of 1999 a tomb from the Early Bronze Age had been discovered. Trench E-16 a,c (5.5 x 10 m) opened to the north of last year's square E-15 runs along the longer, N-S axis of the tomb. It was hoped that the original entrance to the structure,

located in the shorter, northern wall, would thus be revealed. It also provided the opportunity to investigate the area immediately north of the tomb where a second chamber or, possibly, another tomb was expected.

Throughout the season the surveying of the area south and southwest of the tell was continued in order to establish the southern and eastern borders of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic village discovered here previously.³⁾ Pre-Pottery Neolithic A (PPNA) and Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) artifacts have been collected from the ground surface. This season, another extensive assemblage of flint objects was gathered from the surface of the western half of private fields nos. 142 and 144. All of the upper part of the western flooding terrace of the river has yielded artifacts. To the south this Pre-Pottery Neolithic settlement extends to the middle section of field no. 160. The settlement was obviously quite large, its estimated area being close to 4 ha.

SQUARE E-16 AND TOMB 1

Square E-16 a,c on the western slope of the tell joins at right angles trench E-15 a,b explored last year. Its chief purpose was to study in detail the external form of Tomb 1, especially the entrance, as well as the archaeological context (only the southern, rear part of the tomb was investigated in the previous season). Initially intended as a 10 by 5.5 m trench, it was extended eastward (2 by 5 m) in order to unearth the whole entrance (consequently, quarters b, d of the square have also been partly explored).

By the end of the season, the entire west wall, more than the half of the ceiling and

the entrance to the tomb had been cleared. Current dimensions of the tomb are as follows: height of NW corner, c. 2 m; SW corner, c. 1.80 m; length of west wall at foundation level, c. 6.30 m; same wall at ceiling level, c. 5.30 m; south wall, c. 4.50 m; north wall, at least c. 3.70 m, the rest still being hidden in the trench wall. The walls are made up of from five to seven layers of stone, depending on the size of the blocks, the bigger blocks positioned in the top layers, the smaller ones below. The spaces between the stones were filled with pebbles and brownish-red clay. The latter was also used as roof filling.

3) Cf. *ibid.*, 288.

The structure appears to extend deeper toward the north. While the level of the foundations has not been reached as yet, a foundation trench has been observed, going down from half the height of the north wall. Obviously, Tomb 1 must have been dug partly into earlier layers accumulated north of it.

It is obvious by now that the west wall was structurally different from the north and south ones. It was built straight up, while the latter two had a step-like construction with successive layers of stone

closing in toward the top. For this reason Tomb 1 slopes downwards toward the north and south.

The entrance, located in the north wall, was closed with a large limestone slab (H. 170 cm; W. 120 cm; Th. 20 cm) leaning against the huge blocks of the jambs. The gaps between the closing slab and the jambs were packed with smaller stones.

The investigations confirmed the presence of a robbers' pit sunk through the roof of the tomb.

OTHER RESULTS OF EXCAVATIONS IN E-16

At least three different occupational levels could be distinguished in the explored part of the trench. Considering the similarity of the pottery, most likely all of them belong to the same period or represent phases that are very close in time. The youngest was deposited just below a very thick topsoil layer (very stony earth containing plastic garbage – same as in E-15 last season). It is formed of brick debris mixed with nests entirely filled with carbonized grain (sampled for examination). Below it is a hard gray compact layer (post-erosion deposit) that seals Tomb 1 and all the structures underneath.

The next occupational level (*Fig. 2*) is represented by three different walls, all consisting of a single course of stones. Two of them (W 3, W 4), oriented NE-SW, are parallel to each other. Considering the character of the fill and the numerous artifacts in the space between them, the passage should be treated as a narrow back street (c. 1 m wide). In addition, W 3 and W 2 (oriented N-S) enclose a rectangular area (locus 2), although they do not, in fact, form a corner. There is a kind of very narrow passage between them suggesting an entrance, but no evident walking level

was identified. W 2 itself turns a corner at right angles to the west, thus enclosing a space to the north and west of it that has been designated as locus 1. The assemblage here included a rich set of pottery vessels and basalt tools. Taking into account the character of the fill (eroded bricks with evidence of ashes mixed with numerous pea-like carbonized seeds, and a significant assemblage of bones and shells), it is reasonable to consider locus 1 as the ruins of a kitchen. Besides, a bone sheath with incised decoration, a metal grinder, and a spindle whorl were discovered in the kitchen. A white compact clay floor was unearthed only in the southern part of the kitchen, presumably close to its entrance where a door socket was also revealed. The stone walls may constitute the sub-structure of mudbrick walls erected on top of them. Indeed, a mudbrick wall, W 1, partly collapsed into the kitchen space, was located above W 2.

