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**THE LATE IIIRD MILLENNIUM COLLECTIVE GRAVE –
INVESTIGATING THE RITUAL FUNERARY CONTEXT IN A BRICKWORK SILO
IN THE ANCIENT CITY OF ŠURUPPAG (FĀRA)**

ABSTRACT The present research elaborates on a brickwork silo discovered by Schmidt's excavation team at Fāra in southern Mesopotamia. This structure held eight skeletons, mostly deposited in a haphazard and careless manner. It was thought that the skeleton assemblage had not been granted any grave goods. The stratigraphical and contextual analysis of the silo content, roughly dated to the Ur III period, argues for a different interpretation. It seems that the bodies deposited inside the silo had been equipped with exceptional terracotta objects used to secure the place of the collective burial against ghosts who could harm the living people due to an improper interment of the bodies. The silo at Fāra offers a unique opportunity to understand the function of terracotta figurines and of models used in Mesopotamian magic.

Key words: Fāra, Mesopotamia, magic, funerary rituals, collective grave

ABSTRAKT Prezentowane badania opisują ceglany silos odkryty przez zespół archeologiczny pod kierownictwem Schmidta w Fāra, w południowej Mezopotamii. Obiekt zawierał osiem szkieletów zdeponowanych w bezładny i niedbały sposób. Do tej pory uważano, że zidentyfikowane tutaj szkielety były pozbawione wyposażenia grobowego. Stratygraficzna i kontekstualna analiza silosu, datowanego mniej więcej na okres III dynastii z Ur przeczy dotychczasowym poglądom na ten temat. Wydaje się, że ciała zdeponowane w silosie zostały wyposażone w wyjątkowe, terakotowe dary grobowe, których zdaniem było zabezpieczenie masowego grobu przed duchami zmarłych, które mogły szkodzić żywym z powodu nieprawidłowego pochówku. Silos z Fāra dostarcza unikatowej okazji do poznania funkcji terakotowych figurek i modeli w mezopotamskiej magii.

Schmidt's excavations at Fāra

The ancient city of Šuruppag (modern Fāra) is located in the Sumerian heartland roughly midway between Nippur and Uruk. This urban settlement was dependent on the local watercourses coalesced with the Euphrates. In Adams' opinion¹, the city faced a major occupational crisis in the Akkadian period, due to the shift of the local waterways towards the Adab. Thus, as pointed out by Martin,² the city of Šuruppag started to fall down when cut off from waterway system, its canals likely dried up shortly after 2000 B.C., which led to the abandonment of the city. Archaeological evidence suggests that Šuruppag grew in the IIIrd millennium B.C., being the cult place of the goddess Sud, albeit its cultural peak should be assigned to the times of 3000-2500 B.C. respectively.³

The site of Fāra had been known to the western explorers from the middle of the 19th century, but its archaeological significance was truly recognized at the beginning of the 20th century by the first large-scale excavations triggered on the site, under the lead of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft.⁴ The promising results retrieved by the Germans prompted the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania to conduct an archaeological expedition to Fāra under the direction of E. Schmidt in 1931.⁵ These excavations were fruitful, enabling Schmidt to define three main Fāra occupation phases, according to the following scheme: Fara I = Ġamdet Našr period, Fara II = ED to Akkadian periods and Fara III = Ur III to Isin-Larsa periods.⁶

A very interesting brickwork silo was discovered by Schmidt in Pit I, in the quadrant defined by excavators as Plot FG 43. The present paper

¹ Adams 1981: 160.

² Martin 2011-2013: 336.

³ Martin 2011-2013: 336; Streck 2011-2013: 334-335.

⁴ Andrae 1903; Heinrich, Andrae 1931.

⁵ Schmidt 1931.

⁶ Martin 2011-2013: 338.

focuses on its unique archaeological context. Unfortunately, it was out of the reach of the present author to study Schmidt's unpublished field notes, kept in the archives of the University Museum, thus the present research hinges on the preliminary report published by Schmidt in 1931, as well as on Martin's monograph of the city of Fāra, published in 1988. The latter relies on Schmidt's unpublished fieldnotes, which is evidenced in the bibliography and in the preface of Martin's monograph.

The brickwork silo – description

The silo, which had originally served as a granary, took the shape of a circle made of "somewhat" plano-convex bricks and mud. Its circular structure was approx. 3.80 m in diameter, with a 0.45 m thick wall. According to Schmidt, the total depth of the silo was approx. 7.0 m, but it must have been slightly bigger. It could have been c. 8.0 m, since it seems that the brickwork silo was originally covered with a roof. The base of the silo was made of clay. It was covered with a layer containing some organic residues, such as plant remains and bones, including charred specimens, up to the depth of 6.35 m. Those residues were interpreted by excavators as the original silo's storage remnants. The level in question yielded also ED III and Akkadian pottery, with a surprising number of 12 miniature specimens and perhaps one ED III cylinder seal, registered at the depth of 6.20 m.⁷

According to Schmidt, the pottery registered in the silo filling abruptly changes its character between the depth 6.0-5.50 m,⁸ which is in line with Martin's data⁹. The materials from this level, most likely constituting a part of a dump fill, cover a timespan of the Akkadian, Ur III and perhaps Isin-Larsa periods.¹⁰ However, the archaeological context argues most likely for the Ur III dates (see discussion below) up to the top of the silo.¹¹

In his preliminary report, Schmidt claims that between the depth of 4.50-5.00 m¹² (Martin identifies the range to 4.50-4.70 m)¹³, close to the northern side of its perimeter wall, 8 skeletons were detected. They were apparently labeled not

as skeletons, but as Graves of nos. 38-45,¹⁴ abbreviated in this study to G 38-G 45. According to Schmidt, the bodies were buried at one period of time and in violent circumstances, since almost all skeletons are contorted or haphazardly arranged, apart from one, a contracted body located in the most western part of the assemblage. Schmidt argues that these people "were buried all at the same time or almost so", and that their burial context had not been disturbed at all.¹⁵ The skeletons' arrangement significantly impressed Schmidt, so he concludes that "There was a fight and again an utter resignation expressed by the position of some bodies".¹⁶ Another feature which may speak for the violent character of these burials is the fact that some of the skeletons were accompanied by stone artifacts which, as indicated by Martin, might have been involved in the victims' death. Martin claims that the bodies found inside the silo might have been stoned to death, although she admits that the stone implements recorded in close proximity of the skeletons could have been part of the rubbish which simply covered the bodies with rubble.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in his conclusion Schmidt speculates that the bodies might have been carelessly thrown into the silo due to their inferior social rank or as a result of an emergency situation which would have forced the local community to get rid of the bodies quickly, i.e. during an epidemic.¹⁸ Whatever the case may be, the bodies "were sealed by a layer of brick rubble at 4.0 m" and apparently covered with further filling, almost up to the silo's mouth, where the circle opening was additionally covered with another layer of brick refuse.¹⁹ The brick layer covering the bodies was not included in the silo's section plan published in Schmidt's preliminary report,²⁰ but is present in the field documentation published by Martin.²¹

The relative dating of the burials is satisfactorily secured due to the presence of Ur III period pottery and two cuneiform tablets, one dated to the times of the king Šu-Sin. These objects are claimed to have been discovered directly below and above the "burials".²² Furthermore, Schmidt points out that a terracotta boat model was recovered from

⁷ Schmidt 1931: 204.

⁸ Schmidt 1931: 204.

⁹ Martin 1988: 43.

¹⁰ Martin 1988: 43-44.

¹¹ Martin 1988: 43-44.

¹² Schmidt 1931: 200.

¹³ Martin 1988: 44.

¹⁴ Martin 1988: 44.

¹⁵ Schmidt 1931: 205-206.

¹⁶ Schmidt 1931: 206.

¹⁷ Martin 1988: 44.

¹⁸ Schmidt 1931: 206.

¹⁹ Martin 1988: 44.

²⁰ Schmidt 1931: 203.

²¹ Martin 1988: 153, Fig. 14.

