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Preliminary report on human remains from Tell Masaikh and Tell Ashara. Season 2008

Key words: Middle Euphrates Valley, human bones, pathology

SUMMARY

In the Middle Euphrates Valley, excavations are currently carried out at Tell Hariri (ancient Mari) and several sites near Tell Ashara. Our research area is Terqa and its surroundings. Terqa lies on the right bank of the Euphrates, about 60 km to the north-west from the ancient city of Mari. In 1996, excavation work was extended beyond ancient Terqa onto the area 6 km away to the north, to Tell Masaikh. Initially, it was rescue excavation, but with time it became regular archeological work. The paper is a summary of anthropological research conducted in 2008. We have been excavated 82 human skeletons (58 individuals from Tell Masikh, and 24 from Tell Ashara).

The 13th season of excavations at Tell Masaikh and 28th season at Tell Ashara (September/November 2008) was abundant in discoveries of

human skeletons. Apart from new burials, small amounts of human bones excavated in the previous years and mixed with animal remains were studied in the excavation house on the bank of the Euphrates river in Ashara-Darnaj. All skeletons were described and measured in the same way as in the previous years (Tomczyk, Sołtysiak 2007). In sum, the remains of 58 individuals were found at Tell Masaikh (Table 1, 2), 24 at Tell Ashara (Table 3, 4) and only one sample came from Gebel Mashtale.

The sample from Tell Masaikh was dated to the Neo-Assyrian, Roman, and Islamic periods, while all the bones from Tell Ashara were found in the Early Bronze Age strata, Shakkanakku and Islamic periods. In both sites, the skeletons were in an average state of preservation.

Analogically to what was discovered before (Sołtysiak 2002), evident bias in sex ratio was observed, with 9 females and 14 males in Tell Masaikh; 3 females and 4 males in Tell Ashara. Since sex scores were corroborated by independent diagnostic methods based both on pelvis and skull morphology, it is likely that there was a real surplus of males, at least in the Islamic cemetery, and that the bias does not reflect inappropriateness of diagnostic methods.

It is interesting that the average stature of individuals from Tell Masaikh and Tell Ashara (Table 5) do not fits the range observed in the previous years: the males around 162/169cm and females around 159cm (cf. Tomczyk & Sołtysiak 2007). It is difficult to find the reason for such a tiny stature of males. The most probable explanation of this fact is that the preservation of the skeleton was not satisfactory, and stature estimation was based on the measures of some bones only.

The most interesting burials found at Tell Ashara in 2008 were labelled TQ28 F197 and TQ28 F250 – the skeletons came from the same tomb. It consists of two chambers with stone domes. The first, smaller chamber contained many luxurious grave goods, including jars, plates, fragments of antique jewellery. The other one was bigger and contained skeletons. The first skeleton – recognized as 45/50 years old male – was buried in the left part of the chamber. The position of the skeleton sug-

gests that the grave must have been robbed and that the body was relocated. A bronze part of a belt, and bronze weapon-blades were found on the right side of the hip. The skeleton was extremely heavy and large – his stature (according to Trotter and Gleser 1952) was about 179cm. Many muscular attachments were clearly marked on the bones (especially on humerus, clavicle and vertebra) and bone robustness was far above the average, which may suggest that the skeleton belonged to a warrior. (Fig. 1)

The second skeleton (TQ28 F250) belonged to a female about 40/44 years old; it was buried in the right part of chamber with an animal (sheep). In situ, we found a big, flat stone on the skull. It did not belong to the grave (the stone has got a different structure and colour than the others). We think that the stone was laid on the skull after death, and then it crushed it. We did not found any proofs in favour of the hypothesis that the head was broken by the stone, i.e. that the woman was killed by this stone. On the occipital bone only we found a small, healed cut (about 10mm x 7mm). It was probably caused by a mechanical injury.

An interesting individual was a woman of about 40 years old (MK13 i71), buried in sarcophagus from Neo-Assyrian period, found in Tell Masaikh. The body was laid on its back with slightly bended knees. The right arms was laid on the thorax, the left was parallel to the main axis of the body. Two bonze rings were found on the right fingers. This skeleton was poorly preserved. (Fig. 2) The skeleton was rather gracile, its height was about 160cm according to the measurement in situ.