The oldest occupational level, only fragmentarily identified so far, is represented by two rounded mudbrick structures and Tomb 1 itself.

The pottery assemblage from this trench is completely different from the material

TELL QARAMEL
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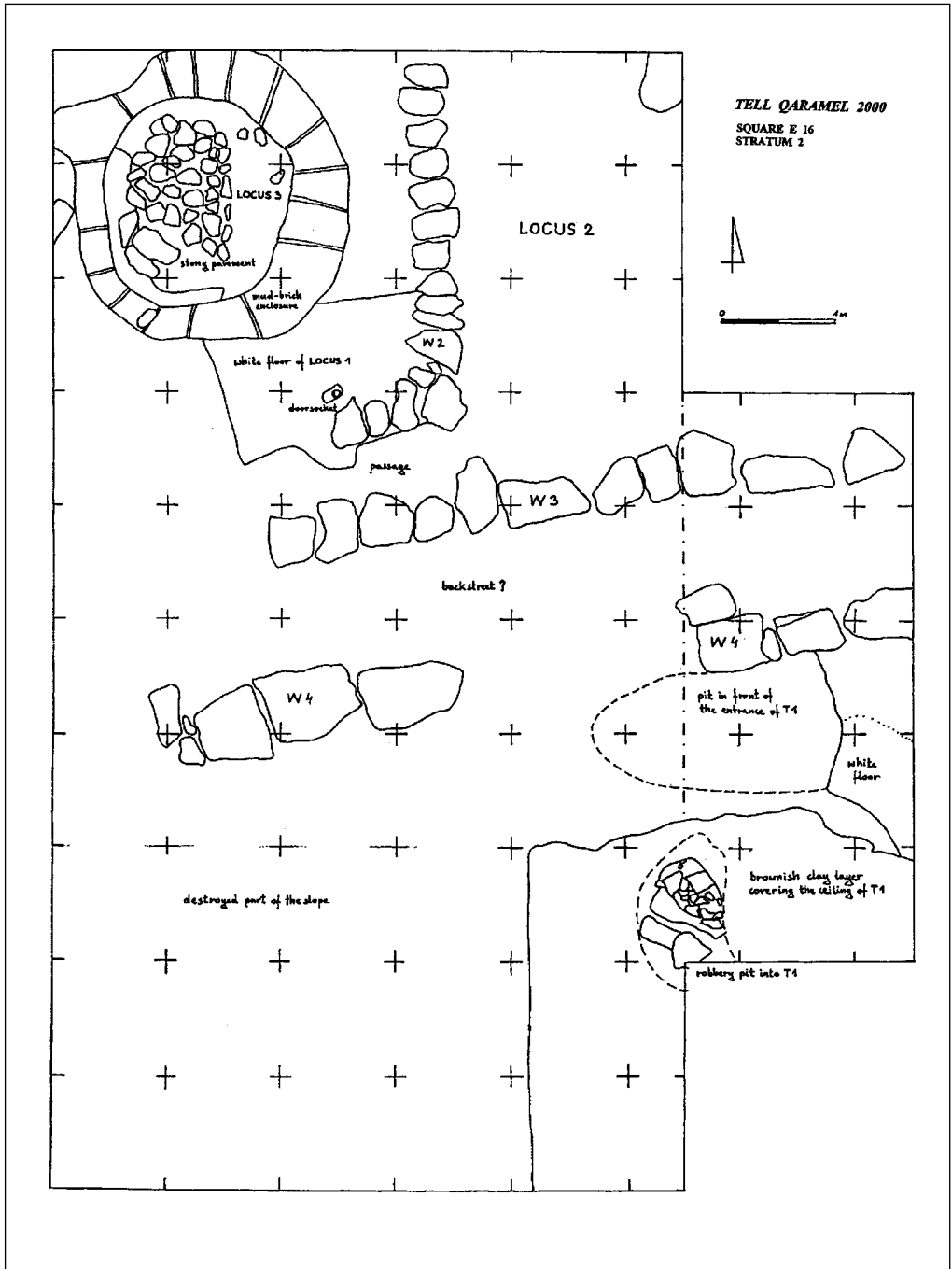


Fig. 2. Tell Qaramel. Square E-16. Stratum 2
(Drawing L. Rutkowski)

excavated on the southern slope of the tell. It is practically homogenous for all the occupational levels explored this season and may be divided into two main groups. The first consists of common and coarse wares made of the same pastes and probably in the same technological process. Black cores with reddish-brown surface and substantial organic temper are common features. Overfiring is frequent. With few exceptions the vessels seem to be handmade, but because of very poor surface treatment it is difficult to detect traces of turning on a potter's wheel. The predominant shape is a pot with everted rim.