²² Martin 1988: 44.

the silo filling just after the skeletons had been removed.²³ He also claims that at the depth 5.20 m “the last pottery figurine appeared”.²⁴ Martin reports that “between 4.40 and 5.75 m nine terra cotta figurines and models were found.”²⁵ However, detailed elevation readings of small finds in Martin’s catalogue²⁶ show that the problem of the aforementioned human figurines is more complex. The depth at which five objects were found is well known: PO 26 – 4.40 m, PO 27 – 4.40 m, PO 28 – 4.60 m, PO 30 – 5.10 m, PO 32 – 5.20 m. However, the position of the three remaining figurines is known just by approximate depth range: PO 31 – 4.70-5.20 m, PO 33 – 5.20-5.70 m, PO 34 – 5.20-5.70 m.

The skeleton assemblage

The bodies’ arrangement is mostly known from Martin’s description,²⁷ the original silo’s plan and the photos.²⁸ The description of the burials given by Martin is more detailed, as opposed to Schmidt’s preliminary report. Thus, the picture presented below is inevitably based on Martin’s publication. Nevertheless, it has been modified, since some relevant data can be attained from the original photo documentation. The skeletons, due to insufficient data provided by Schmidt, cannot be precisely classified into six general age groups (Infans I, II, Juvenis, Adultus, Maturus, Senilis).

The skeleton arrangement and the stratigraphy observed inside the silo indeed suggest that the bodies might have been deposited at the same time, but their detailed layout (see discussion below) advocates for their division into three separate units. The units’ division adopted for this research is as follows: Unit 1 – Graves nos. 39, 40, 41, (G 39, G 40, G 41), Unit 2 – Graves nos. 42, 43, 44, 45 (G 42, G 43, G 44, G 45), and Unit 3 – Grave no. 38 (G 38).

Unit 1 – a detailed description

Martin points out that G 40 belongs to an adult female, discovered in a slightly flexed

position on side, whereas her hands are folded below the chin.²⁹ This arrangement is evident as far as the left hand is concerned. However, the right bent arm is abutting on the silo’s wall perimeter, which is displayed both in the photos and in the silo’s plan (Fig. 1, 3).³⁰ Martin reports that a stone flake was noted next to this skeleton.³¹ The available photos suggest the existence of at least two unspecified objects (rubble?) next to the folded left arm and the head of G 40. The body is lying below G 39, which is indicated by its legs situated under the pelvis of G 39.

The skeleton G 39 was an adult male, extended on his back.³² His torso is flexed in relation to his legs, which are covering a part of the skeleton assigned as G 41 (Fig. 1, 3). G 39’s left arm is lying along his trunk, whereas the right arm is thrown out to side, reaching the facial part of the skull which belongs to the woman from G 40. Martin reports that the following artifacts were recorded near the G 39: two grinding stones (one fragmentarily preserved), a whetstone and a miniature chariot wheel.³³ The photos of this level³⁴ show at least five unspecified objects associated with this skeleton (Fig. 1): two ones located between its knees (the smaller one lying on the top of the femur, abutting the bigger one), one square in shape placed between the lower parts of its legs, one lying on the elbow joint of the right arm, which is thrown out towards the face of G 40, and finally one located to the south of the skull.

The skeleton of G 41 was a child of unidentified sex. According to Martin, it was lying on its face with one arm extended, whereas the second arm was covering its head (Fig. 1, 2, 3).³⁵ The photo documentation fails to be helpful here, since the picture of G 41 is either imprecise or too bright.³⁶ As a result, this skeleton is badly readable, with the exception of the skull and the right arm, which is clearly bent over it. The puzzling long bone located at the left side of the child’s skull, which could be interpreted as the child’s left arm, was registered in Schmidt’s plan probably as part of G 40’s flexed leg. Schmidt’s silo plan provides us with two further details of G 41: the child’s legs are bent, the child’s body is partly overlaid by G 39.

²³ Schmidt 1931: 202-203.

²⁴ Schmidt 1931: 204.

²⁵ Martin 1988: 44.

²⁶ Martin 1988: 192.

²⁷ Martin 1988: 45.

²⁸ Schmidt 1931: Pl VIII: 1, Pl. V, Pl. VI: 1; Martin 1988: 159, Fig. 20a, 294, Pl. XIIIa, 295, Pl. XIVa-d.

²⁹ Martin 1988: 45.

³⁰ See Schmidt 1931: Pl VI, Fig. 1.

³¹ Martin 1988: 45.

³² Martin 1988: 45.

³³ Martin 1988: 45.

³⁴ See Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV a-b.

³⁵ Martin 1988: 45.

³⁶ See Martin 1988: 294, Pl. XIII a, 295, Pl. XIV a-b.

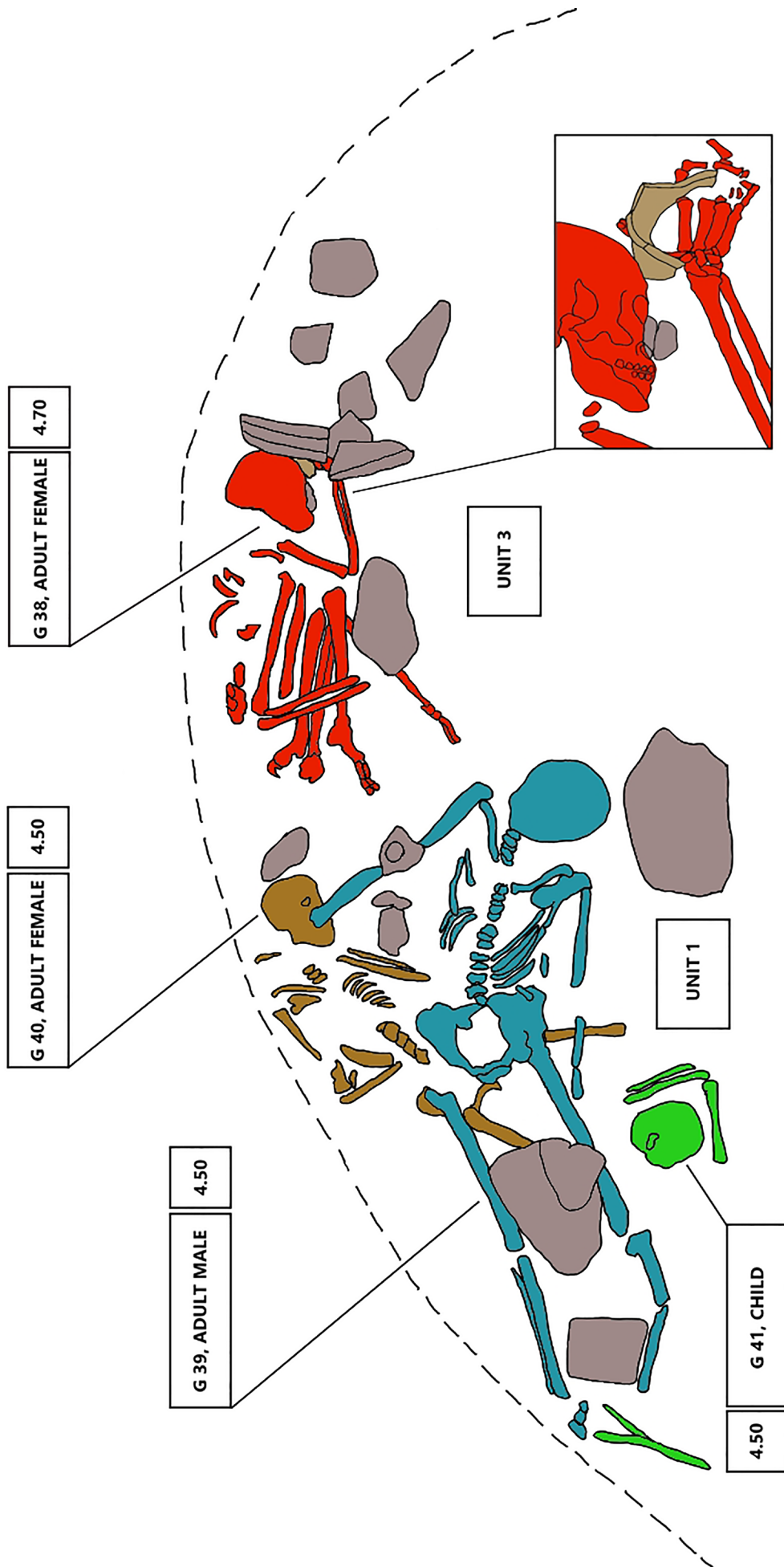


Fig. 1. The skeletons' arrangement inside the Fāra silo – Unit 1 & 3 partly covered with rubble (?), with a detail showing the position of a piece of pottery found with G 38
 (Drawn and modified by M. Paszke after Martin 1988, 295, Pl. XIV a, b, c, d; cf. Schmidt 1931, Pl. VI, Fig. 1)

