



ADELHEID OTTO & KAI KANIUTH (HRSG.)

unter Mitarbeit von FEMKE GROPS

50 Jahre Vorderasiatische Archäologie in München

Der vorliegende Band feiert das 50-jährige Bestehen des Instituts für Vorderasiatische Archäologie der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Er schöpft aus Archivalien, Forschungs- und Verwaltungsdaten, vor allem aber aus den Erinnerungen seiner Mitglieder seit der Gründung im Jahr 1970. Institutsgeschichte, Lehrerfahrungen und Forschungsleistung sind die drei vielfach ineinander verwobenen Eckpunkte, zwischen denen sich die Beiträge bewegen. Das lebendige Bild einer Gemeinschaft von Praktizierenden ist zugleich Würdigung des Vergangenen und Werbung für eine weitergehende Erforschung der „Wiege der Kulturen“.

Adelheid Otto &
Kai Kaniuth (Hrsg.)

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Camels passing by the lower town of Fāra.

The Fāra Regional Survey Project (FARSUP) (2016–2018)

The Fāra Regional Survey Project (FARSUP) investigates the area between Iṣān Bahrīyāt / ancient Isin and Fāra / ancient Šuruppak. A special focus is on the settlement structure of Šuruppak, one of the major centres in this „heartland of cities“ during the entire third millennium. Our methods included surface survey, aerial photography and geophysical prospection. Although Fāra has suffered from looting after 2003, we were able to identify residential areas, manufacturing zones, and a large public building in the center of the site.

يقوم مشروع المسح الإقليمي لفارا بالبحث في المنطقة الواقعة بين إيشان بحريات/إيسين القديمة و فارا/شوروباك القديمة. يتركز الاهتمام بشكل خاص على بنية مستوطنة شوروباك التي تمثل واحداً من المراكز الرئيسية في “قلب المدن” هذه خلال الألفية الثالثة بأكملها. يتضمن منهجنا المسح السطحي، التصوير الجوي والاستقصاء الجيوفيزيائي. بالرغم من تعرّض الموقع لأكثر السرقات تخريباً بعد سنة 2003، تمكّننا من تحديد مناطق سكنية، مناطق تصنيعية، ومبنى عاماً كبيراً في المركز.

After decades of instability, work in Southern Iraq has finally become possible again. The chance of conducting a survey around Fāra, ancient Šuruppak, was offered to a team of LMU Munich in 2016 by the Iraqi Antiquities Directorate.¹ It began in cooperation with the Qadis survey project of Prof. Nicolò Marchetti (University of Bologna), and continued in 2017 and 2018 as “The Fara Regional Survey Project (FARSUP)”, a joint project with Prof. Abbas al-Hussainy and Jacob Jawdat (University Al-Qadisiyah), who – together with the authors, Christoph Fink and Hardy Maaß – constitute the core members of the project. Up to eight graduate students from the University of Al-Qadisiyah, a team of Geophysicists, and three more team members from Munich (Pierre Borsdorf, Friederike and Johannes Einwag) participated in the project. Funds were provided by LMU Munich and the *Münchener Universitätsgesellschaft*.

The surveyed area lies in the province of Al-Qadisiyah, south of the modern town Afak and covers the area between Iṣān Bahrīyāt, ancient Isin – a former project of our institute (see ch. III.1) – and Fāra, one of the earliest German excavations in the Sumerian ‘Heartland of Cit-

ies’. The main part of the survey region is steppe today, without any village or road, and the numerous ancient canals can be a serious challenge for modern cars during a survey (Fig. 1). Our foremost aim was a damage assessment in this remote area, which has suffered the most severe, irreversible destruction through year-long, systematic looting following the last Gulf War. Twenty sites between Isin and Fāra have been investigated so far, eight of which had been previously surveyed by Adams and Nissen in the 1970s (Adams/Nissen 1972), while twelve other sites were documented and surveyed for the first time. Heavy recent damage was registered at more than 80% of the sites, which date from the Early Uruk to the Islamic period, with a marked peak in the 4th and 2nd mill. BC (Otto et al. 2018).

The damage is most devastating in Iṣān Bahrīyāt and Fāra, where appr. 90 % of the surface of the main mounds has been destroyed between 2003 and 2006 by thousands of looting pits, some of them 2–4 m deep (Fig. 2). Clearly, ceramic and broken artefacts were not the focus of the illicit diggers, since the sites are literally covered with incredibly high numbers of pottery and objects regarded as worthless on the black market and thrown away by the looters. At Fāra, complete conical bowls, beads and broken figurines, bronze vessels or tools were left in the heaps of the looting pits, as well as fragmentary third

¹ Our sincere thanks go to the Director General of Antiquities Qais Rasheed, chair of SBAH, numerous SBAH staff members from Diwanayah and Afaq, especially Haidar Laäbi.