The second group is made up of a fine ware of sorts. Examples were found in the Tomb 1 assemblage of the previous season. These are pots and jars of average or small size, often with painted geometric decoration (dark reddish-

brown paint on a pale yellow surface). Most often there is a band of horizontal wavy lines on the shoulder, sometimes combined in a more complex design. Vessels are carefully smoothed and slipped. Bases are always flat and traces of string-cutting are in evidence on occasion. Insignificant mineral temper in the form of fine white and black grits can be observed in the compact and brightly colored fabric.

A preliminary examination of the pottery suggests a date in the Early Bronze Age. The lack of ring bases and the unsophisticated shapes and ware of the predominant group may confirm the dating. The assemblage is obviously earlier than the clearly different EB IV pottery material detected in the deepest layers of the trenches on the southern slope of the tell.

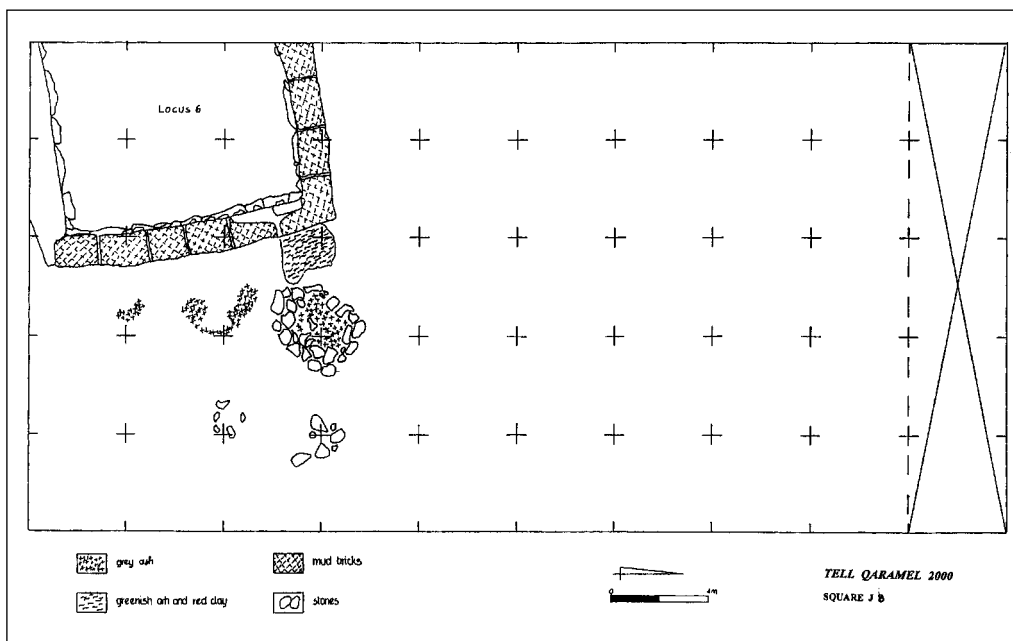


Fig. 3. Tell Qaramel. Square J-8. Strata III and IV
(Drawing R. Maskowicz)

SQUARES J-8 AND J-7

Squares J-8 and J-7 are situated on the southern slope of Tell Qaramel, at the lower end of a step-trench dug to examine the stratigraphy of the tell. Excavations in both trenches (each 5 x 9 m) were a continuation of work done in this area during the previous campaign.

SQUARE J-8

A layer of ash and hard, burned soil (stratum III) was found below the stone foundations of stratum II excavated last year. In the southern part of the trench, there was a round fireplace made of stones with traces of black ash inside and layers of greenish ash and red, burned, soft earth nearby. No other structures connected with this stratum were found. In the southwestern corner of the trench, part of a room (Loc. 6) from the earlier (IV) stratum was uncovered. It was probably reused in stratum III as a rubbish dump, since its lower part was filled with the same kind of ashes and red earth as mentioned above (*Fig. 3*). The lower part of the walls of Loc. 6 were built of stone and plastered with red clay on the inside; the upper part was made of large red mudbricks, measuring 46 x 34 x 10 cm.

