

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE BISHRI REGION
— REPORT OF THE ELEVENTH WORKING SEASON —

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The 11th working season of the Syria-Japan Archaeological Joint Mission to the Bishri Region was undertaken from October 11 to October 25, 2009. The members of the joint mission from the Syrian and Japanese parties are as follows.

Syrian party: Mohamad Sarhan (Director) and ‘Aid ‘Aisa.

Japanese party: Shogo Kume.

Before describing our activities, we would like to express our sincerest thanks to Dr. Bassam Jamous, the Director General of the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, and Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi, the Syrian Supervising Adviser for this joint mission and the Director of Archaeological Excavations and Research at the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums, who made available their generous help and heart-warming cooperation. Our sincerest thanks also go to local staff at Raqqa Museum. Especially, generous supports from Mr. Jajan and Mr. Sale were very helpful for us.

In this working season, we undertook cleaning and survey of an Early Bronze Age cemetery located at the Wadi Daba area near the site of Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali. The following is the results of the season.

Cleaning and survey of Early Bronze Age shaft graves at Wadi Daba cemetery near Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali

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Introduction

The fourth season of the field researches focused on Early Bronze Age (EBA) cemeteries near Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali was conducted from 11th to 18th October 2009. Previous seasons including survey, cleaning and sounding of the cemeteries in the area defined four unique associations of types of graves, which contain distinctive land use patterns across the landscape, i.e. 1) hilltop burial cairn, 2) hilltop cist/stone-chamber graves, 3) inland cist/stone-chamber graves with shaft graves, and 4) lowland shaft graves (Numoto and Kume 2009a, 2009b, n.d.).

Amongst them, this season targeted on the lowland shaft graves named Wadi Daba cemetery located at the modern village of Ghanem al-‘Ali in the Euphrates Valley, approximately 650 m southwest from Tell Ghanem al-‘Ali (Fig. 1). Our primary goal was to develop funerary dataset in the area

towards an attempt to explain relationships between the cemeteries, which should allow us to understand the nature of burial practices of the EBA communities in the middle Euphrates Valley.

Survey of Wadi Daba cemetery

Wadi Daba, a tributary wadi of the Euphrates, flows into a dwelling area of the modern village of Ghanem al-‘Ali. In the area, fluvial processes have formed steep slopes on the both sides of the wadi course, eroding a terrace of the Euphrates (Fig. 1). The 2007 pilot survey documented two clusters of seriously plundered EBA shaft graves, excavated into the western slope of the course (Tsuneki 2008). Apparently, many shaft graves were also found just northwest of the cemetery, where a slope of the Euphrates terrace was formed, but recent house constructions seriously destroyed the archaeological loci.

In this season, one-day quick survey targeted on the slopes of the wadi bank and the river terrace was conducted to document spread of plundered graves. In particular, the slope of the river terrace was carefully examined, since preserved slopes in the area potentially imply EBA burial places. Most parts of the slopes have severely been destroyed by modern activities of house, road and canal constructions, etc (Fig. 1). However, well-preserved part of the slopes was located between a modern road and a small wadi, where several depressions excavated by robbers were identified. Combined the burials with the results of previous research, three units of grave-clusters were thus far defined in the Wadi Daba cemetery area (Fig. 1):

Unit A (Fig. 2) is located at the western slope of Wadi Daba, stretching c. 55×11 m. Some 20 entrances of plundered shaft graves and many depressions dug by robbers were identified. At the present, part of the slope has been cut, probably for borrowing soils. In addition, these seriously plundered graves have often been used as garbage pits by locals.

Unit B (Fig. 3) is also located at the western slope of Wadi Daba, covering an area of c. 20×30 m. Approximately 15 plundered shaft graves were identified. Southern edge of the area has been cut by modern road, suggesting these graves were principally part of Unit A. However, the cluster has currently been defined as an independent Unit for the reason of convenience of the investigations. The pits have also been used for garbage purpose.

Unit C (Figs. 4a and 4b) is located at the slope of the terrace of the Euphrates, some 150 m northwest of Unit B. This unit contains six to seven depressions excavated by grave robbers, covering an area of 15×20 m. Although a modern house and courtyard has occupied on the terrace immediately above the slope, the plundered area itself has retained original surface of the slope.

