



# PREFACE

by Dieter Vieweger/Jutta Häser



Fig. 0.1 Tall Zirā'a. View from west to east. Photograph taken in 2011 (Source: APAAMEE, David Kennedy).

When the German engineer G. Schumacher explored Transjordan in 1885, Tall Zirā'a was among his discoveries<sup>1</sup>. He was the first European since the time of the Crusaders to enter the region. However, after thousands of years of prosperity, the valley had changed dramatically during the Ottoman period. The bedouins told Schumacher that the wādī had declined to become a “popular shelter for all sorts of refugees and criminal scum”.

Except for a few sugar mills, operated by water power, there were only a few small hamlets. A water flow of about 0.75 m<sup>3</sup> 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”<sup>2</sup>.

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

“singularly imposing and completely isolated hill of Tall Zera‘ah (...)”<sup>3</sup>

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

“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 tall<sup>4</sup> had already attracted attention due to its location and imposing appearance, no intensive research was conducted at this time, because of the hill's location close to the border of Israel in the west (c. 7 km) and Syria in the north (c. 14 km). During the foundation

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

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’.

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 by the Jordanians as 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 where Jordan, Syria and Israel meet, became the north-westernmost corner of the Hashemite Kingdom, and there was not even a paved road to the tall.

Also the construction of the Wādī al-‘Arab Dam in 1978 did not make a significant difference to the *status quo*. The archaeologists who investigated the area within the scope of a rescue survey prior to the dam construction did not appreciate the archaeological potential of the tall, which majestically overlooked the future reservoir.

Another period of time passed until the Oslo Peace Agreement was ratified in 1993, but it was only after the peace treaty between Jordan and Israel, which King Hussein and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed on October 26, 1994, that the area again became accessible to the public.

D. Vieweger, director of the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal (BAI) and since 2005 also of the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (GPIA), travelled many times through the north-western part of Jordan between 1998 and 2000, exploring the area for a suitable tall site, which would serve as an authoritative chronological record for the region’s long and important cultural history. He found it in the Wādī al-‘Arab.

Tall Zirā’a is located in the middle of the Wādī al-‘Arab (Figs. 0.1 and 0.2), was continuously occupied for at least 5,000 years, and offers an unique insight into the way of life of the region’s people. Its outstanding archaeological significance results from the artesian spring in its centre, which created optimal settlement conditions over thousands of years. For this reason, Tall Zirā’a offers an unusual opportunity to compile a comparative stratigraphy for northern Jordan from the Early Bronze Age to the Islamic period, while also making it possible to trace cultural developments in urban life, handicrafts and the history of religion over long periods. Moreover, here it is possible to study abundant remains from the Biblical periods in a broad cultural and historical context.

As mentioned above, a major trade route passed through the valley, connecting Egypt in the south with the Syrian-Mesopotamian region in the north (Fig. 1.22). The Wādī al-‘Arab also connects the Jordan Valley to the Mediterranean coast via the northern Jordan ford at Ġisr el-Maġāmi‘ (Gešer), as well as the plains of Jezreel and Tall al-Ḥiṣn (Beth Shean) to 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 ‘Ammān in the south. Because the Yarmuk Valley to the north and the Wādī Ziqlāb in the south are too steep and narrow to serve as major transport routes, the Wādī al-‘Arab played a prominent geopolitical role. Not surprisingly, economic success and the hard work of residents across the millennia have left a profusion 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 grave sites.

Tall Zirā’a offered good living conditions for a settlement. The artesian spring offered an unfailing water supply, and the hill provided security. The tall rises impressively (depending on the direction) between 22–45 m above ground. As the only prominent natural elevation in the lower Wādī al-‘Arab, Tall Zirā’a dominates the valley. From here one cannot only see Gadara, but also easily monitor the narrow entrance of the wādī to the west.

The adjacent fertile wādī ensured adequate nourishment, with potentially arable land in the western and central valley, terraced slopes and spurs suited for rainfed agriculture in the east, as well as the wādī slopes that are suitable for grazing small livestock, forming a broad semicircle from the east and south to the west. As a result of his observations, D. Vieweger decided to implement preliminary investigations here from 1998 to 2000.

The ‘Gadara Region Project’ was launched in 2001 by the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal (BAI), Germany. In the first season, the surface of Tall Zirā’a was explored<sup>5</sup>, the tall was accurately surveyed, and

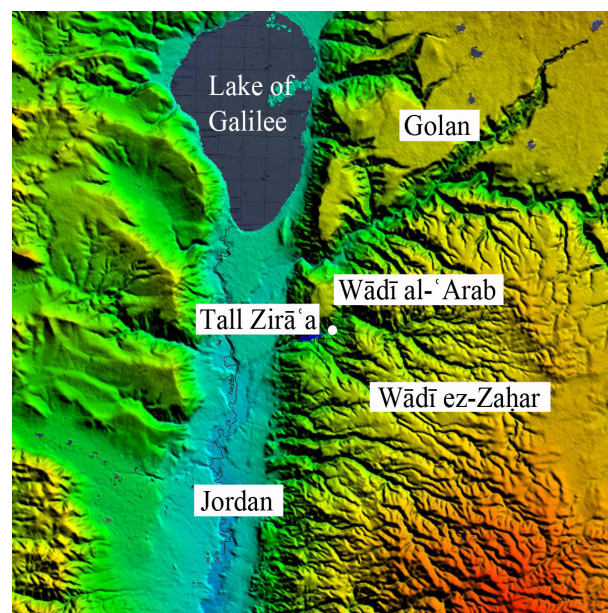


Fig. 0.2 Map showing the area around Tall Zirā’a (Source: BAI/GPIA).

