

Tall Zar'a

Project Name: Gadara Region Project/ Excavations at Tall Zar'a

Duration: March 4- April 5, 2005

Number of Workers: -

Cost: JD 4530

Sponsor:

Director: Dieter Vieweger

Representative: Taha Batayne

During the third excavation season of our archaeological project "Region of Gadara/Umm Qays - Tall Zar'a" as in previous years we focused our work in spring 2005 on area I in the northwest of the Tall Zar'a (32°35'N, 35°40'E). We are looking for the stratigraphy of the habitation area and for one of the two city gates of the town in this location. We are searching for a reference stratigraphy for the Gadara/Umm Qays region, representing remains from a long succession of archaeological periods (Early Bronze Age - Ottoman period). Up to now we have reached the Late Bronze Age, excavating to a depth of 3.90m. We expect (according to our geophysical prospection) a depth of cultural layers of more than 8m. In 2005 we expanded area I by 25 squares of 5x5m- a total of 625 sqm.

Further work was done for aerial photogrammetry in the Wadi al- 'Arab (including photogrammetry research work with a helium-filled balloon).

During this season, four of the five already explored strata were exposed further; and labeled 1 to 5 from top to bottom. In the uppermost stratum (1), the remains of three large houses of the Roman-Byzantine Era were uncovered. One house with six and another with four rooms were explored in 2003 and 2004. They are oriented nearly exactly north-south. The walls are built with undressed and some dressed stones. To the west the houses were placed on deep foundations. Toward the western part of the slope, the buildings are eroded near the edge of the slope's steep incline.

A pebble-paved street encircles the tell from the northwest. We continued to expose the street in the balk AM / AN 119. In the squares AK/ AL 117 we explored a courtyard of one of the houses, and in AK 117 and AI 116 a fourth Roman Byzantine house.

The two subsequent strata (2 and 3) can be dated to the Iron Age. According to C14 dating, these strata belong to the 12/11th and 10/9th-Century BC.

In 11 squares (AM-AP 118/119, AL 118, AK 117 and AI 116) we exposed new parts of the Iron Age II city on the tell. There we expect to reconstruct three houses (AP 118f; AN/ AO 118/119; AL/AM 118/119) and maybe a postern in AK 116. A zigzag wall of this city had already been exposed in 2003 and 2004.

The architectural remains of stratum 3 have now been explored in 14 squares. A coherent building structure could be established. In the south of area I we explored a lot of well-preserved walls and a stone pavement with a circular stone of about 1 m diameter (AH 115). This 12cm thick circular hewn slab was removed, and a cistern was explored to a depth of 2.6m. The originally depth of the cistern is not yet known.

The city entrance of the Iron Age I is expected in the north of AH 115, not far from the Iron Age II gate(?).

The remains of the Late Bronze Age city wall were reused during Iron Age I in nearly all squares excavated so far.

In the slope terrain of the excavation area (AI-AO 115-117) the layers of the Late Bronze Age (stratum 4) were reached. An imposing casemate wall with a big tower, were exposed further. Also, a second large chamber of the gate-tower and the gate itself were found. The casemate city wall with five rooms - which protected the western slope in this period - was excavated. In the city gate three stone slabs of a staircase were explored. The entrance to the gate was at least 2.75m wide. In the northern tower we explored two rooms, one of them

unfortunately destroyed by the Iron Age I settlers. The other contains two column bases and a little plastered bench. There are two floor levels (a thick chalk-plaster and deeper stone pavement).

A street runs parallel to the east side of the casemate wall. In AM/ AN 116/117, AM 117 and AL 117, we exposed at least four chanel, which are covered by large stone slabs. They collected water from north, east and south, draining it into the casemate AM 116. It can be assumed that the 3m deep shaft beyond the city wall in square AM 115 (excavated in 2004) was part of this construction. At the foundation level of the Early Bronze Age glacis the shaft deviates from the vertical at an angle of about 30°.

Just as the architecture of the Late Bronze Age is very prestigious, so are the finds. Various bronze objects have been found like remains of figurines, knives, needles and large fragments of bowls as well as imported Mycenaean and Cypriote pottery.

Stratum 5 is represented by a 3m high glacis running along the western hill. This glacis and the basis of the city wall can be dated to the Early Bronze Age. In 2005 we did not do any work in this area.

The aerial survey

Surveying and photogrammetric mapping have made possible new research methods for archaeology by combining modern equipment with digital technologies.

These are aerial photogrammetry for the production of site maps, topographical maps and photogrammetry used in the documentation of archaeological features, respectively.

Similarly, the excavation squares on Tall Zar'a were documented with the help of modern technological equipment. On a daily basis, nearly perpendicular photos were taken from c.4m above the squares. First, the distortion of the objective was corrected. Then the digital photographs were rectified via control points (here the corner points of the squares). In this way, both the progress of the excavation could be documented and site sketches produced with great accuracy.

Finds

In 2005 we found many well-preserved valuable finds in domestic contexts made of metal (iron and bronze; stone and ceramic). Only some are mentioned here: In Iron Age contexts we found a stamp seal with a bull and a masculine god standing on its back. A sitting bronze, gold-covered god also dates to this period. There was a very beautiful bi-chrome painted crater with motives of a bull, human figures, snakes and a lion, also bearing a geometrical design, was found in the Iron Age I deposits. A wonderful head of a figurine (fragment) made of stone (and ceramics) dates to the Late Bronze Age.

Further work

In the next season, in summer 2005, we will only work on the pottery found in 2001-2005. In 2006 we will expand the excavation territory to the south and reach the Late Bronze Age stratum in all squares. Afterwards, from 2006 on, we will excavate the strata of the earlier times of the tell.

Problems

As in 2004, some unwelcome visitors from Irbid and Kufur Asad looked at our excavation on several occasions. Unfortunately, in 2005 they destroyed some archaeological contexts in the afternoon or during the weekends. They pulled out ceramics from the balks (including vessels for reconstruction), stone vessels - and they looked for an Arabic tomb near our excavation (these are tombs of the Bedouins living near the tell)! We would therefore like to ask the Department of Antiquities for a guard of the Tall Zar'a!