Fig. 1. The car is stuck! or the difficulties of passing an ancient canal during the FARSUP survey.



Fig. 2. Severe looting of the main mound of Fāra: spotting the areas of the former excavations.

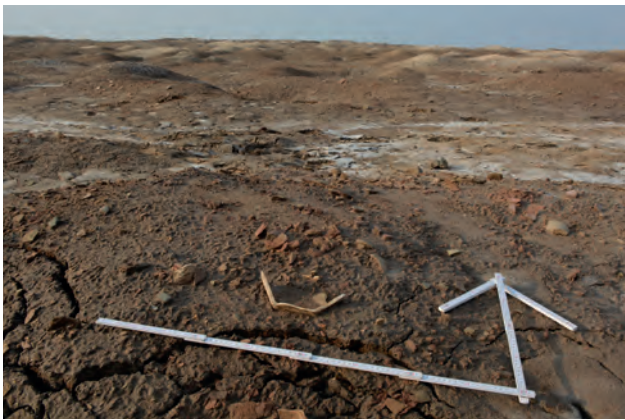


Fig. 3. The heap of a looting pit where half an Early Dynastic stone bowl had been left behind.

millennium bowls and pots from calcite, marble or sandstone (Fig. 3).

Our main focus, however, lay on the intensive survey of Fāra itself in order to identify the functional areas of this major Sumerian city. The mound, no more than 10m above plain level but appr. 200–250 ha large, was one of

the largest Sumerian cities, and is still today challenging because of its enormous extension (Fig. 4). The distances are outrageous, especially when archaeologists have to walk up and down the looting pits in the soft soil, which feels like hiking in deep snow (Fig. 5).

The first excavations were conducted by Robert Koldewey and Walter Andrae on behalf of the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft* in 1902–1903. They became legendary, not only due to the difficult conditions in a then fairly belliscose tribal area under the burning heat of the Mesopotamian summer. In Andrae’s words: “Es gehörte der ganze draufgängerische Mut und das unbeugsame Pflichtbewußtsein Koldeweys dazu, zu Beginn eines mesopotamischen Sommers, im Juni, aufzubrechen und ein solches Unternehmen inmitten der ‘Wüste’ in Gang zu setzen” (W. Andrae in Heinrich/Andrae 1931: 1). The hardships suffered by the team members, were even acknowledged by Koldewey: “Herr Nöldeke hat Herrn Baumgarten am 10. Oktober in Fara abgelöst. Herr Baumgarten ist am 12. Oktober hier eingetroffen; er ist im Besitz von 9 gut ausgebildeten Bagdadbeulen” (Koldewey 1902: 8). Fara became a key site, mainly because the urban structure of a Sumerian town was there investigated systematically for the first time, and with the best methods of those early days of archaeological research in the Near East: one large trench crossed the site from SW to NE, and 14 trenches, 3 m wide and up to 900 m long, were laid out in W–E direction. These trenches are still visible today (Fig. 4), and they give the mound a specific structure and are helpful as orientation marks (Fig. 6).

The early trenches, which were enlarged to excavation areas in some places, brought to light the remains of several “houses” of Early Dynastic date. About 1.000 cuneiform documents found inside allow to identify the site as ancient

