

EXCAVATIONS AT TELL DEIR 'Alla
SEASON 1979

by
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and Gerrit van der Kooij

Introduction remarks

Archaeological excavations by a joint expedition of the Department of Antiquities at Amman and the University of Leiden were carried out at Tell Deir 'Alla during eight weeks in Febr. and March 1979. The work was a continuation of what was done in the seasons of 1976 and '78. (See preliminary report in A.D.A.J. XXII. 1977/78, pp. 57-80 Plts XXVI - XLII). The aims and methods were the same. Within the same program another two seasons are planned in order to excavate more of "phase M".

The expedition was financed mainly by the Department of Antiquities, and the University of Leiden, but also the Netherlands organization for the advancement of pure research (Z. W. O.) contributed materially.

The team consisted of Jordanian and Dutch members (See Pl. X), with Dr. Moawiyah M. Ibrahim and Gerrit van der Kooij as directors. Square supervisors were Miss Rose Habaybeh in square B/C8, Mr. Tayseer Ateyat with Anees Qarakesh in squares B/A7 and 8, Mr. Mohammed Darwish in squares B/A9 and 10, Mr. Mohammed Jamra in squares E/B9 and 10 and B/C9, Mr. Harm Mooibroek in square B/B5, Mr. Harco Willems in Squares B/A5 and 6, Dr. Klaas Smelik (during the last week assisted by Miss Emily Hemelrijk) in squares B/B6 and B/C6. Finds administration and - cleaning, as well as household

by Mrs. Malou Nozeman. Object drawing by Mr. Ad van Weezel. Photography by Mr. Peter Daalderop and Mr. Gerrit van der Kooij. The driver of the Departments car was Owdeh Toshani; chief cook Abu Mohammed. Specialised formen at the dig were Ali Abdulrasul, Sadik Abdullah, Amin Cana'an and Abu Maruf (the last two from Deir 'Alla). The workmen came from Deir 'Alla.

With the kind permission of Dr. Subhi el-Qasim we could, again, use the buildings and furniture of the University Farm as a camp. The team digging at Tell el Mazar under the direction of Dr. Kheir Yassine used the camp during partly the same period, which happened in good co-operation with us.

Apart from the actual work on the site and in camp, which meant for many team members an important training in field work, some stress was also put on understanding the archaeological and natural environment of the site. Several excursions were made during afternoons and weekends. Some issues concerning the background of archaeological studies were discussed by lectures.

Very important for our work was the support we got from Dr. Adnan Hadidi, Director general of the Department of Antiquities in Amman, and Dr. Henk J. Franken, Director of the Institute for archaeology of Palestine and surroundings in Leiden.

Excavations

This season the excavations were limited to the top of the tell only. Work was done in almost all of the 5×5 m squares to the North of the baseline, in which the work had started in 1978. See *op. cit.* fig. 9, p. 70. Work was done also in square B/C6, the SE corner of the 1967 excavation area.

The excavations had to do with the phases below phase V in most of the squares (for the preliminary phasing system see *op. cit.* p. 60). However the later phases were touched also, namely where baulks were removed (cf. *op. cit.* pp. 71 ff.).

Phase I

The medieval arabic graveyard on top of the tell was touched in the baulks only. Some of the graves, excavated before, were still partly left in them. One complete, though damaged, grave with a main part of the skeleton was found in the 1.5 m wide N - baulk of B/B5, on top of the remnants of the phase V E - W wall. The skeleton had at its feet a small stone, artefact with a waist-like middle part.

Phase II

The characteristic pits of this phase were found in some of the baulks (partly) as well as probably in square B/C8. Substantial work on this phase was done in B/A9 and 10, in excavating the very large pit which was discovered in 1978 already. This pit (deposit nr. B/A 10.6) turned out to be partly 2.75 m deep. Large portions of the thick accumulation of red-brown courtyard layers of phase IV, through which this pit had been dug and which formed the edge of it, were broken

off and fallen down into the pit, partly together with other fill. The reason for making this pit is still obscure. One might think of digging away the plant remains of phase IV as manure, but the pit went considerably below that phase as well.