Cleaning of a plundered shaft grave at Unit C of Wadi Daba cemetery

Following the survey, we selected Unit C as an area for cleaning because of the well-preserved condition of the slope and robbers' pits. As a research procedure, a 4×4 m square was laid out, enclosing a large robbers' pit, to uncover plundered graves. At the same instance, a 1×11 m narrow square attached to the main square was also opened to attest spread of graves. Because several grave/robbers' pits were successfully identified in the narrow square, the main square was enlarged to the west. Consequently, the research area was composed of the main 4×10 m square and 1×5 m sub-square (Fig. 5). Amongst the identified grave/robbers' pits, cleaning was concentrated on a shaft grave because of one-week limited time of the field season.

The rectangular entrance of the grave measures c. 1.2×0.8 m in length and width. The orientation of the grave indicates the NE-SW direction. The 2.5 m deep shaft was excavated with a slope toward the SW, then a pair of stairs were set, leading to the burial chamber. The height of the stairs measures some 0.8 m. The bottom of the stairs was constructed using two mud bricks. Three undressed gypsum stones were additionally laid on the bricks. Two monolithic gypsum stones were also used to seal the entrance of the chamber (Fig. 6 and 7). Very few artefacts were recovered from the shaft, but

collected an *Al Hamra* cigarette package suggest the grave was plundered within some twenty years.

The oval burial chamber measures c. 2.2×2.8 m in length and width, and c. 1.0 m in height. The chamber produced a massive pile of sherds at the SE quadrant (Fig. 8). They are including 14 complete vessels (Fig. 9) and many semi-complete sherds. Although intensive refitting has not yet been carried out, more than 30 individuals might have been placed there, suggesting multiple inhumations were performed. The sherds include both of fine and plain wares. In particular, a recovered vessel of so-called Black Euphrates Ware with spiral burnishing (Fig. 10) indicates that the burial is dated to Phase 4 (c. 2450-2300 BC) defined by A. Porter (Porter 2007).

Immediately beneath the pile, fragmented elements of human remains were attested. Damaged condition of the remains only allowed us to document a concentration of fragmented cranial bones at the eastern edge of the chamber. So far, no information of the bones has been obtained, since analysis of the human remains is still in progress.

The artefacts recovered from the pile also included a zoomorphic (probably sheep/goat) pendant (Fig. 11), fragments of bronze pin with mushroom-shaped head (Fig. 12) as well as various beads made of bone, shell and stone (Fig. 13).

Although there were no built-in features in the chamber, four postholes dug into the bottom were unearthed at the eastern edge. The interval of each hole measures c. 0.9×0.5 in major and minor axes. The location of the postholes, situated just beneath of the pile of sherds and human remains, may suggest a wooden coffin or a table for grave goods, or the like was laid out (Fig. 14).

Some remarks

The fourth season produced relatively rich funerary dataset of “lowland shaft graves”, which would allow us to assess backgrounds of this type of cemetery and relationships with other categories. Of particular note is obtained concrete evidence of pottery sherds, dated the grave to c. 2450-2300 BC, since dating of graves was often disturbed by the scattered nature of the salvaged collections in our past researches. Intensive future work is still required at the cemetery, which possibly contains several well-preserved graves.