North of Loc. 6, below the stratum III level, there was a thick layer of practically sterile, compact brown clay. Decayed red mudbricks of stratum V appeared below this, but were not explored further this year.

SQUARE J-7

Trench J-7 is situated immediately south of J-8, separated from it by a meter-wide balk. After remains of floors and stone wall foundations of the previously excavated

stratum VII (which might belong to the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age period) were removed, the same thick layer of brown, compact clay as in square J-8 appeared. Below it were structures of stratum VIII, dating to the Middle Bronze Age period (*Fig. 4*). They consist of a courtyard with tamped earth floor on a layer of small stones and surrounding mudbrick walls erected on stone foundations. In the lower part of both the NW-SE walls, close to them and parallel were rows of vertically set mudbricks providing the stone foundations.

In the northeastern part of the trench a large round structure (Loc. 14), c. 3.5 m in diameter, was uncovered. It consists of a few levels of good-quality, thick lime plaster floors surrounded by a stone foundation. It is still unclear whether this structure had been built earlier and incorporated into the building or had been contemporary with it. Above the floor of Loc. 14, a small, well-preserved terracotta figurine of a woman was found. Figurines of the same kind are characteristic of Hama level H (first half of 2nd millennium BC). In the lower levels the excavated area retains its function as a courtyard or an open space, with cobbled floors, shallow pits filled with ashes and structures (working places or platforms?) made of tamped clay and gravel. In the lowermost stratum (IX), only partially uncovered this year, there was yet another round enclosure with walls made of clay and an earthen floor. From this stratum large quantities of bones and flint artifacts were retrieved, as well as some sherds, possibly of Early Bronze IV date.



*Fig. 4. Tell Qaramel. Square J-7. Upper level of Stratum VIII
(Photo R. F. Mazurowski)*

SQUARE K-6

Further to the south, a new trench in square K-6 a,c (5 x 10 m) was opened. Its northwestern corner adjoins the south-eastern corner of trench J-7.

The topmost layer (stratum I) consisted of gray clay with many stones and (mostly in the northern part of the trench) mudbrick debris. This stratum contained – among other finds – human and animal bones and a basalt vessel fragment. The only structure found in this stratum was a meter-wide stone wall, the preserved section being c. 3 m long. It ran from the western part of the trench along an E-W axis.

The next layer (stratum II) consisted of brownish-red, loose earth mixed with clay or decayed mudbricks. Sherds, bones, flint tools and a stone pestle were found in this

stratum. From the eastern part of the trench also some pieces of slag were collected. In the middle part of the trench, close to the western end, a meter-wide stone wall running for a length of 1.5 m was discovered (Fig. 5). This wall turned a corner in the north, delimiting from the south a limestone plastered floor set on a few layers of small stones mixed with sherds. This floor stretched c. 4.5 m to the north. Close to the northern end a refuse pit containing fragments of pottery, animal and shells was discovered.

Belonging to the next stratum (light reddish-brown compact earth) is a fireplace surrounded by stones, found in the northeastern part of the trench. Close to it were pieces of bronze slag, fragments of vessel for melted metal, and a carnelian

