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Tall Zirā'a

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Final Report

Volume 7

Byzantine to Umayyad Period (Strata 5–3)

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Editors of the Tall Zirā'a Final Reports

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviated Journals and Series

AAJ	Annual of the Department of Antiquities	JRA	Journal of Roman Archaeology
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins	LA	Liber Annuus
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology	LRBC	Late Roman Bronze Coinage
AW	Antike Welt	MIRB	Moneta Imperii Romani Byzantini
BarIntSer	British Archaeological Reports. International Series	OrA	Orient-Archäologie
BASOR	Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research	PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
DOB	Arab-Byzantine Coins in Dumbarton Oaks	RB	Revue Biblique
		RIC	The Roman Imperial Coinage
		SHAJ	Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan
		ZOrA	Zeitschrift für Orient-Archäologie

General Abbreviations

BAI	Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal	GPIA	German Protestant Institute of Archaeology
DoA	Department of Antiquities of Jordan		

Abbreviations used in the Catalogues

D	Diameter	Obv.	Obverse
g	gram	rem	remaining
H	Height	Rev.	Reverse
h	hour (position of stamp on coins)	Th	Thickness
L	Length	W	Width



Fig. 0.1 Tall Zirā'a, view from west to east (Source APAAME D. Kennedy 2011).

PREFACE

by D. Vieweger/J. Häser

When the German engineer G. Schumacher explored Transjordan in 1885, he discovered among other sites, Tall Zirā'a¹ (Fig. 0.1). He was the first European since the time of the Crusaders to enter this region. However, after thousands of years of prosperity, the valley had changed significantly during the Ottoman Period. The bedouins told Schumacher that the wādī had degenerated into a “popular shelter for all sorts of refugees and criminal scum”.

Except for a few sugar mills that were operated by water power, there were only a few small hamlets. A water flow of about 0.75 m³ per second flowed through the Wādī al-‘Arab in June 1885, and

the Wādī az-Zaḥar added the same amount of spring water. C. Steuernagel wrote:

*“Where the valley widens and the water becomes shallow, there are large numbers of trout that are easy to catch. Once while bathing, Schumacher saw a black water snake, almost a metre long. These are said to be very common here and are highly dreaded”*².

The archaeologist N. Glueck visited Tall Zirā'a in 1942. He reported the

*“singularly imposing and completely isolated hill of Tall Zera‘ah (...)”*³

and mentioned a water source on the plateau of the tall as the

1 Schumacher 1890, 110. 142 f. Schumacher visited Tall Zirā'a and described remains of rectangular buildings. His observations are published by Steuernagel 1926, 81.

2 Steuernagel 1926, 80. Citation is given in English translation; cf. also Schumacher 1890, 142 f. For Schumacher's travels see in general: Schumacher 1886.

3 Glueck 1951a, 182 Fig. 71.

“result of a natural siphon phenomenon leading the underground flow of the water from the higher level of the hills beyond down to below the bottom and, as through a pipe piercing its center, up to the top of Tall Zera‘ah”.

Although the tall⁴ had already attracted attention due to its location and imposing appearance, no intensive research was conducted at that time, because of the hill’s location close to the border of Israel to the west and Syria to the north. During the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and again during the Six-Day War in 1967, the western part of the Wādī al-‘Arab was declared a military zone. A passage which had been open in all directions for millennia was thus essentially cut off from sections of its surroundings. The territory around Gadara and the Wādī al-‘Arab, in the triangle between Jordan, Syria and Israel, became the northwesternmost corner of the Hashemite Kingdom, and there was not even a paved road to the tall.

Even the construction of the Wādī al-‘Arab Dam in 1978 did not make a significant difference to the status quo. The archaeologists who surveyed the area prior to the dam’s construction as part of salvage investigations did not appreciate the archaeological potential of the tall that majestically overlooked the future reservoir. Some more time passed before the ratification of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, but it was not until after the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, signed by King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on October 26, 1994, that the area became accessible to the public again. D. Vieweger, director of the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal (BAI), and, since 2005, also of the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (GPIA), traveled to the northwestern part of Jordan several times between 1998 and 2000, exploring the area for a suitable tall site that would serve as authoritative chronological record for the region’s long and important cultural history. He found it in the Wādī al-‘Arab.

Tall Zirā‘a—located in the middle of the Wādī al-‘Arab (Fig. 0.2 and Fig. 0.3)—was continuously inhabited for at least 5,000 years and offers a unique insight into the way of life of the region’s people. Its outstanding archaeological significance results from the artesian spring at its center, which created optimal settlement conditions over thousands of years. For this reason, Tall Zirā‘a offers a great opportunity to compile a comparative stratigraphy for northern Jordan from the Early Bronze Age right through to the Islamic period, while at the

same time tracing cultural developments in urban life, crafts and religious history over long periods of time. Moreover, it is possible to study the numerous remains from Biblical times in a broad cultural and historical context.