Unit 2 – a detailed description

The skeleton G 43 belongs to an adult male. Martin claims that this body was lying on side with its left arm extended and the right arm under its head.³⁷ The latter detail is not detectable either in the field photos³⁸ or in the silo's plan,³⁹ since close to G 43's head there is a femur bone of G 44, which was probably lying under G 43 (Fig. 2, 3). This feature can be observed in Schmidt's silo plan. The contracted right leg of G 43 is spread sideways and abutting or covering part of the trunk, or at least the pelvis of G 42. This nuanced detail is discernible in the photo documentation⁴⁰, but has not been registered in Schmidt's silo plan. The left leg of G 43 might have been extremely contracted due to the presence of a fibula (?) next to the femur, but its character is unclear. In Martin's opinion G 43 "overlaps with both grave 41 and 42".⁴¹ It is indeed true for G 42, but the example of G 41 seems to be much more complicated: I would argue that the silo's plan does not exhibit any relation between G 43 and G 41, albeit at the conjunction of G 41, G 42 and G 43 there exists an area which is made up of a lot of intertwined bones, as registered in the photo documentation.

The skeleton G 42 was identified as an adult female lying on her back with arms outstretched and her lower legs contracted (Fig. 2, 3).⁴² This observation is in line with the photos, apart from the position of her fragmentarily-preserved right arm, which according to Schmidt's plan,⁴³ should be located under the sub-rounded (rectangular in Schmidt's silo plan) piece of rubble (?) located close to her head.

The body of G 44 was probably (sex not entirely clear) that of a young adult female. She was lying on her back with arms along her sides and her legs contracted (Fig. 2, 3).⁴⁴ Unfortunately, this skeleton has not been photographed, thus its arrangement is only known from the plan of the silo.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, at least some parts of her legs are present (see discussion above) in the photo

showing G 43,⁴⁶ thus one may speculate that G 44 was partly overlaid by G 43.

The skeleton G 45 belongs to a baby, registered in a contracted position with legs partly below G 44.⁴⁷ The sex of the skeleton was not identified. Similarly to G 44, no photographs of this skeleton were taken, but it was registered in Schmidt's plan⁴⁸.

Unit 3 – a detailed description

Special attention should be paid to G 38. The skeleton was identified as an adult female in a flexed position (Fig. 2, 3). Martin claims that "Only Grave 38 assumes anything like the normal contracted burial position. The others are all sprawled in unlikely poses".⁴⁹ This is in line with Schmidt's description, which states that "Nearly all skeletons gave the impression of hurried and unsympathetic disposals".⁵⁰ Martin provides us with a list of small finds associated with this skeleton, so we know that the following objects were found here by the excavators: an oval quern, a bone flake and a pebble in a charred wooden shell and a large natural shell. However, according to Martin's knowledge, none of these objects had ever been registered.⁵¹

Two detailed photos of G 38⁵² show that the body was lying on side with its right-arm elbow bent and shifted towards the front of the skull. It must be emphasized that a piece of pottery was recovered between the bones of G 38's right hand and its forehead, which went unnoticed in the existing studies. The position of the skeleton's carpals, the metacarpals and of the phalanges suggests that the woman was holding the mentioned piece of pottery when she was deposited inside the silo (no further data about the other possible, remaining pottery pieces of this vessel is available). The arrangement of the axial skeleton is poorly readable apart from the skull, although blurred remains of its backbone and ribs are visible along the silo's curved wall in the photo documentation.⁵³ The appendicular skeleton is much better emphasized, so it is clear that the body was deposited in a crouched position,

³⁷ Martin 1988: 45.

³⁸ See Schmidt 1931: Pl. V; Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV a.

³⁹ See Schmidt 1931: Pl. VIII, Fig. 1.

⁴⁰ See Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV a.

⁴¹ Martin 1988: 45.

⁴² Martin 1988: 45.

⁴³ See Schmidt 1931: Pl. VIII, Fig. 1.

⁴⁴ Martin 1988: 45.

⁴⁵ See Schmidt 1931: Pl. VIII, Fig. 1.

⁴⁶ See Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV a.

⁴⁷ Martin 1988: 45.

⁴⁸ See Schmidt 1931: Pl. VIII, Fig. 1.

⁴⁹ Martin 1988: 44.

⁵⁰ Schmidt 1931: 204.

⁵¹ Martin 1988: 45.

⁵² See Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV c-d.

⁵³ See Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV b.

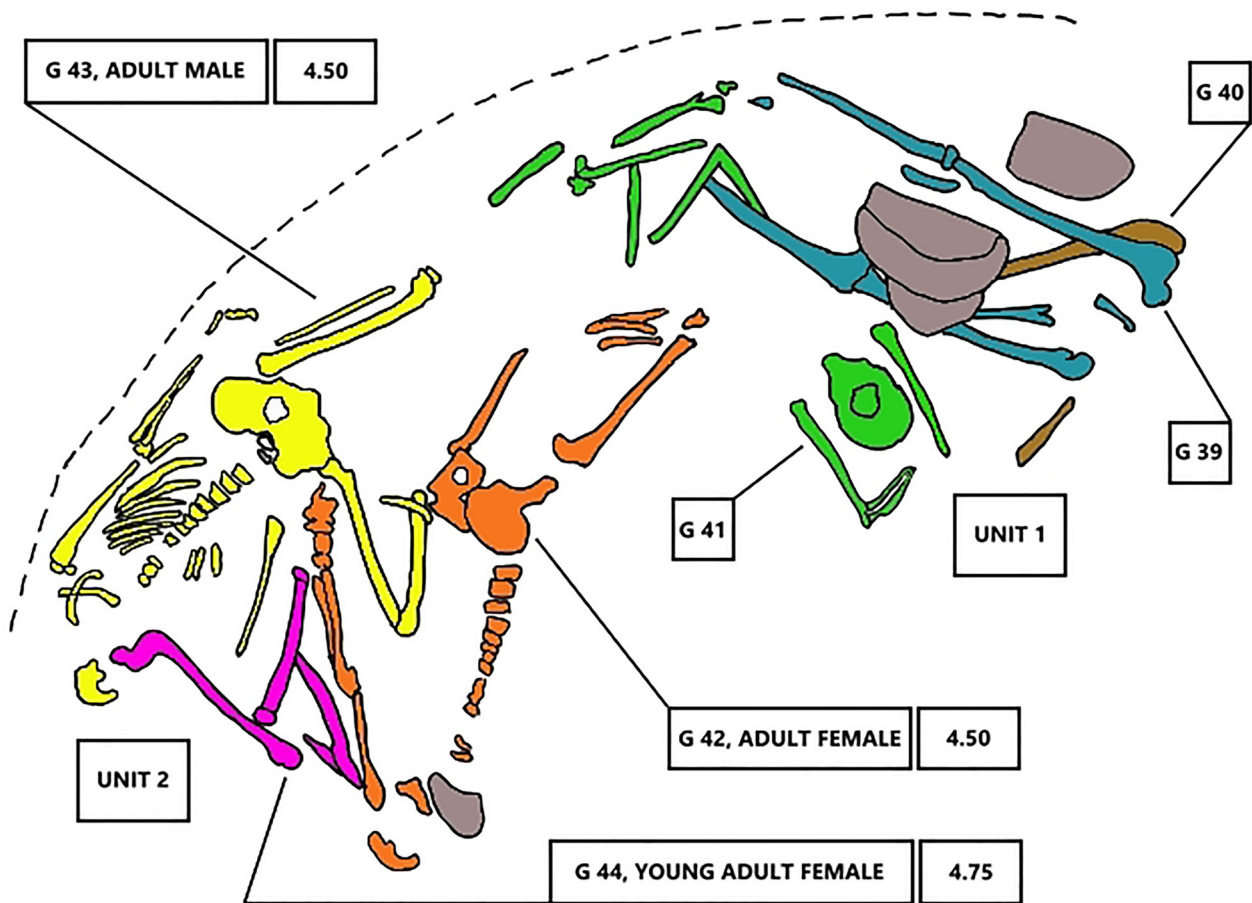


Fig. 2. The skeletons' arrangement inside the Fāra silo – Unit 2 & 1 partly covered with rubble (?). A major part of the skeleton G 44 and the whole skeleton G 45 are missing, since their photo documentation is inexistent or has never been published (Drawn and modified by M. Paszke after Martin 1988, 295, Pl. XIV a, b; Schmidt 1931, Pl. V)