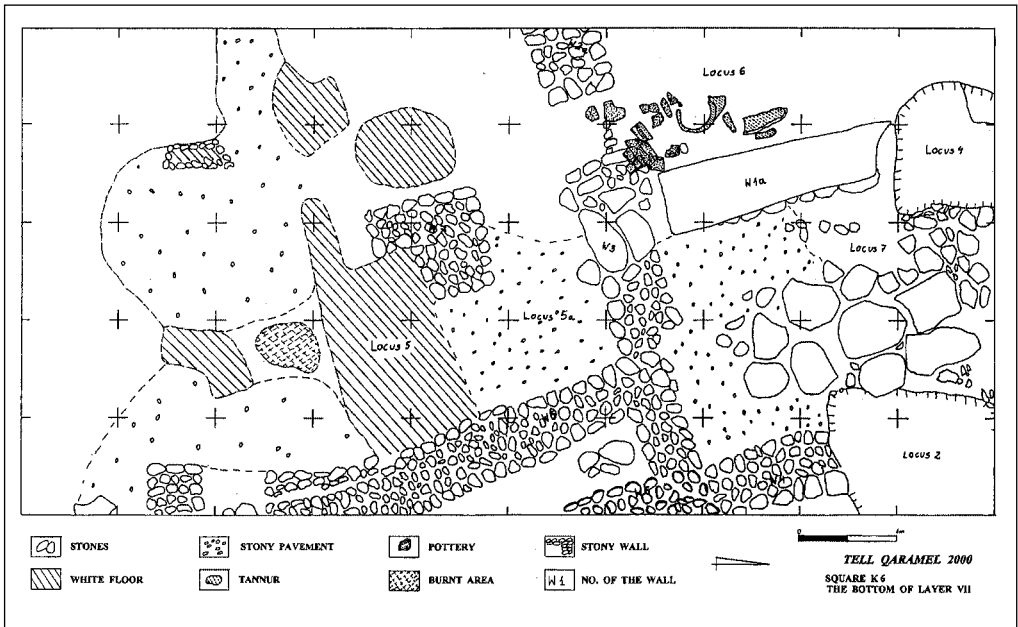


Fig. 5. Tell Qaramel. Square K-6. Bottom of layer VII (stratum II)
(Drawing K. Januszek)

bead. To the north of it, there was another refuse pit containing sherds, broken bricks, bones, flint artifacts and a stone spindle whorl.

In the northern part of stratum IV, grayish-red mudbrick debris mixed with gray earth and ash was identified. This stratum contained sherds, flint artifacts, bones and an oblong bone bead. In the northern part of the trench, also parts of four rectangular rooms belonging to a house were unearthed. In one of these rooms, separated from the western one by a mudbrick wall erected on stone foundations, there was a stone pavement. In its northwestern part, there was a refuse pit, close to which a worn quern was discovered. Adjoining on the west was another room, probably a kitchen, with a clay floor. Inside, there were the remains of a *tannur*, several pieces of big storage vessels, bones and carbonized nutshells. To the south of the kitchen, a corridor with cobblestone floor was uncovered, leading to another room with white floor, limited on the northwest and east by stone walls. The southern limit of the room could not be determined.

The next stratum (V) consisted in the northern part of the trench of gray and light

gray earth with many pebbles, and in the middle and southern part of stone debris. In the northern part, some sherds, flint artifacts and a large quantity of bones were discovered; in the southern part, the stone debris yielded human bones mixed with ash. In the southwestern part of the trench a grave was discovered, containing a single skeleton with the skull facing down. On a floor of large flat stones there were three vessels (two of them misshapen). Inside one of them, pieces of a bronze pin were found. In the stone debris to the east of the grave, there was another, decayed and partly disturbed human skeleton. East of it there were fragments of a decorated object made from an animal rib-bone; a pestle, whetstone with incised decoration and an *erminette* were discovered.

Stratum VI consists of dense, compact, grayish-beige clay in the northeastern part of the trench and a grayish-black loose earth in the remaining part. In the northeastern part, a cooking pot with skeletons of (probably) two infants was found. This vessel contained also a shell pendant and a small white marble bead. Besides, the northern part of the trench contained some stone and mudbrick structures, which were not explored this year.

SQUARE K-5

The northwestern corner of square K-5 b,d adjoins K-6. This was the southernmost area explored during this campaign. Arbitrary layers 10-15 cm thick were removed, reaching the lowermost levels at a depth of 2 m below the actual surface of the tell in this spot. Numerous stones were detected in all of the explored layers of the trench. The subsurface layer was badly eroded and contained mixed material starting with a modern burial. The remnants of an oval mudbrick structure

were uncovered in the layer underneath in the southwestern part of the trench. To judge by the numerous flint and stone artifacts, and the scarce potsherds, it was quite possibly a Bronze Age flint workshop. Similar oval structures were unearthed in the southwestern corner of the trench and its western balk wall (one with the white floor inlaid with pebbles). Considering the pottery evidence, these structures can be dated to the Middle Bronze Age.

The earliest oval-type structure was uncovered at the northern edge of the trench. Its enclosure was made of stones bonded with clay and plastered from outside (*Fig. 6*). Its floor was hollowed funnel-like to c. 1.5 m below the foundation level of the enclosing wall. Its entrance opened to the south and was flanked by stone walls (surviving as

foundations). The fill yielded numerous flints, bones, stones and pottery sherds, the latter including plenty of fine ware typical of EB IV (ring-based goblets with ribbed decoration). The flint and stone artifacts, however, are still very much PPNA-related in form (mostly blades); this could be suggestive of their secondary position.

POTTERY FROM THE STEP-TRENCH

At the time of writing, the following provisional conclusions could be drawn concerning the pottery assemblage retrieved this year from the trenches situated on the southern slope of the tell.