As mentioned earlier, a major trade route ran through the valley, connecting Egypt in the south with the Syrian-Mesopotamian region in the north. The Wādī al-‘Arab also connects the Jordan Valley with the Mediterranean coast via the northern Jordan ford at Ġisr el-Maġami‘ (Gešer Naharajim), and the plains of Jezreel and Tall al-Ḥiṣn (Beth Shean) with the eastern Jordanian highlands. It was possible to climb from the Jordan valley, at some 290 m below sea level, to the fertile and very early populated Irbid-Ramtha basin, which lies around 560 m above sea level. Direct routes led from the Irbid-Ramtha basin to Dimašq (Damascus) in the north, Baġdād in the east and Amman in the south. Since the Yarmūk valley in the north and the Wādī Ziqlāb in the south are too steep and narrow to serve as major transportation routes, the Wādī al-‘Arab played a prominent geopolitical role. Not surprisingly, economic success and the hard work of residents over the millennia have left a wealth of traces in the valley. More than 200 sites of human habitation, from the very earliest settlements to the Islamic Period, provide an eloquent testimony to the history of this region: Settlements, channels, water mills, cisterns, oil presses, wine presses, watchtowers and burial sites.

Tall Zirā‘a offered good living conditions for a settlement; the artesian spring ensured an unfailing water supply, and the hill provided security. The tall rises impressively (depending on the direction) between 22–45 m above the ground. As the only prominent natural elevation in the lower Wādī al-‘Arab, Tall Zirā‘a dominates the valley. From here, not only Gadara can be seen, but also the narrow entrance of the wādī to the west can be well monitored. The adjacent fertile wādī ensured adequate nourishment, with potentially arable land in the western and central valleys, terraced slopes and spurs suitable for rainfed agriculture in the east, and wādī slopes suitable for grazing small livestock, forming a broad semicircle from east and south to the west. Based on his observations, D. Vieweger

4 The Arabic word ‘tell’ or ‘tall’ as well as the Hebrew word ‘tel’ will be written in this publication in the standard literary Arab version ‘tall’ or ‘Tall NN’.



Fig. 0.2 Tall Zirā'a and its geographic location (Source: Ababsa 2013, Fig. 1).



Fig. 0.3 Map of the Tall Zirā'a area (Source: BAI/GPIA; P. Leverkus).

decided to implement preliminary investigations here from 1998 to 2000.

The 'Gadara Region Project' was launched in 2001 by the Biblical Archaeological Institute (BAI) in Wuppertal, Germany. During the first survey season, the surface of Tall Zirā'a was explored, the tall was accurately surveyed, and more than 24,000 pottery sherds and many other finds were systematically collected and analyzed⁵. The results of the survey helped to formulate the objectives of the excavation program and to select suitable areas (residential, religious, administrative and craft production) for investigation.

The first excavation season on the tall took place in 2003. The first team was financed by the 'Society of Friends of the BAI Wuppertal' and traveled under the direction D. Vieweger with a Volkswagen bus from Wuppertal via Turkey and Syria to Amman. A house of the Ottoman period in the Gadara/Umm Qēs archaeological site served as living and working quarters, which was in a very poor condition at that time, but was sympathetically renovated and equipped with modern sanitary facilities and kitchens in the following seasons. The results of the

first season were so promising that the 'Gadara Region Project' was inaugurated, with a planned time frame of ten to twenty years.

Over the course of the subsequent 18 seasons, 25 strata were uncovered in three areas and several scientific processes and archaeological experiments were carried out; surveys were also completed for the area around Tall Zirā'a and in the Wādī al-'Arab.

The slopes of the Wādī al-'Arab from Tall Zirā'a upward to the region of Šēdūr and Dōqara, as well as the region around the Wādī al-'Arab dam, were surveyed in 2009; large parts of this region had not previously studied in detail. 78 sites, 30 of which were previously unknown, were documented. The environmental survey continued in 2010 in the region of Dōqara, which is near Irbid; 57 sites were documented at that time.

In 2004, the BAI Wuppertal under the directorship of D. Vieweger, and the German Protestant

5 Vieweger et al. 2017, 59–155; Vieweger et al. 2003, 191–216.

Institute of Archaeology (GPIA) in Amman which also served as the research unit for the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), under the directorship of J. Häser, agreed on a close partnership, which ensured ongoing archaeological and interdisciplinary collaboration for the remainder of the archaeological seasons. The subsequent directors of the GPIA in Amman, F. Kenkel, K. Schmidt and B. Jansen, agreed to continue this cooperation.

In 2018, excavations in Area II resumed under the direction of K. Schmidt with a special focus on the Iron Age. The results of the 2018 and 2019 campaigns have been published in a printed and an online version⁶.

All finds were stored at the excavation house in Umm Qēs. Some of the more important finds were exported to the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal (BAI) and restored by M. Blana; they were returned to the Department of Antiquities of Jordan in several stages, with the last ones returning to Jordan in spring 2015. More than 50 objects discovered during the project are on display in the Jordan Museum in Amman.

In July 2019, a special exhibition titled ‘Tall Zirā’a – Mirror of Jordan’s History’ opened at the Jordan Museum in Amman, displaying 84 finds from Tall Zirā’a that attest to the cult and religion, arts and crafts, and cultural contacts of the people at this site over thousands of years⁷. In 2020, the exhibition was also presented at the Museum of Jordanian Heritage at the Yarmouk University in Irbid.