while its left tibia was overlapped by a piece of stone or brick (?) rubble. Further pieces of rubble were lying next to the head of G 38. The photo documentation published by Schmidt⁵⁴ suggests that the two pieces of rubble nearest to the skeleton's head might have belonged to the architectural debris (pay attention to their contoured surface) which overlay the woman's right hand, the one holding a piece of pottery vessel.

The skeleton arrangement –
a further investigation

At this stage of discussion, the presented material prompts us to several conclusions. Following Schmidt's and Martin's observations, we can conclude that at least 7 bodies were the subject of ferocious treatment due to their abnormal, intertwined

and contorted position. Nevertheless, the 8th crouched skeleton does not show similar practice. Whether the discussed bodies were those of the victims of stoning it is impossible to judge, due to insufficient skeletal data, unless it is simply assumed that the wide range of artifacts and part of the silo filling (the grinding tools, the figurines, the clay tablets, some of the filing particles, etc.) were used as a murder weapon leading those people to death, which was – at a certain level of discussion – tentatively considered by Martin.⁵⁵ However, it is clear from the records that Martin was not committed to this interpretation. Thus, a few sub-rounded objects covering some skeletons' parts and distributed around them may be regarded as part of the rubble which covered the bodies.

The bodies were most likely thrown down the silo, perhaps except Unit 3, in a certain order which can be partly reconstructed. Let us recall that each skeleton unit recognized at the beginning of this

⁵⁴ See Schmidt 1931: Pl VI, Fig. 1; cf. Martin 1988: 295, Pl. XIV c.

⁵⁵ Martin 1988: 44.

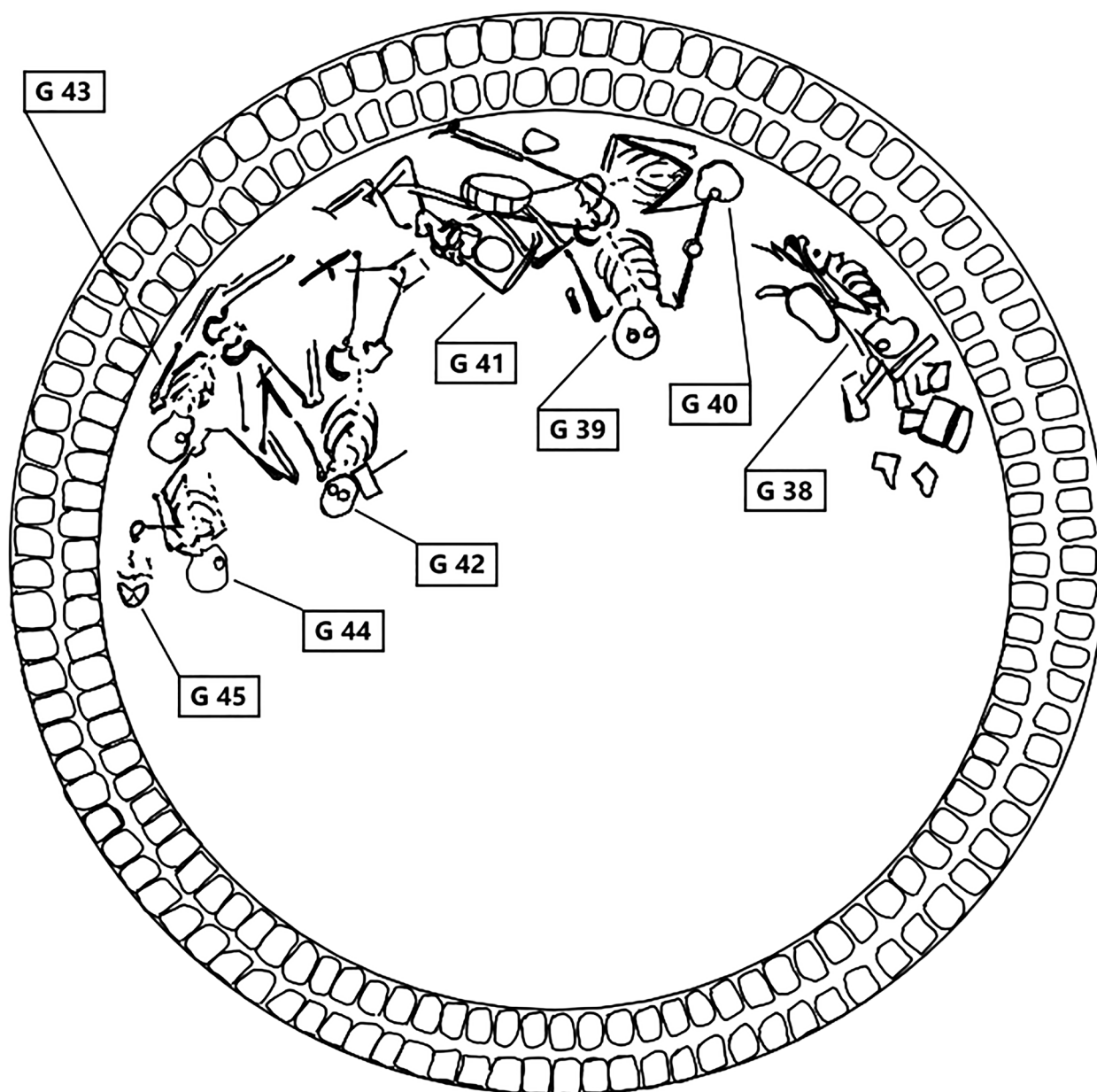


Fig 3. Plan of the skeleton arrangement inside the Fāra silo
(Drawn and modified by M. Paszke, after Martin 1988, 45; cf. Schmidt 1931, Pl. VIII, Fig. 1.)

study has got its specific gender structure. Unit 3, which stands out against the whole assemblage, is made up of a single adult female, Unit 1 consists of two adults (male and female) and a child, whereas Unit 2 is made up of two adults (male and female), a baby and a young adult female. Taking into consideration the gender structure of last two units and their seemingly chaotic distribution inside the silo, one may arrive at a conclusion that Unit 1 and 2 may represent two individual families. If this model of interpretation is correct, Unit 3 would constitute a separate social entity. The order of the body disposal can be somewhat reconstructed from the discussed data. It seems that in Unit 1 the child G 41 was deposited as the

first one, probably followed by the female G 40, finally they were both overlapped by the male G 39 (pay attention that the stratigraphic relations between G 40 and G 41 are not clearly defined). In Unit 2 the baby G 45 was deposited as the first one, then it was covered by the young adult female G 44, after that comes up the adult female G 42, who, together with G 44, was overlaid by the adult male G 43. Thus, one may speculate that in both units the adult male individuals had been thrown down the silo at the end of each sequence. Unit 3, with only one representative G 38, was in all probability deposited separately in a crouched position. Whether it was the first or the last body to have appeared in the silo remains an open question which

cannot be answered. One can only assume that G 38 was not fiercely deposited in the silo, unlike all the other bodies.

