

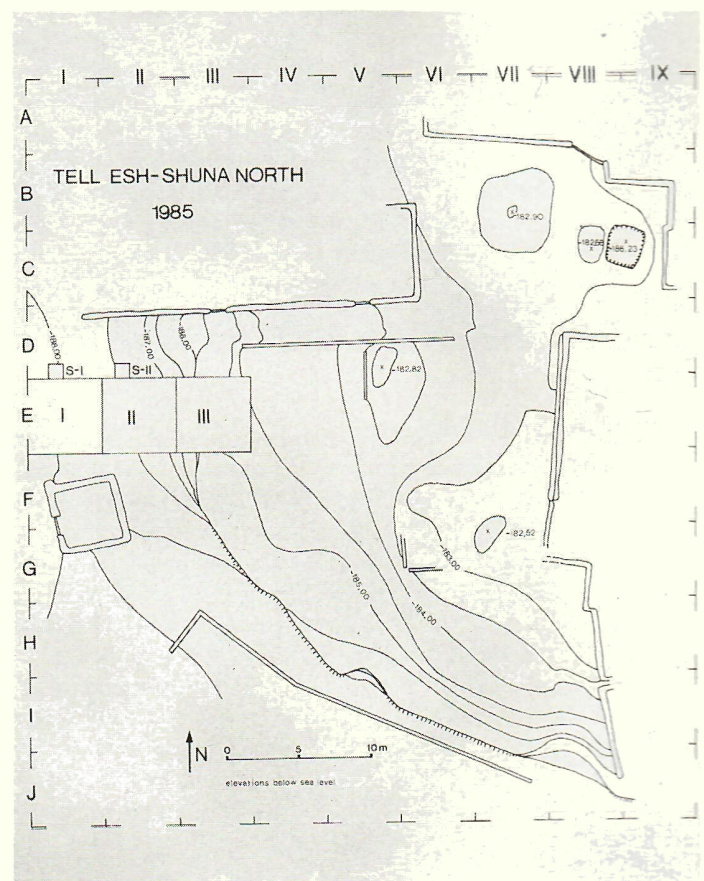
## Tell esh-Shuna North: 1984 and 1985

Tell esh-Shuna North is located in the northern Jordan Valley at the junction of the main road descending from the Irbid plain down to the north-south valley road. The importance of the site was initially recognized in 1953 during the Point IV Archaeological Survey under the direction of G. Lankester Harding. In connection with this survey, Hasan Abu 'Awad excavated a small probe trench which yielded an occupational sequence dating from the 'middle Chalcolithic' through to the Early Bronze II. Also reported in the 1960 publication of this earlier work at Shuna North are the dimensions of the tell at 1 km in length with a maximum preserved height of 10 m (Mellaart, *ADAJ* VI-VII, 1962, pp. 126-157 and De Contenson, *ADAJ* IV-V, 1960, pp. 12-98, *RB* 68, 1961, pp. 546-556 and *MUSJ* 37, 1960, pp. 57-75).

Since the early 1950s, the villages of Khirbet esh-Shuna and Khirbet esh-Sheikh Hussein, situated on and around the ancient mound, have developed and grown at the expense of the archaeological material beneath. Today, though the sherd scatter extends throughout the town of Tell esh-Shuna Shamaliyeh, only several small portions of the mound are preserved. Due to rather industrious bulldozing activities at the Shuna North bus stop, we were presented with an excellent opportunity for salvage excavations in the form of a 'made-to-order' step trench towards the more central area of the mound. Even this area, measuring only 45 m × 50 m with a maximum preserved height of 6 m, was only available for excavation due to the destruction of the overlying houses in 1967. The accompanying destruction debris and accumulated garbage deposits alone amount to one and a half metres, the mound's preserved height (FIG. 1).

Under the sponsorship of the University of Tübingen in combination with the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Yarmouk University and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, salvage excavations were conducted at Shuna North in the spring of 1984 and 1985. Based on a 75 sq m exposure with the depth of occupation at approximately 4.5 m, 109 strata were identified which outline the local development from the PNB-related/Chalcolithic into the beginning of the Early Bronze I. Alongside the main trench, cut directly into the northern balk, we also excavated two 1 sq m probes in an attempt

1. Preserved segment of tell showing area of 1984 and 1985 excavations.



to reconstruct both the contemporary environmental and micro-artifact sequence. All material was sieved with a 10 per cent sample saved for flotation.

Though the site was investigated in the early 1950s and even blessed with a published preliminary report, one of the reasons we decided to probe deeper was based on the need for a well-stratified sequence spanning the 4th millennium.

This became evident when studying the literature pertaining to the material revealed in the early probe trench and the resulting confusion as to where this material fitted into an accepted chronological frame.

