

The "Gadara Region Project" in northern Jordan has been initiated by Prof. Dr. Dieter Vieweger, Director of the Biblical-Archaeological Institute in Wuppertal, in 2001. The aim of this interdisciplinary project is the investigation of the regional history of the Decapolis city of Gadara. The project is closely linked with the long-term archaeological investigations in Gadara/Umm Qays conducted by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology.

After intensive surveys in the Wadi el-'Arab and the Wadi ez-Zahar south of Gadara in the year 2001 Tall Zar'a was selected as the most promising excavation site. The site lies 4.5 km southwest of Gadara. The main excavation started in 2003. Since 2004 the project has been conducted in close cooperation between the Biblical-Archaeological Institute in Wuppertal and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology and directed by Prof. Dr. Dieter Vieweger and Dr. Jutta Häser.

The fourth excavation campaign takes place from March 20 to April 22, 2006. A team of 20 archaeologists, surveyors, architects, students and Jordan workmen from Umm Qais work on the site. The excavation area reaches now a total of 625 m². The deepest square is now located at 4 m below the tall surface.

Five strata - designated by numbers beginning with 1 from top to bottom - were identified. They can be dated from the Roman-Byzantine period to the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3200 B.C.). The architectural remains of the Early Bronze Age are currently only visible on the western slope in the form of the outer edge of the city wall.







The excavation of the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.) brought to light a massive city (casemate) wall and a system of water canals. Four steps have been discovered in the south west of the wall. They can be interpreted as a small gate to the wadi. The special construction of the southern room with the two column bases and the small, separate room could point to a small gate sanctuary.

A bell-shaped pit - surrounded by a paved floor - is situated near the gate. This is carefully lined with large stones and covered with a round carefully hewn stone, measuring 1 m in diameter and with a 15 cm wide hole in the middle. The pit was filled with layers of soil and has been excavated to a depth of 2.60 m. However, the bottom has not been reached as yet. The function of the pit is still unclear.

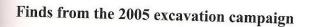
Architectural remains of the Iron Age I period (1200-1000 B.C.) could be discovered in 14 squares. In this period the settlement was not protected by a wall, at least in this area. The inhabitants used the foundations of the Late

Bronze Age casemate wall, which must have been clearly visible at the time. Only in this case would the construction of silos and working areas inside the casemate wall have been possible. Also, small walls were constructed along the strong Late Bronze Age walls. Nearby the poor residential area we found a first part of a large building of much better quality.

Architectural remains of Iron Age II (1000-800 B.C.) were uncovered in 11 squares. The settlement of this period was protected by a zigzag-like wall along the northwestern slope. The residential buildings were built adjoining the settlement wall. In all cases only the foundations, constructed without mortar from undressed fieldstones, could be excavated. At this stage, three or four houses can be distinguished. These houses consist of one or more rooms and one or more courtyards.

In the Roman-Byzantine period (100 B.C.-636 A.D.) three large houses can be distinguished. They were separated by a paved road of small pebbles.





About 60,000 pottery sherds were found in the excavated layers till now, which can be designated as domestic ware. The pottery finds were examined typologically as well as archaeometrically. This analysis - under the direction of Dr. Wolfgang Auge (BAI Wuppertal) - is supported by Deutsches Bergbaumuseum Bochum (PD Dr. Andreas Hauptmann).

The household equipment also included a large amount of grinding stones and bowls of different shapes, dimensions, and materials, loom weights, and spin whorls.

Beside these household items, some finds are of special value, for instance a ceramic pot with two handles painted in red and black (Right Figure). The painting shows an animal scene together with a human figure. The vessel can be dated in the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 B.C.).

A seal impression (3.5 cm x 2.7 cm) was found in a burnt layer of Iron

Age II (1000-800 B.C.). It shows a male figure standing on a bull, lifting its left arm (Below Figure). The figure depicts the weather god Ba'al or Hadad, a typical motif of this region. The reverse bears three impressions of a perpendicular fastening.

A 7.2 cm high, conical limestone figurine was found in a Roman-Byzantine context. Its execution and less-than-perfect technique employed in working the soft limestone points to an interpretation as a toy. Only the face and hair were engraved with simple lines.