The youngest layers contain sherds, possibly of the Late Bronze/Iron Age periods. These include a red-slipped burnished bowl and plate fragments, as well as storage jars with raised band and impressed decoration.



Fig. 6. Tell Qaramel. Square K-5. Stratum III. View of the oval building from the south (Photo R.F. Mazurowski)

Pottery from the deeper-lying layers appears to belong to the Middle Bronze Age and is similar to sherds found at Tell Rifa'at H5 and Tell Hailane.

The deepest layers reached this year contained pottery which can be dated to the

Early Bronze IV period. Close parallels are to be found among sherds retrieved from the Kiln Dump at Tell Kadrich (e.g. fine-ware ring-based goblets with ribbed decoration, bowls with crescent rims and a cordon below the rim on the outside, etc.).

CHIPPED STONE INDUSTRY

Flint artifacts were found in all the excavated trenches this year, on the surface of the tell, and on the spot of the PPNA settlement. Almost all of them were made from local raw material of chocolate color, easily available in the form of small concretions and pebbles. Other flint material, as well as gray obsidian (most likely imported from Turkey) occurs, albeit seldom. Blades and flakes were obtained from bipolar cores with opposite platform to blade, as well as short conical cores with a single platform, and to a lesser degree from splinters. Among tools, which constitute over a dozen percent of all flint artifacts, points are the most numerous group. Moreover, retouched blades, end-scrapers, sickle blades, burins, retouched flakes, perforators, scrapers, borers, saws, and truncations can be distinguished.

The chronological and cultural classification of tools is still provisional at the present stage of the research. Unfortunately,

artifacts clearly associated with PPNA and Early PPNB tend to co-exist with evidently younger forms belonging to the Pottery Neolithic, Chalcolithic, and Bronze Age periods.

As for typical PPNA forms, El-Khiam points occur (A 10, A 12, according to Cauvin's classification⁴) together with Mureybet (A 25 - A 32) and a single specimen of an *erminette*. Furthermore, some of our end-scrapers and perforators look like analogous tools known from the PPNA settlement at Mureybet, for example. Other flint tools made of blades, like retouched blades, end-scrapers, sickle blades, burins, borers, saws; truncations, are derived from unipolar and bipolar cores. They are encountered in comparable percentages at our site. These tools, of much smaller size than those typical of the PPNA and PPNB, are known from both the Pottery Neolithic and the Chalcolithic periods, and in the case of sickle blades from the Bronze Age, too.

GROUND AND PECKED STONE INDUSTRY

The ground and pecked stone industry of Tell Qaramel is represented by a big number of complete or partly preserved querns IIB1a, IIE1a and grinders IIIIE1a, IIIIE2a, IIIIE2b and IIIB1, IIIB2 (in

Mazurowski's classification).⁵ They are nearly all made of basalt and may represent occupation of different periods, starting from the PPNA. Unfortunately, most of the objects discovered in this

4) M.C. Cauvin, D. Stordeur, Les outillages lithiques et osseux de Mureybet, Syria, Fouilles (Van Loon 1965). Publications de l'URA n° 17, *Cahiers de l'Euphrate* no. 1 (Paris 1978).

5) R.F. Mazurowski, Ground and pecked stone industry in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic of Northern Iraq, in: S.K. Kozłowski (ed.), *Nemrik 9. Pre-Pottery Neolithic Site in Iraq*, vol. 3 (Warsaw 1997).

