

THE 'GADARA REGION PROJECT' IN NORTHERN JORDAN THE SPRING CAMPAIGN 2006 ON TALL ZAR'A

Jutta Häser and Dieter Vieweger

Introduction

In 2001, an interdisciplinary project started in the Wādī al-'Arab, i. e. the 'Gadara Region Project', conducted by the Biblical-Archaeological Institute Wuppertal and directed by Prof. Dr. Dieter Vieweger. The first two years were taken up by intensive surveys in the Wādī al-'Arab and its tributary, Wādī az-Zaḥar. During these explorations, Tall Zar'a emerged as the most promising site for investigating the more than 5000 year old history of the region. The first excavation was carried out in 2003. Since then, each year two campaigns (in spring and summer) were carried out. In 2004, the co-operation with the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology was established. The project has since been directed by Prof. Dr. Dieter Vieweger and Dr. Jutta Häser. The authors have reported regularly on the progress of the work, especially on the results of the excavations on Tall Zar'a.

The fourth excavation campaign was conducted from 19 March to 22 April 2006. A team of 22 archaeologists, surveyors, architects and students from various disciplines worked on the excavation for five weeks, supported by 33 volunteers who participated for two weeks. Eight Jordanian workers from Umm Qays were also recruited for the excavation.

The work continued in Area I in the northwest of the tall. At the end of the excavation, 31 squares (5 x 5m) were opened, 775m² in total. In most of the area excavated, a depth of 4m of the proposed 12m of cultural layers have been reached. At that point, the archaeological investigation had arrived at the latest phase of the Late Bronze Age. The earlier strata can only be excavated after the whole area has been exposed at this level, for logistic but especially security reasons. However, the excavated area should

be extended to ca. 1000m² before continuing to deeper levels.

A second area (Area II) was opened on the north side of the tall's plateau, and five squares (5 x 5m) were excavated.

Results of the 2006 Excavation Campaign

Area I

In order to show the development of the architectural features from the Early Bronze Age to the Roman-Byzantine period, the excavation results will be explained below, beginning from the lowest layer reached to the surface of the tall.

The survey of the tall done in 2001 showed a high concentration of Early Bronze Age pottery in Area I. However, only the outer layer of a massive Early Bronze Age fortification could be excavated in square AN-AO 115, in the step trench beyond the Late Bronze Age city wall.

The remains of two Middle Bronze Age strata with residential buildings have so far been uncovered in the same part of Area I (AM-AO 116-117), at 2m below the Late Bronze Age casemate wall. In the older one of these two strata, the corner of a house could be unearthed, and a hearth and a *tābūn* were found. The western part of the room has eroded down the slope.

In the younger Middle Bronze Age stratum, two rooms of two different houses were uncovered. They were separated by two walls that had been built against each other. The western part of one of the walls has also eroded. Therefore, it remains unclear, whether a fortification of the settlement existed at this place in this period. Actually, it is not possible to say anything definite about the Middle Bronze Age culture before the still unexcavated Late Bronze Age level and further strata have been excavated. It is a unique