The results of the excavations have been presented in the form of articles in several scientific journals as well as monographs and dissertations⁸. In addition, the Tall Zirā’a website provides information in German and English about current activities on and around the tall⁹. After 18 intensive seasons exploring the tall and its surrounding, it was decided to interrupt excavation and survey activities in order to publish a complete record of the results so

far. To this end, it was decided that work from 2012 onward would consist of study seasons in the excavation house at Umm Qēs to process the data and results gathered to date.

The following volumes of the final publication are already published or planned:

Volume 1: Introduction¹⁰

Volume 2: Early and Middle Bronze Age (Strata 25–17)¹¹

Volume 3: Late Bronze Age (Strata 16–14)¹²

Volume 4: Iron Age and Persian Period (Strata 13–9)¹³

Volume 5: Hellenistic and Roman Period (Strata 8–6)

Volume 6: Hellenistic to Umayyad Period (Strata 8–3). Ceramic, Glass and Metal Finds¹⁴

Volume 7: Byzantine and Umayyad Period (Strata 5–3)

Volume 8.1/8.2: Wādī al-‘Arab Survey¹⁵

Volume 9: The Iron Age, Hellenistic and Early Roman Period in Area II¹⁶

All volumes will be or have been already published online in English, in order to make the results available free of charge and to a wide audience. The online publication also allows the integration of 3D-images, reconstructions and digital films. Furthermore, original data from the excavations, such as plans and database extracts, are included. These additional documents are published in German¹⁷; however, they will be understandable to anyone with some knowledge of the German language and allow professional researchers to access the primary data.

The printed version of the publication can be ordered from Gütersloh Verlag in Germany. Volumes 1, 2, 3, 6, 8.1/8.2 and 9 have already been published.

General comments on the systems and processes used in the publications follow:

The Palestine Grid 1923 is the basis for the geographic grid system used for the project. It was first

6 Schmidt (ed.) 2022.

7 Häser – Schmidt (eds.) 2019.

8 For a complete list of the publications concerning the ‘Gadara Region Project’ cf. <<http://www.tallziraa.de/Publikationen/0335.html>> (10.12.2022).

9 Cf. www.tallziraa.de

10 Several authors in: Vieweger – Häser (eds.) 2017.

11 Vieweger 2019.

12 Soennecken 2022.

13 Soennecken in prep.

14 Kenkel 2020; Hoss 2020a; Hoss 2020b.

15 Soennecken – Leiverkus 2021.

16 Schmidt (ed.) 2022.

17 Cf. the appendices to the present volume.

used in the autumn 2001 for 5 m x 5 m squares on Tall Zirā'a, for both excavation and survey work¹⁸.

- The citation style is based on the guidelines of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), but has been adapted to the conventions of English language publications.
- In order to minimize misunderstandings, the problem of transliterating Arabic and Hebrew words into English orthography with Latin letters for local place and family names is solved with by the transcription system of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, which is based

on the guidelines of TAVO (Tübinger Bibelatlas des Vorderen Orients).

- In this publication, the name of the site is called *Tall Zirā'a*. Other transcriptions include *Tell Zer'ah* (MEGA Jordan; Jadis; Kerestes et al. 1977/1978; Glueck 1951a; Glueck 1951b); *Tell Zer'a* (Reicke – Rost 1979); *Tell Zara'a*/*Tell Zara'a* (Schumacher 1890; Steuernagel 1926); *Tell Zira'a* (Hanbury-Tenison 1984), *Tall Zar'a* (AAJ, SHAJ).
- All dimensions in the catalogues and in the captions are in cm unless otherwise stated.

18 Cf. Vieweger – Häser (eds.) 2017, 235–237 for the grid system used on Tall Zirā'a.

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

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Jutta Häser

INTRODUCTION

by J. Häser

This volume 7 of the Tall Zirā'a Final Reports contains the results of the excavations of the Late Roman to Umayyad strata, *i.e.* Strata 5 to 3, which were carried out under the direction of D. Vieweger and J. Häser between 2001 and 2011 as well as in 2014.

The geographical setting and the morphology of Tall Zirā'a, the natural environment in the Wādī al-ʿArab, the research history of the site, the aims of the 'Gadara Region Project,' the methodology used in surveying and excavation as well as the framework of the archaeological work were published in *Volume 1* of the final Tall Zirā'a publication series¹. They will not be repeated here.

To date, three areas—labeled Area I, II, and III—have been opened on Tall Zirā'a (*Fig. 0.4–0.8*). Excavations were carried out from 2003 to 2011 in Area I, from 2006 to 2009 and in 2011 in Area II and in 2007, 2008, and 2014 in Area III². This results in a total excavation area of about 3000 m².

In Area I the exploration was carried out expecting living areas and workshops, in Area II administrative buildings and in Area III a prestigious building of the Roman and/or Byzantine period.

The building complexes in Area I and II show a development that makes a division into three main strata, *i.e.* Strata 5 to 3, reasonable. For Area III, it is difficult to decide whether this place was also built on at the time of Stratum 5, since excavation there was not as intensive as in the Areas I and II. Further investigations are necessary to clarify the situation. However, it is obvious that with the construction of a church in Area III, a new architectural stratum with the designation 4 began. Stratum 3 marks the further development of architectural structures in all three areas. It was during this period that the highest density of occupation was found in the excavated areas.