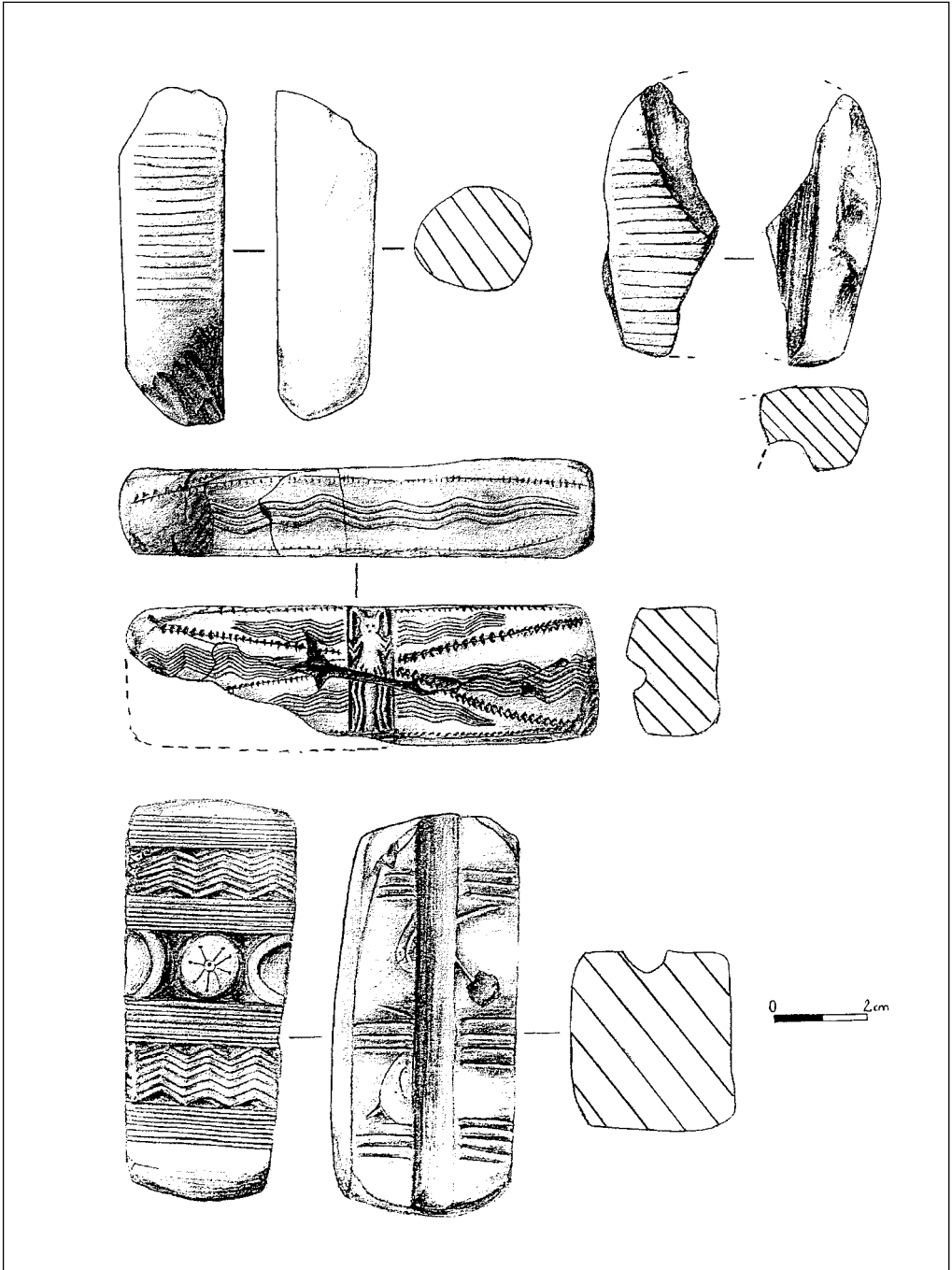


Fig. 7. Decorated whetstones from PPNA, discovered in secondary context in Early and Middle Bronze Age layers (Drawing R. Maskowicz)

