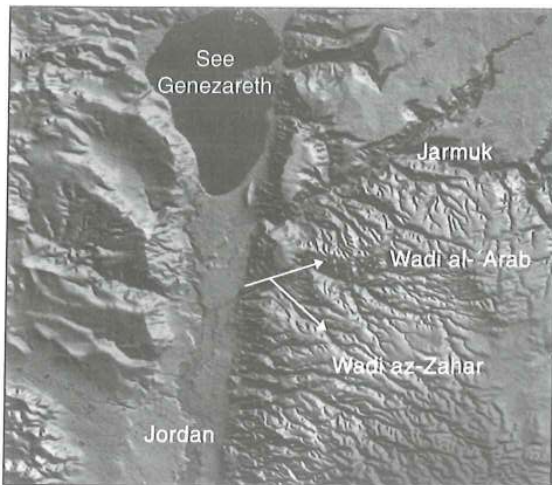


**Tall Zar‘ā**

Tall Zar‘ā is located in north-west Jordan close to the border with west bank, 10km south-southeast of the Sea of Galilee and 4.5km south-west of the ancient Decapolis city of Gadara. Due to its strategic position and the natural conditions, the site was almost continuously inhabited from the Early Bronze Age to the 19th century AD (FIG. 1).

Tall Zar‘ā is situated in the Wādī al-‘Arab in north-west Jordan located at a key point, both topographically and geopolitically, lying as it does at the point of transition between Palestine and the Syrian-Mesopotamian as well as the Egyptian cultural spheres, and politically and culturally influenced by both. The settlement site was also well chosen on a prominent hill on a major trade route through the Wādī al-‘Arab linking Egypt with Damascus and Mesopotamia. Finds of imported goods, e.g. pottery from Syria, Mycenae and Cyprus, bitumen from the Dead Sea, copper ore, faience and raw glass, bear witness to the inhabitants’ contacts with neighbouring regions.

Through the centuries, a perennial artesian spring provided water to the tall and made habitation possible on a continuous basis. Its first inhabitants settled the 20 m-high, 5.6 ha-broad calc-sinter hill in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. From then on, the hill was settled virtually continuously until the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. As a result,



1. Location of Tall Zar‘ā (BAI/DEI).

over the 5000 years of settlement more than 16 m of cultural layers accumulated. Tall Zar‘ā thus offers archaeologists the unique opportunity to develop a comparative stratigraphy for northern Jordan from the Early Bronze Age to the modern period.

The first scholarly mention of Tall Zar‘ā dates to 1885 by G. Schumacher; its systematic exploration started with a survey in August 2001 and was followed in 2003 by the first excavation campaign, both conducted by the Biblical Archaeological Institute Wuppertal and directed by Prof. Vieweger. Since 2004, this project has continued with two campaigns per year as a co-operative project of the Biblical-Archaeological Institute Wuppertal and the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology in Amman (and also in Jerusalem, since 2006), directed by Prof. D. Vieweger, Dr. J. Häser and, since 2013, Dr. F. Kenkel. Excavations ceased in 2012. Since then we have been preparing our final report that will appear in multiple volumes. We hope to publish the first volume [of nine projected] late this year.

Three areas were excavated. Area I was excavated to the earliest habitation layers of the site in the Early Bronze Age. Area II and III were excavated to the Hellenistic stratum and to the Byzantine stratum respectively. Therefore, the strata relevant for this lecture are located in Area I. This is situated in the north-west part of the tall and measures 1750m<sup>2</sup> (FIG. 2).

