

THE OCCUPATION LEVELS OF TELL TWEINI AND THEIR HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The bay and plain of Jebleh (Syria)¹ have long been a crucial area for polities in the northern Levant (fig. 1). Most notably, it was a contested region between the kingdoms of Ugarit and Sianu in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. The largest tell in this region, at over 11 hectares, is Tell Tweini (fig. 2). Before habitation shifted to the modern town of Jebleh in the later Iron Age, this city must have been a dominant settlement. During the Bronze Age, it commanded an excellent sheltered harbor, created by a sea incursion. Several springs next to the tell provided the necessary fresh water for the population. Recent palynological research suggests that the silting of this lagoon coincided with a shift of habitation closer toward the seashore.²

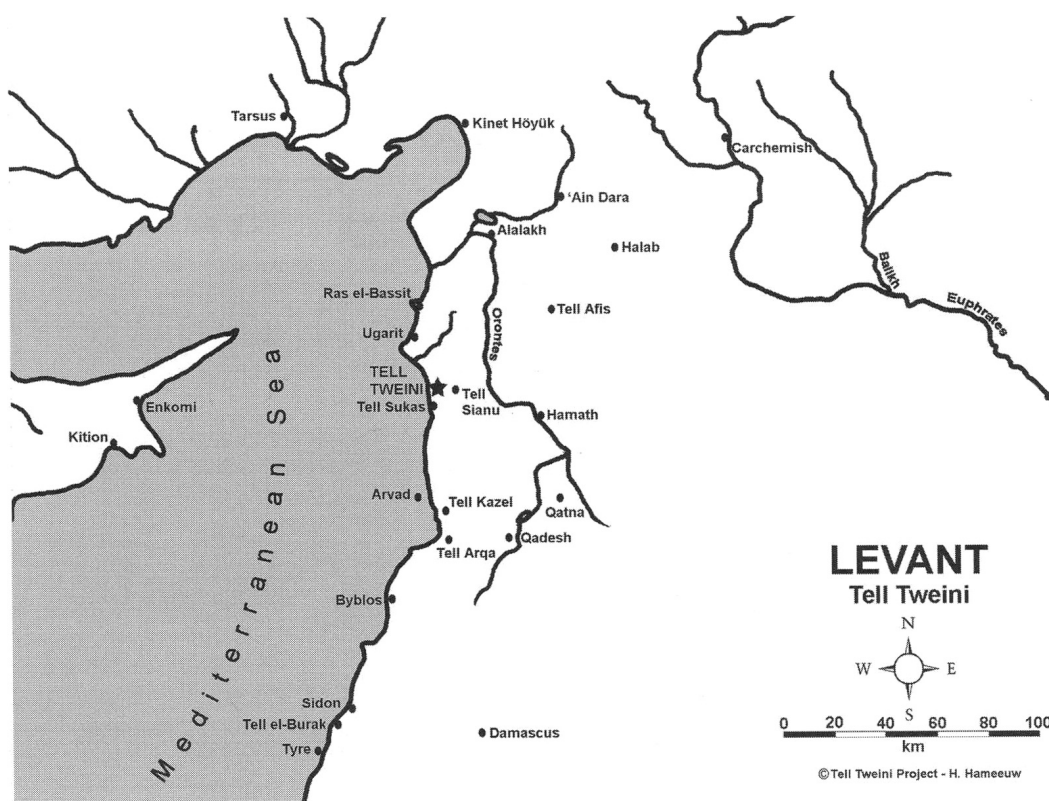


Figure 1. Map of the northern Levant — geographical location of Tell Tweini.

* The contents of this paper were presented as a poster at the 51st Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale: “Syro-Belgian Excavations at Tell Tweini, The Occupation Levels of Tell Tweini and Their Historical Implications.”

¹ Poul Jorgen Riis, Ingolf Thuesen, John Lund, and Thomas Riis, “Tall at-Tuwaini,” in *Topographical Studies in the Gābla Plain*, Publications

of the Carlsberg Expedition to Phoenicia 13 (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 2004), pp. 27, 68–69.

