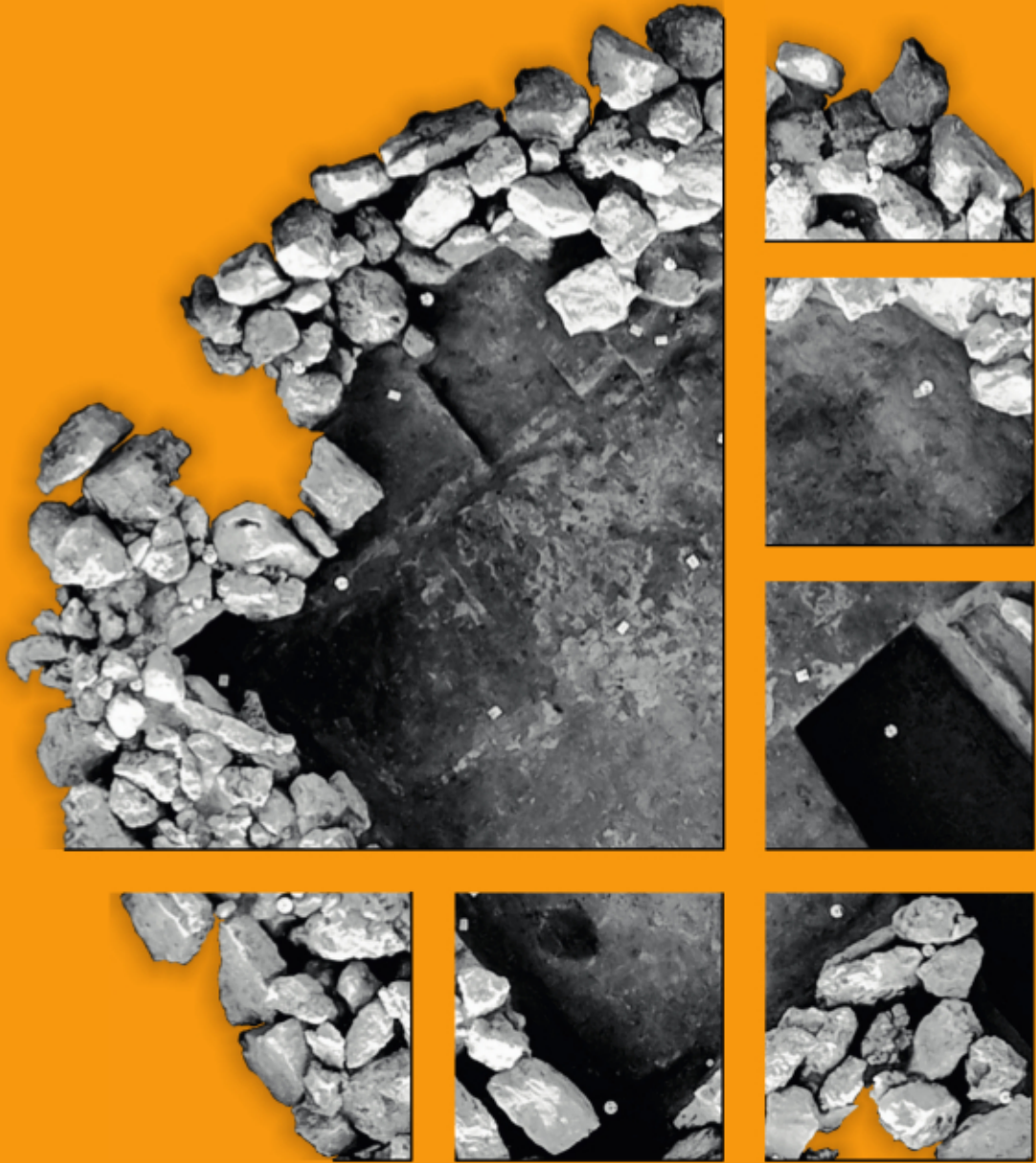


# DISSERTATIONES ARCHAEOLOGICAE

ex Instituto Archaeologico Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae



Ser. 3. No. 4. | 2016

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Universitatis de Rolando Eötvös nominatae