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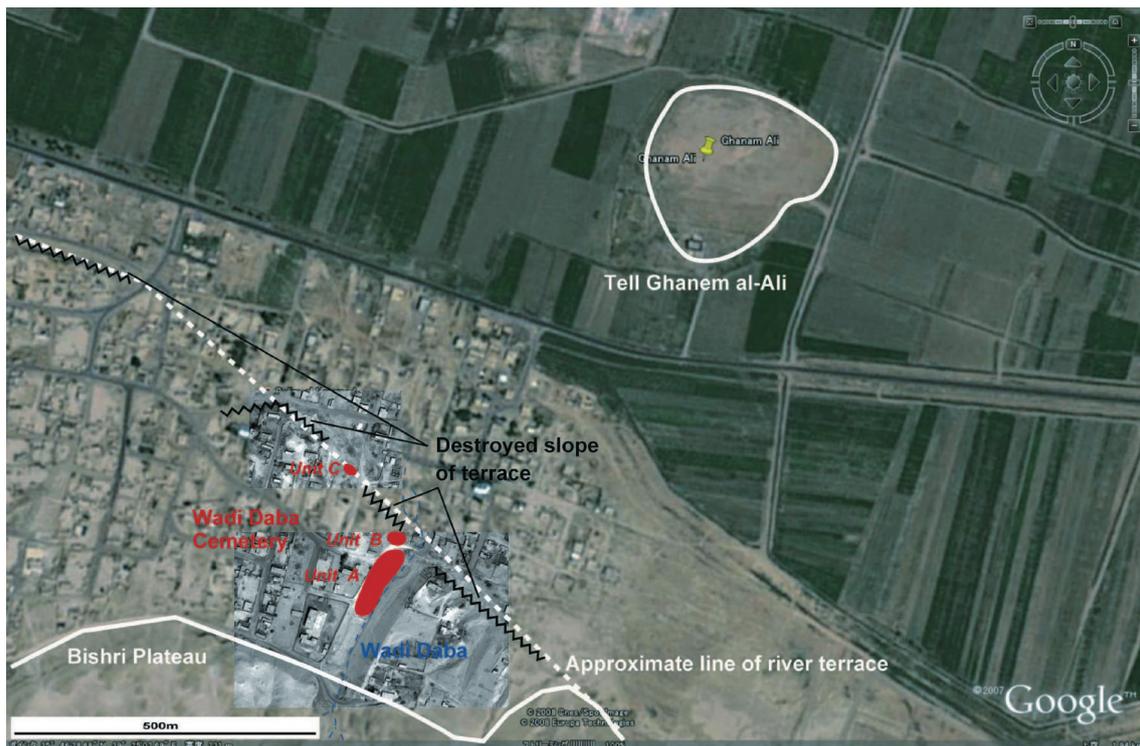


Fig. 1: Research area and distribution of plundered graves (Satellite image after *Google Earth*, partly supplemented by *Quickbird*).



Fig. 2: Plundered graves at Unit A, looking west.

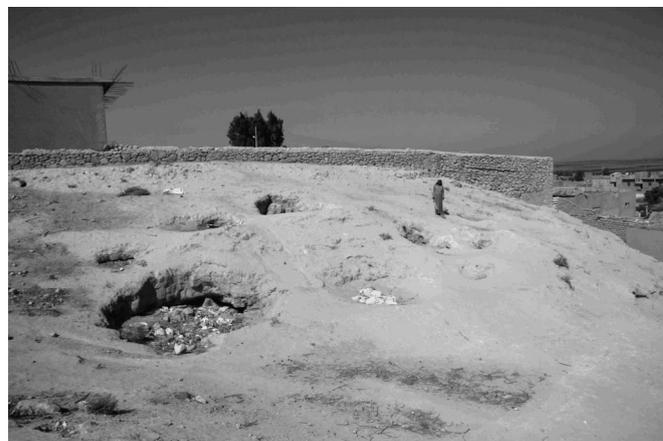


Fig. 3: Plundered graves at Unit B, looking northwest. Graves are used as garbage pits.



Fig. 4a: Traces of depressions dug into the slope by grave robbers at Unit C, looking west.



Fig. 4b: Distant view of Unit C, looking south. Eastern edge of the slope of the Euphrates terrace is cut by modern road.

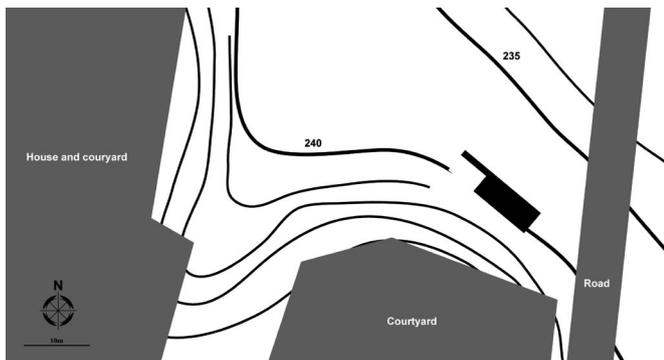


Fig. 5: Location of square laid out at Unit C. 1 m interval contour lines were reproduced from a 1/5000 topographic map published in Syria.