The early material of Shuna North, published as Shuna I, has been labelled by various authors as late Neolithic or late Neolithic 2, Pottery Neolithic B or Jerichoan VIII, middle, late or upper Chalcolithic, late or developed Wādī Rābah, Neve Ur or early Ghassul. Shuna level II has been referred to as late Chalcolithic, Ghassul-like or Ghassulian-influenced, Esdraelon 1, Proto Urban A & C, EB I A, EB I A-B, EB I A-C, and EB I A-B variant, or, more recently, Proto-historical I. Shuna level III floats in the morass of the all-encompassing EB I. Our excavated sequence corresponds roughly to the Shuna levels I-III published in 1960, and perhaps the major factor contributing to this confusion is the long-lived local craft tradition which disregards the attempted tripartite division.

Shuna North has presented us with a compact occupational sequence of general residential character, characterized by a series of multi-phase, multi-room dwellings with associated courtyards; a series of beaten earth, gravel or cobbled outdoor work areas with associated pits, burning installations and possible settling basins; large ash lenses, garbage deposits, refuse pits and dumps; a rather uninformative series of wall fragments which tell us little other than the fact that this area of the site continued to be inhabited; the ubiquitous 'fill' layers;

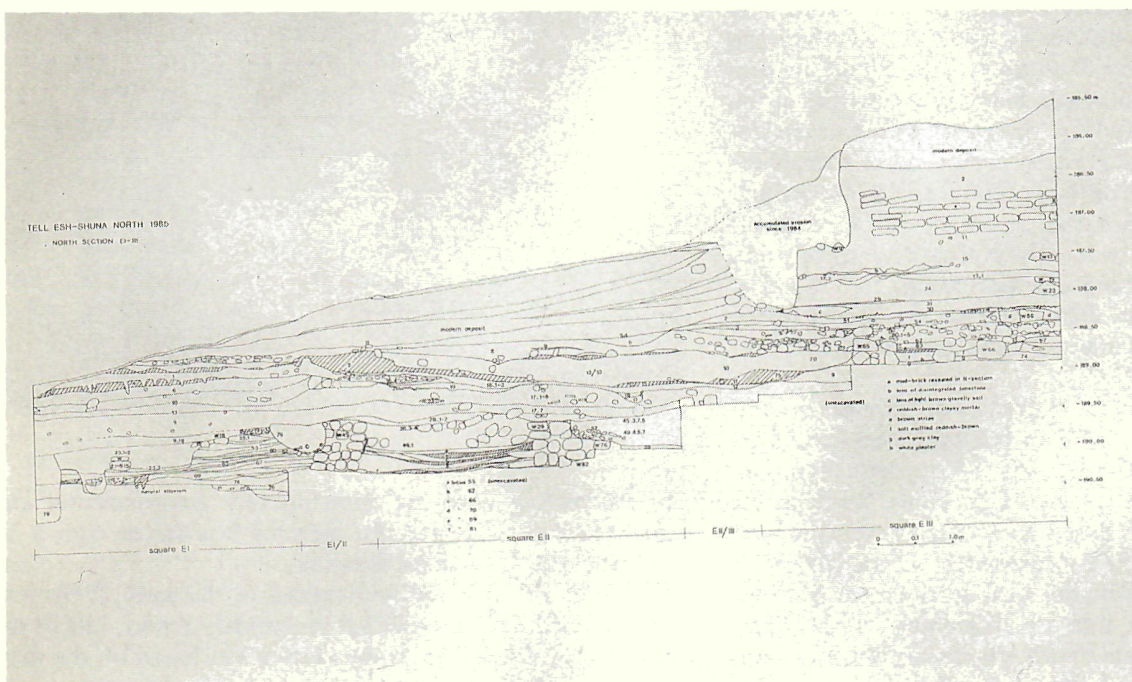
and topping our sequence, a heavily destroyed though obviously rather substantial basalt wall with an associated chipping stone surface (FIG. 2).

Shuna North has also presented us with three basic artifact assemblages; however, the craft traditions of the earlier period continue into the later one, and the local traditions, though undergoing continual modification, did not yield to abrupt change. The basic local ceramic repertoire is characterized by three overlapping pottery traditions of very coarsely tempered red-painted, red-slipped and plain wares (FIGS 3 & 4). Parallel to the coarse red-slipped wares is a subsidiary tradition of finer sand or sand- and chaff-tempered red-slipped and burnished wares which appear throughout the sequence.