Although the finds were mixed due to numerous intrusions in the different stratigraphic levels, Stratum 5 can be dated to the Late Roman and Early Byzantine periods, while the contexts of Stratum 4 belong to the fully developed Byzantine period. Stratum 3 can be dated from the very Late Byzantine to the Umayyad period. The transition from the Byzantine to the Early Islamic period is smooth, both in terms of architecture as well as pottery and

small finds. A cultural break is not apparent until the Abbasid period, caused here not by political changes but by the devastating earthquake in AD 749 that destroyed many other sites in the region³. Due to this transition, and instead of a sharp break, the Byzantine and Early Islamic/Umayyad period will be presented together in this volume. The strata of the later Islamic periods will be described in another volume of the final reports.

The excavations confirmed the results of the tall survey carried out in 2001, which revealed the highest number of sherds in the Roman and Byzantine periods (5541) and the Late Byzantine-(Umayyad) period (7125) (*Fig. 0.9 and 0.10*)⁴. It should be taken into account that the finds in the upper levels of a tall are overrepresented, but the dramatic decrease in the Islamic period with only 374 sherds is more than obvious.

In 2014, a geomagnetic prospection was carried out on Tall Zirā'a⁵. Due to the fact that all walls were built from limestone, which cannot be detected in great detail using this method, the prospection revealed nevertheless some indications of the built-up area on the tall (*Fig. 0.11*). In some cases—especially in the space between Area I and II—there are walls that could belong to Strata 4 or 3, as the excavated walls are continued in the geomagnetic image. The prospection also shows that there are no walls left from the southern part of the buildings in Area II, which means that the edge of the building Complex K has been reached.

The geomagnetic image also shows that the walls of the Byzantine period continue into the northwesternmost unexcavated area between Area I and II. However, their connection with tower in Complex G 2 in the northeast corner of Area I could not be clarified.

1 Vieweger – Häser (eds.) 2017.

2 Vieweger – Häser 2017a, 27–57; Vieweger – Häser 2017b, 235–266.

3 Häser 2023.

4 Vieweger et al. 2017; Vieweger 2017, 142–149; Kenkel 2017, 84–90.

5 Rassmann – Reiter 2017, 193–196.

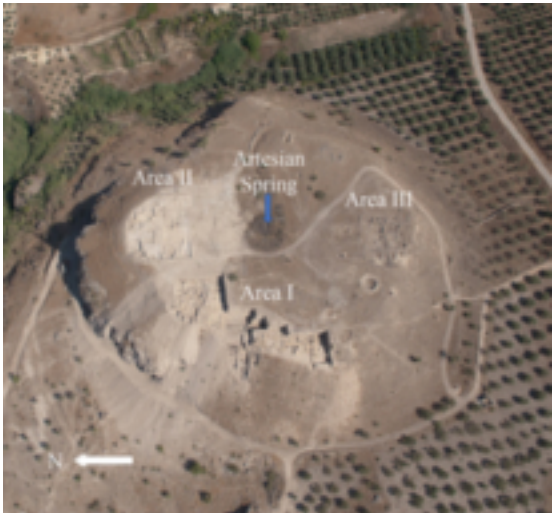


Fig. 0.4 Tall Zirā'a with its three excavation areas and the artesian spring in 2011 (Source: APAAME, D. Kennedy).

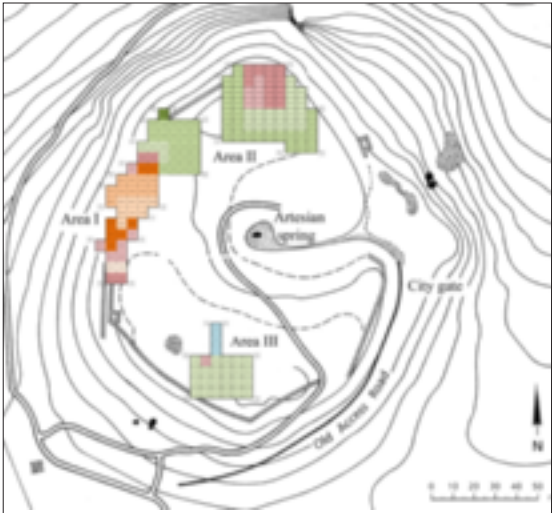


Fig. 0.5 Tall Zirā'a. Topographical map with Areas I to III with 5 m × 5 m excavation squares (Source: BAI/GPIA).



Fig. 0.6 Plan with squares in Area I (Source: BAI/GPIA).

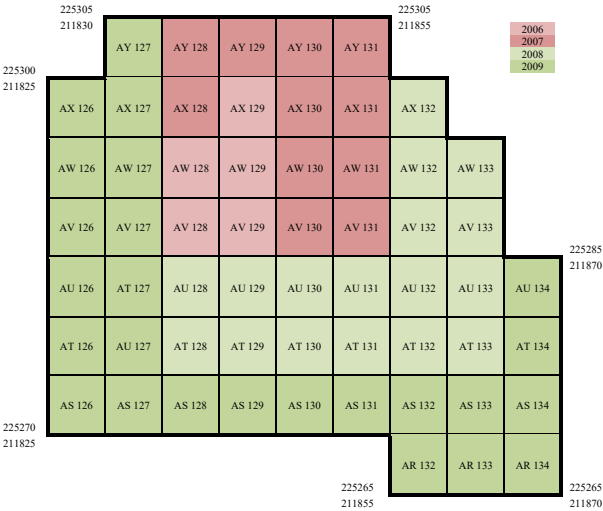


Fig. 0.7 Plan with squares in Area II (Source: BAI/GPIA).