Fig. 6: Shaft of the grave. Two monolithic stones seal the entrance of the chamber.



Fig. 7: A pair of stairs, leading to the chamber. The bottom of the stairs is constructed using two mud bricks.

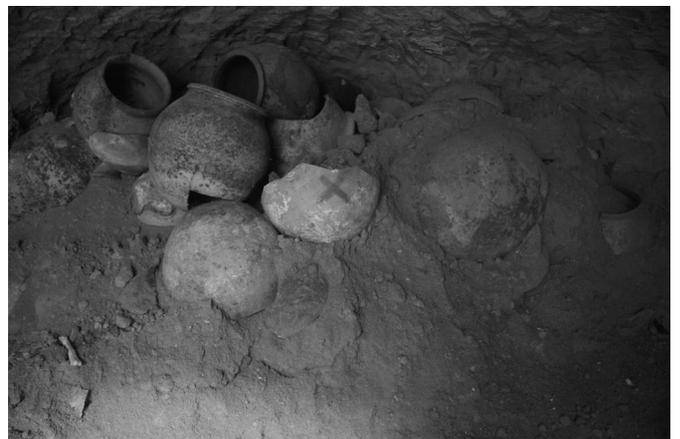


Fig. 8: A pile of pottery in the burial chamber.



Fig. 9: Complete vessels recovered from the chamber.

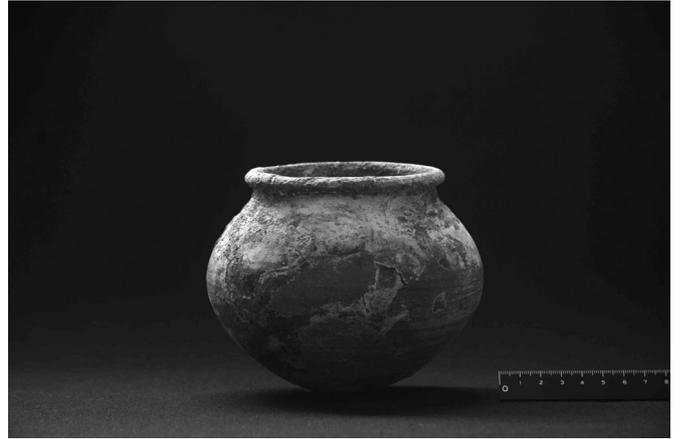


Fig. 10: So-called Black Euphrates Ware. Spiral burnishing is clearly observed.



Fig. 11: Zoomorphic (probably sheep/goat) pendant.



Fig. 12: Bronze pin with mushroom-shaped head.



Fig. 13: Examples of recovered beads.



Fig. 14: Postholes unearthed from the bottom of the chamber.

الموسم الحادي عشر من أعمال البعثة الأثرية السورية اليابانية المشتركة في منطقة البشري

بدأت أعمال البعثة السورية اليابانية المشتركة في منطقة جبال البشري بتاريخ 11 تشرين الأول
وانتهت بتاريخ 25 تشرين الأول من عام 2009 0

احمد سلطان مدير الجانب السوري

كاتسوهيكو اونوما مدير الجانب الياباني

بداية نتقدم بخالص الامتنان والشكر الجزيل للدكتور بسام جاموس المدير العام للآثار والمتاحف
في سورية والدكتور ميشيل مقدسي مدير التنقيب والدراسات الأثرية في سورية والمشرف
المستشار لهذا البحث الأثري , لما قدموه من دعم ومساعدة لإنجاح في إنجاح هذا الموسم 0

تركزت أعمال هذا الموسم على بحث ودراسة منطقة واحدة من مناطق البحث والتي اشتملت
على تنظيف وتسجيل ودراسة المدافن العميقة (shaft graves) المنتشرة على طول حافة
وادي الضبع المجاور لموقع تل غانم العلي 0