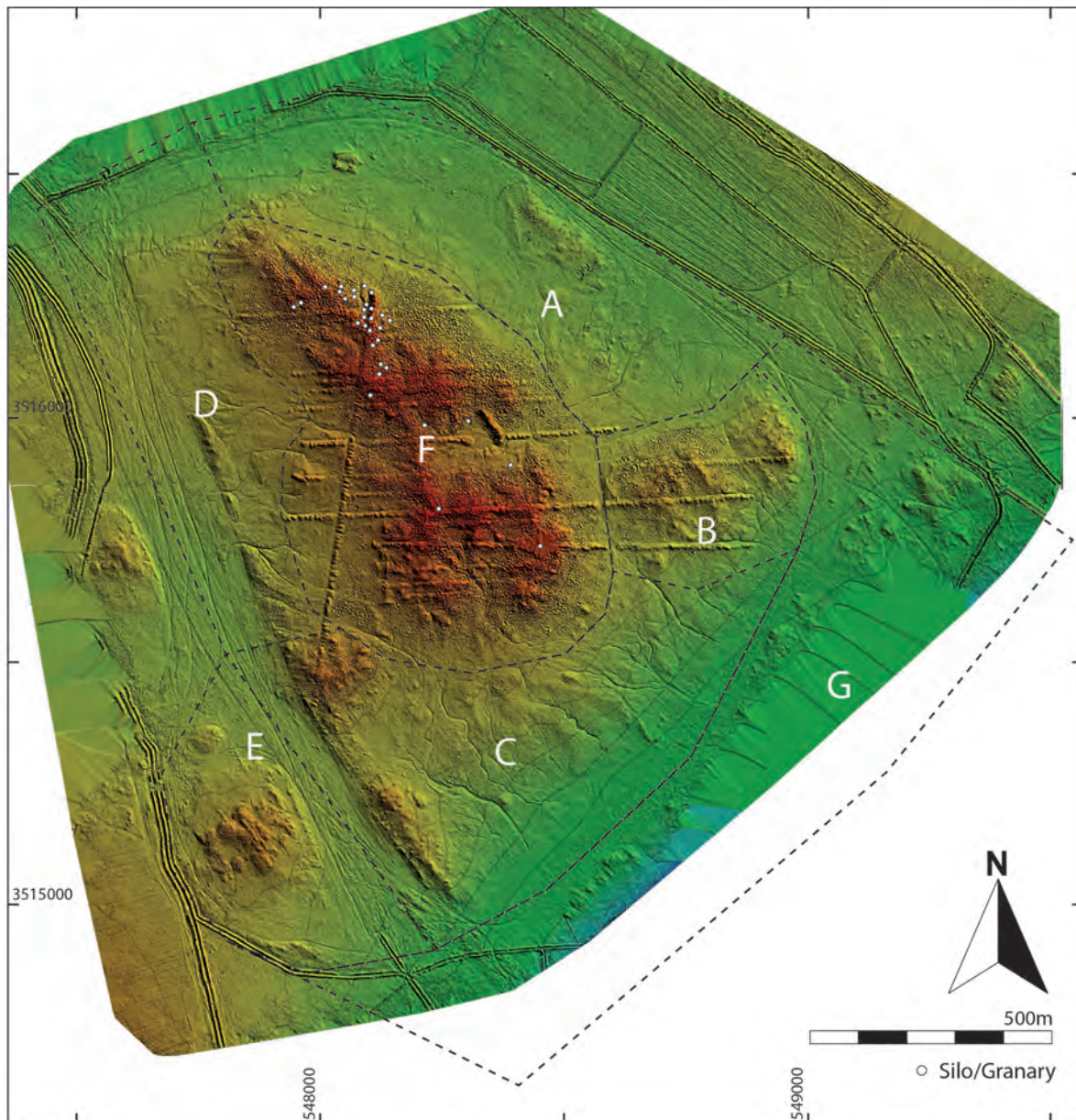


Fig. 4. Digital elevation map of Fāra with the newly designated areas.

Šuruppak, home of the flood hero Utnapištim/Ziusudra and seat of the last dynasty “before the Flood” according to the Sumerian King List. The tablets and hundreds of sealings, which were discovered in the uppermost burnt house level, were so characteristic that the period was labelled “Fara Period” (today mostly referred to as ED IIIa). Later excavations by Erich Schmidt from the University of Pennsylvania (Schmidt 1931), the survey by Harriet Martin in 1973 and her thorough study of Fāra (Martin 1988) have revealed the chronology of Šuruppak from the Jemdet Nasr period until the early Isin-Larsa period, when the site was abandoned for good. Nevertheless, many questions remain unsolved and initiated the renewed investigations.

One striking inconsistency was the fact that the cuneiform tablets discovered in the house archives testify to a centralised administration under the leadership of a ruler and the town’s goddess Sud (^dSU.KUR.RU); however, no traces of any public building, neither a temple nor a palace, were discovered. Even a city wall, which must be expected around any major Early Dynastic city which was constantly involved in rivalries with other city states, had not been found, although the excavators in search of them extended their trenches towards the edge of the city until no more artefacts were found (Heinrich/Andrae 1931: 7).

The objective of our project therefore was to survey the surface of the entire town area, which not only con-



Fig. 5. Surveying on Main Mound F.



Fig. 6. The ancient “Graben II” leading down from the highest point of Main Mound F to Eastern Mound B.



Fig. 7. A terracotta sickle on the surface of Area C.

sists of the main mound targeted by earlier excavations, but also the extensive lower town surrounding it. During three campaigns in 2016, 2017 and 2018 we surveyed almost the entire area of the lower town. In 2018, the team of Jörg Faßbinder, Marion Scheiblecker and Sandra Ostner additionally carried out magnetometer prospections (see also chp. III.28).