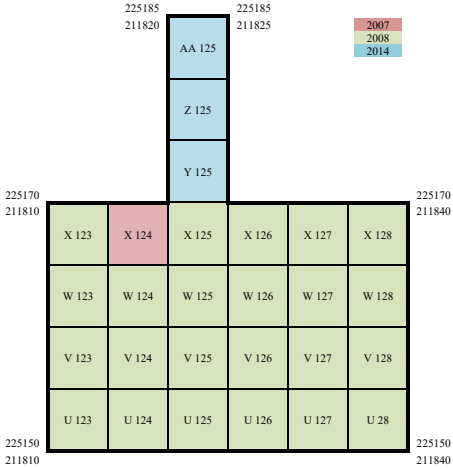


Fig. 0.8 Plan with squares in Area III (Source: BAI/GPIA)

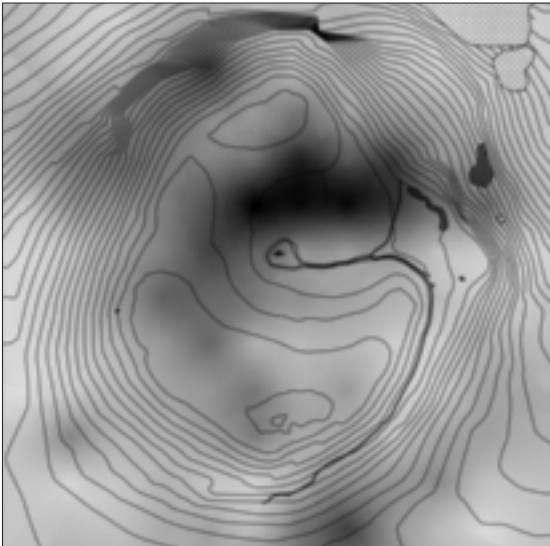


Fig. 0.9 Distribution of Roman and Byzantine pottery sherds between 0 (white) and 15 (black) per 400 m² (Source: BAI/GPIA).

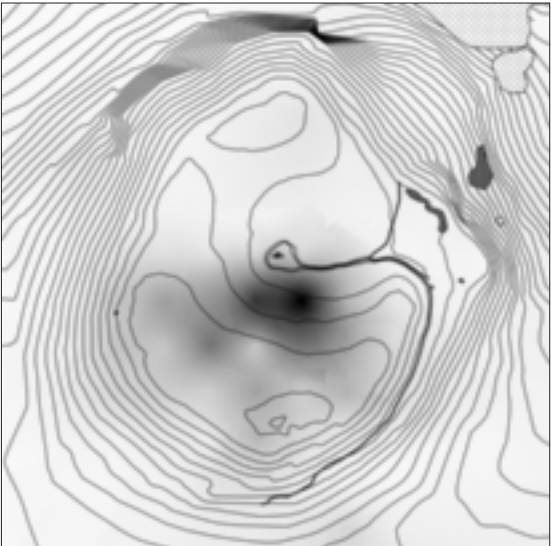


Fig. 0.10 Distribution of Late Islamic pottery sherds between 0 (white) and 15 (black) per 400 m² (Source: BAI/GPIA).

The description of the excavated architectural features is divided into three chapters corresponding to the Strata 5 to 3. These chapters are subdivided in Area I, II and III. The characterization of the individual strata in the present volume follows the scheme used already in Vol. 3 and Vol. 4 of the Tall Zirā'a final publication series:

1) A short comprehensive introduction with a GIS map of the tall and a map of the area including context numbers and complex label. The complexes are labeled by capitals (A, B, C etc.) from north to

south and from west to east. The individual contexts (walls, floors, pits etc.) are color coded.

- red wall
- dark red wall that has already been used in the previous stratum
- dark red number in brackets collapsed wall
- green pit
- brown soil accumulation/debris
- blue tabun/fire place
- orange floor.



Fig. 0.11 Contour map of Tall Zirā'a with possible indications of walls carried out with a geomagnetical survey combined with the architectural features of Stratum 3 (Source: BAI/GPIA; K. Rassmann – S. Reiter).

2) Short description of each complex with its location in the area and the grid system.