مسح المدافن الممتدة على حافة وادي الضبع

(هيروتوشي نوموتو, بروفييسور جامعة طوكيو 0 شوغو كومي , طالب , جامعة طوكيو)

حيث يعتبر هذا هو الموسم الرابع من عمل هذا الفريق ضمن بحث هذه البعثة المشتركة . حيث
تتركز أبحاث هذا الفريق على دراسة مدافن عصر البرونز القديم المجاورة لتل غانم العلي
(حوالي 1 كم جنوب التل)

فقد اشتملت أعمال هذا الفريق في المواسم السابقة على مسح ودراسة المدافن المنتشرة في هذه
المنطقة وقد كشفت هذه الدراسة عن أربعة نماذج من المدافن التي توزعت على الحافة الجبلية
المقابلة لتل غانم العلي 1- المدافن الحلقية (Tumuli) 2 المدافن الحجرية (stone
chamber) توضع هذه المدافن فوق الحافة الجبلية 3- المدافن الحجرية (stone
chamber) والمدافن العميقة أيضاً 4- المدافن العميقة (shaft) توضع هذه المدافن
في المنطقة المنخفضة أسفل الحافة الجبلية 0

تركز البحث لهذا الموسم على دراسة المدافن العميقة (shaft graves) الواقعة في المنطقة
المنخفضة على حافة وادي الضبع المجاور لبلدة غانم العلي على الفرات الأوسط , حوالي 650
م جنوب غربي تل غانم العلي , حيث تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى محاولة فهم طبيعة وأسلوب الدفن
لمجتمعات عصر البرونز القديم على حوض الفرات الأوسط 0

فخلال مسح المنطقة الممتدة على طول الوادي تبين وجود مجموعة من المدافن العميقة (shaft
graves) المنهوبة التي تعود إلى عصر البرونز القديم منتشرة على حافة الوادي الذي يمر
ضمن القرية , حيث تم تقسيم هذه المدافن إلى ثلاثة قطاعات 0 A . B . C