It is also important to note that the original shape and level of the silo's bottom, at the time of the skeletons' deposition was probably uneven. This feature may be deduced partly from the photo documentation showing the skeletons *in situ*⁵⁶ and from the elevations evidencing their depth. According to Martin's records G 38 (Unit 3) was at a depth of 4.70 m, whereas G 39, G 40, G 41 (Unit 1) at a depth of 4.50 m.⁵⁷ This would mean that G 38 was deposited lower than the nearby G 40 and G 39, but this feature can not be inferred from the existing photos. Moreover, when we look at the photos⁵⁸ showing the position of Unit 3 and Unit 1 *in situ*, it is clear that Unit 1 is sloping down to the north-west, which is evident if we compare the position of G 39 with that of G 41. The sloping-down character of the silo's bottom is conspicuous when we pay attention to the readings in Unit 2. Martin reports that G 42 and G 43 were at a depth of 4.50 m, while G 44 and G 45 were at 4.75 and 4.70 m, respectively.⁵⁹ Nothing is known about the southern part of the silo, but the quoted values suggest that its northern part, occupied by skeletons, might have been more elevated than the rest of the silo's bottom surface.

The case of grave goods – a further investigation

In his conclusion, Schmidt claims that the skeletons discovered inside the silo were not at all equipped with any grave goods. He reports that "No mortuary vessels filled with food and drink for the life beyond had been given to them. There was not a single ornament. A few mullers only were close to some skeletons".⁶⁰ A bit further he adds "if we had found an especially well-equipped burial close to these skeletons or below them, we would not have hesitated to suggest a sacrificial character of the communal disposal".⁶¹ The problem of the lack of grave goods was perhaps noticed by Martin, because she claims that a few

querns, stones and rubbers discovered near the skeletons might have been considered as the only "grave goods".⁶² However, since she put the latter phrase in quotation marks, we may guess that she had never considered this interpretation seriously. In Martin's opinion, these stone artefacts could have been a part of the rubbish that was used to cover the bodies.

Contrary to Schmidt's and Martin's opinion, I believe that the people thrown inside the silo were equipped with some extraordinary grave goods, which will be the subject of my further discussion.

It is important to note that the 8 skeletons were discovered at a depth of 4.50-5.0 m⁶³ (in Martin's records: 4.50-4.70 m).⁶⁴ Surprisingly, this level was not barren of artifacts, since Martin reports that "between 4.40-5.75 m, nine terra cotta figurines and models", probably of Ur III dates, were detected. They have been tentatively associated (see discussion above) by her with the idea of stoning, since she claims that "For the same reason it may be of significance that broken figurines and tablets were just found under and over the bodies".⁶⁵ It must be pointed out here, for the record, that Schmidt claims that "At 5.20 below the orifice, the last pottery figurine appeared",⁶⁶ although it is somewhat inconsistent with the elevations published in Martin's catalogue, since two figurines (PO 33, PO 34) are said to come from the depth of 5.20-5.70 m.⁶⁷ In addition, Schmidt reports that "While the skeletons were taken out, we made an interesting find, namely an attractive boat-shaped vessel".⁶⁸ Keeping in mind that the original surface of the silo could have been uneven, this context is quite interesting from the stratigraphical point of view, especially when we realize that the number of the discovered figurines (some of which should be labelled as plaques) and their gender structure roughly fits the gender structure of the skeletons deposited inside the silo.

The figurines – their assemblage

Martin, in her work devoted to Fāra, outlines the collection of human figurines discovered inside the silo (Fig. 4). The labels given to these

⁵⁶ See Martin 1988: 294, Pl. XIII a, 295, Pl. XIV a-b; Schmidt 1931: Pl. V.

⁵⁷ Martin 1988: 45.

⁵⁸ See Martin 1988: 294, Pl. XIII a, 295, Pl. XIV a-b.

⁵⁹ Martin 1988: 45.

⁶⁰ Schmidt 1931: 206.

⁶¹ Schmidt 1931: 200.

⁶² Martin 1988: 44.

⁶³ Schmidt 1931: 200.

⁶⁴ Martin 1988: 44.

⁶⁵ Martin 1988: 44.

⁶⁶ Schmidt 1931: 204.

⁶⁷ Martin 1988: 192.

⁶⁸ Schmidt 1931: 202.

objects by Martin have been epitomised here for the sake of convenience, thus for example “Penn Object 28” corresponds to PO 28. This scheme has been adopted throughout this research for all the figurines.

We know that three of the figurines were hand-made (PO 27, 31, 33), while the remaining were pressed in an open mould.⁶⁹ It should be emphasized, for the record, that at least four specimens (PO 26, 30, 32, 34)⁷⁰ may be labelled as figurines with a more or less accentuated plaque background. Due to its state of preservation, it is impossible to determine whether the case is the same as far as the PO 28 is concerned. Nevertheless, one thing is certain, the majority of the assemblage is fragmentarily preserved. The figurines’ relationship with the discussed skeletons is unknown, but their elevations have been published by Martin and are as follows: PO 28 – 4.60 m, PO 30 – 5.10 m, PO 33 – 5.20-5.70 m, PO 34 – 5.20-5.70 m, PO 32 – 5.20 m, PO 26 – 4.40 m, PO 27 – 4.40 m, PO 31 – 4.70-5.20 m.⁷¹

The detailed figurines’ description, as presented below (Fig. 4) has been provided with their original excavation numbers issued by the Germans, in order to avoid any errors with the catalogue numbers of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania.

The human figurines can be divided into two groups. The first one consists of three male figurines:

- 1) PO 28 (FP 948) – a trunk of a bearded male figure with arms, the male is probably holding two axes (only one ax head preserved) against his chest, the body is covered with 6 scattered circles bearing the cross symbol and one image of an upside-down crescent. The head, a part of the left arm and the lower parts of the body are missing.
- 2) PO 30 (FP 978) – an image of a bearded male, with only the trunk and the head preserved, the lower body parts missing, the man has long and curly hair, perhaps he is holding similar weapons to those of PO 28, the plaque background indicated.
- 3) PO 33 (FP 990) – a male figurine (sex not clearly indicated), the trunk and the head preserved in good condition, a necklace around the neck, much of arms and legs missing, the head may be topped with a cap.

The second group includes five female figurines:

- 1) PO 34 (FP 991) – a trunk of a female with arms and head, the legs are missing, she has long hair topped with a hat, she is wearing a necklace and a cloak, her hands resting below her breasts, the cloak is hiding her right arm (?), while the left one is on full display, a circular object covered with small dots on her belly, two stylized rosettes or flowers at the sides of her head, the plaque background indicated.
- 2) PO 32 (FP 980) – a female figurine, only the lower parts of legs are missing, the woman is adorned with a huge pubic triangle, she is holding a circular object in her hands against her belly, the woman has long hair (?) with a hat on the top of her head, she is probably wearing jewellery, i.e. a necklace and circular-shaped earrings (?).
- 3) PO 26 (FP 666) – a nude female figurine, the head and the lower parts of legs are missing, breasts more emphasized in comparison to PO 34 and PO 32, her hands are resting on the belly, it cannot be determined whether the woman is holding a small circular object, but it is clear that the shape of her hands is rounded, the plaque background indicated.
- 4) PO 27 (FP 667) – the head of a female, the rest of the body missing, with a hat on the top of her head, below the head on each of its sides, kidney-shaped objects – probably locks of hair or some kind of jewellery, a necklace on her neck.
- 5) PO 31 (FP 981) – the legs and part of the pubic triangle (?) of a female, the upper body parts are missing, the remaining features suggest that it was a female nude figurine.

The figurines – a further investigation

I believe that the terracotta figurines correspond with the bodies deposited inside the silo (Tab. 1). One may think that their elevations harmonize only in two cases (PO 28 and PO 31), because PO 26 and 27 were deposited 10 cm higher (4.40 m) than the highest skeleton elevation, whereas the remaining 4 figurines were detected lower (PO 30, 32, 33, 34; roughly 5.10-5.70 m according to Martin, *versus* Schmidt’s claim that, the last pottery figurine appeared at 5.20 m below the orifice – see discussion above). However, there exist some factors that may link these figurines to the discussed skeletons. First, it seems that the silo bottom at the time when the bodies were deposited inside it, was uneven. Second, the procedure

⁶⁹ Martin 1988: 54, 192-193.