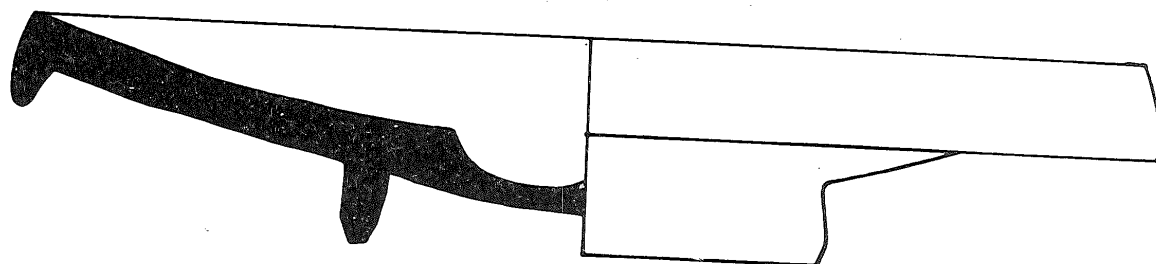
Phase III

The remnants of this phase are of the last building activities (as far as the evidence goes until now), which took place on the tell. Wall parts of a large building were found in 1978 right on top of the mound. Outside this building no architectural remains of this phase could be discerned. The walls and floors found in squares B/A 5 and 6, and B/B 5 and 6 in 1978, and previously attributed to phase III have to be connected with phase V. This gives a change in date attribution of this phase: not earlier than the 4th cent. B. C.

Some pits belonging to this phase had been partly preserved in the baulks. An almost complete flat bowl was found in pit B/A 8.6 (= B/B 8.3, see section drawing fig. 3.), which was partly filled with white vegetable material. This black slipped plate (see Pl. XXII, 1 and drawing fig. 1), made of red burning clay, is a Greek type, so called "fish plate", of the 4th cent. B.-C.

Phase IV

The thick accumulation of red-brown plant matter, mixed with some earth ("courtyard layers") was dug away again on several places, especially in the baulks. Again no walls were found associated with these layers during this phase. At places it is clear that some irregular pits were made during the accumulation



DA B/A 6 (2711)



Fig. 1



DA B/A 649 (2710)

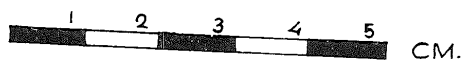


Fig. 2

and filled again with the same kind of layers. Human activity during the accumulation is also clear from some pots and many potsherds found in the layers, and also from a sherd with some aramaic ink writing on it (It is a sherd of a jar written below the handle). However the sherd was found without any other sherd of the same jar around.

The character of the layers is still not clear. A first-glance judgement at the Biological-Archaeological Institute in Groningen, where all the biological samples from Tell Deir 'Alla are being analysed, made it clear that the plant matter had been heated considerably, but the background of this way of accumulation is still obscure.

Phase V

Most of phase V had been excavated in the two previous seasons already. Some architecture was found as well as courtyards with pits (silo's). See *op. cit.* p. 70 fig 9. However several lacunae in the walls still existed. The walls in squares B/A5 and 6 and B/B5 and 6 had been built in the phase between V and VI (see below) and rebuilt (reused) in phase V. Wall B/A5.1 was a re-use of wall B/A5. 21, 29, 30, going together with B/A6.1 on top of B/A6.33. B/A5 and 6.1 had been attributed to phase III in the previous report. On the other hand a 10 m long wall, discovered in the N. baulks of B/B5 and 6 was contemporary with N-S wall B/A5.2, so belonging to phase V. Peculiar in this E-W wall was that a large stone with a cavity (for grinding?) was found in its foundation. The wall was well preserved with its one, partly two, rows of foundation stones, and four, partly five, courses

of mudbrick left.

