CHAPTER 5

Excavations at Rayy

The surveys carried out at the site in 2005 and 2006, and also the work undertaken at the Penn Museum archives and stores, allowed for deeper reflection concerning the excavation. The choice of the sites of the tests was weighed at length. The intersection of data, those of Schmidt’s archives and those of the first surveys, allowed two sites to be chosen (Fig. 30): one in the šahrestān (T2), between the numerous cultivated fields, and the other against the inner façade of the southern rampart (T1). Other test trenches were carried out during the excavation, providing a dating of the rampart and to bring up to date the fortification of the lower city of Rayy.

The Šahrrestān Rampart

The vestiges of the šahrestān rampart (Fig. 31) form a small part of its overall perimeter. The first surveys on the site rapidly showed the complexity and major interest of the rampart. The wall is
composed of several parts, corresponding to its different reconstructions and periods (Fig. 32). Each side of the wall presents different phases of construction and repair. The side of the wall, which apparently was subject to the greatest amount of modification, seems to be the outer side. The rampart appears to have been constituted of four principal periods, as may be seen in detail later, each of which was itself broken down into several phases of construction or repair.

The two ends of the rampart were marked by towers, which currently present a round plan, although they had been square originally: Tower 1 and Tower 5 (Fig. 31). The more easterly of the towers, larger and better conserved, is extant to the height of approximately 1103.30 m above sea-level. Next, the two towers Tower 2 and Tower 4 are square. In the centre of the rampart appears a small semi-circular tower, Tower 3. One of the individuated repairs, the most clear on the outer façade of the rampart, consists of a facing of sections of mud bricks (27×27×10 cm (Fig. 33) and with a thickness of about 25–30 cm (Fig. 34). These pieces of repaired wall were fixed directly onto the destroyed wall. This type of restoration was also used on the interior of the rampart, as was noticed during the excavation of test T1 (Fig. 35). As has been observed during the architectural surveys, the portion of wall between the semi-circular tower and the tower further to the west shows traces of a large gate (Fig. 36) whose piers may be perceived up until the springing of the vault (Fig. 37). The gateway is today completely blocked by large blocks of rammed earth. In this outer part of the rampart, defence was also ensured by the rock on which the wall had been built. In fact, several metres separate the level of the plain and the beginning of the rampart (except at the level of the gate, where the difference in level is very slight), to which can be added the total height of the rampart itself. Viewed from the exterior, the rampart seems to leave no possibility for enemy attack (Fig. 38). The morphological configuration of the terrain where the fortified city was founded is not entirely rock. The rock seems to be a branch of the Kuh-e Sorsore, which reappears on the surface from this level to the curve of the rampart. The rest of the rampart