⁷⁰ Martin 1988: 192-193.

⁷¹ Martin 1988: 192.

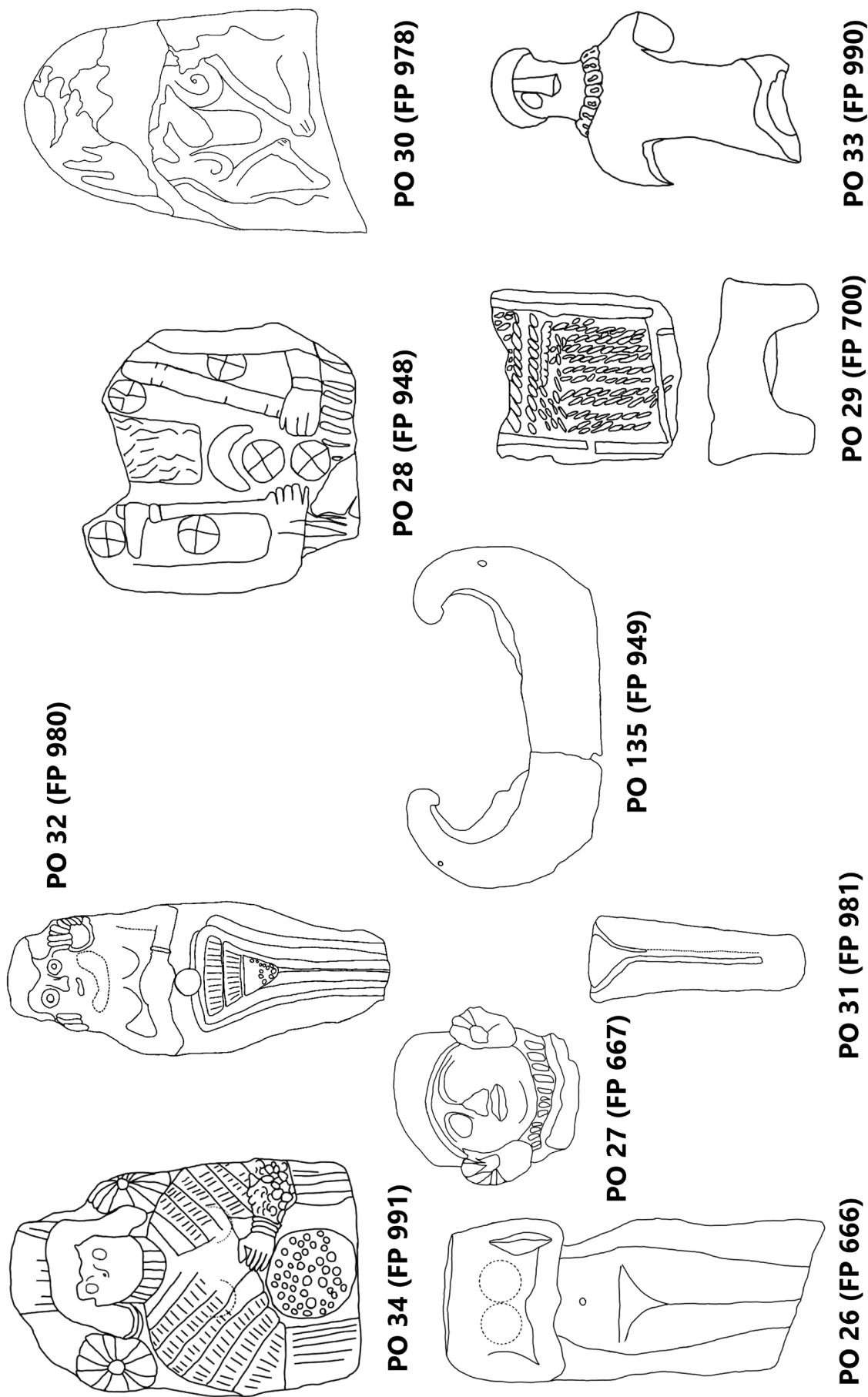


Fig. 4. The collection of figurines and models found inside the Fāra silo.
 The figurines PO 34 and PO 32 deeply modified in order to reflect their original photo equivalents.
 (Drawn and modified by M. Paszke, after Martin 1988, 193, PO 28, 29, 31, Pl. 28 a-c, and PO 26-34; Schmidt 1931, Pl. VII, Fig. 1, Pl. IX, Figs. 1-5.)

of filling the silo just before and during the bodies' deposition is unclear. Evidently, one thing is certain – the bodies were covered with brickwork rubble at the depth of 4.40 m. I consider that all the 8 figurines should be regarded as grave goods, albeit not the standard ones, but as artifacts which were the subject of a magical procedure. The horizontal position of the figurines is not known, but they may be allocated to the skeletons, basing on the concept proposed below.

The collection contains only two male figurines of armed male individuals (Fig. 4). Therefore, PO 28 and PO 30 may correspond to the male skeletons G 39 and G 43. The appearance of the PO 33 figurine resembles the image of a male child, thus it may be assigned to the skeleton of the baby G 45. The women's skeleton assemblage is made up of 4 individuals (Unit 3 – G 38, Unit 1 – G 40, Unit 2 – G 42, G 44), but taking into consideration the overall gender structure of all the figurines found inside the silo, the skeleton of the child G 41 (sex unspecified) may also fall into this group. Thus, the comparison drawn between the figurines and the skeletons leads us to a more accurate picture of the female individuals sealed inside the silo, which may be theoretically defined as follows: Unit 1 – an adult female (G 40) and a female (?) child (G 41), Unit 2 – an adult female (G 42) and probably a young female (G 44), finally Unit 3 – an adult female (G 38).

It is also interesting to note that almost all the female figurine examples (PO 31, 32, 26; pay attention to PO 31' pubic triangle) were nude, with the exception of PO 34 and PO 27. Was the latter also an example of a nude figurine? Most probably, the issue will never be resolved, since only the head of the figurine was preserved. Taking into consideration the structure of each of the individual skeleton units, I would tentatively assign all the female nude figurines, including the head of PO 27, to the female bodies encountered in Units 1 and 2. Since the adult woman PO 38 (Unit 3) stands out from the records (see discussion above), with her normalized body position and no sign of violent circumstances, I would apply the unique dressed female figurine PO 34 particularly to her.

The figurines – towards an understanding

Martin⁷² points out that the human figurines recorded by Schmidt find their closer or further

equivalents at Nippur,⁷³ Tell Asmar,⁷⁴ Ur,⁷⁵ Tello⁷⁶ or Tell el-Wilaya, in materials roughly dated to the times of the Akkadian, Ur III, Isin Larsa and Old Babylonian periods. I would also add to this collection some specimens found earlier by Heinrich and Andrae at Fāra.⁷⁷ In their study of baked clay figurines, plaques and models from Nippur, McCown, Haines and Hansen⁷⁸ emphasize that the purpose of the figurines is principally a matter of speculation. Nonetheless, they claim that female and male figurines could have had a dangerous magical power which had to be annihilated, resulting in their fragmentary state of preservation. They claim that both the human figurines and the models were mainly used in a private or formal religion and in magic rituals. They also emphasize that it is hard to conclude whether the figurines represent human or divine beings, particularly when their attributes are not clearly emphasized, which is indeed the case here. This belief is supported by the existence of terracotta examples from Ur and Nippur depicting minor divinities without a horned crown. Since a similar controversy arises in the case of the figurines of the nude females, it has been tentatively suggested that these examples “might present women who sacrificed their chastity at certain religious festivals”.⁷⁹ In this model of interpretation, the nude female figurines should be regarded as amulets given by the temple to the women for their sacrifice.⁸⁰ However, because this belief is based on the doubtful text passage of Herodotus I. 199, which shows young Babylonian maidens maintaining sexual relations with random strangers in the temple of Aphrodite (Mylitta), this idea seems to be erroneous. The story told by Herodotus has been undermined by modern scholars, thus we know that Herodotus did not refer to the accurate Babylonian reality, but he fantasized, in order to create a world constituting the anti-type of a Greek *poleis*.⁸¹

⁷³ See McCown, Haines, Hansen 1967: Pls. 122-124, 127.