Contemporary anthropology uses new 'tools' – DNA analysis. This season we took some samples (teeth) for genetics analysis. The teeth were complete without cavities and other diseases. The samples were collected in sterile gloves, mask and with the help of appropriate instruments. Storing them in polyethylene container should minimize the risk of contamination by modern DNA (Rogan, Salvo 1990).

Table 1. Human Remains from Tell Masaikh (season 2008).

No	Sex	Age	Chronology	State of preservation	Enamel Hypoplasia	Caries	Comments
MK13i4	M	Adult	Islamic	2			
MK13EN19	?	>15y	Islamic	3			
MK13EN22	-	3/4y	Islamic	4	-	-	*Cribra orbitalia* on both orbits
MK13EN23	M	35/40y	Islamic	2	+	-	
MK13EN26	M	45y	Islamic	3	+	+	Spondylosis in lumbar vertebrae (Fig.3), bent shaft of ulna and radius
MK13EN31	F	30y	Islamic	4	+	+	
MK13EN34	-	0.9y	Islamic	3			
MK13EN35	?	Adult	Islamic	1			
MK13EN37	-	1/2y	Islamic	4			
MK13EN41	?	Adult	Islamic	1			
MK13EN43	M	22/26y	Islamic	3	+	-	
MK13G48	F	45y	Roman	2	+	+	Osteophytes on lumbar vertebrae
MK13EN51	-	1y	Islamic	4	+	-	Hypoplasia on the deciduous teeth
MK13G57	M	30/39y	Roman	3	+	-	
MK13EN58	M	35/40y	Islamic	3	+	+	Ossified thyroid cartilage, spondylosis in thoracic vertebrae
MK13G59	?	Adult	Roman	1			
MK13EN61	M	35/40y	Islamic	2	-	+	
MK13EN62	M	18/20y	Islamic	2	+	+	
MK13EN69	M	40/45	Islamic	2			Many osteophytes on the ribs

MK13i71	F	40	Neo-Assyrian	2			Individual from sarcophagus
MK13EN73	F	30/34	Islamic	2	-	+	Impression on the femur head (Fig. 4)
MK13EN74	M	25/29y	Islamic	3			Robust clavicle with osteophites
MK13EN75	F	40/44y	Roman	1	-	-	
MK13EN79	M	22/30y	Islamic	2	+	+	
MK13G79	?	25y	Islamic	1			
MK13G81	-	4/5y	Islamic	3	+	-	Hypoplasia on deciduous teeth
MK13G84	?	Adult	Islamic	1			
MK13EN88	M	35/40y	Islamic	2			*Cribra orbitalia* on the left orbit.
MK13G104	-	5y	Roman	3			
MK13G117	F	40y	Neo-Assyrian / Roman	2	-	+	
MK13G154	?	40/50y	Islamic	4	+	+	

State of preservation (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – very good); Chronology: Islamic (600–1200 AD), Roman (200–400 AD), Neo-Assyrian (0,00–7000BC).

Table 2. Human Remains from Gabel Mashtale and Tell Masaikh (earlier seasons).

No	Sex	Age	Chronology	State of preservation	Enamel Hypoplasia	Caries	Comments
ML02C13	M?	Adult	Modern	2			
MK11D89	?	Adult	Old Babilonian	1			
MK11D97	F?	Adult	?	2			
MK11D98	M	50?	Old Babilonian	4	-	-	
MK12G88	-	7-14y	Roman/ Islamic	2			
MK12H11	?	Adult	Islamic?	1			

MK12G14	?	Adult	Roman/ Islamic	1			
MK12EN15	?	Adult	Islamic?	1			
MK12G15	-	1y	Roman	4	-	-	
MK12H17	-	Adult	Roman	2			Bones partially burnt
MK12E18	F?	Adult	Islamic	2			
MK12EN21	-	0-7y	Islamic	3			
MK12G23	-	2/3y	Roman	3			
MK12H27	?	Adult	Roman	1			
MK12G32	?	Adult	Roman	1			
MK12G36	?	Adult	Neo-Assyrian?	1			
MK12G45	?	Adult	Roman/ Islamic	1			Many osteophytes on the ribs (Fig.5)
MK12G53	?	Adult	Roman	1			
MK12EN58	-	7-14y	Islamic	1			
MK12EN66	?	Juvenis/ Adult	Islamic	1	-	-	
MK12G68	?	25y	Roman	2	-	-	
MK12H70	-	Fetal	Neo-Assyrian	3			
MK12H73	?	Adult	Neo-Assyrian	2			
MK12H78	F?	35y	Neo-Assyrian	2			
MK12EN83	?	Adult	Islamic	1			
MK12EN119	?	14-18y	Islamic	1			
MK12G154	?	Adult	Roman	1			
MK12G167	?	Adult	Roman	3			