Within the coarse ware tradition, painted decoration typical of the Jericho Pottery Neolithic is the preferred decorative technique at the beginning of the sequence, becoming very rare towards the end where it is supplemented and then eventually replaced by vertical painted band decoration, typical of the EB I. Also popular with the Shuna potters was the technique of applying or incising a rope-like band on the vessel surface. Although several of the techniques involved in producing this decorative effect varied, with specific techniques being more popular during the earlier or later part of the excavated sequence, the intended effect is retained throughout. Rare at the beginning of our sequence, this decorative technique gains in popularity, as does the use of red slip.

Three non-locally produced ceramic wares appear within

2. North section, squares EI-EIII.



3. Tell esh-Shuna North, Red-slipped wares ± applied and/or incised decoration.



4. Tell esh-Shuna North. Local early painted pottery; lower register later painted wares.



the Shuna North sequence which provided a rough chronological guideline. Some very rare geometric painted and dark-face slipped and burnished wares appear in the first third of the sequence, in part contemporary with the preference for the red-painted wares (strata 114–55). The most visible change in the ceramic sequence appears with the introduction of the Esdraelon wares (strata 54–23). Although these wares represent less than 1 per cent of the total sample used in our preliminary analysis, it appears as though a little outside competition stimulated local production. Approximately 67 per cent of the ceramic types characteristic of the earlier assemblage continue to be produced, but many new types are now introduced with a noticeable change in the local cooking wares. The production of or preference for painted pottery declines markedly, whereas the application of red slip and rope-like bands becomes the predominant decorative scheme. Alongside the continuing though slightly modified local ceramic assemblage, the EB I is marked by the appearance of an apparently locally made 'band-slipped' ware in the upper third of the sequence (strata 26–7; Gustavson-Gaube, *ADAJ*, xxix, 1985, pp. 43–87 and forthcoming).

Continuing with ceramics as a guideline, the second reason for exhuming Shuna North lies in the suspicion of a possible further regional variation of the general Palestinian late Chal-

colithic which combines north Jordan and southern Syria. The identifiable Ghassulian Chalcolithic, in its classical form, did not extend into the north-eastern Jordan Valley. To all intents and purposes, this region simply became a void, its Neolithic inhabitants quietly packing up and moving away, only reappearing with our ability to identify the Early Bronze in the established chronological frame.

As with Palestine, our knowledge of the Syrian Chalcolithic is also regionally restricted. In northern Syria, the Chalcolithic is well known and neatly sub-divided into various phases based on the presence, absence and sequence of varying ceramic wares. Intruding into this compact arrangement is a red-slipped ware, with or without applied and/or impressed rope-like bands. Such decorative techniques are alien to northern Syria and do not evolve out of the local northern pottery traditions. In the Damascene basin; however, Tell el-Khazzami and possibly the latest settlement of Tell Ramad are sites with an associated red-slipped and rope-like band decorated pottery assemblage. At both of these sites, the characteristic northern Syrian traditions are absent. Though the potters of the Damascene basin and those who produced the Shuna North pottery had a variety of techniques at their disposal, the similarity of a number of techniques chosen by the respective potters is striking. What is referred to here is not an exact parallel

of one pot sherd to another, since the ware or paste used in their manufacture is very different, but to a shared conceptual framework of the respective potters. The general range of forms produced, the use of red slip, and the choice of applied rope-like horizontal impressed bands as the preferred decorative technique, were specifically selected and developed by both.

Based on the appearance of similar wares in the northern Syrian Chalcolithic sequence, de Contenson has dated the Tell el-Khazzami assemblage to the late 5th millennium (De Contenson, *AAAS* 18, 1968, pp. 55–62). Though red-slipped and rope-like band decorated pottery does appear in the early Shuna assemblage, it played a secondary role to the painted wares. The strongest ties between Tell el-Khazzami and Shuna North lie in the Shuna middle phase which, at its earliest, may be dated towards the middle of the 4th millennium.

The basic range of vessel forms and the decorative techniques are similar at both sites; however, as mentioned above, the ware or fabric is very different. The coarseness of the Shuna wares is typical of Jordanian pottery traditions throughout

the preceding and contemporary periods. The contrasting finer-tempered, well-finished ware of Tell el-Khazzami is also typical of the general Syrian Chalcolithic. Is it possible that the Shuna potters or their predecessors adopted, then transformed to fit their local production requirements, a ceramic tradition from their northern neighbors?

The early Shuna potters were producing a predominantly plain and painted ware assemblage, typical of the region. In the succeeding phase, we can see certain affinities to the Ghassul to the south; however, too many elements of the classical Ghassulian form repertoire decorative and manufacturing techniques are absent.

I would like to conclude this paper with the suggestion that what we see at Shuna North may be part of a general northern Jordan Valley, possibly northern Jordan, cultural assemblage, assimilating and transforming traditions borrowed from its northern neighbors and continuing onwards, albeit unwittingly, to contribute to the local development of what is labelled the Early Bronze I.