**The Late Bronze Age Strata (16<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> Century BC)**

During the Late Bronze Age, Tall Zar‘ā was the center of a city-state as we can infer from the architecture and the finds. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for its name. In 2005, Jan Dijkstra assumed that Tall Zar‘ā might be identified with the city “Qaduru in the land Hanma“ (qa-dú-rù m p3 t3 n ha-an-má) mentioned in an inscription on the northern wall of the hypostyle of the Amun-Re-Tempel in Karnak. Here, Sethos I described his first campaign against Retenu and the



2. Overview on Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).

victory over several cities on both sides of the Jordan River in 1293 BC. In Hellenistic times, the name “Qaduru” would have been transferred from Tall Zar'ā to the new city on the nearby plateau, Gadara. There is no proof for this thesis, but it is obvious that Tall Zar'ā was part of the network of the Late Bronze Age city-states in the Southern Levant. Besides some Egyptian finds, there are no signs that Egyptian culture had a vital influence. Instead, the inhabitants of Tall Zar'ā were strongly oriented to the north and west in respect to culture and economy. The city was destroyed around 1200BC, probably by an earthquake or another natural disaster: there are no signs for a military intervention causing the destruction.

The Late Bronze Age habitation can be divided in three occupational strata (16 to 14). The lowest stratum (stratum 16) of this period is represented by several courtyard-houses. We have only few architectural remains of this city because of a large landslide destroying almost all the area excavated in Area I around 1400 BC – therefore the evidence on layer 16 is meager. With great effort from the city's inhabitants, the whole area was filled with at least ten layers of stone and soil to create stable ground for further building activities (stratum 15).

One of the most significant and remarkable structures from this period is a massive casemate wall in the northwest part of Area I (stratum 14; FIG. 3). This building type is clearly influenced by Hittite/Syrian architecture. In the

Southern Levant, it will not be common for settlement fortifications until the Iron Age. East of the casemate wall, large residential courtyard-houses were found typical for Bronze Age architecture in the Southern Levant.

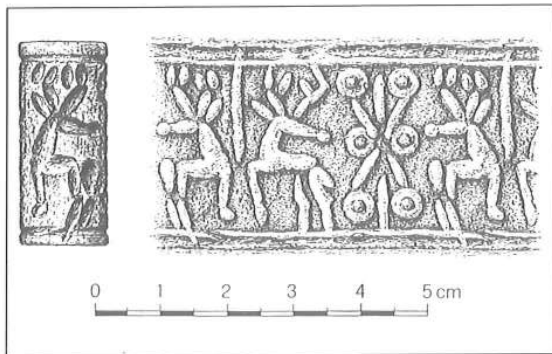
Another building on Tall Zar'ā modelled on Syrian types is the temple *in antes* (Werner 1994). It is a large room with a base for a pillar or a column located almost in the centre. In front of the room two antes extended into a large paved courtyard. To the north, a staircase was attached, and to the east the courtyard was delimited by four small rooms (FIG. 4).

The finds excavated in the cella of the temple are very interesting. 24 of 38 cylinder seals of the so-called Common Style of the Mitanni glyptic were found there (FIG. 5). The remaining cylinder seals found in later occupation levels were probably dispersed due to later building activities but originally belonged originally to the offerings inside the cella as well. The seals in the cella were accompanied by a scarab bearing the cartouche of Amenophis III, a silver pendant with the depiction of a goddess and several other valued finds. Offering of cylinder seals and other precious finds in a temple was a well known rite as can be seen in the temple at Alalakh, Ugarit, Tall al-Qudah, Bisan, Dayr 'Allā, Pella, and 'Ammān at the same period (Häser *et al.* 2016).

In the south of Area I, the casemate wall ended in a large, inward-facing tower divided in two parts. It contained a temple of the long-room type with a small adytum, a main room and a courtyard with an elaborate altar. The peculiar character of this building calls to mind the Bronze Age gate sanctuaries found elsewhere. A large stone, cut flat on the bottom and with a symmetrical peak towards the top, which lay toppled beside the column bases, may be a cultic stone due to its similarity to cult stones found in the Southern Levant.

In addition to the finds that compare to northern and western material, some of which were imports from Egypt and the Eastern Mediter-





5. Cylinder seal of the 'Common Style' of the Mitanni Glyptik from Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).

ranean, the inhabitants of Tall Zar'ā produced some objects combining cultural features in a unique way. The best example from the Late Bronze Age material is a pot painted with a scene depicting a man sitting on a small chair and playing the lyre. The man is surrounded by a lion, a bull, snakes and some other animals. The pot and the red-black painting are common in the Southern Levant, but the depiction is obviously unique (FIG. 6).

