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Short Fieldwork Report: Tell Barri (Syria), seasons 2008–2010

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Tell Barri (Syria), seasons 2008–2010

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During the 2008-2010 fieldwork seasons at Tell Barri (36°44'20"N 41°07'37"E) excavations focused on Area J at the western slope of the tell and around the tell itself, including trenches in the Area L, Area M, and Operation 19. During these excavations, the previously studied sample of 106 individuals (Sołtysiak 2008) was appended by the remains of 11 individuals originating from strata 1 and 2 (Early Islamic and Modern Bedouin cemetery) as well as stratum 9 (Achaemenian period). A large proportion of the skeletons was extremely eroded, with obvious weathering, root etching, and signs of invertebrate activity. Only one recent skeleton (T72) was well-preserved. Most of the skeletons belonged to adult individuals (see **Table 1**), and this evident age bias was most likely also the effect of erosion. See Sołtysiak 2008 for a description of the fieldwork protocol.

The only complete skeleton (T72) from the modern Bedouin cemetery exhibited clear directional asymmetry of the upper limb—the right side was more developed. The clavicles were the only exception, which is expected in humans (cf. Jaskulska 2009). The first sacral vertebra was partially lumbarised, with the right transverse process resembling a lumbar vertebra and the left one more developed and attached in an irregular way to the second sacral vertebra (**Figure 1**). At the same time, the first coccygeal vertebra was sacralised.

While the skeleton T202 was poorly preserved, a few of the skeletal elements were surprisingly well-preserved, including some metatarsals, metacarpals, and phalanges. This adult individual exhibited still preserved one deciduous canine, at least two cervical ribs, and non-specific deformation of the proximal end of the right fibula. Moreover, polysyndactyly was recognized in the left third finger which split in the middle of the proximal segment, had two distinct middle segments, and joined in the distal segment (**Figure 2**). The distal end of the corresponding metacarpal was broadened in comparison to its right counterpart. At least

one other finger may also be deformed. Only a few finger segments were preserved, so more precise reconstruction of the pattern of polysyndactyly was not possible.

Table 1. Human remains from Tell Barri excavated in 2008-2010.

Trench	Context	Stratum	Sex	Age	Caries	Comments
K28:L.EF14	T72	2	M	15-21	0/28	complete and well-preserved skeleton
K30:M.R10		9	?	adult	0/7	small bone assemblage
K30:M.S9		1	?	adult		four bone fragments of at least two individuals
K30:M.S9		9	?	adult		six bone fragments of one individual
K30:M.T9		1	?	adult		small bone assemblage; osteoarthritis of the spine
K30:M.T9	T201	1?	?	15-21	0/20	poorly preserved skeleton
K30:M.T9	T201	1?	--	1.5		poorly preserved and incomplete skeleton
K30:M.T9	T202	9	?	adult	0/27	poorly preserved skeleton
K30:M.88		1	?	adult	2/6	a few elements from a single skeleton
K30:OP19	ST4	2	?	adult	0/5	poorly preserved skeleton
K30:OP19	ST5	2	?	adult	0/7	spondylosis and osteoarthritis in all vertebral segments

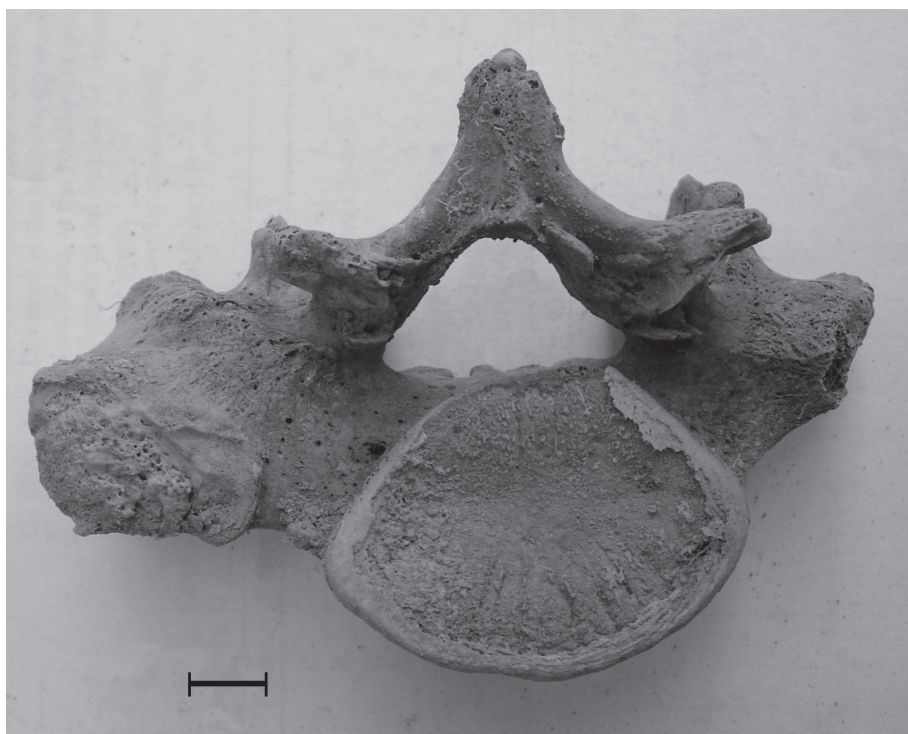


Figure 1. Partially lumbarised first sacral vertebra. T72, modern cemetery.



Figure 2. Polysyndactyly in the left third finger. T202, Achaemenian period.

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Tell Fares al-Sharqi (Syria), seasons 2006–2009

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Excavations at Tell Fares al-Sharqi (36°44'31"N 41°04'04"E) began in 2006 by a French team directed by Jean-Daniel Forest and Régis Vallet (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). This small site, covering some 4ha, was occupied chiefly during the Late Chalcolithic (LC) period and abandoned in the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (EBA), with no traces of settlement dating after the Ninevite 5 period. Recently the mound was used by local Bedouin tribes as a cemetery and several modern burials disturb earlier strata.

Between 2006-2009, the remains of several buildings were unearthed together with 22 simple intramural burials, most of which were infant skeletons (**Table 1**). In spite of the small sample size, some temporal differences in mortuary habits at the site were observed, with neonates and infants less than one year old dominating the Late Chalcolithic 1 and 2 deposits, older subadults more common in the Late Chalcolithic 4 and 5 deposits, and a few adult skeletons were found in the Ninevite 5 strata. However, the differences between LC 1/2 and LC 4/5 are not statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, $p=0.12$). So far, no human remains dated to the LC 3 were found.