

THE LOCATION OF TELL TWEINI

The mound of Tell Tweini is situated near the modern city of Jebleh, which lies on the Syrian coast at 28 km South of Lattakia, and roughly 35 km from the ancient city of Ugarit, present day Ras Shamra. Jebleh is located in a wide, fertile plain and possesses a small fishing harbour. Within the city limits and in its immediate surroundings, many ancient remains have survived, such as the archaeological site of Tell Tweini - probably to be identified with ancient Gibala - just east of the city. Jebleh itself was built on top of the remains of the Phoenician and Roman city Gabala, of which the Roman theatre is an impressive reminder. Since 1999, Jebleh and its surroundings have been the focus of an extensive archaeological and historical research project, directed by the Syrian Direction Générale des Antiquités et des Musées and the Belgian Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

EXCAVATIONS AT TELL TWEINI

Tell Tweini is situated no more than 1 km East of the urban centre of Jebleh. The tell lies at the junction of two streams, called Nahr ar-Rumaila and Nahr al-Fawwar. The river Rumaila runs from the site to a sandy bay just North of Jebleh, clearly visible from the tell. The tip of the pear-shaped mound points to the West. Approximately 400 m long and 290 m wide, the tell with its surface of 11.6 ha rises 15 to 20 m above the surrounding agricultural fields.

The archaeological project at Tell Tweini is a multi-disciplinary one, launched at the request of the Syrian Department of Antiquities. Prof. Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi and Prof. Dr. Karel Van Lerberghe direct the project, the field directors are Dr. Massaoud Badawi and Prof. Dr. Joachim Bretschneider.

The aim of the project is to study the archaeological layers dating from the 3rd millennium to the Byzantine era, using the latest scientific techniques and methods. Research focusses on

the technological developments in the material culture and the different economical strategies employed by the inhabitants. One goal of the project is to establish a complete chronological sequence spanning the time from the Early Bronze Age to the end of the Iron Age. During eight campaigns, from 1999 to 2007, several parts of the tell were investigated: the site has so far proven to have been inhabited continuously from the Early Bronze Age to the Iron Age.

A SHORT HISTORY OF TELL TWEINI

(from ca 2500 BCE to 638 AD)

The Bronze Age

From the excavation results at Tell Tweini we know that the city was already inhabited during the 3rd millennium BCE. Soundings on fields A and B exposed remains from the Early Bronze Age (ca 2500-2300 BCE). The work in these soundings is still ongoing, therefore it is possible that in the future older layers of occupation will be encountered. In the plain which surrounds Jebleh remains of Neolithic occupation have yet been found (ca 6th millennium BCE).

Some spectacular tombs, dating to the Middle Bronze Age (1st half of the 2nd millennium BCE), were found in direct relation to the houses. In this period it was the custom to bury the dead under the floors of the dwellings. An extraordinary find was the communal tomb dating to ca 1700 BCE. The grave contained the skeletons of 42 adults and 16 infants. Serving as grave-goods were 160 well-preserved ceramic vessels, plates and dishes, several bronze pins and a figurine. Another inhumation consisted of the grave of a woman and her child. On field B, the remains of three men were encountered in a silo. Among others, the grave goods included a fenestrated axe, quite typical for this period. Similar axes have also been discovered at Sukas, Ugarit and Byblos.

The first mention of Gibala in a historical text dates to the Late Bronze Age, more precisely in a text from the Ugarit archives. These particular archives were established between 1350 BCE and the razing of the city by the Sea Peoples around 1200 BCE. Gibala is mentioned in a document from the reign of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit. The tablet, written in Akkadian, contains a treaty between Niqmepa and king Abdi'anati of Sianu, a city South of Ugarit and near Gibala. In this treaty, the names of places in the kingdoms of Ugarit and Sianu are enumerated. In the list of cities belonging to the territory of Ugarit the mention *gi-ba-la* appears. Around 1200 BCE, the political system of Ugarit collapses under the stress of the Sea Peoples' invasions.

During the Bronze Age, Gibala had access to the sea through a sea-incursion; this was brought to light by recent geomorphological and palynological research. This scientific proof matches the knowledge from the Ugarit texts that Gibala was a harbour-city.

The Iron Age

During the 1st millennium BCE, the dominant influences in Tell Tweini and the nearby settlements Tell Sukas - Suksu (6 km to the South) and Tell Sianu (7 km to the East) were Phoenician, Aramaic and Assyrian. The military operations of the Assyrians in the Tweini area are extensively documented. The destruction layers in the urban part of Tell Sukas can be linked to the military campaigns of Salmanasser III in 858 or 844 BCE. In 738 BCE, Tiglatpileser III reached the Mediterranean Sea and thus also Gibala and the land of Hamat. This Aramaic kingdom was finally incorporated into the Assyrian Empire during the reign of Sargon II. In the 6th century the Egyptian pharaoh Apries (588 BCE) and the Babylonian king Nabonidus (550 BCE) have deported prisoners of war from this area. The numerous military campaigns can be taken as an indication that the political and economical influence of the Jebleh-plain was held in high regard. Therefore the triangle Gibala-Suksu-Sianu acted as the primary exchange and trading point between the Eastern Aegean and the Near East.

After the irregularities at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the subsequent architectural hiatus, renewed large-scale building activities can be recognized at Tell Tweini at the beginning of the Iron Age. Once more urban structures covered the entire surface of the tell, as they did during the Bronze Age. According to the results of the geomagnetic survey, the occupation phases of the Iron Age (first part of the 1st millennium BCE) have become obvious. On the map of the city, which allows to identify unexcavated structures, the network of roads, public and private buildings as well as industrial workshops are clearly discernible.

On the westernmost tip of the tell, at the end of the main street (field B), the Syrian team investigated a broad-room temple dating to the 7th and 6th century BCE. In the centre of the excavated area stands a sanctuary, its cella floored with rectangular stone slabs. In front of this cella the anti-cella is located and the whole construction is encircled by other rooms. Numerous small finds from the area around the sanctuary could be linked to cultic activities.

From the Iron Age onward, the custom to bury the dead in an urban context disappears, instead they are buried in necropolises outside the city limits. These burial grounds are yet to be discovered at Tweini.

Throughout the Iron Age, the sea-incursion linking Bronze Age Tell Tweini to the sea silted up and with it the important inner harbour of the site. One of the challenges in the research is to assess the influence of this loss on the economical development of the city. Towards the end of the Iron Age, during the 1st millennium BCE, a rise in the agricultural and industrial activities can be observed. An indication of this can be seen in the countless olive presses on the site, dating to Iron Age II (8th century BCE). Among other effects, a large public building on the A field seems to lose its function and is reorganised into several smaller rooms housing industrial activities. This evolution runs parallel to the conquest of western Syria by the Assyrian king Sargon II. In the end, the tell is abandoned for a location on the coast with direct access to the trade routes over sea, the present-day Jebleh or classical Gabala.

Greeks and Byzantines

The best information for this period can be gleaned from coins struck in Gabala from the final quarter of the 3rd century BCE on. These coins are clearly linked to the types found at Arados but here the mention GB appears on the coin, pointing to the Greek letters Gamma and Bèta, the first two consonants of Gabala. The city became independent around the middle of the 1st century BCE and started its own calendar.

During Byzantine times, Gabala no longer formed part of the province *Syria Prima* but it was instead part of a new province, *Theodorias*. Gabala appears on the Tabula Peutingeriana together with the cities of Antioch and Laodicea. Also dating to this period are some houses with nicely finished water installations located on the field B of Tell Tweini. Finally, in 638 AD Syria is conquered by caliph Mu'awiya.