

The Region of Gadara/Umm Qeis Project. The 2002 season: a test trench on Tell Zera'a

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On Tell Zera'a, a conspicuous archaeological site located in the centre of the Wadi el-'Arab and 4.5 km south-west of Umm Qeis, there are traces of continuous habitation since the Bronze Age. As a focal point in the regional archaeology of the Gadara/Umm Qeis area, the tell and its surroundings were explored by a joint project. In autumn 2001 a large scale survey of the site was undertaken by a team from the Biblical Archaeological Institute, University of Wuppertal (Vieweger et al. 2002), followed by the excavation of a test trench carried out by a team from the Theological Faculty, University of Utrecht (Vriezen 2002).

In 2002 the work on the test trench was continued by a team from Ut-

recht, from the 19th until the 31st of October. The trench was enlarged to 6.00 x 7.00 m, and was excavated to a depth of 4.72 m (that is, 22.54 m below sea level).

The trench is situated on the western edge of the top of the tell. On the surface three parallel walls are visible; in the excavation these appeared to contain ceramics from the Iron Age to the Early Islamic Period, but may have been constructed in more recent times. They are built as terrace walls. East of these and 0.3 m below the surface, an older terrace wall was found retaining soil with finds also dating from the Iron Age to the Early Islamic Period. The walls are built with field stones, except for some dressed building stones in one of the latest of them.

In the enlargement of the trench excavated in 2002, the northern continuation of the loamy floor dating from the early Byzantine Period was found, together with the wall connected to it. Many tabun sherds were found on the floor.

Underneath the terrace walls and the Byzantine floor, there was an accumulation of layers containing only Iron Age finds, the great majority

dating from the Early Iron Age. This accumulation of soil covered three walls and their connecting floors belonging to a sequence of four Early Iron Age houses (Fig. 1). Connected to the upper and last wall, were two consecutive floors, 2 cm thick and grey in colour. The second wall is related to a 4 cm thick black floor, consisting mainly of ash. To the third and lowest wall, a 2 cm thick grey floor is related (Fig. 2) and, this wall is constructed on the lowest of the floors, again forming a 2 cm thick, light grey layer. Each of these walls is built of undressed stone blocks, with widths of between 0.65 m and 0.85 m. Each of the floors has ash pockets containing cooking pot sherds, indicating the existence of fire places and cooking activities.

The lowest floor covered a large pit, 3.20 m in diameter, filled with stone boulders and red-brown earth



Fig. 1: Part of the North and the East sections of the test trench

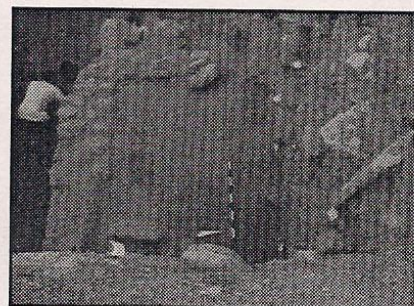


Fig. 2: The lower Iron Age wall and connected floor

that cut into a thick layer of yellow loam. In and under this layer of loam, dark brown and bright yellow bricks were discerned that may be interpreted as tumble from mud brick walls. The structure of these brick walls could not yet be established; however one 0.90 m wide mud brick wall is visible in the south section of the trench (Fig. 3). Since finds from the Late Bronze Age increase in these lower levels,

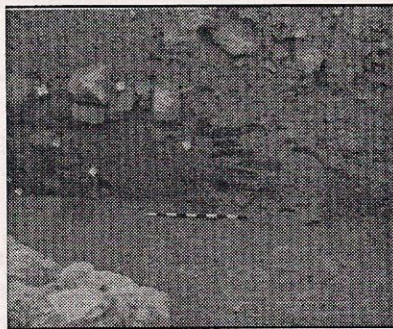


Fig. 3: Mud brick wall in south section of the test trench

it would not be surprising if future excavations reveal these bricks to be of Late Bronze Age date.



Fig. 4: Chalice

At the end of this second campaign the following conclusions may be drawn (Fig. 4). In the test trench, under four terrace walls dating between Late Antique and modern times, there are the remains of two cultural periods: a floor of the Byzantine period and a sequence of four Early Iron Age houses. Under-

neath are the remains of mud brick walls, which may belong to the Late Bronze Age.

References

Vieweger, D. et al., Tall Zera'a in the Wadi al-'Arab, *Occident & Orient* 7/2, 2002, 12-14.

Vriezen, K., The Region of Gadara/Umm Qeis Project. Second part of the 2001-season: a test trench on Tell Zera'a, *Occident & Orient*, 7/1, 2002, 18-19.