*Ser. 3. No. 4.*



Budapest 2016

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## Grd-i Tle 2016

### Preliminary Report of the Hungarian Archaeological Mission of the Eötvös Loránd University to Grd-i Tle (Saruchawa) in Iraqi Kurdistan

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**Abstract**

*The Hungarian Archaeological Mission of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest to Kurdistan (Iraq) lead by Tamás Dezső and Gábor Kalla has set out several goals for the first season (09.09.2016 – 07.09.2016) of the excavations at the tell-settlement of Grd-i Tle (Ranya Plain). The most determinant factor for the selection of this site was to identify and to investigate an administrative centre lying at the eastern frontier of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Moreover, since the site was occupied from the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium B.C. until the early or mid-19<sup>th</sup> century AD, it seemed to be appropriate to provide a firm, stratigraphically certified chronological reference point for the archaeological finds of the region. The first task was to carry out the topographical survey of the site, which has been supplemented by field survey with the use of metal detector. After the survey three main locations have been set on the site. The first is situated on the very top of the tell, cutting through its north-eastern edge (Field 01). The second, smaller location occupies a section of the south-eastern plateau (Field 02), while for the third one was chosen a recently ploughed surface on the lower plateau of the southern slope of the site, where a higher concentration of the finds could have been observed during preliminary survey (Field 03). Our investigations revealed a fortress from the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century at Field 01, a medieval cemetery with cist graves at Field 02, and a kiln at Field 03, which can be dated to the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> century as well. Besides the remarkable amount of ceramics, several metal finds have been found on the surface of each field. In case of Fields 01 and 02 we were able to reach the late antique levels.*

The Hungarian Archaeological Mission of Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest to Kurdistan (Iraq) lead by Tamás Dezső and Gábor Kalla has set out several goals for the first season (09.09.2016 – 07.09.2016) of the excavations at the *tell*-settlement of Grd-i Tle (Ranya Plain) (Fig. 1–2).<sup>1</sup>

One of our original goals was the investigation of an administrative centre lying at the eastern frontier of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and for that, the site of Grd-i Tle seemed to be an appropriate place.<sup>2</sup> This region was the starting point of the Assyrians campaigns towards Western Iran, led through the Zagros range.

The strategic significance of the settlement is obvious,<sup>3</sup> with its remarkable size it dominates the landscape of the western part of the Ranya Plain and, as for the matter of size, only one site can be compared to it, Tell Basmusian,<sup>4</sup> which is by now submerged in the Dokan Lake and can only be investigated provisionally, during low tide, with great difficulty.

One of the main goals of the first season of the excavations of Grd-i Tle was to define what kind of methods are at our disposal to reach the Neo-Assyrian layers and to reveal how deep these layers are lying beneath the features of later periods.

Due to the complete lack of any previous excavation of the site, the most important goal was to carry out a detailed topographic survey and thorough stratigraphical analysis of the available

1 The members of the expedition were: Tamás Dezső (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Gábor Kalla (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Barzan Baiz Ismail (Raparin Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage), Kamal Rasheed (Sulaimaniya Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage), Maxim Mordovin (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Zsófia Masek (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest), Ardalan Khwsnaw (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Nóra Szabó (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Aram Ali Hama Amin (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest), Attila Weisz (Geodata, Salisbury Ltd.), Lajos Sándor.

2 Our investigations fit well to the range of the recently enhanced archaeological excavations in Kurdistan (Iraq). On the latter projects see KOPANIAS – MACGINNIS – UR 2015.

3 On the significance of the site see previously HASEGAWA – YAMADA 2016.

4 AL-SOOF 1970.



strata. The latter is a part of the planned five-year typochronological evaluation of the pottery assemblages of the site preliminary known to be occupied from the 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. until the early or mid-19<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>5</sup>