² Preliminary conclusion, personal communication by David Kaniewski (Laboratorium voor Systematiek) and Etienne Paulissen (Fysische en regionale geografie), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, spring 2005.



Figure 2. Aerial view of Tell Tweini (from Yves Calvet and Geneviève Galliano, *Le royaume d'Ougarit: Aux origines de l'alphabet* [Lyon: Musée des Beaux-arts, 2004], p. 60).



Figure 3. Field A, general view (photo by B. Vandermeulen).

One of the aims of the archaeological research project at Tell Tweini³ is to gather knowledge about the transition between the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age. At that time, Tell Tweini formed part of the Ugaritic kingdom and thus it must have been influenced by the sudden and drastic destruction of the capital. The project attempts to understand the stratigraphy of the settlement at that time. It aims to achieve the same for the later Iron Age, when it is believed that habitation shifted to the location of the present-day city of Jebleh.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Since the project started in 1999, three excavation fields have been opened. In field B several phases of a main Iron Age temple have been excavated and in field C parts of the massive ancient city wall have been unearthed. This paper will focus on the results of Belgian excavations in field A (fig. 3). A total of nine main occupation levels have been distinguished and some of these have been divided into sublevels based on stratigraphical data. Each level consists of a construction and one or more occupation phases (e.g., Level 7A–B–C; 7C is the construction phase of two occupation phases, 7A and 7B; fig. 4). The subject of this study is the Late Bronze Age II and Iron Age I and II levels, which constitute an interesting sequence in the occupation history of Tell Tweini and whose interpretation contributes to our understanding of the history of the region. Many structures in Level 7B (Late Bronze II) are deserted and only reoccupied in Level 6A (Iron Age II), in contrast with Ras Shamra where the destruction of the Late Bronze Age settlement led to the final abandonment of the site. At Tell Tweini, one may speak of limited occupation during Level 6C (or Iron Age I). This will be illustrated by a brief overview of the archaeological finds and architectural remains of Levels 7 and 6.

OCCUPATION LEVELS — TELL TWEINI — FIELD A		
Level 1		Modern
Level 2		Byzantine–Islamic
Level 3		Hellenistic–Roman
Level 4	A	Iron Age III
	B	
Level 5	A	Iron Age II
	B	
Level 6	A	Iron Age II
	B	
Level 6	C	Iron Age I
	D	
Level 7	A	Late Bronze Age II–Iron Age I
Level 7	B	Late Bronze Age II
	C	
Level 7	D	Late Bronze Age I
	E	
Level 8	A	Middle Bronze II–Late Bronze Age I
Level 8	B	Middle Bronze Age II
	C	
Level 8	D	Middle Bronze Age I
	E	
Level 9	A	Early Bronze Age IV
	B	

Figure 4. Occupation levels — Tell Tweini — Field A. Light gray = occupation phase; dark gray = construction phase.

³ The excavations are part of the Jebleh Project directed by Prof. Dr. Michel Al-Maqdissi (Directorate-General of Antiquities and Museums, Syria) and Prof. Dr. Karel Van Lerberghe (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium). Since 1999 the field directors are Mr.

Massoud Badawy and Prof. Dr. Joachim Bretschneider. The Jebleh Project is part of the Belgian Program on Interuniversity Poles of Attraction, inaugurated by the Belgian State Prime Minister's Office for Science Policy Programming (IAP V/14).

2. LATE BRONZE AGE II AND IRON AGE I-II OCCUPATION LEVELS

LEVEL 7B-C

The architectural remains of Level 7C are well preserved and cover the entire excavated area of field A. Three main structures can be distinguished, the largest of which, House 2, was built on terraces connected by a stairway (fig. 7a, Room 2/8). The difference in height between the two parts of House 2 is two meters. In House 3, an elaborate doorway between Rooms 6/2 and 6/1 may be part of a large (non-domestic) building.