5 See Vol. 1., Chap. 2. For this survey see also Vieweger et al. 2003, 191–216.



more than 22,000 pottery sherds and many other finds were systematically collected and analysed. The survey findings 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 was in 2003. The team was financed by the ‘Society of Friends of the BAI Wuppertal’ and travelled by Volkswagen bus from Wuppertal to Amman via Turkey and Syria, under the direction of D. Vieweger. An Ottoman period house inside the Gadara/Umm Qēs archaeological site was used both as living and working quarters; it was in a state of very poor repair at that time, but has been systematically restored during later seasons, providing modern bathroom and kitchen facilities. The results of the first season on Tall Zirā’a were so promising that the ‘Gadara Region Project’ was inaugurated, with a planned timeframe of between ten to twenty years.

In 2004, the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal (BAI) under the directorship of D. Vieweger, and the German Protestant 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 to a close partnership, which ensured ongoing archaeological and interdisciplinary collaboration for the remainder of the archaeological seasons. The German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Jerusalem (GPIA), run by D. Vieweger since 2005, also joined the work in 2006. The cooperation with the GPIA Amman was confirmed by the new Director of the Institute, F. Kenkel, from 2013 to 2016.

During the course of the subsequent 18 seasons, twenty five strata in three areas have been uncovered, and several scientific processes and archaeological experiments have been carried out; archaeological surface surveys were also completed for the area surrounding Tall Zirā’a, the Wādī al-‘Arab, and the Wādī az-Zaḥar.

The slopes of Wādī al-‘Arab from Tall Zirā’a upwards to the region of Šedūr and Dōqara, and the region around the Wādī al-‘Arab Dam were surveyed in 2009; large parts of this region had not been studied in detail before. In total 78 locations were documented, 30 of which were previously unknown. The survey was continued until 2012. All in all 327 sites were registered which cover an area from Tall Zirā’a to North Šūna.

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)

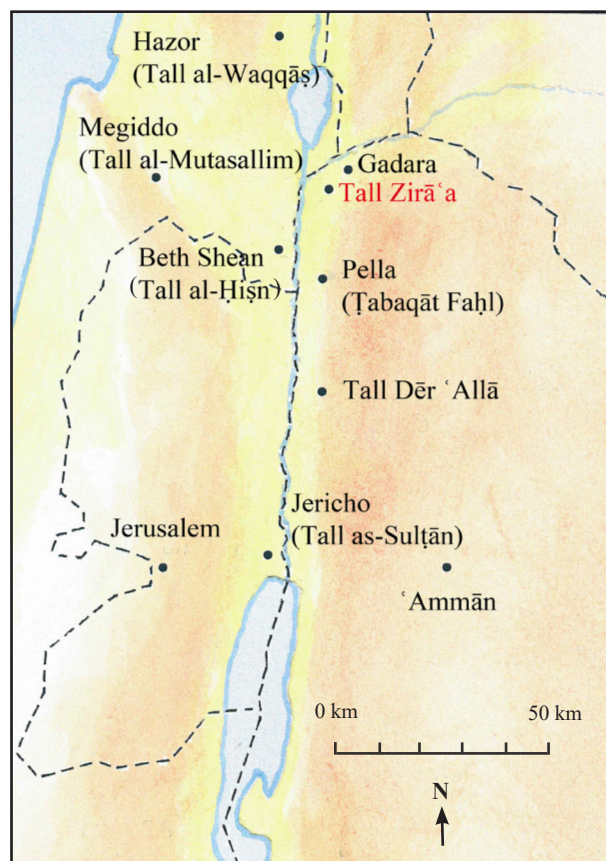


Fig. 0.3 Tall Zirā’a and its geographic location (Source: BAI/GPIA).

and restored by M. Blana; they were returned to the ‘Department of Antiquities of Jordan’ (DoA) over several stages, with the final delivering to Jordan in the spring of 2015. Furthermore, more than 50 objects discovered during the project are on display in the Jordan Museum in Amman.

Excavation results have been presented as articles in several journals, together with separate publications and dissertations<sup>6</sup>. In addition, the Tall Zirā’a website provides information about current activities on and around the tall in German and English<sup>7</sup>.

After 18 intensive seasons of work researching the tall and its environment, it was decided to interrupt excavation and survey activities in order to publish a complete record of the results thus far. To this end, it was decided that from 2012 until 2017 work would be comprised of study seasons in the excavation house at Umm Qēs, to process data and results gathered to date (for the excavations carried out see the film in *App. 0.1*).