⁷⁴ Frankfort, Lloyd, Jacobsen 1940: 221-222, 223, 231, Pls. 108-111, Pl. 113, Pl. 125a-c.

⁷⁵ Woolley, Mallow 1976: Pls. 66-68, 74-75.

⁷⁶ De Genouillac 1936: Pls. 103-106, 121, 136:5, 94:3.

⁷⁷ Heinrich, Andrae 1931: 143-145, Taf. 74b, 75c, 76a.

⁷⁸ McCown, Haines, Hansen 1967: 83-92.

⁷⁹ McCown, Haines, Hansen 1967: 83-84, 86, 91-92, 95.

⁸⁰ Frankfort, Lloyd, Jacobsen 1940: 210.

⁸¹ Roth 2006: 22; Westenholtz 1989: 261-264.

⁷² Martin 1988: 54-55.

Table 1. The elevation readings of skeletons, terracotta figurines and models discussed in the article. The given values are in meters (Created by M. Paszke, after Martin 1988, 44-45, 188, 192; Schmidt 1931, 200, 202-204)

Grave nos., sex and elevation readings		Figurine nos., sex and elevation readings			Model nos. and elevation readings		Schmidt's skeletons level	Martin's skeletons level	Schmidt's figurines level	Martin's figurines level	Brickwork rubble level
G 39	adult male	4.50	PO 28	male	4.60	PO 135	4.50-5.00	4.50-4.70 4.50-4.75	?-5.20	4.40-5.70 4.40-5.75	4.40-4.00
G 40	adult female	4.50	PO 32	female	5.20						
G 41	child	4.50	PO 31	female	4.70-5.20						
G 42	adult female	4.50	PO 27	female	4.40						
G 43	adult male	4.50	PO 30	male	5.10	PO 29	4.50-5.00	4.50-4.70 4.50-4.75	?-5.20	4.40-5.70 4.40-5.75	4.40-4.00
G 44	young adult female	4.75	PO 26	female	4.40						
G 45	baby	4.70	PO 33	male	5.20-5.70						
G 38	adult female	4.70	PO 34	female	5.20-5.70						

Unfortunately, the assemblage of the female figurines lacks any clear signs of divinity. Some examples are adorned with hats and jewellery, in one case there are two small rosettes at the sides of the individual figure, but these features are too vague to speak about divine beings. Martin noticed that the hair and the beard style, as well as the weapons' arrangement which characterizes the two men figurines from the silo, resembles some terra cotta figurines from Ur, which show divine beings sporting a horned crown and the ears of a bull.⁸² The general characteristics of these creatures may resemble the bison-man *kusarikku*, which was associated with the sun-god.⁸³ Thus, the male figurines could theoretically represent some divinities. The problem is that these objects are deprived of their heads.

It is a well known fact that clay figurines were used in magic rituals, usually against supernatural powers threatening the living people. Scurlock, based on magical texts from the Ist millennium B.C., points out that the figurines' manufacturing process could have involved an additional activity, such as the preparation of the clay obtained from a purified pit. The figurines could have represented ghosts, a dead person, a specific demon or a sickness. In general, they were usually fashioned according to a special and occasionally time-consuming procedure, to finally meet a ritual burial in a pit.⁸⁴ Scurlock claims that particularly ghosts were believed to harm people if the earthly body had not been properly buried or if they were not receiving any funerary offerings. The latter issue played a fundamental role for the wellbeing of the deceased in the Mesopotamian Netherworld, which was emphasized by Cohen⁸⁵ and Skaist.⁸⁶ The cuneiform texts suggest that the ghost's subjugation was not an easy task. Sometimes the malevolent power had to be forced to execute the command given. It is the reason why the body parts of the figurines were subject to maltreatment.⁸⁷ Was it in such a way as far as the case of our figurines' assemblage is concerned? This question is difficult to be answered, but indeed the majority of the discussed figurines retrieved from the silo are incomplete, a condition which concerns the legs

(or their parts), the arms, the head, and the torso. It is so perhaps with the only exception of PO 32, although it is missing the lower parts of the legs.

The models – towards an understanding

It may be argued that the 8 figurines deposited inside the silo are contextually related to two further small finds registered by Schmidt, which are the boat model (PO 135) and the bed terracotta model (PO 29) as well (Fig. 4). Let us recall that the first one was recovered from the silo filling just after (!) the skeletons had been removed,⁸⁸ at the depth of 4.60 m.⁸⁹ According to Martin, the bed model was deposited at the depth of 4.70 m.⁹⁰ Since the skeletons' level is defined at 4.50-4.70/75 m (4.50-5.00 m in Schmidt's preliminary report) and the original shape of the bottom part of the silo, at the time of the skeletons' deposition, is not well recognized, it seems reasonable to assume that these objects might have been related both to the bodies and the figurines (Tab. 1).

Boat models are perhaps the most recognizable type of objects used in the ritual context. McCown, Heines and Hansen refers to them as to vessels used to send evil demons back to the underworld in order to free a sick man from the illness.⁹¹ Scurlock claims that the figurines of family ghosts were equipped with boats which helped them to travel back to the Netherworld.⁹² Boat models made of clay, bitumen, copper and silver are present in the Mesopotamian IIIrd millennium funerary background. The best examples come from the Royal Cemetery at Ur, where the bitumen boats were equipped with additional funerary offerings, perhaps of food closed in pottery vessels, which were set inside and around the boats. However, as noted by Woolley, their context does not indicate whether they were intended to attract and send back an unwanted demon or to provide the dead with a supply of funerary offerings.⁹³

In this context, the purpose of the model of the bed is the most puzzling one to understand. Neveling Porter points out that the models of empty beds have received a wide variety of interpretations. Thus, they were seen as toys, votive gifts, sexual amulets and finally as magical

⁸² Martin 1988: 55; See Woolley, Mallown 1976: Pl. 74: 93, 96, Pl. 75: 106, 109; De Genouillac 1936: 94:3, 136:5.

⁸³ See Wiggermann 1986: 303-314.

⁸⁴ Scurlock 2006: 49-50.

⁸⁵ Cohen 2005: 79, 99-116.

⁸⁶ Skaist 1980: 123-128.

⁸⁷ Scurlock 2006: 50.

⁸⁸ Schmidt 1931: 202-203.

⁸⁹ Martin 1988: 188.

⁹⁰ Martin 1988: 192.

⁹¹ McCown, Heines and Hansen 1967: 95.

⁹² Scurlock 2006: 55, 537-538, text no. 228.

⁹³ Woolley 1934: 145, Pls. 16a, 19 a-b.

objects which could have been helpful in restoring a man's potency.⁹⁴ The last character derives from the fact that there exist bed model examples bearing the images of a vulva or necked couples maintaining sexual intercourse. However, this is not the case here. It must be emphasized that some rare cuneiform texts from the ED III period list varieties of grave goods including a "boxwood bed and chair".⁹⁵ Scurlock, elaborating on the 1st millennium magical texts, argues that some types of furniture models were given as offerings to the ghosts. She refers to the magical texts, which recommend supplying the ghost with a bed frame and a chair.⁹⁶ These objects, in the shape of terracotta models, were apparently part of the magical items used alongside with the boat models to dispatch malevolent beings to the Netherworld.

Other small finds

The texts discussed by Scurlock demonstrate that the magical procedures against the evil powers involve, except the figurines, a wide range of objects used to subdue the potentially malicious agent. Thus, in theory the silo filling from the skeletons' level should carry more small objects as evidence of this procedure. In order to study this premise, I have decided to elaborate on the material recorded in the silo at the arbitrarily estimated depth range of 4.40-5.20 m roughly, reflecting the level where the skeletons were discovered (see discussion above).