Fortunately, the shallow lower town (Areas A, C and D) was less severely looted and is in better condition than the Main Mound F. The superficially visible structures as well as the concentration of artefacts and waste in specific places allow for a preliminary functional interpretation of the urban areas during the third millennium, as these levels lie directly at the surface. Areas for the production of pottery vessels or clay sickles (Fig. 7), brick-making, stone-working, grain-milling, bread-baking and others could be identified in the lower town. Extended areas in the southern lower town (Area C) were covered with ceramic slag, which testifies to the production of pottery, clay tools, bricks and artificial basalt.

Our campaign in February 2018 started with heavy rainfall. The journey from Afak to Fara took hours, so many wadis suddenly filled with water had to be crossed somehow, and car-driving felt more like ice-skating. But the rain had washed out hundreds of artefacts, among them a complete Ur III moulded figurine of an enthroned mother goddess (Fig. 8). Even more spectacular were the results of the drone photography: buildings, streets and places became visible in the less destroyed areas – but only for two days, then their image vanished again. The houses must have been extremely numerous, and the ground plans of more than one-hundred houses could be traced on the aerial photos of Eastern Mound B alone (Fig. 9).

The 2018 magnetometer survey at the eastern edge of Eastern Mound B yielded more unexpected results: a fragment of the city wall beyond the easternmost end of Walter Andrae’s trenches became clearly visible in the magnetometer image, although not the faintest trace of it was visible on the ground. Even the drone photography revealed houses and streets quite clearly, but not the city wall. This is a good example why all available methods must be brought to bear in order to achieve optimal results (Otto/Einwag 2020).

The work on Main Mound F was concentrated on a few places. The large cylindrical installations of baked plano-convex bricks, quite probably grain silos, have long been known from Fāra; we documented all the visible silos (Fig. 10). They are clearly concentrated in the northern part of the main mound F and testify to the centralized storage of enormous amounts of grain for the whole population – typical for the Early Dynastic economy.



Fig. 8. A terracotta figurine of a mother goddess washed out by the rain in 2018.

Another target of research was the center of the main mound (Graben III, a–b), where the early German excavators had discovered one “house”, which stood out from other houses by one niched wall of baked bricks and the exceptional size of its rooms; therefore, they suggested that this might have been a temple or a palace (Heinrich/Andrae 1931: 13). We asked Jörg Faßbinder’s team to investigate this area by magnetometer. The results were stunning: the few rooms which had been excavated in 1902 constitute just a small part of a very large building, which covers more than 160 by 100 m and consists of a series of rooms around large courtyards (Fig. 11). The broad western wall seems to have been decorated with niches – another strong argument for the official purpose of this building.

To sum up the results of these short survey campaigns, we propose that Main Mound F and Eastern Mound B contained extended residential areas, that there existed public buildings on Mound F, and that these residential and administrative quarters were surrounded by a kind



Fig. 9. Early Dynastic houses on Mound B visible in the drone photos after rain.