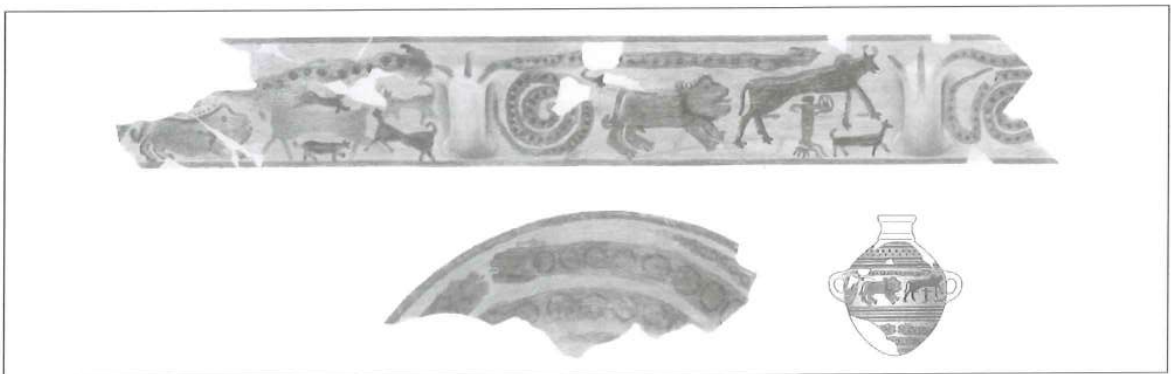
The importance of this Bronze Age city is attested to by its massive architecture and the exceptional finds found here, including a significant percentage of imported pottery from Cyprus and Greece (5%). Taken together, these findings reflect wealth and extensive trade connections. It seems very likely we are dealing with a prominent city or capital of a Levantine city-state. It was destroyed around 1300 BC; not by an act of war, but by natural causes, most probably due to earthquakes, which are common in this area.

### The Iron Age I Stratum (12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Century BC)

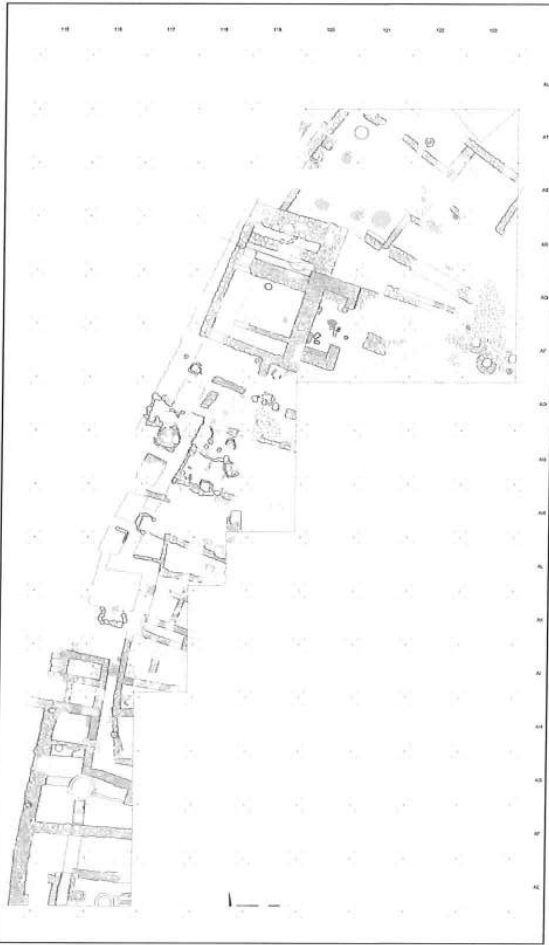
The Iron Age I settlement (12<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century BC) reveals a significant cultural break in comparison to its Late Bronze Age features. Rather than a fortified urban complex, the evidence indicates a village without a surrounding wall that was inhabited by tillers and stock farmers. It is striking that its early Iron Age inhabitants did not create a specific settlement pattern (in the northern excavated area) but reused ruins of the Bronze Age city (FIG. 7).