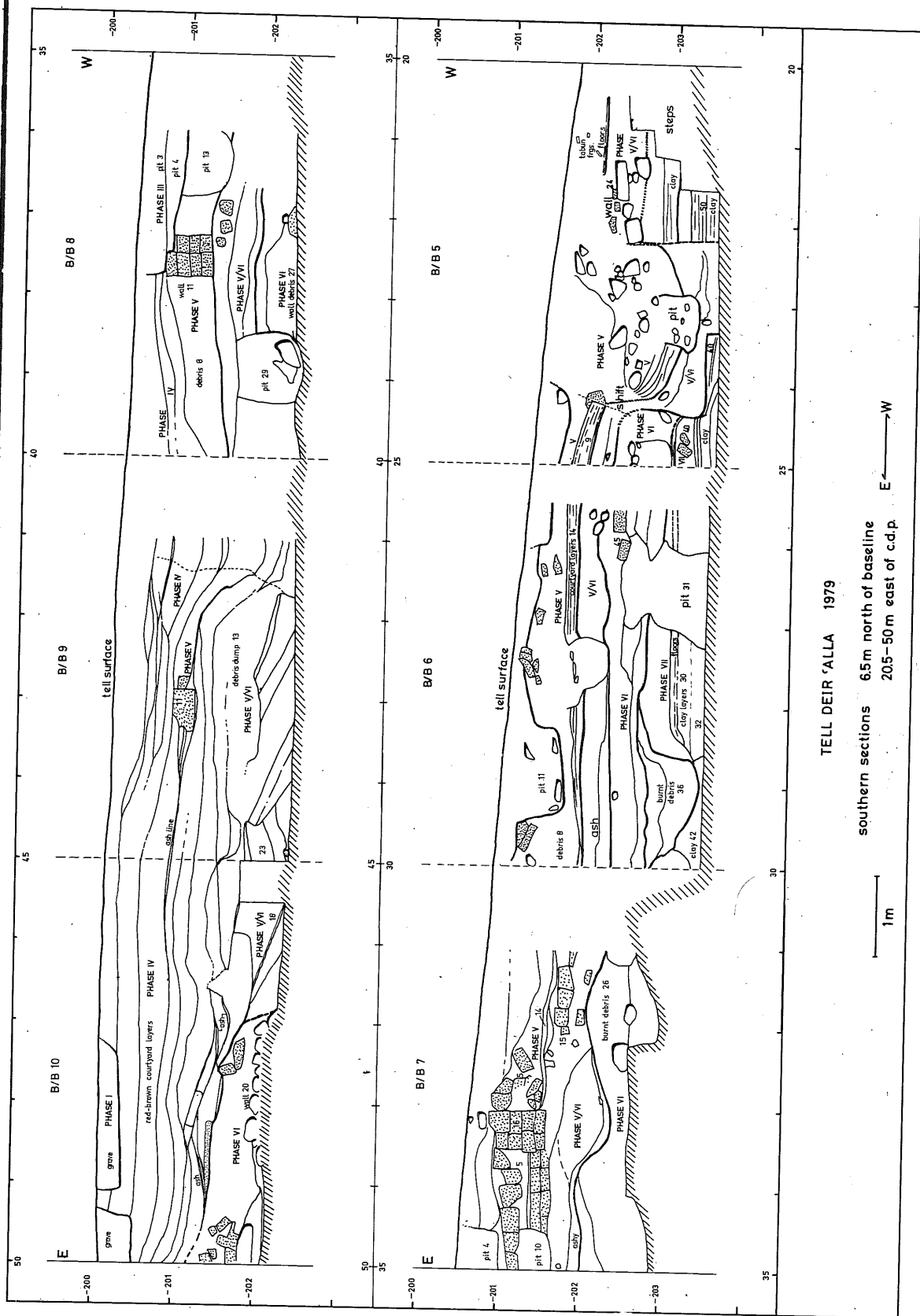
The date of this phase has to be put somewhere in the 5th/early 4th century B.C. (Fig. 2; Pl. XXII, 2).

Additional phase between V and VI (phase V/VI)

We had to decide to establish an intermediate phase to account for several courtyard layers, many pits and a reappraisal of the stratigraphy of the architectural evidence in squares B/A5 and 6 and B/B5 and 6. The architecture to be attributed to this phase is limited to the W. part of the excavated area, as it has been drawn in *op.cit.* p. 70, fig. 9, as attributed to phase V. Cf. Pl. XI for stone foundation of walls B/A5, 15, and 29. This phase started with digging away much of the preceding phase VI, e.g. in B/A8 and 9 and B/B8 and 9 (See section drawing fig. 3, and plan drawing of phase VI, fig. 4). This digging was possibly done in order to obtain clay for building. During the existence of this additional phase several other pits were made, e.g. in B/B9 and B/C8 (cf. Pl. XVIII). Some of them were filled with the same burnt debris of phase VI as was taken out.

The accumulation of courtyard layers was quite high as is visible on Pl. XII, a photograph of the E section of B/A7. Note The stones just above the bottom of the trench belong to phase VI as do some of the washed accumulation on top of the stones. The mudbricks visible in the upper half of the section belong to wall B/A7. 5A of phase V. It is also visible that this wall was cut by a phase III pit, to the N. To the S the phase V and IV courtyard accumulation are clearly visible.

Among the objects coming from this



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southern sections 6.5m north of baseline
205-50m east of c.d.p.