6 See e.g. Vieweger et al. 2002a, 12–14; Vieweger et al. 2002b, 157–177; Vieweger et al. 2003, 191–216; Vieweger et al. 2016, 431–441; Vieweger 2003a, 10; Vieweger 2003b, 459–461; Vieweger 2007, 497–502; Vieweger 2010, 755–768; Vieweger 2013, 231–242; Häser – Vieweger 2005, 135–146; Häser – Vieweger 2007, 526–530; Häser – Vieweger 2012a, 693–696; Häser – Vieweger 2012b, 251–268; Häser – Vieweger 2014, 640; Häser – Vieweger 2015, 20–23; Vieweger – Häser 2005, 1–30; Vieweger – Häser

2007a, 1–27; Vieweger – Häser 2007b, 147–167; Vieweger – Häser 2009, 1–36; Vieweger – Häser 2010, 1–28; Kenkel 2012; Kenkel 2013a, 1–24; Kenkel 2013b, 301–308; Kenkel 2016, 765–781; Kenkel – Vieweger 2014, 12; Schwermer 2014; Groppe 2013; Lehmann – Schulze 2015, 28–30; Schulze et al. 2014, 13; Leiverkus – Soennecken 2016, 509–518; Soennecken – Leiverkus 2014, 14.

7 For an overview of the publications see [www.tallziraa.de](http://www.tallziraa.de) (9.6.2016).

A total of nine volumes are planned on the following topics:

- Volume 1: Introduction.  
Aims of the ‘Gadara Region Project’; Tall Zirā’a and the Wādī al-‘Arab; Research History of Tall Zirā’a; the 2001 Tall Zirā’a Survey; Scientific Methods; Framework of Archaeological Work on Tall Zirā’a.
- Volume 2: Early and Middle Bronze Age (Strata 25–17)
- Volume 3: Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I (Strata 16–13)
- Volume 4: Iron Age IIA/B and IIC (Strata 12–10)
- Volume 5: From Persian to Umayyad Period (Strata 10–3). Stratigraphy
- Volume 6: From Persian to Umayyad Period (Strata 10–3). Finds
- Volume 7: From Abbasid to Ottoman Period (Strata 2–1)
- Volume 8: Wādī al-‘Arab Survey
- Volume 9: Archaeometry

All nine volumes will be published online in English, in order to make the results free of charge and accessible to a wide audience. In addition to this, publishing online enables the 3D-images and reconstructions, together with digital films, to be included with the material, which can thus be integrated and used interactively. Furthermore, an online publication will enable the attachment of original data from the excavations, such as plans and database extracts, which would be otherwise impossible. These additional documents will be published in German and will provide professional researchers with the ability to access the primary data itself, not only as they are interpreted.

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General remarks regarding systems and processes used within the publications follow herewith:

- The Israel or Palestine Grid 1923 is the basis for the geographical grid system used for the project. It was first used in autumn 2001 for 5 m x 5 m squares on Tall Zirā’a, and was consequently applied for excavation and survey work alike (see *Vol 1., Chap. 4.1.*).
- Citation styles are based on the directives provided by the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), but have been adapted to the conventions of English language publications.
- In order to minimise misunderstanding, the problem of transliterating Arabic and Hebrew words into English spelling using Latin letters for local sites and family names is dealt with by using the transcription system of the ‘Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft’, based on the directives of TAVO (see the *Tübinger Bibelatlas*).
- For detailed explanations of the chronology of the Southern Levant in the scope of the history of Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia, see Vieweger 2012, 459–507 (*Vol. 1., Chap. 4.3.*).
- In this report the name of the site is called *Tall Zirā’a*. Other transcriptions are e.g.: *Tell Zer’ah* (MEGA Jordan; Jadis; Kerestes et al. 1977/1978; Glueck 1951); *Tell Zer’a* (Reicke – Rost 1979); *Tell Zara’a/ Tell Zara’a* (Schumacher 1890 and Steuernagel 1926); *Tell Zira’a* (Hanbury-Tenison 1984).
- All dimensions in the catalogues as well as in the figure captions are given as cm, if not otherwise stated.
- Besides Figures, Plates and Tables also Appendices are presented in this volume showing films, 3D-models, Panorama and charts. They can be seen on the website [www.tallziraa.de](http://www.tallziraa.de) ([http://www.tallziraa.de/Final-publication/Appendix-Vol-1/1\\_473.html](http://www.tallziraa.de/Final-publication/Appendix-Vol-1/1_473.html)). See also the ‘List of Appendices’ this volume on page XXI.

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Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)

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- to the Protestant Academy Bad Boll for their untiring, collaborative thinking and contributions.

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- The Council for British Research in the Levant
- The Thomas Morus Academy, Bensberg
- The Protestant Academy Bad Boll
- The Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz

## *In memoriam*

Oberstudiendirektor Dr Heribert Steinmetz †  
(23.2.1952–18.10.2015)

Our team member Dr Heribert Steinmetz died suddenly during the publication of this volume. It is a great loss for all who knew him and worked with him.