3) Description of each room identified by numbers (A 1, A 2 etc.), again from north to south and from west to east. A room constitutes an enclosed area and can be either an interior space or a courtyard.

a) The description of the rooms refers to their boundaries and their architectural features. Unless otherwise stated in the text, the term 'wall' refers to the foundation of a wall. This generally consisted of several layers of limestone. The overlying brickwork was usually built from mud bricks of which hardly any have survived. Finds from walls give always a *terminus ad quem* for the construction of a wall since the objects stem from earlier levels. Sometimes, however, younger material penetrated into the remaining wall foundation, because pits were dug and stone material was looted.

b) After the description of the rooms, installations like ovens, silos etc. are described. The term 'context' denotes a coherent area (*i.e.*, a find context within a square, usually a wall, installation, oven, soil, or floor). In some cas-

es, a find was assigned a context number, but this documentation practice was common only in the early excavation seasons. All maps and pictures of complexes and contexts are oriented to the north.

c) The next step describes the fill layers. These can be either fill between two floor levels, collapse debris from the roofs or walls, a floor, paving, or an area that was intentionally leveled when a new building was to be constructed. Since they can only occasionally be clearly distinguished, 'fill layer' is chosen as the generic term and is further specified in the text when possible. The fill layers overlying a stratum's floors are also included because the finds they contain belong to that stratum.

d) The description includes also the listing of selected and relevant finds. Finds are labeled with a six-digit number, the prefix 'TZ', and a three-digit suffix (*e.g.*, TZ 001234-001). All finds are stratigraphically recorded in an appendix (*Tab. 0.1*). Finds are described in the context of the stratum where they were discovered, even if they may be dated to an earlier or later period.

These appendices are published online on the home page of the final Tall Zirā'a publication.

4) At the end of each complex description there is a short table listing all contexts belonging to this complex (*Tab. 0.2*). This is a condensed version of the detailed table in the appendices, indicating only whether there are finds in a particular context. Finds are categorized into artefacts, which are objects worked or made by humans, and ecofacts, such as organic material, components of the natural environment, *e.g.*, unworked animal bones. Artefacts are divided into ceramics and small finds.

The pottery from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine strata has been profoundly dealt with by F. Kenkel in her dissertation, which has been published online in German⁶. A summary of her results as well as a catalogue has been published by F. Kenkel in English in the Tall Zirā'a final reports Vol. 6⁷. The metal and glass artefacts of the Hellenistic to the Islamic periods were treated by S. Hoss and also included in Vol. 6 of the final reports⁸. The pottery, metal and glass finds were typologically evaluat-

6 Kenkel 2012.

7 Kenkel 2020.

8 Hoss 2020a; Hoss 2020b.

Befund	Quadrant	Komplex	Beschreibung			Bemerkung			Interpretation		
5	AM 118	D 4	Trockenmauer aus Feldsteinen und Spolien			Stratum 05 auch 04 a.b.c.03 a.b			Mauer		
	Material	Fundnr.	Ansprache	Anzahl	Warengruppe	Bemerkung	Datierung	Dekor	Typologie	Typ	---
	Keramik	20621	Deckel	1	WM C Buff		MB SB EZ			Bauchscherbe	
			Flasche	1	WM C Buff		MB SB EZ			Henkel mit Randlippe	
			Flasche/ Krug	1	WM C Buff		MB SB EZ			Henkel	
			Kochtopf	1	CP 5		MB	Relief- dekor	Kt MB 1b	Bauchscherbe	
			Kochtopf	1	CP 5		MB			Randlippe	
			Krug	1	HM R2B		FB			Boden	
			Krug	1	WM C Buff		MB SB EZ			Bauchscherbe mit Henkel- ansatz	
			Krug	1	WM C Buff		MB			Randlippe	
			Krug	2	WM C R2B		MB SB EZ			Bauchscherbe mit Henkel- ansatz	
			Schale	1	WM C Buff		MB SB EZ			Randlippe	
			Schale	1	WM C R2B		MB			Randlippe	
8	AL 117	D 5/6	Trockenmauer aus Feldsteinen			Stratum 05 auch 04 a.b.c.03 a.b			Mauer		

Tab. 0.1 Example of table with detailed registration of contexts and finds (Source: BAI/GPIA).

Context	Square	Description/Interpretation	Complex	Artefacts		Ecofacts
				Pottery	Others	
3271	AR 120	loose sediment with cobbles	A 2	✓	✓	–
3280	AR 120	sandy, loose sediment	A 2	✓	✓	✓
3294	AR 120	remains of clay wall and stone foundation of tabun	A 2	✓	–	✓
3307	AR 120	debris	A 2	–	–	–

Tab. 0.2 Example of context table (Source: BAI/GPIA).

ed independently of their stratigraphic context. In the present volume, the defined typological groups were analyzed with regard to context and distribution in the different excavation areas.

The small finds made from bone, stone, ceramic, etc. from Strata 5 to 3 are catalogued in the present volume according to their stratigraphic context.

The period from the middle of the second century AD to the beginning of the fourth century AD is a time of almost constant external threat in the Roman East. It is also characterized by the transformation from paganism to Christianity with profound social changes. The year AD 324 does not mark the end of this turmoil, but a crucial turning point in history.

Emperor Constantine I gained supremacy over the Roman Empire and began to introduce Christianity as the state religion.

After the almost complete destruction of the Early Roman occupation in the first half of the second century AD on Tall Zirā'a, the wall remains were leveled and new buildings were erected. This took place during the fourth century AD. It could not be determined whether the tall was unsettled for a certain period of time or whether the occupation immediately followed the destruction of the former large Roman-era farmstead. However, the appearance of the architecture and the social group that inhabited the tall at that time changed almost completely.