State of presentation (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – very good); Chronology: Modern (1850–1950 AD), Islamic (600–1200 AD), Roman (200–400 AD), Neo-Assyrian (900–700 BC), Old Babilonian (1850–1750 BC)

Table 3. Human Remains from Tell Ashara (season 2008).

No	Sex	Age	Chronology	State of preservation	Enamel Hypoplasia	Caries	Comments
TQ28F32	F?	Adult	Islamic	2			
TQ28F47	-	0.9/1y	Islamic	4	-	-	
TQ28F50	-	0.6y	Bronze II	4	-	-	

TQ28F97	?	Adult	Bronze II	1			
TQ28F112	M	40/44y	Bronze II	3	+	+	Spondylosis in thoracic vertebra
TQ28F176	?	Adult	Late Shakkanakku	1			
TQ28F197	M	45/50y	Bronze II	3	-	-	Individual from tomb
TQ28F249	-	3/4y	Late Shakkanakku	4	+	-	Hypoplasia on deciduous teeth, cribra orbitalia on the right orbit
TQ28F250	F	40/44y	Bronze II	3	+	-	Individual from tomb
TQ28F252	?	Adult	Late Shakkanakku	1			
TQ28F256	M	25/29y	Late Shakkanakku	3	+	+	Two adult individuals
TQ28F265	M	40/44y	Late Shakkanakku	1			

State of presentation (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – very good); Chronology: Islamic (600–1200 AD), Late Shakkanakku (1900–1800 BC), Bronze II (2650–2450 BC)

Table 4. Human Remains from Tell Ashara (earlier seasons).

No	Sex	Age	Chronology	State of preservation	Enamel Hypoplasia	Caries	Comments
TQ25F90	?	14-18y	Early Dynastic III	1			
TQ25F100	?	Adult	Early Dynastic III	1			
TQ25F114	?	14-18y	Bronze II (2650-2450 B.C.)	1			
TQ25F117	?	Adult	Early Shakkanakku	1			
TQ26F162	?	Adult	Early Dynastic III	1			
TQ27C7	?	Adult	Islamic	1			
TQ27C10	?	30y	Islamic	1	-	+	
TQ27F54	F?	Adult	Bronze II	2			

TQ27F96	-	0-7y	Early Dynastic III	2			
TQ27F172	?	Adult	Bronze II	1			
TQ27F196	?	Adult	Bronze II	1			
TQ27F222	?	Adult	Bronze II	1			

State of presentation (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – very good); Chronology: Early Shakkanakku (2200–1000 BC), Early Dynastic III (2450–2350 BC), Bronze II (2650–2450 BC)

Table 5. Maximum stature according to Trotter-Gleser (1952) formula for white males and females.

No	Sex	Chronology	Humerus	Radius	Ulna	Femur	Tibia	Fibula	Average
MK13EN26	M	Islamic				162			162
MK13EN43	M	Islamic		169					169
MK13G48	M	Roman				162			162
MK13G57	M	Roman	164				167		165
MK13EN69	M	Islamic				152*			152*
MK13EN74	M	Islamic	165						165
TQ28F197	M	Bronze II		179	180		180		179
TQ28F250	F	Bronze II	156	160	163				159
TQ28F256	M	Late Shakkanakku	154		162				158

State of presentation (1 – very poor, 2 – poor, 3 – average, 4 – good, 5 – very good);Chronology: Late Shakkanakku (1900–1800 BC), Bronze II (2650–2450 BC), Roman (200–400 AD), Islamic (600–1200 AD).

Fig. 1. Individual (TQ28 F197) lumbar vertebrae.

Fig. 2. Sarcophagus from Tell Masaikh (MK13 i71).

Fig. 3. Lumbar vertebrae with deformations (MK 13 EN26).

Fig. 4. Impression on femur head (MK13 EN73).

Fig. 5. Ostophites on the ribs (MK12 G45).

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