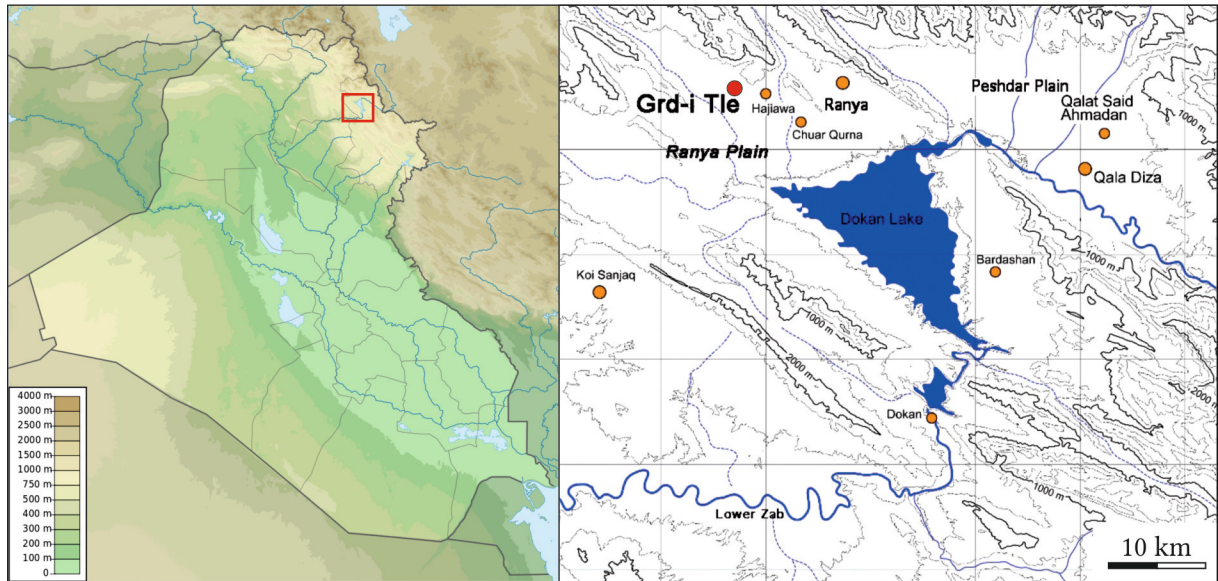


Fig. 1. Location of the site in Iraq (after HASEGAWA – YAMADA 2016, Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the site.

In the first two weeks of the research the site and its closest accessible vicinities have been digitally and topographically measured giving as a result a detailed topographic map (Fig. 3–4). The survey

5 See HASEGAWA – YAMADA 2016.

was supplemented by multi-layered field-walking including the use of metal detector fixing the coordinates of all finds.

After the survey three main locations have been set on the site. The first is situated on the very top of the *tell*, cutting through its north-eastern edge (Field 01). The second, smaller location occupies a section of the south-eastern plateau (Field 02), while for the third one was chosen a recently ploughed surface on the lower plateau of the southern slope of the site, where a higher concentration of the finds could have been observed during preliminary survey (Field 03).

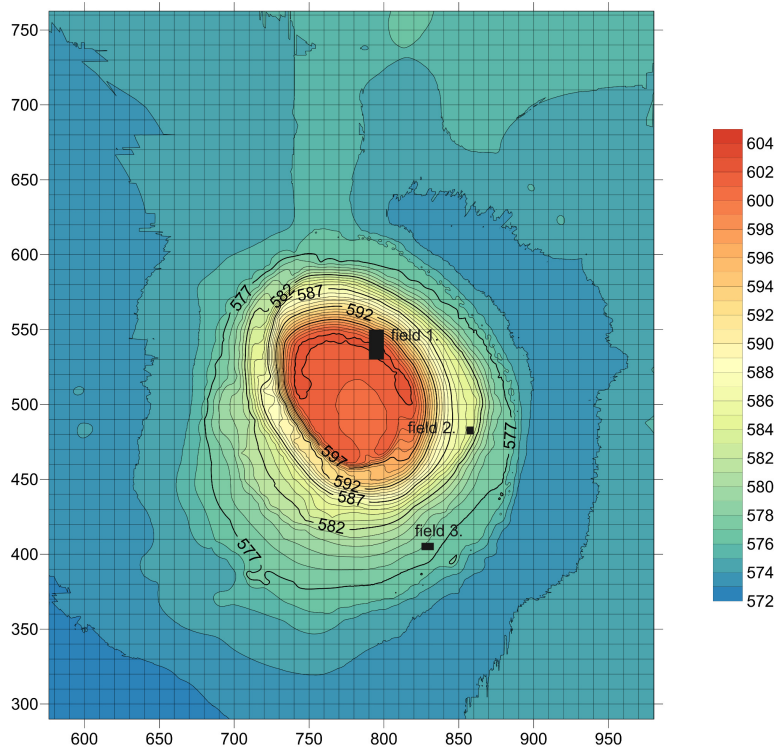


Fig. 3. Isometric map of the site with the locations of the excavated fields.

