

A HISTORY OF SYRIA IN ONE HUNDRED SITES

edited by

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Cover Illustration: View of the excavation at Hummal site
© The Syro-Swiss mission on the Palaeolithic of the El Kowm Area

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50. Tell Bazi (Aleppo)

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Tall Bazi was a major town in the Euphrates valley from the Early to the Late Bronze age (ca. 2500-1350 BC). The citadel was heavily fortified already around 2500 BC, and a large temple was erected in the MBA and LBA here. The 50 houses of the western lower town, still containing many remains of their inventory, offer an ideal example of a functioning settlement of that time. This temple and the lower town were destroyed violently around 1350 BC. The citadel was reused in Late Roman time only.

Tall Bazi is situated in north Syria in the district of Sirrin near the village Tell Banat. It is situated on the east side of the Euphrates valley, i.e. in the Jazira. Since 1999 the lower parts of the settlement have disappeared in the Tishrin lake. Bazi has been excavated in the framework of rescue excavations between 1993 and 2010 with the

help of dozens of people from Banat-village. We want to thank them for all their help and friendship over the years. Furthermore we thank the Directorate of Antiquities for the various permissions required and generous support. The work was made possible by the German Research Foundation DFG, the German Archaeological Institute DAI and the University of Munich.

The site consists of a large citadel and an extended lower town at its foot (Fig. 1). The citadel was fortified as a stronghold already in the middle of the 3rd millennium. It continued to be in use until 1350 BC. Then there was an occupation gap until the Late Roman period, when a sanctuary was erected on the citadel.

The lower town merges into the settlement of Banat, which has been investigated by another team (see Tall



FIG. 1 3D RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITADEL AND THE LOWER TOWN DURING THE LATE BRONZE AGE.

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FIG. 2 HUNDREDS OF SLING BULLETS COVER THE ENTRANCE OF THE FORTIFIED BUILDING ON TOP OF THE CITADEL, CA. 2400 BC.



FIG. 3 THE TEMPLE IN THE CENTRE OF THE CITADEL.

Banat). The settlement area of Tall Bazi and Tall Banat was protected on its east side by a massive town wall of the Early Bronze Age, and on the west side by the Euphrates. ‘Banat-Bazi’ was occupied from about 2600-2200 B.C., in the Early Bronze Age III and IV. It measured all together about 40ha and thus constituted one of the largest Early Bronze age sites in the area of the Upper Euphrates. Its ancient name in the 3rd millennium was probably ‘Armium’ or ‘Armanum’. This city was among the most important cities of Syria at the time when Ebla and Mari struggled for supremacy in the 24th century. Even the Akkadian king Naramsin claims the conquest of the citadel of Armanum as one of his proudest achievements.

During the Middle and Late Bronze Age (1800-1350 BC), the citadel housed a large temple, below which was the lower town, consisting of domestic dwellings and artisan workshops. With the help of geophysical surveys and large-scale excavations considerable parts of the city were revealed, but no palace or other official

building has been discovered, except the temple. Indeed the two cuneiform tablets discovered indicate that there existed no king in the Mittani period, but the society was governed by the elders of the city.

The Citadel

The citadel is situated on a 60m high natural hill and has been fortified with massive circular walls from stone blocks. These fortifications originate from the Early Bronze Age IV, ca. 2400-2300 BC. The hill had been separated from the natural mountain spur by an artificial, 40m wide ditch. A large gate building was erected at the ditch in order to protect the access to the citadel. This gate building was a compact, tower-like structure with a central chamber gate, flanked by massive 10m wide walls with triangular niches, which served for defensive purposes. The gate tower was violently destroyed in a considerable military event, which is attested by thousands of clay bullets and several flint arrowheads lying in the entrance area of the building (Fig. 2). After



FIG. 4 THE DENSE DOMESTIC QUARTERS OF THE 'WESTSTADT', CA. 1350 BC.

this destruction the building was restored and reused in the Akadian period, but it was again completely destroyed. More structures of the Early Bronze Age period were found in the centre, where several rooms of a large building were uncovered, possibly the palace of the royal family. A large cistern was cut into the northern edge of the hill. It served as a water reservoir for the citadel.

The centre of the citadel was covered by a large temple, measuring 38 x 16m. It was built in the Middle Bronze Age and continued to be in use until it was destroyed violently around 1350 BC. One of the rooms still contained hundreds of vessels and many animal bones, probably the remains of offerings and commensal events. The entrance to the temple had been protected by a pair of flanking stone lion figures (Fig. 3).

While the citadel housed mainly official buildings, i.e. a well-protected palace in the 3rd millennium, and a large temple in the 2nd, expanded settlement areas with houses were found in the lower town.

The lower town

The area north of the citadel had been covered by domestic quarters from the Early until the Late Bronze age continuously. When the town area became too small, a new city enlargement was built west of the citadel, the so-called 'Weststadt' (= western lower town). It consists of one level only and it existed for only about 100 years from ca. 1450-1350 BC. 50 houses from this lower town were excavated between 1993 and 1998 (Fig. 4). Most of these are quite similar, which points to a small stratified society: they have the same ground plan and are equipped with similar installations; the mobile inventory is mostly quite similar. The standard house was built on ground level and had one main room flanked by a row of 3 to 6 secondary rooms. The main room served for social



FIG. 5 A STEATITE STONE MOULD FOR PRODUCING JEWELLERY.

gathering, cooking and baking, eating and drinking. Also numerous handicraft activities took place there, e.g. textile production, stone-cutting, and metal working (Fig. 5). Commercial activities took also place in the houses, and the ancestors and the gods of the house were venerated at altars in every house.

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