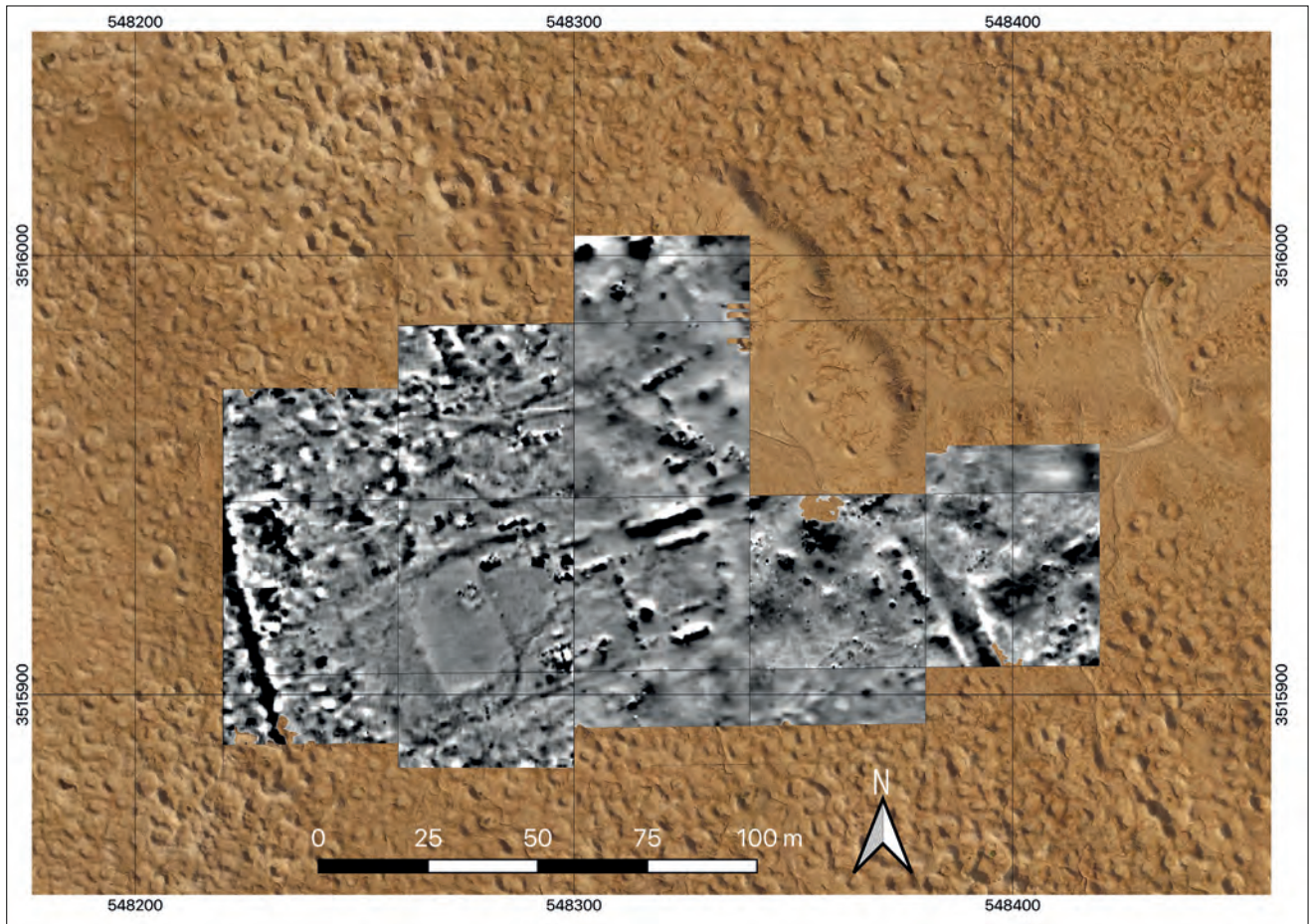


Fig. 11. The large building in the center of Mound F: combined image from magnetometry (J. Faßbinder) and drone photography.



Fig. 10. Documenting a grain silo in the northern part of Mound F.

of industrial zone, where various manufacturing activities took place. Today it is difficult to imagine that the main branch of the Euphrates passed by the city in the third millennium, but magnetometer prospecting seems to hint even at a harbor in Area E. So far we cannot be

sure if the large building in the center was the temple of the city goddess Sud, the palace or another official building, but we hope to get the chance for investigating this and many more open questions in future campaigns.

We cannot conclude this short essay without mentioning the circumstances of our survey. All earlier research at Fāra by the DOG in 1902–1903 and by the University of Pennsylvania in 1931 were both terminated after one campaign because of the incredibly hard circumstances. This area is one of the hottest in the world, with temperatures between 50 and 60°C in summer and over 30°C already in February, alternating with freezing cold or hot desert winds and sandstorms, and no shelter of any kind. The situation has not changed since. Still today this is pure steppe, with only herds of camels or sheep passing by every now and then; no vegetation or villages can be found nearby, and the only shelter from the sun and the wind is offered by the cars. Sufficient water supply is crucial – but how to keep it cool for hours on a pick-up-truck? We had to live in a house in the nearest town Afak (or Afej), and drive every day for one hour to the site. We – that is the German and Iraqi team and 6–10 policemen who took care of us every minute, day and night,



Fig. 12. The team of 2018.

on the site and in the house in Afak. Additional protection was provided on the site by the two guardians of Fāra, who kindly invited us to a traditional meal on site; but the best security concept was certainly – since this is tribal area till today – to become friends with the

Sheikh of the al-Bu Deir. Our sincere thanks go to all of them, especially to all the team members, who made our research in this ‘Heartland of Abandoned Cities’, former homeland of the Flood, possible (Fig. 12).

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Adelheid Otto & Berthold Einwag

Adelheid Otto and Berthold Einwag have worked as archaeologists in Syria and Iraq for 36 years under not always very comfortable circumstances, but wondered why excavations at Fāra had never resumed after 1931. After three short survey campaigns they begin to understand the reasons, but nevertheless want to continue research at Fāra. The photos show the authors in front of Koldewey’s and Andrae’s fortified Qasr, and with “visitors” at the site.

(continued on page 357)