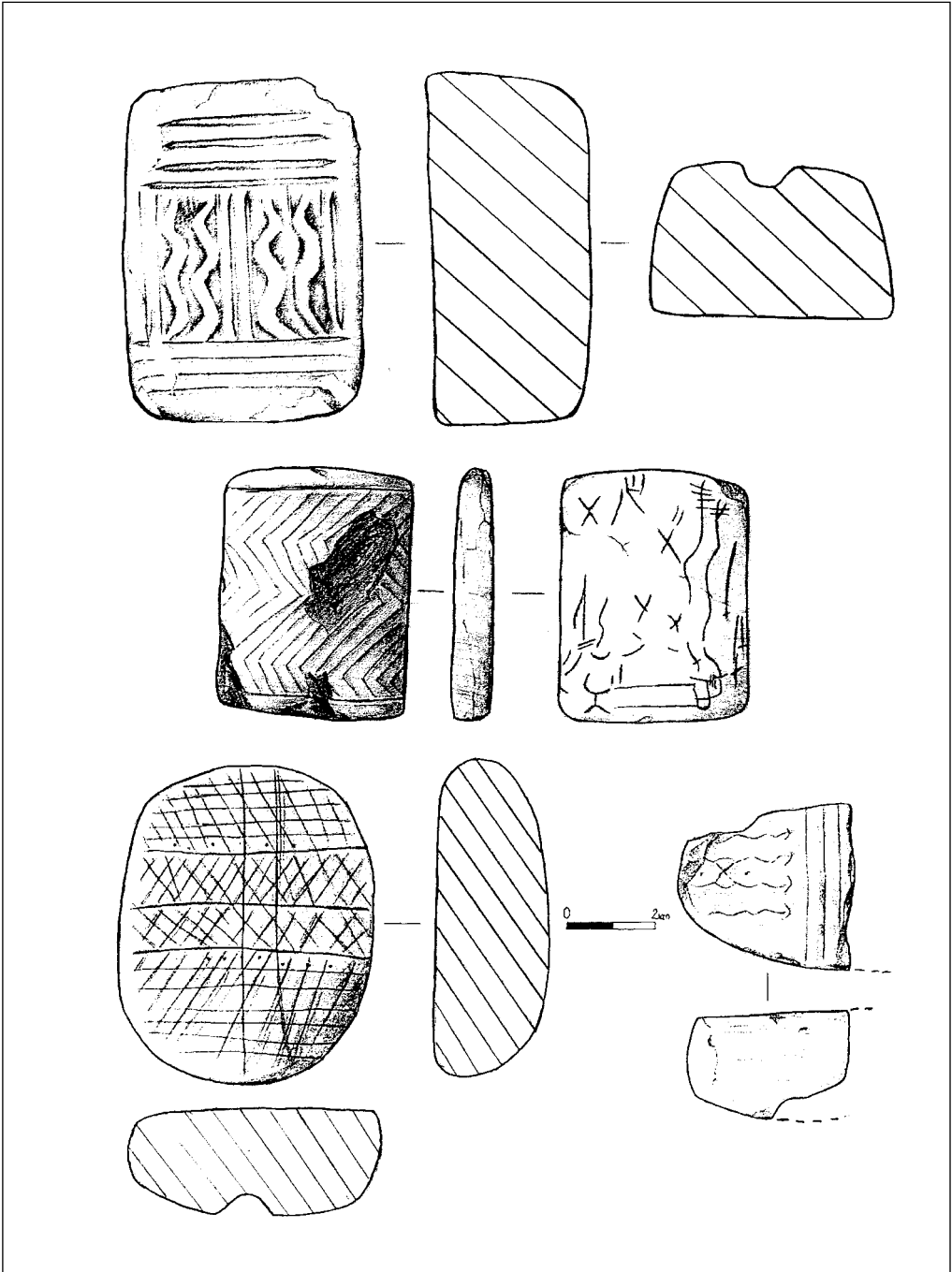


Fig. 8. Decorated whetstones and plaques from PPNA, discovered in secondary context in Early and Middle Bronze Age layers (Drawing R. Maskowicz)

year's trenches had been reused. This is true of celts VII A1a, VII A1b, VII A2a, VII A3a, made of fine-grained shale or "greenstone" (dolerite), small pestles III A1 and III A2 with sides carefully polished and sometimes displaying secondary scratches along the longer axis of the pebble, decorated and undecorated bowls XIV A1, XIV A2, forms II A1, and pointed tools XI B. The morphology and execution of these tools are typical of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. The same could be said of the c. 13 complete or fragmentary whetstones XV A, XV B and XV C (rectangular) made of schist, shale (?) or sandstone pebbles (?). Some are beautifully decorated on one, two

or more surfaces with geometric lines, solar, lunar, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs (*Figs. 7, 8*). A few of these objects have evidently been reused as plaques once they had been damaged and could no longer serve their original function. Some also display secondary V- or U-shaped grooves cutting across the older decoration.

Many of the above mentioned whetstones have parallels among the decorated forms of palettes and grooved stones discovered at Jerf al-Ahmar.⁶⁾ A fragment of III A1 or III A2 pestle with several parallel engraved lines situated laterally to the longer axis of the object is of similar date.

BONES

Most of the animal bones excavated this year represent domestic animals like sheep/goat, cow, horse/donkey, and dog. The remaining bones belong to wild animals, like gazelles and different species of birds. Post-consumption evidence on the bones is in abundance: the most frequent being cuts, signs of being torn apart, overheating, burning.

About three dozen bone tools were also discovered. Needles and perforators were made of straight bones, cutting tools of ribs. There are three ornamented pieces, including a finely-made sheath with geometric design from square E-16.

Human bones were discovered in several burials, all excavated in trenches K-5, K-6, and J-7. Anthropological analysis is pending.

6) M. Fortin, Syria. Land of Civilisations (Quebec 1999), 269, Figs. 259-261.