1m

E → W

Fig. 3

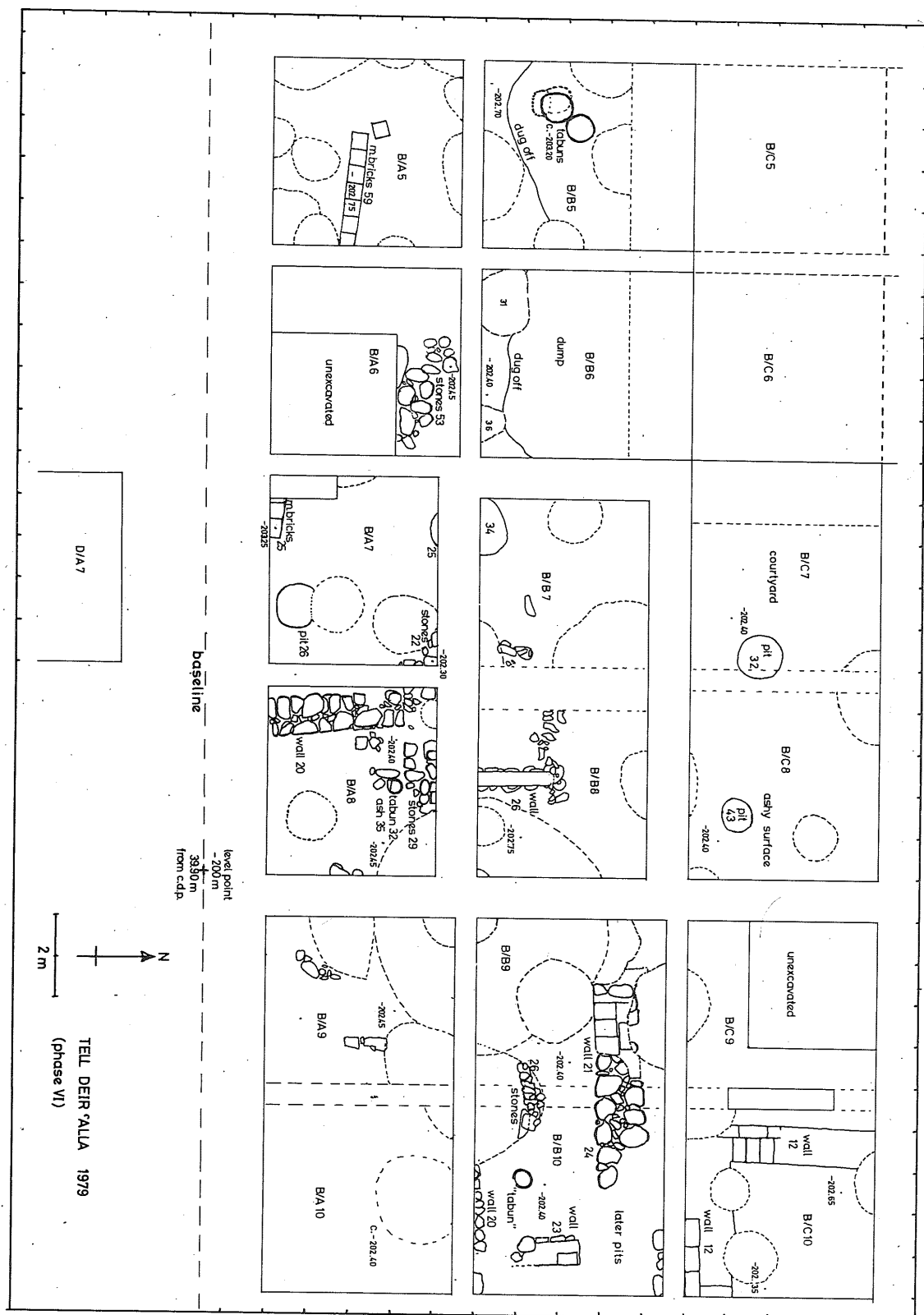
phase one may mention several oblong loomweights (some of them were found together with some pottery, including a small "decanter" (Pl. XXIII, 1) at the bottom of pit B/B5.34. In B/C8.31 (dumped debris) a small fragment of an ostrakon was found written on both sides in aramaic script. The layers of this phase seem to date from around 600 B.C. (other objects: Plates XXIII, 2 — XXV, 1).