They added fixtures to the foundations of the Late Bronze Age city wall that were still in place (e.g. large silos for grain, various agricultural installations, stables and simple huts). This indicates that the inhabitants could still see the city's previous structure, which is consistent with a rapid repopulation – maybe even by the same people – as seen by the continuity of crafts and artisanship.

Other areas of the excavation present an altogether different picture: In the southern part of the areal, an extraordinarily large kiln made of clay was found, along with a large, well-built house whose walls used Late Bronze Age ruins for additional fortification. The northern part of the house was built as a court-house, showing a connection between Iron Age and Bronze Age building techniques. It had a large court, long and narrow rooms in the north and south, as well as a central room – fitting the typical layout for so-called "four-room houses" – with a glass and faience workshop.



6. Painted jar from stratum 14 on Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).



7. Plan of Iron Age I stratum 13 Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI, M. Voigt-Werling).

Concerning crafts, pottery shapes from the Late Bronze Age continued throughout the Iron Age. Overall, in the Iron Age, Tall Zar'ā can be described as an unfortified agricultural settlement.

The Iron Age I period took place either between 1220 and 970 BC or from 1270 to 1040 BC as shown by charcoal analysis.

Although the character of the settlement has changed entirely, the cultural affiliation to the west and north continued, as can be seen by some finds. There was found a fenestrated vessel ("window pot"; FIG. 8) which can be compared to specimens from Late Bronze Age contexts in Ugarit, Kamid el-Loz, Tall al-Qudah and Tall Dayr 'Allā as well as in Iron Age contexts in Kinneret, Tall el-Qadi, Tall Hadar,

and in Tall es-Sarem. Stefan Münger assumed that this special type shows affinities to the Syrian realm (Münger 2013: 163).

A kernos belongs also to a cultic context (FIG. 9). The best comparisons can be found again to the west and north: in Tall Dayr 'Allā from a Late Bronze Age context, in Bisan and Tall al-Mutasallim from an Iron Age I context and in Khirbat Ras az-Zayt (Ḥorvat Rosh Zayit) from an Iron Age II context (Gropp 2013: 412-415).

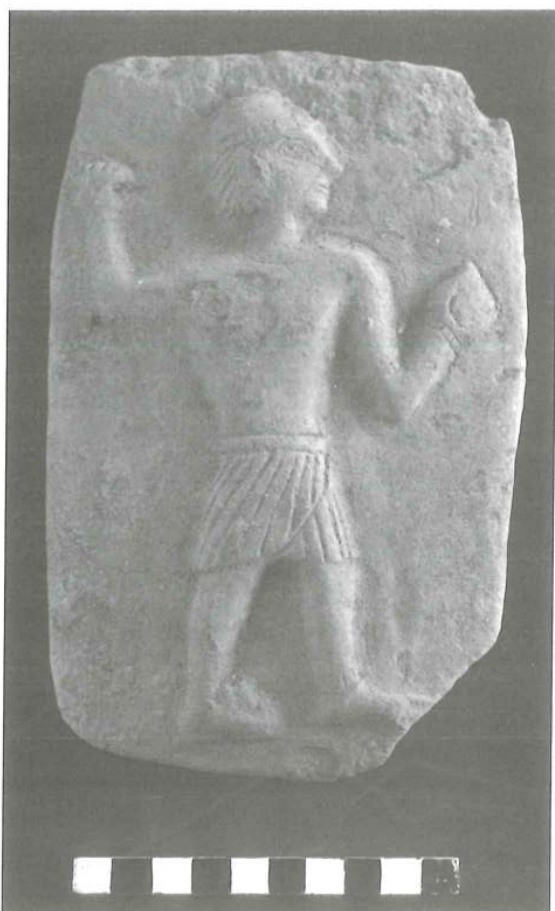
As in the Bronze Age, there are finds of the Iron Age I period from Tall Zar'ā that are unique. One of them is a ceramic plate with the depiction of a standing man, raising one arm and holding a cut head in the other hand (FIG. 10). The man is surrounded by four more cut heads scratched in the ceramic. The scene reminds one of Egyptian and Assyrian stone



8. 'Window pot' from Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).