At this level, Martin's catalogue lists several pieces of pottery shreds (4.40-5.50 m) defined as Ur III examples (PP 122-128 and FP 984; PP = Penn. Pot No.)⁹⁷, but they can be read as the loose material randomly mixed with the filling that covered the bodies. However, the series of these Ur III pottery vessels which survived probably intact (PP 131-134) is quite intriguing and needs more attention. PP 131 (FP 1107) is a tall jar bearing the elevation of the "grave 41" (4.50 m). PP 132 (FP 1161) is a small bowl detected at the depth of 4.30 m. PP 133 (FP 985) is a bowl which was deposited at the same depth as the "grave 43" (4.50 m). In the catalogue pottery register, the shape of PP 133 detected at the depth range of 4.40-5.00 m

is known from at least four further pottery examples (FP 701g, FP 982, FP 1136 a-FP 1136 b). However, they are not provided with drawings in the catalogue. Finally, at the depth 4.40-4.50 m another, this time a smaller bowl PP 134 (FP 701o) was retrieved.

The structure of this pottery assemblage consists of one jar and seven bowls of various sizes, which makes a total of eight pottery vessels. Due to insufficient stratigraphical data, it is difficult to state whether this assemblage is in any way related to the eight skeletons discovered inside the silo.

The characteristics of the remaining small finds found at the depth range of 4.40-5.20 m are vague, especially since some of them have not been registered at all, which according to Martin is in the case of G 38 (an oval quern, a bone flake and a pebble in a charred wooden shell and a large natural shell).⁹⁸ The artifacts (a grinding stone, a whetstone, a fragment of another grinding stone) said to be associated with G 39⁹⁹ are also hard to identify in the existing catalogue, since not all of them are supplied with drawings. The list of these objects may be summarized as follows: PO 50 (FP 979) – a fragmentarily preserved animal pottery figurine (5.20 m), FP 1162 – a pottery "chariot wheel" (4.80 m), probably the one said to be associated with G 39 (4.50 m), FP 986 and PO 95 (FP 993) – two stone (flint or obsidian) tools (4.70-5.20 m and 5.20-5.70 m respectively), PO 142 (FP 983) – a piece of fragmentarily preserved steatite stone bowl (4.70-5.20 m), FP 940 – a stone tool discovered "with grave 38" (4.70 m), PO 176 (FP 992) – a weight (5.20-5.70 m), FP 938 – a bone tool (4.70 m), PO 212 (FP 939) – a shell (4.70 m), FP 994 – a cornelian disc bead (5.20-5.70 m), PO 284 (FP 987) – a bone bead (4.70-5.20 m).¹⁰⁰

It was demonstrated that at the depth of 4.40-4.00 m the skeletons had been sealed with a brickwork layer. The small finds discovered above this level in the silo filling can be traced back in Martin's catalogue. The detailed characteristics of this material are as follows: FP 620 – a pottery object (unspecified) (3.0-4.0 m), PO 82 (FP 618) and PO 83 (FP 619) – two "chariot wheels" (3.0-4.0 m), PO 149 (FP 648) – a fragmentarily preserved stone tool (mortar?) (3.90-4.10 m), FP 617 – a weight (3.0-4.0 m), PO 208 (FP 622) and PO 209 (FP 1163) – two fragmentarily preserved bone tools

⁹⁴ Neveling Porter 2002: 529.

⁹⁵ Cohen 2005: 93.

⁹⁶ Scurlock 2006: 111-112, 126, 134, footnotes nos. 374, 627, 796.

⁹⁷ See Martin 1988: 188.

⁹⁸ Martin 1988: 45.

⁹⁹ Martin 1988: 45.

¹⁰⁰ Martin 1988: 194-195, 198-199, 200-205, 207, 210, 212-213, 218.

(both at 3.0-4.0 m), FP 304 and FP 305 – two pottery beads (both at 1.0 m), FP 647 – a cornelian disc bead (3.90-4.10 m), PO 361-364 – four copper objects (FP 614-616 at depth 3.0-4.0 m and FP 988 at depth 0.0-0.10 m).¹⁰¹

An overview of these small finds makes it impossible to associate almost all of them with the ritual involving figurines and models. The available data is simply too scarce. It seems that these objects were admixed particles of the silo filling, perhaps with the exception of the eight pottery vessels reported at the skeletons' level. Indeed, they might have been part of a ritual while playing the role of offerings given to the dead.

Conclusions – the ritual reconstruction

The presented data prompt us to a new understanding of the unusual burial discovered inside the brickwork silo at Fāra. It seems that the silo originally played the role of a storage unit, at least from the ED III period onwards, however its basic function ceased most likely in the Akkadian period.

At that time or, more specifically, at the time transitional to the Ur III period, the silo pit was successively filled with dump refuse, and could have been a midden. Perhaps, this deposit was characterized by an uneven top surface. On the silo bottom floor of such a shape, presumably the members of the local community placed the eight bodies. The exact order of their deposition is unknown, but it can be partly reconstructed. Moreover, it is not possible to point out the first skeleton deposited inside the silo. One may only hypothesize that it could have been Unit 3 represented by the female G 38, due to its funerary character not deviating from the norm, but this conviction is purely a subjective one. Similar confusion rises as far as the further skeleton units are concerned. I would hypothesize that it could have been Unit 1. Its character and stratigraphical features suggest that perhaps a family consisting of 3 individuals was fiercely thrown down the silo, creating a skeleton assemblage in this area. The remaining 4 members of Unit 2, likely a family too, were thrown down the silo in the same violent manner, just to the north-west of Unit 1. The sequence of the bodies' deposition in both units is roughly (see some concerns raised above)

complementary: the youngsters had been thrown down the silo first, they were followed by the adults – with a female and a male at the end of the queue. Due to insufficient data, we must assume that all the Units including the example of G 38 occupied the silo in connection with the same events of potentially unknown social nature.

Since the bodies were incorrectly buried, likely in fear of malevolent ghosts, eight pottery figurines had been prepared, later to go through a magical procedure including body maltreatment as evidenced by their partial state of preservation and be placed inside the silo during different stages of the ritual. Thus, they could have been sent down the uneven bottom of the silo when the certain bodies already were occupying it, or some of them could have been even thrown down to its bottom just before the bodies got there. Records suggest that two of the figurines could have been thrown on top of the skeletons' level just before the bodies were sealed by the brickwork layer. Moreover, at a particular stage of the ritual, perhaps at the same time as some of the discussed figurines were being deposited, two pottery models – the boat and the bed, as well as eight pottery vessels, were deposited inside the silo. The example of the boat model suggests that this terracotta object in particular had been placed in the context just before the bodies. The boat and the bed models must have played an important role in the ritual, perhaps by helping to neutralize the dangerous effects of an improper interment, while the pottery vessels could have held the food offerings. It is hard to determine whether the bodies were equipped with other grave goods at this stage of the burial procedure. Based on the available data, one may suspect that it might have been the case with the peculiar example of the contracted woman G 38, since the quern, the bone flake and the pebble in a charred wooden shell and the large natural shell are said to be associated with her, let alone the piece of pottery detected in her left hand. The rest of the small finds registered at the skeletons' level was in all probability a part of a dump fill. In the next stage of the interment, the surface was covered with brickwork and perhaps stone admixture rubble. The brickwork layer with the thickness of 0.60 m sealed the collective grave effectively. The remaining silo filling up to its mouth should be regarded as a dump fill.

The silo at Fāra remains the unique example of the late third millennium B.C. Mesopotamian collective grave, furnished with the terracotta objects used in the funerary ritual context. The silo filling gives a great opportunity to get a better insight into the poorly explored phenomenon of the

¹⁰¹ Martin 1988: 188, 190, 198-199, 204-205, 207, 210, 216, 218, 223.

Mesopotamian terracotta figurines and models. The presented data suggest that the discussed terracotta objects could have played a central role in a magical ritual, perhaps protecting the local community from the ghosts of the people buried in the silo collective grave at Fāra.

Abbreviations

- MDOG *Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin* (Berlin 1898/1899 ff.)
 OIP *Oriental Institute Publications* (Chicago 1924 ff.)
 RIA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin 1928 ff.)

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