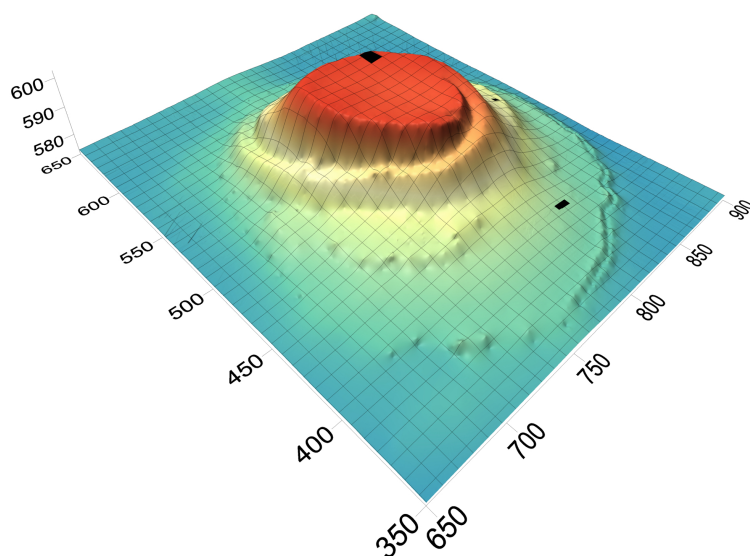


Fig. 4. 3D model/picture of the site as viewed from the South.



## Non-destructive research of the site

Among the non-destructive methods of the research the topographic survey should be mentioned at the first place. Carried out by Attila Weisz (Salisbury Ltd.) using Leica Total Station TCRA 1101 this survey consists of dataset of more than two thousand heights creating thus a trustful and high-density 3D view of the *tell* and its neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> The whole site was covered by a 10 × 10 m net giving a stable grid for aligning archaeological trenches. The height of the control point No. 1 is 602.32 m above sea level. According to the survey, the top of the *tell* is situated 26–28 m above the surrounding plain, its main dimensions 76 × 86 m. This highest plateau is encircled by a lower, approximately circular rampart, remains of which have been used in the modern time for irrigation. This may be identified with the traces of an antique city wall, the exact date and features of which are to be defined during the following season. The dimensions of the lower “city” are 250 × 210 m.

The topographic survey was done simultaneously with the field walking and metal detecting. Lajos Sándor is the professional metal detectorist who has been thoroughly surveying the site and three excavation trenches. Results of his work greatly ease to define the main timeframes of the site and the pattern of the inhabitation in particular chronological phases. GPS coordinates of the each removed find have been fixed and the finds also have been photodocumented *in situ*. Only the finds from the surface or from the ploughed upper layer have been collected – either metal or ceramic – the undamaged archaeological context always was kept intact even in case of deeper signals. As a result, the field walking has produced significantly more metal objects (jewellery and coins) and thus information clearly showing an intensive 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century settlement strata south of the *tell*. Among several noteworthy finds two late 17<sup>th</sup>-century Nurembergian tokens must be mentioned.

### Field 01, Squares 790-530/790-540

The first trench (*Fig. 5*) situated on the edge of the upper plateau of the site had as a goal to create a stratigraphical sequence of the ceramic from the latest phases of the inhabitation. Works here were led by Tamás Dezső and Maxim Mordovin. The most important discovery at this location was the appearance of a mortar stone rampart wall, in average 0.8 m thick having at least three building phases. The dating of the construction of the wall is not yet definable but according to the documented stratigraphy this wall strongly defined the latest building activity of the spot. At least eleven other wall-fragments have been detected, all of them aligning to the mortar wall. In any case, the excavated wall is part of a fortification. The military character of the structure is emphasised by a semi-circular tower excavated in the east-northern part of the trench.