Phase VI

In addition to the architecture found in 1976/78 some more walls of phase VI were unearthed this season. See plan drawing (fig. 4), and see also plan drawing, (fig. 10) in the previous report. The architectural remains are still very fragmentary due to the large scale pit digging during subsequent phases. Most of these later pits are indicated on the plan drawing. The largest one is in the SW half of square B/B9 and the bordering squares (see also section drawing, fig. 3). It has a diameter of about 5.5 m. Phase VI itself had started with a large scale digging too. This is clear in squares B/B5 & 6. Much of the solid clay deposits of phase VII had been removed, and the resulting "pits" have been filled again with debris dump. Many sheep or goat bones were found on a surface in the lower part of this dump (Pl. XIII). There had been some leveling as well, and it is worth noticing that in most squares the surface of the beginning of phase VI was at about the same level (c. -202.40 m).

The main pieces of architecture were in squares B/C 10, B/B8, 9, 10 and B/A8. The room in B/C 10 had been excavated in 1978 and had still much plantmaterial on its floor. It apparently was a storeroom

with its thick walls. The heavy stone foundation of wall B/B9.21 (= B/B 10.24), see (Pl. XIV), may indicate an important building, but only very little had been left of it. The stones B/B9.26, visible on drawing and photograph, do not belong to phase VI; they are part of a pit fill. Squares B/A 10 and 9 did not show any connecting walls, just a few groups of stones. Their original function is not clear. The large phase II pit B/A 10.6 reached just to the lower surface of phase VI. Square B/A8 showed (see also Pl. XV) a N-S wall (nr. 20) with remains of a crosswall to the N, and further a connecting N-S wall again in B/B8. To the E of wall B/A 8.20 there was a small oven (dep. nr. 32) with much ash (nr. 35) around with several complete pots in it, e.g. (Pl. XVI, 22). The place W of this wall shows few remains: pit B/A 7.26 with plant matter and loomweights in it, and several courtyard layers. The function of mudbricks 25 is not yet clear, nor is it certain to which phase they belong. The stones B/A 6.53 may be of another wall. The row of bricks B/A5.59 is not a wall, but kind of a path. The surroundings of it were filled upto almost the same level with hard packed courtyard layers. No architecture was found in this square nor in B/B5 and 6. That place functioned apparently as courtyard. A cluster of four tabuns used successively, is characteristic of this (see Pl. XVII for three of them). An important feature in the construction of the tabuns was the use of mudbricks at some of the outside lower parts of them. The ovens were used during the process of filling up the "pit". There were no clearly used surfaces in the dump which filled the same pit in B/B6. The fill layers were



sloping down northward. The squares B/C7 and 8 had courtyard layers only, with some small pits and much ash. (See Pl. XVIII, XIX). For some artifacts coming from this phase, (see Pls XXII - XXVII).

Phase VII

Phase VII is upto now represented by solid courtyard layers of clay in squares B/B5 and 6 as well as normal wash and courtyard layers in B/C7 and 8 and B/A7. In B/A8 also stones are involved, but no clear wall foundation. The clay deposits in B/B6 are especially interesting, because they have many holes of pointed poles in and below the floors, (see Pl. XX, 1). The unexpected identity of the holes was understood by the fact that the object that had made them had pressed the clay layers in which it came sideward and downward. The poles had been standing close together in a certain order, but not all at the same time. The precise function of them remains obscure. Further digging more to the S may give clear suggestions.

Very much of this phase had been dug away at the beginning of phase VI.

Phase VIII

The 8th phase has been touched in B/C6 7 and 8 only. There appears a very shallow remnant of it. The main feature is an almost 7 m. long double row of mudbricks (size 40 × 55 × 10 cm) going E-W, with in B/C6 a double N-S row of mudbricks making a corner. In B/C6 the rows have two courses of bricks each, and the bricks are made of the local yellow banded clay. It seems that the rows of bricks are two courses high everywhere. This would possibly mean that the brick-made construction had not been built higher originally, whatever its function