These developments can be recognized in the excavations in Areas I and II but in Area III it is different. A large vaulted ashlar cistern was probably dug into the older strata in Hellenistic or Roman times. It was used as such at least in the Byzantine and/or Early Islamic/Umayyad periods. However, whether it was originally constructed for this purpose has not yet been proven. It may also have served as a substructure for a large Hellenistic and/or Roman building, which has now disappeared⁹. This does not exclude the simultaneous use as a cistern as it is known at other sites. Additionally, some layers adjacent to the cistern were excavated in a trial trench, but due to the very limited excavation area they do not give a clear indication of the function.

The dates given for the Byzantine, Early Islamic and Umayyad periods are based on historical events and are recognized by almost all scholars working in the southern Levant. It is obvious that the occupation of a site and the archaeological findings did not exactly follow these historical dates. In most cases, the transition from one period to the next is fluid and cannot be immediately recognized from the cultural material such as pottery and glass sherds, metal objects, etc. However, there are changes in architecture and household items that indicate a social change. This is true for both the beginning and the end of the Byzantine period at Tall Zirā'a.

Late Roman period c. 150–324 AD

Byzantine period 324–636 AD

Early Islamic – Umayyad period 636–750 AD.

9 Häser 2020, 407–412.

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St. Hoss, The Hellenistic to Islamic Metal Finds, in: D. Vieweger – J. Häser (eds.), Tall Zirā‘a – The Gadara Region Project (2001–2011) Final Report 6 (Gütersloh 2020) 393–431 and online https://www.tallziraa.de/data-file-bai/docs/final_publication/Tall_Ziraa__Volume_VI__complete.pdf (10.12.2022)

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1. THE LATE ROMAN AND EARLY BYZANTINE PERIODS

by J. Häser

1.1. The Late Roman and Early Byzantine Periods in Jordan

The period from the end of the third century to the middle of the seventh century was referred to as 'Late Roman,' 'Late Antiquity' and 'Byzantine'. Scholars who studied this period in Jordan largely agreed to use the term 'Byzantine' to refer to the period between the founding of Constantinople as the new imperial capital in AD 324 and the fall of the Roman Empire at the Battle of Yarmūk in AD 636¹. This period is again roughly divided into an early phase comprising the late third and fourth centuries and a later phase comprising the sixth and early seventh centuries. It is clear that these are only historical cornerstones in a fluid transmission from the Roman to the Byzantine Empire, which are not always visible in the archaeological records.

During the first half of the second century AD, the Roman Empire was prospering which can be observed in large building projects of theaters, amphitheaters, public baths and nymphaea. This development can also be recognized in the former Decapolis cities in Trans- and Cisjordan like Gadara, Abila, Gerasa, Hippos, and Scythopolis. In the course of this development, the cities got a Romanized character, although they were inhabited by a mixed population consisting of local Semitic people, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, and Jews². Not only the cities benefitted of the infrastructure measures but also the chora due to the enhancement of the road and the water management systems (*Fig. 1.1*).

At the end of the second century and the beginning of the third century, the situation changed due to campaigns against the Parthian Empire (AD 195–199), the kingdom of Palmyra and the Sassanian Empire (AD 242 Gordian III against Šapur I). It is marked by the suspension of the mintage (AD 239 last minting under Gordian III) as well as by the fortification of the cities in southern Syria and northern Transjordan³. If these fortifications were intended to restrain the attempts of conquering the eastern parts of the Roman Empire by the local Arab tribes, the Sassanians or the kingdom of Palmyra is still under discussion⁴. Under the Roman emperor Philip the Arab (reign AD 244–249), Bostra received the sta-

tus of a metropolis. The Palmyrenean queen Zenobia succeeded over the Roman army in 267 and got the control over the provinces of Syria and Arabia. However, already in AD 272, the Roman emperor Aurelian (reign AD 270–275) defeated the Palmyrenean army and deported Zenobia to Rome.

In AD 284, Diocletian (reign 284–305) became Roman emperor (*Fig. 1.2*). He tried to solve the ongoing border conflicts and the difficult economic situation with various measures. He established a tetrarchy and divided the Empire in four administrative areas. He himself reigned over the eastern province (Oriens) and resided in Nicomedia (today Izmit in Turkey). Galerius got the province Illyricum, Maximian reigned over Italy, Raetia, Spain and Africa, and Constantine was responsible for Gallia and Britannia. Due to the changed structure of domination and the shift of the imperial residences to new places, the city of Rome lost its dominance⁵. Diocletian reorganized also the eastern provinces by dividing them in four imperial prefectures, twelve dioceses and about 100 small provinces. The area under study was part of the prefecture Oriens with its capital in Antioch at the Orontes (modern Antakya) and the province Syria Palaestina administered by a legate in Caesarea maritima. The separation of civil and military governance which was already set up by Galienus (reign AD 253/260–268) was continued by Diocletian⁶.

