

TELL BAZI

German mission
Direction: B. Einwag and A. Otto (DAI)

TELL BAZI - A RESCUE EXCAVATION OF THE GERMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE IN A METROPOLE OF THE LATE BRONZE AGE (CA. 14-12 CENTURIES BC)

Since 1993, the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus has participated in the international rescue excavations in the region of the future lake to be produced by the Tishreen Dam on the upper Euphrates with the excavation of Tell Bazi. In the fall of 1995, the fourth campaign had been concluded under the direction of Berthold Einwag and Adelheid Otto.

Tell Bazi consists of a fortified citadel that was founded on a spur of the Euphrates Plateau and a lower city that lies at the foot of the citadel (fig. 1). Both stem from the late Bronze Age (ca. 14-12 centuries BC) and belong to a series of contemporaneous settlements which form a regularly spaced chain along the Euphrates Valley. Many

of these settlements, such as Emar, Faqus, and al-Qitar, also possess fortified citadels. This is understandable through our knowledge of the historical situation of the late Bronze Age: inscriptions reveal that the rich Euphrates Valley was a centre of interest for the three empires of that time, the Mitanni, the Hittite, and the Egyptian. One focus of the excavations of Tell Bazi has been concentrated on the citadel. On its flanks, we have investigated the system of surrounding defensive walls, sloping roads, and gates. The walls were built of large stone blocks set on natural rock. They had a defensive function as well as serving as a terrace, which enabled small houses to be built.

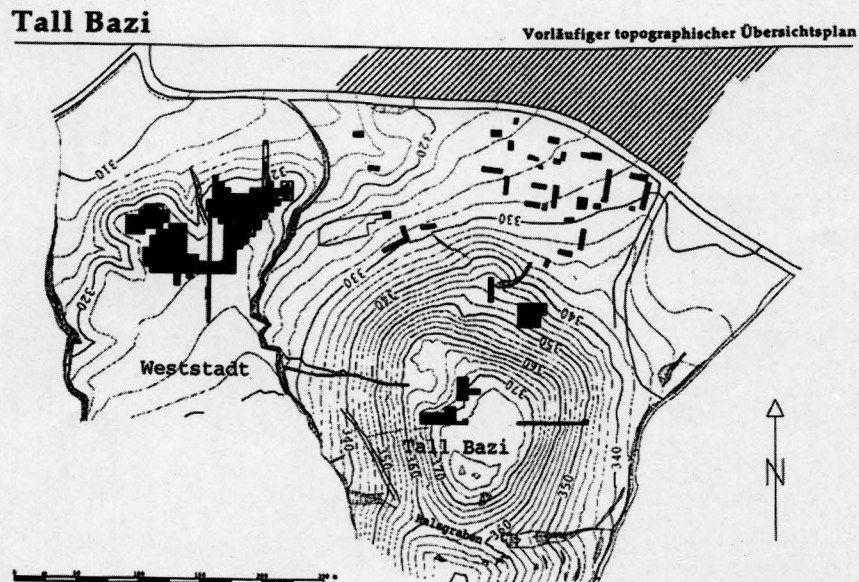


Fig. 1: Topographical plan with excavation areas.

A small horizontal excavation was started on the plateau of the citadel in order to clarify the character of the structures. It has been discovered that large public buildings stood on this spot; this has been ascertained through small finds such as the terracotta wall nails like those used in temple facing, and numerous models of sheep entrails (photo 1). Furthermore, we have found a large cistern cut in the rock which emphasizes the role of the citadel as a shelter in times of war. These ideal defensive conditions were re-used in the Roman period when the Romans established a castle on the small spot.

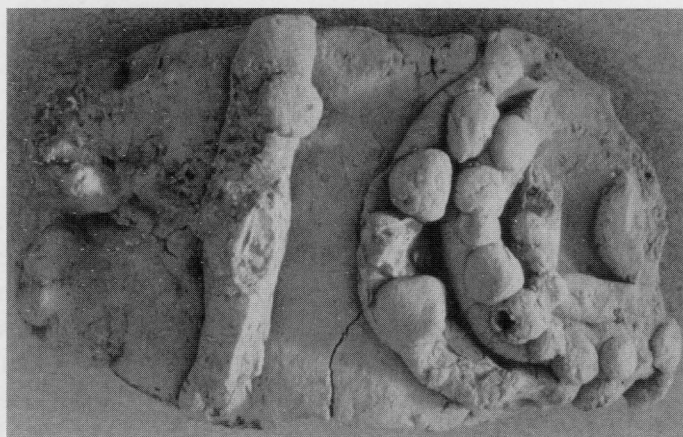


Photo 1: Unbaked model of the large intestine of a sheep that served as a predicative guide during ceremonial sacrifice.

The second focus of the excavation has been the large-scale horizontal excavation of the lower town which was founded on a gravel terrace only slightly elevated above the level of the valley, and thus the first to be submerged by the new lake. This city was planned and built in a short time, and was violently destroyed after a brief period of existence (ca. 100 years). Evidently, the enemy attacked the inhabitants so unexpectedly that they could only rescue their lives and were forced to leave behind all of their possessions. This created an ideal basis from which to acquire information about the planning and structure of a late Bronze Age city. On the basis of in situ artifact inventories, we could learn about the ideal form of houses and gain a sense of the function and social organization of the neighbourhoods.

The now excavated area of over 5000 sq. meters consists of numerous living quarters which are arranged around wide streets. The closely packed houses were sometimes separated by narrow alleys which were evidently accessible only to the inhabitants of the adjoining houses as indicated by the discovery of door-sockets to these alleyways. In the north-eastern part of the settlement (photo 2) lie two regular neighbourhoods opposite each other. This area, in light of many examples, illustrates the ideal form of house: a longitudinal main room, equipped with an oven and a hearth, flanked on one side by many small secondary rooms used for storage. The main room functioned as the residence in which ritual



Photo 2: Aerial photograph of the northern section of the lower city.

practices also occurred as evidenced by certain small finds such as a kernos (photo 3). Additionally, the main room seems to have been used as a workshop also. In a house in the north-west section in which metals were evidently worked, we found, in addition to large molds for bronze tools, a small mold of steatite that could produce jewellery of precious metal, presumably gold. Additional evidence for the wealth of the inhabitants of the lower city, who

were evidently artisans and traders, are the rare imported pieces such as the cosmetic cup of light-green frit (photo 4).

Who and what was the reason for the rapid abandonment of this flourishing settlement in which even a 30 cm long dagger was left behind (photo 5) is one of many questions which will be hopefully answered in the coming campaigns.



Photo 3: Fragment of kernos with an attached miniature pot and a spout in the form of a ram's head.



Photo 4: Small cosmetic pot of light-green frit.



Photo 5: Bronze dagger ("Griffleistendolch") (length 30 cm).