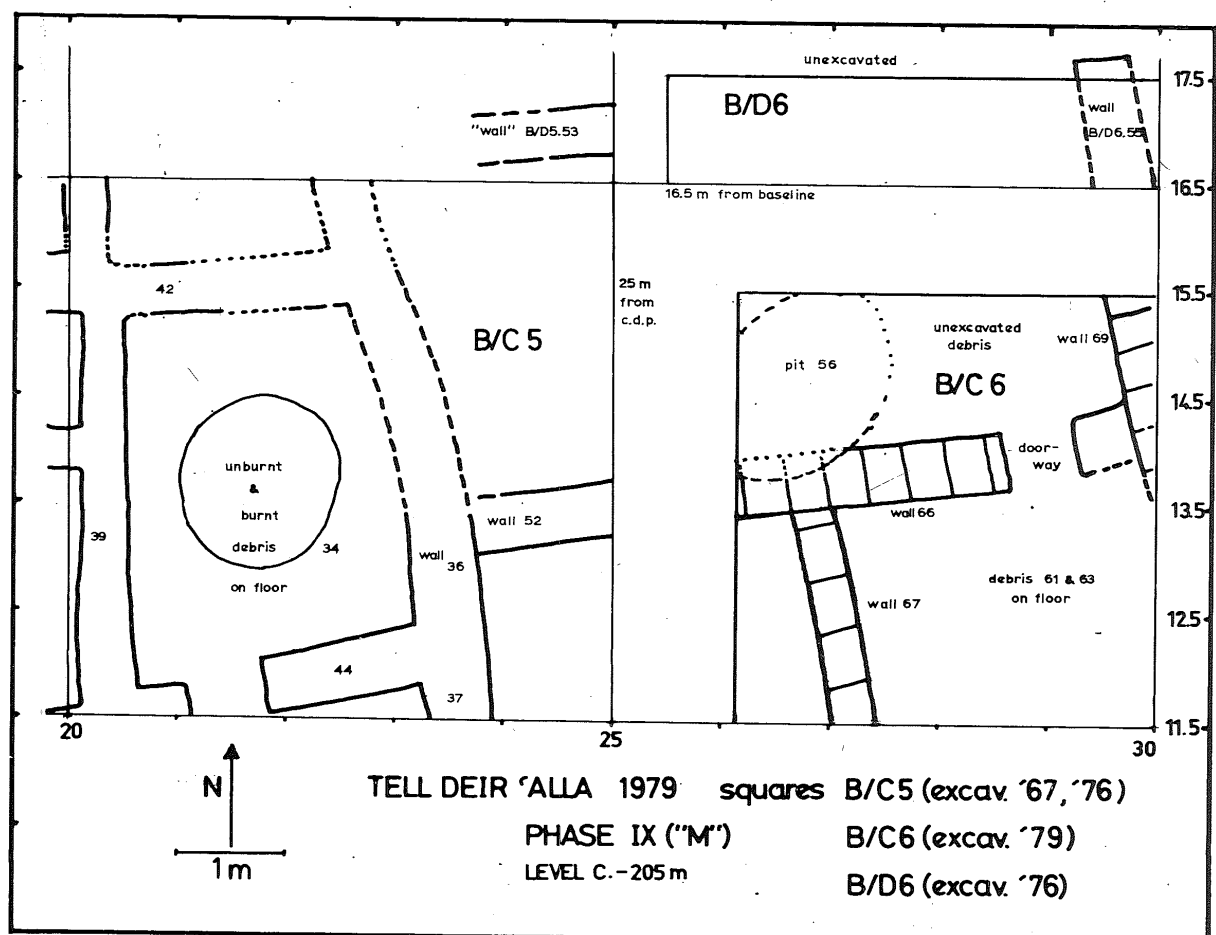
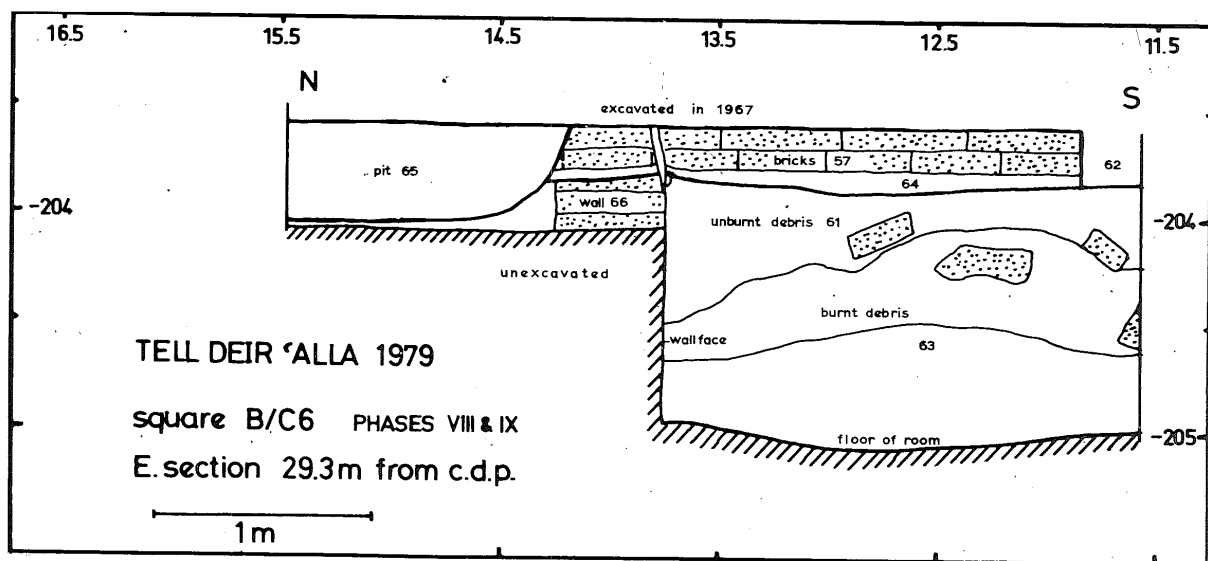
might have been.