In order to protect the eastern provinces against the invasion of the Sassanians on the one hand and the Arab tribes on the other hand, Diocletian installed legionary fortresses at Laḡḡūn (Legio IV Martia) und Uḡruḡ (Legio VI Ferrata) in Transjordan and deployed the Legio X Fretensis from Jerusalem

1 Watson 2008, 443.

2 Millar 1998; Lichtenberger 2003.

3 Weber 2002, 79.

4 Cf. Parker 2000; Freeman 2008 with literature.

5 Demandt 2008, 48 f.

6 Demandt 2008, 245.



Fig. 1.1 Towns, fortresses, legion camps and road systems in Cis- and Transjordan during the Late Roman period (Source: Augé 2013, Fig. III.14).

to Aila (‘Aqaba). Moreover, he had renovated the so-called *Limes Arabicus*. He had also repaired the road system and installed the new *Strata Diocletiana*. The protection of the eastern border caused an increase in the settlement density in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire⁷.

In the course of a financial reform in the year AD 294, Diocletian abrogated the provincial mintage and only an imperial coinage became valid. The *follis* was introduced as a new copper coin. The currency reform was the basis for the renewal of the monetary economy⁸. The fiscal system underwent also a reform but the introduction of a maximal rate for goods and services was probably of minor success.

Not only the foreign threat but also the improvement of Christianity became a problem for the Roman Empire. In the year AD 303, Diocletian issued therefore the first of four edicts which should Christians lead back to the old faith⁹. These edicts resulted in the closing or demolition of churches and eradication of Christian literature, as well as

7 Parker 1992, 324; de Vries (ed.) 1998.

8 Demandt 2008, 55–57.

9 Demandt 2008, 57; Hauschild 2000, 139 f. A new view on the persecution of Christians between 284 and 312 gives Shin 2018.



Fig. 1.2 Coin minted c. AD 270 found on Tall Zirā'a, a obverse, b reverse, TZ 110312-001 (Source: BAI/GPIA).



Fig. 1.3 Coin minted AD 328/329 found on Tall Zirā'a, a obverse, b reverse, TZ 111606-001 (Source: BAI/GPIA).

the martyrdom of Christians¹⁰. From this evolved several cults of martyrs which were also celebrated in Transjordan¹¹.

After Diocletian's abdication in 305, a new tetrarchy was installed but there were continuous struggles between the regents Maxentius, Maximinus Daia, Galerius, Licinius and Constantine¹². Between AD 305 and 311, Christians were increasingly persecuted under Maximinus Daia in the eastern provinces. Initially, this came to an end by the Edict of Milano released by Galerius in AD 311 and by Constantine and Licinius in AD 313¹³.

In AD 312, the army of Constantine defeated the army of Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge close to Rome what resulted in the takeover of the reign over the western part of the Roman Empire by Constantine. During the years from AD 313 to 324, Constantine reigned as emperor in the west and Licinius in the east. Since Constantine invaded in the eastern provinces of the empire, a new civil war arose. In AD 324, Constantine's troops defeated the army led by Licinius close to Adrianopolis (today Edirne in Turkey) and Chrysopolis (today the district Üsküdar in Istanbul) and Constantine raised to the solely Augustus of the Roman Empire (*Fig. 1.3*).

However, the battle at the Milvian Bridge not only changed the political primacy, it also led to a new acceptance of the Christian faith by the Roman emperor. Lactantius and Eusebius reported that Constantine is said to have had a vision before the battle against Maxentius, in which, according to Lactantius, the Christogram and, according to Eusebius, the cross with the inscription 'τοῦτῳ νικά' 'hereby I conquer' should have appeared¹⁴. In response to this vision, Constantine is said to have ordered his soldiers, who were all pagan, to paint the Christogram on their shields. With the help of the Christian God, Constantine is said to have won this battle in the eyes of his contemporaries and also in his own opinion.

Constantine did not initially convert to the Christian faith, but in the following years the emperor and the church came closer. What reasons—personal, religious or political—motivated Constantine to promote Christianity cannot be said with certainty¹⁵. However, it is clear that Constantine was concerned with the unity of the Church. He issued an edict in AD 324, which indicated a turn towards support for the Christian church and a restrictive tolerance towards paganism and Judaism.

The internal church conflicts—in particular the Trinitarian dispute (Arian controversy)¹⁶—formed an increasing political problem, so that Constantine felt compelled to intervene himself, because the church could only exercise its state-supporting function through its unity. Thus, Constantine convened a council which was held in AD 325 at his palace in Nicaea (now Izmir near Istanbul) and under his leadership. At Constantine's urging, a formula for the relationship between God the Father and Christ was agreed upon. They were now referred to as 'consubstantial'. Arius and two Libyan bishops who insisted on their opinion and

10 Gemeinhardt – Leemans 2012, 1–14.

11 Weber 2002, 80.

12 Demandt 2008, 66–70.

13 Hauschild 2000, 140 f.

14 Demandt 2008, 40; Hauschild 2000, 143 f.

15 Hauschild 2000, 142–149.

16 Hauschild 2000, 151 f. Arius (c. AD 260–327) was an early Christian theologian who, based on the two-natures doctrine of Origines (Hauschild 2000, 166 f.), saw Jesus as created and therefore not divine, not consubstantial with God. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, Arianism was condemned as heretical. In addition to Arianism, non-Arian Origenic doctrines of the Trinity developed, which also rejected the confession of Nicaea. That is why today one no longer speaks of the Arian dispute, but of the Trinitarian dispute.