

## Tall Zar'a

Project Name: Gadara Region Project – Excavation at Tall Zar'a

Duration: March 4 – April 10, 2007

Sponsor: Biblical Archaeological Institute, Wuppertal and German Protestant Institute of Archaeology

Director: Prof. Dr. Dieter Vieweger, Dr. Jutta Häser

Representative: Salameh Fayyad

The "Gadara Region Project" was initiated by Prof. Vieweger in 2001 to investigate the surroundings of the ancient Decapolis city of Gadara – a major field of German research since the late 1960s. After two years of intensive surveys in the Wādī al-ʿArab and Wādī az-Zahar it turned out that Tall Zar'a is the most promising *site for excavation*. This tell is situated 4.5 km southwest of Gadara/ Umm Qays at the confluence of the Wādī al-ʿArab and Wādī az-Zahar. The excavation started in 2003.



Fig.1: Overview of Tall Zar'a.

Area I on the north-western slope of the tall was extended to the north and to the south. The deepest trench was excavated to a depth of 4.5 m. The excavation continued in 15 of the already opened squares. All in all the excavation now covers an area of 950 m<sup>2</sup> in Area I.

In Area I, we explored the stratigraphy of the tall. Up to now, we have exposed an Umayyad level (single houses), a densely populated Roman-Byzantine settlement, installations of Hellenistic housing activities, two Iron-Age II fortified cities, an Iron Age I open settlement, and at least two strongly fortified Late Bronze Age cities.

Only 4.5 m of the estimated 12 m height of cultural layers have been explored so far. The test soundings on

the slope show some more Late and Middle Bronze Age layers and at least one Early Bronze Age settlement fortified by a huge city wall.

In 2007, the excavation focused on a remarkable large, carefully built and well preserved, Iron Age I house in the south of Area I. Its character seems similar to the Late Bronze Age Canaanite courtyard houses. Another aim was the exploration of the Late Bronze Age city of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. A casemate wall, the southern gate, a tower with a sanctuary and some representative house structures were investigated. 24 cylinder seals (22 of them in one house-context), a bronze pendant and many extraordinary finds underline the importance of the Late Bronze Age city of the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C.

Area II in the north of the tall was extended to the east, west and north. The whole excavation there

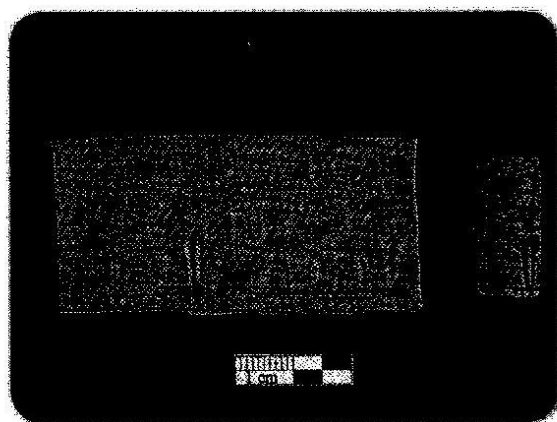


Fig.2: Cylinder Seal of Mitanni glyptic found 2006. 22 more cylinder seals of this style were found in 2007.

covers an area of 400 m<sup>2</sup>. A large building complex of courtyards and rooms could be observed. This was founded in the Roman period. It was reused and extended several times during the Roman-Byzantine period. After its destruction, rooms were set inside the older wall remains with a completely different orientation. They can also be dated to the Roman-Byzantine period. In the Umayyad period, the rooms were filled up with debris and the former large building was reused and extended. A pavement of lime and large stones was laid on this level inside the courtyards.

The most interesting finds from this area are some oil lamps, a half complete glass flask and two nicely shaped ivory tools.

The intensive surveys on the tall made it clear that there is a large building (Area III) situated on the southern outcrop of the tall. There are walls of dressed stone visible and a large cistern of 11 m x 6 m x 6.5 m is known. After documentation with photographs from a balloon and from ground level, we started to remove the stones, which had been displaced in the centuries after its destruction. Based on the masonry and the pottery on the surface, the building can be dated to the Roman period with phases of re-use in the Roman-Byzantine and the late Islamic period.

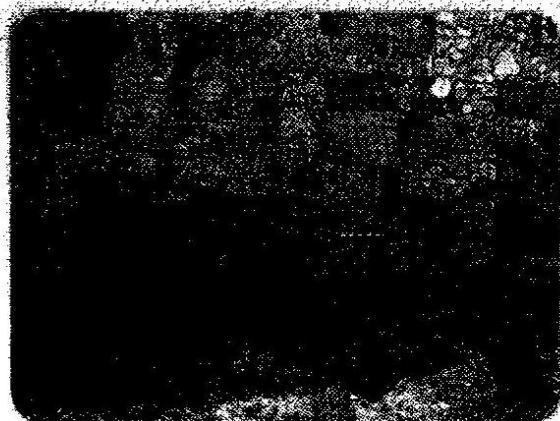


Fig.3: Iron Age I house.

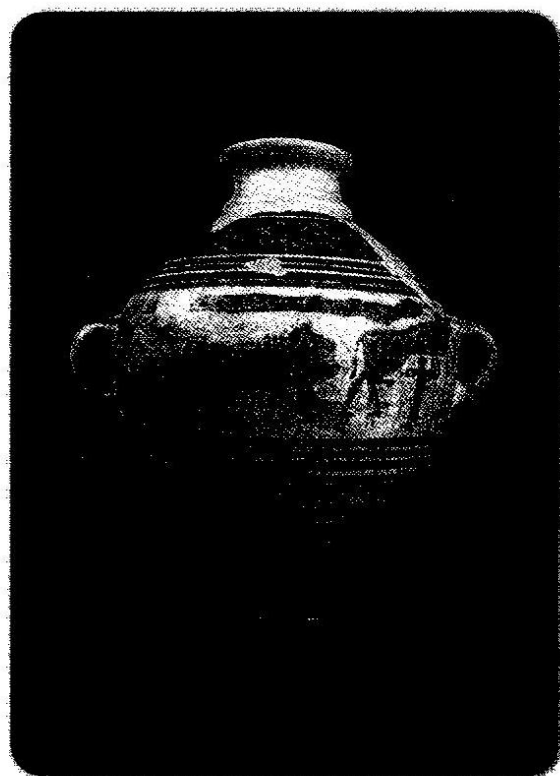


Fig.4: Figurative painted jar found in 2006. In 2007, the missing sherds were found in the next square to the east.