It is possible that phase VII has to be combined with VIII.

Phase IX

This phase IX is the same as phase M in previous countings. Much of it had been excavated in 1967 in an area of c. 25 × 25 m NW of the trenches dug during the last three seasons. Much of the architecture had been revealed, and some of it has been published preliminary in J. Hoftijzer, G. van der Kooij, *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla*, Leiden, 1976, (Pls. 16-19) and in A.D.A.J. *op. cit.* 1978, p. 64, fig. 6 (square B/C5). During this season excavations of phase M were done in one square only, namely in B/C6, to the E of B/C5, labelled EE 400 and EE 300 respectively in 1967. In 1967 it became clear that all the phase M architecture excavated had been destroyed by earthquake and fire. The room found in B/C6 was destroyed by fire too.

The walls are partly still standing up to 1.25 m high, and the room is found filled with burnt roof and wall debris. For a plan of the walls combined with those of B/C5 see plan drawing (fig. 5). The height of the debris (deposits 61 and 63) is shown on (Pl. XX, 2) where the floor is visible as well as the E most part of the burnt debris. Note also the lower course of mudbricks 57 going N-S at the top of the photograph. To the left is a doorway with a quern at the threshold. See also (Pl. XXI, 1) for a photograph of one stage in the removal of the debris inside the room. In the NW corner the floor of the room is visible. An especially interesting feature is the antler found as fallen almost directly on the floor of the



room (Pl. XXI, 2). Some of the artifacts found may be mentioned here. Plates (XXVIII, 2 — XXIX, 2) show some of the pottery found. A sealed jar handle (see Pl. XXX, 1). A sherd with graffiti writing and drawing (Pl. XXX, 2). Phase IX probably has to be dated in the 8th century B. C. (Pl. XXXI).

Some general remarks

Dating the phases is still in a preliminary stage. The artifacts still have to be studied carefully in this respect and the samples for C 14 dating are still being analysed.

The information about all the upper phases is very fragmentary due to the large number of pits made during subsequent phases. This feature gives the fragmentary character to the architectural picture, but it also caused a large scale mixture of the artifacts from the distinguished phases. Many objects found in later deposits can be taken (or suspected) as belonging to earlier phases, because the digging of pits brought them higher up. This also applies to the pot sherds found. A careful study of the stratigraphy combined with a comparative study of the artifacts should be able to give some conclusions about the relations between objects and stratigraphy. Next season (the

expedition is planned for 1981) we hope to finish the excavations of the phases on top of phase M in the limited area we are working in upto now. Then a final publication can be expected. This publication is going to include also data and conclusions earned from the many metal, soil, plant matter, and animal bone samples taken from the deposits, so as to get a picture of the environment, culture and history of the people connected with those phases as comprehensive as possible.

It was important to have been digging in phase M this season. The height of the walls, the sudden fire destruction (in this place too), the proven large number of biological and cultural finds again underlined the possibility of getting a relatively extensive picture of the character of the settlement, of the culture and so of the people of this phase. This picture would have a value by itself, but an additional value is given by the phase M inscriptions with their important contents. For 1981 and '82 another two seasons of excavations are planned in order to excavate this phase in an area of at least 15 × 30 m.

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