During this first season in average a depth of 1–1.4 m has been reached at the first location. The observations confirms existence of at least three main and three less significant habitation strata all datable to the so-called “late Islamic” period. The finds of lead bullets and – most of all – particular types of pipes enables to define this period to the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The presence of the bullets at the same time unambiguously refers to somewhat conflict in that time explainable later in context of local history.

6 Although formerly a Japanese team carried out preliminary topographical surveys (HASEGAWA – YAMADA 2016) our future work necessitated the accomplishment of our own survey.





Fig. 5. View of the Field 01 from the west showing the excavated “late Islamic” walls.

The excavated location in the Trench I seems to have been a domestic part of the latest fortification complex. This is confirmed by the large number of bread-baking ovens (locally *tendur*) observed on every settlement strata. One of the ovens is especially interesting because of its inner geometric decoration. This fact is very unique in itself and unusual having no known analogies so far across Middle East. It might have been connected with some kind of hidden custom or tradition which was kept in secret.

The strata on the outer side (north) of the wall can be separated into three main phases. The upper layers unambiguously belong to the same “late-Islamic” occupation that have been observed within the walls and consisted mainly of the levelling and waste layers. The second – unfortunately precisely not datable yet – phase shows very characteristic signs of destruction by fire preceded the Islamic settlement. According to the latest finds from these layers it can be connected to the Hellenistic (or Parthian?) period. The first one can be confirmed by a Greek coin from a lower layer. At the same time some unearthed bronze and iron arrowheads refer to a military conflict as a cause for the destruction. The third phase is presented by a single layer so far. This very hard, rammed earth with relatively small amount of finds can be interpreted as foundation or wall and thus presenting an even earlier stage of the fortification of the *tell*.

Evaluating the latest phases of the settlement, more exactly the reusing of the earlier fortifications during the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries it can be clearly stated that the inhabitants can be identified with the local Kurdish population. Even the possibility of the Kurdish origin of the mortar walls cannot be excluded but this can be clarified via further excavations.





Fig. 6. Burials excavated in Field 02.

### Field 02, Square 850-480

The second location led by Gábor Kalla is situated on the eastern plateau of the *tell* rising up to 12 m above the plain surrounding the site. The spot with dimensions 4 × 4 m was opened to verify the presence of phases preceded the “Islamic period”. Almost immediately under the surface a number of closely located cist graves (in stone-built coffins) have been discovered (Fig. 6).



Fig. 7. Hellenistic silver tetradrachm from beside Grave 7.

Among the altogether 22 burials only four were adults, the rest belonged to new-borns and infants. Most of the cist graves were constructed very similarly: the inner walls of the grave pit were coated by larger stone slabs, the deceased was laying on his back orientating west–east, with heads turned south. The cists then were covered by other stone slabs. None of the burials has contained any grave goods. Their fillings contained pottery from the surrounding soil including large number of ceramics of medieval character but seemingly much earlier than the pottery from the “late-Islamic” layers of Field 01. Beneath the excavated graves a dry stone wall and fragments of rammed earth wall could have been documented.

Both of them can be dated to the Hellenistic or Parthian period, which dating is confirmed by a Macedonian coin minted between 310 and 301 BC. in Lampsacus (Fig. 7).



### Field 03, Square 820-400/830-400

Field 03 situated on the lowest plateau within the visible stone fortifications was set off on a site of larger concentration of pottery and an oven destroyed by a recent agricultural activity. At the same time the metal detecting activity gave a strong and clear signal on the spot. Therefore it was decided to testify the location in order to clarify the stratigraphical situation of the lowest part of the site. The extent of the destruction, however, decreased the possibility of the proper research therefore the works here were stopped after the documentation of the excavated oven and its closest neighbourhood. In the middle of the oven a larger bronze vessel was found – this gave the clear metal sound during the research (Fig. 8). The dating of the documented features and the bowl – according to the coins from the same layer – can be narrowed to the 18<sup>th</sup>–19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Fig. 8. Bronze bowl from Field 03.

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