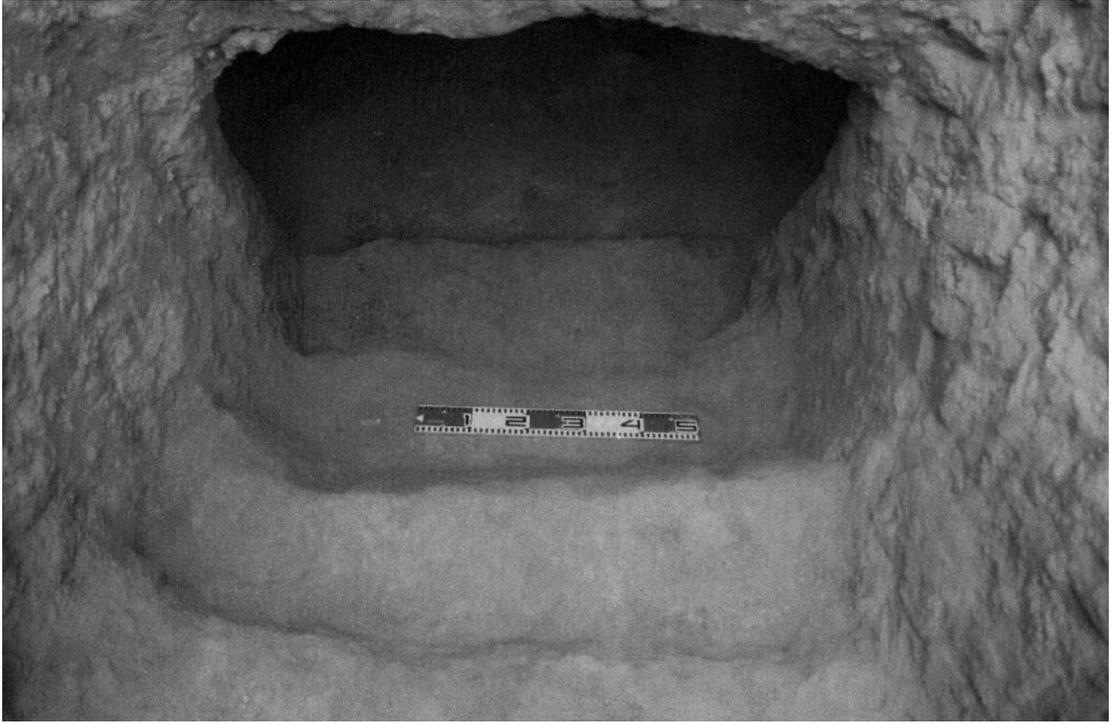
فقد تم إجراء السبر الاختباري للقطاع C الذي يبعد حوالي 150 شمال غرب القطاع B , ويغطي مساحة 20×15 م , حيث تم تحديد مربع بقياس 4×4 م , تضمن مدفن منهوب كما تم تحديد حفرة بقياس 1×1 م ملاصق للمربع السابق بهدف التحقق من امتداد هذه المدافن المنهوبة في القطاع , والتي امتدت باتجاه الغرب 0 وبناء على ذلك فقد تشكلت منطقة البحث من مربعين بقياس 10×4 م و 5×1 م , حيث تركز البحث على تنظيف وتوثيق المدافن العميقة (shaft graves) فقد تبين أن مدخل هذا المدفن كان بقياس 0.8×1.2 م , وباتجاه شمال شرق وجنوب غرب , هذا النوع من المدافن كان بعمق 2.5 م منحدرًا باتجاه الجنوب الغربي حيث توضع درجتين من الحجر الكلسي مواجهة لحجرة الدفن , وقد بلغ ارتفاع الدرجتين حوالي 80 سم وعند أسفل الدرجتين وجد تشييداً لقطعيتين من اللين , أيضا وجد بداخل الحجرة قطعيتين من الحجر الكلسي الضخم والذي كان مستخدم لإغلاق مدخل حجرة الدفن وخلال تنظيف حجرة الدفن وجد مجموعة من الأوساخ المتناثرة ضمن الحجرة كعلبة دخان وغيرها مما يدل على أن هذا المدفن تعرض للنهب من قبل لصوص الآثار 0

حجرة الدفن كانت ذات شكل بيضاوي بقياس 2.8×2.2 م وارتفاع 1 م , وفي الزاوية الجنوبية الغربية داخل حجرة الدفن تجمع ركام ضخم أحتوى على مجموعة من 14 أنية فخارية بحالة جيدة بالإضافة إلى الكثير من الكسر الفخارية التي تنوعت بين منتجات ذات الجودة العالية ومنتجات بسيطة وعادية , إحدى الأواني الفخارية كانت من منتجات فخار الفرات الغامق (Black Euphrates ware) مما ساعد على تأريخ هذا المدفن الذي يعود إلى عصر البرونز القديم (حوالي 2300 - 2450 قبل الميلاد) ومن الممكن أن يكون قد دفن حوالي 30 شخص بداخل هذا المدفن مما يشير إلى وجود دفن جماعي ضمن هذه النوع من المدافن 0 كما وجد أيضاً بقايا لعظام إنسانية اشتملت على بقايا جمجمة , هذه البقايا لا تزال تحت الدراسة والتحليل 0 بالإضافة إلى كسر لمسمار برونزي وعدد كبير من الخرز العظمي 0

أيضاً تم الكشف عن أربعة حفر عند أسفل الحافة الشرقية من حجرة الدفن بلغ أبعاد كل حفرة 50×90 سم , مما يدل على وجود تابوت خشبي أو مكان مصطبة لمرفقات الدفن 0

لقد قدمت أبحاث هذا الموسم نتائج همة ساهمت في تقديم معلومات أوسع عن طقوس الدفن للمدافن العميقة (shaft graves) في الجزء المنخفض لمنطقة البحث , كما تسمح في تحديد علاقة هذا النوع من المدافن بالمدافن الأخرى 0

حيث قدمت هذه الدراسة دليل واضح وأكيد في تأريخ هذه المدافن إلى عصر البرونز القديم 4 (2300 - 2450 ق.م) 0



صورة لمدخل المدفن مع حجرة الدفن