

THE 'GADARA REGION PROJECT' IN NORTHERN JORDAN SPRING CAMPAIGN 2005 ON TALL ZAR'A

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Introduction

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 (A. Hoffmann, G. Schauerte, C. Bührig) and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (U. Wagner-Lux, K. Vriezen).

After intensive surveys in the Wādī al-'Arab and the Wādī az-Zaḥar south of Gadara in 2001, Tall Zar'a was selected as the most promising excavation site. After a trial excavation by Dr. Karel Vriezen in 2002 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 the authors.¹

The third excavation campaign took place from March 4 to April 5, 2005. A team of 17 archaeologists, surveyors, architects and students of various disciplines worked on the excavation for five weeks, supported by 20 volunteers who participated for two weeks. Depending on the number of German excavators, between two and ten Jordanian workers were recruited for the excavation.

In order to interpret excavated architectural remains of the Roman-Byzantine, Iron Age, and Late Bronze Age periods in a better way, the area

of excavation (Area I on the northwest side of the tall) was enlarged in the north (AP 118, AP 119) and the south (AI 115, AI 116, AH 115, AH 116) by six squares of 5 x 5m each so that the excavation area now measures a total of 625m². Those squares that had been opened during the previous years were to be excavated to the Late Bronze Age stratum. The deepest square is now located at 4m below the tall surface. In order to have a larger area to work on, the balks were excavated systematically.

Five strata — designated by numbers beginning with 1 from top to bottom — were identified in the excavation campaigns of 2003 and 2004. They can be dated from the Roman-Byzantine period to the Early Bronze Age. 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 other remains of this stratum as well as the remains of an expected Middle Bronze Age stratum are still covered by layers of later periods.

Results of the 2005 Excavation Campaign

In order to show the development of the architectural features of the Late Bronze Age (stratum 4) to the Roman-Byzantine period (stratum 1), the excavation results will, in the following, be explained beginning from the lowest layer reached to the surface of the tall.

In squares AI-AO, 115-117, the excavation of the Late Bronze Age casemate wall continued, which had been discovered already in the campaigns of 2003 and 2004 (**Fig. 1**). During the extension of the area to the south, a large

1. The results of the previous surveys and excavations are published in: Vieweger 2002a, 2002b, 2003a, 2003b, in press a, in press b, in press c; Vieweger/Häser 2005a, 2005b, in press a, in press b, in press c; Häser/Vieweger

2005, in press; Vriezen 2002, 2003; Dijkstra *et al.* 2005. A short overview of the previous campaigns can also be found on the internet at www.bainst.de and www.deiahl.de (see: Kampagnen/ Tell Zera'a).