9. Kernos from Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).



10. Relief plate with human figures from Tall Zar'ā (BAI/DEI).

reliefs showing kings holding or slaughtering their captives. However, a ceramic object like this has never been found elsewhere. The interpretation of the object in context is difficult. Perhaps the man was a local ruler celebrating a victory over his enemies.

This Iron Age I settlement demonstrated the continuity of Late Bronze Age traditions as well as the introduction of new features. As before, the cultural orientation extended to the west and north. The name of the settlement and the political affiliation, however, are unknown. This Iron Age I settlement was destroyed due to an earthquake, a fire or a violent attack in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century BC.

Shortly after, another settlement was built on top of the destruction layer – this time again with a more urban character.

### Summary

Coming back to our questions from the beginning: What have we learnt from Tall Zar'ā?

There is a clear break between the highly developed urban culture of the Late Bronze Age and the smaller village-like settlements of Iron Age I. Nevertheless, some traditions continued without interruption, including architectural elements and artisanal techniques (*e.g.* pottery and glass-production). The time between 1200 and 1000 BC clearly was a period of transition, characterized by the co-existence of approved Bronze Age traditions on the one hand and technical developments that typify Iron Age II on the other. Though the destructions were severe and affected all of the excavated Area I, no clear signs of a military invasion could be recognized. The re-settlement of the site always followed shortly after these destructions. While changes in the settlement layout, house types and crafts are obvious, older traditions continued as well. Therefore, it is possible that the same people re-settled their destroyed place. This does not exclude the possibility that people from the surrounding became residents on Tall Zar'ā as well (Vieweger *et al.* 2014).

A second observation is the continuous cultural, religious and economic orientation of the inhabitants on Tall Zar'ā to the west and north. And in addition, during the domination of the Egyptians in the Levant during the Late Bronze Age, the inhabitants on Tall Zar'ā were only sparsely influenced by the Egyptian culture. This fact is not surprising, due to the geographical location of the site.

The third observation is the lack of concrete evidence for the political or ethnical affiliation of the inhabitants on Tall Zar'ā during the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Ages.

To answer the question of what caused the breakdown of the city states between 1200 and 1000 BC, we have to broaden our view: It is not a breakdown of one city or one nation but of a complete region (from Greece and Italy to Egypt, the Levant up to Mesopotamia). It is

not possible to name one reason: Not the “Sea Peoples”, not one invading nation, not solely internal struggles, climate change or an earthquake seem sufficient to explain the scale of affected areas. Maybe it is helpful to remember how connected the city-states and countries at the end of the Late Bronze Age were – how dependent on trade with distant regions (e.g. importing tin from Afghanistan to produce bronze weapons). There was a powerful but at the same time fragile network of trade, communication and diplomacy, and when this network started to fail, all of its participants were afflicted. Some city-states (e.g. Ugarit or Tall Dayr ‘Allā) were destroyed by invading enemies between 1207 and 1177 BC, some years later (e.g. Lachish), some already destroyed cities were re-settled by new settlers who were perhaps refugees (Cline 2014: 157 and 159f). Some cities were simply abandoned with no evidence of a catastrophe, some suffered from severe earthquakes between 1225 and 1175 BC (Cline 2014: 141). There is also evidence pointing to drought, famine and maybe a change in climate (Cline 2014: 142ff and see also the debate whether there was a climate change or not: Kaniewski *et al* 2013: 9 and Drake 2012: 1862-65 and Langgut *et al* 2013). All in all, there is not just one culprit to blame, but many. Concerning Tall Zar‘ā, there is no evidence for military involvement and so it appears that natural causes that lead to the destruction of the Late Bronze Age city.

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