The ceramic material from Level 7B consists of a wide range of local wares, such as “Canaanite” storage jars, plain plates with rounded rims, bowl lamps, and wall brackets. A diverse corpus of imported ceramics was found including Cypriot base-ring ware II, red lustrous wheelmade ware, red-on-black ware, white slip II, and Late Helladic IIIA and B sherds. In locus TWE-A-00185 in Room 2/9 (fig. 7a), some of these ceramics were preserved in situ: for example, a Late Helladic IIIB kylix decorated with shell motifs⁴ (fig. 5: 1) and a vessel in so-called handmade burnished ware (Fabric 3B at Tell Tweini), which is also a feature of the last phase of the Late Bronze Age at Tell Kazel (fig. 5: 2).⁵ The locus was sealed by a destruction layer ending the Late Bronze Age occupation in this part of the tell, which may be dated to the second half of the thirteenth century B.C.

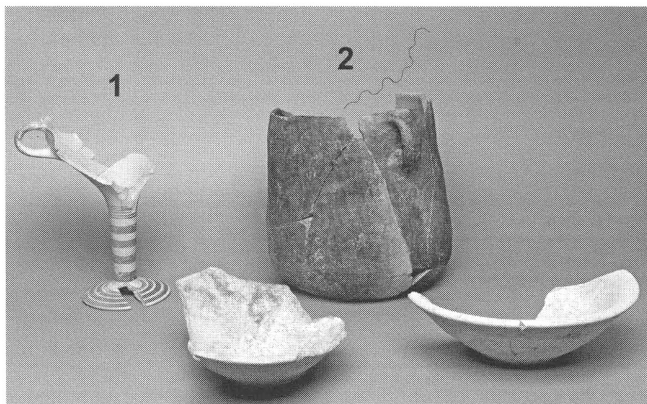


Figure 5. Late Bronze Age IIB ceramics. (1) TWE-A-00185-024 and (2) TWE-A-00185-023 (photo by B. Vandermeulen).



Figure 6. Early Iron Age I ceramic vessel TWE-A-01717-C-001 (photo by B. Vandermeulen).

LEVEL 7A

The transition between the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age I at Tell Tweini is well preserved in Houses 2 and 3. Destruction by fire has been attested in only a limited number of loci and most structures seem simply to have been abandoned.

LEVEL 6C-D

There are fewer architectural structures in this level (Iron Age I) compared to Level 7B-C (Late Bronze Age II). In some places on the tell, new structures were erected. These generally have a slightly different orientation even though some 7C walls, for example, TWE-A-W01401, were partly reused as foundations in Level 6D, such as in the case of TWE-A-W01601 (fig. 7b). An interesting example of this is Room 3/1. The 7C walls and installations were largely removed in Level 6D, but TWE-A-W01956 (7C) was partly overbuilt by TWE-A-W01907 (6D) and partly demolished. As a result of this activity a dump with Late Bronze material was formed outside Iron Age I House 3, just below the Iron Age II street level.

⁴ Jacques-Claude Courtois and Liliane Courtois, “Corpus céramique de Ras Shamra-Ugarit, niveau historique, Deuxième partie,” in *Ugaritica 7*, edited by Irène Schaeffer de Chalon and Antoinette Schaeffer-Boehling, Mission de Ras Shamra Tome XVIII (Paris: Mission Archéologique de Ras Shamra, 1978), p. 307, fig. 36: 1, Inv. 27.744.

⁵ Leila Badre and Eric Gubel, “Tell Kazel (Syria): Excavations of the AUB Museum, 1993–1998, Third Preliminary Report,” *Berytus Archaeological Studies* 44 (1999–2000): 198.

The ceramics from Level 6C are, at present, limited in number and variety. Predominant among these are black and orange burnished craters and a large collection of footed cups, most of which were found in situ in Room 3/3 (TWE-A-F00027/02124). The walls of Level 6B were built directly on top of these loci, sealing the end of Iron Age I. Other craters, decorated in black and red colors with hourglass motifs, hatched triangles, and wavy lines (fig. 6), continue the Late Bronze Age tradition but can be dated to Iron Age I (see Ras Ibn Hani)⁶ or 1100–825 B.C. (see Tell Kazel).⁷ This suggests that at Tell Tweini, this tradition continued into the ninth century B.C. The craters were mainly found in large fill layers (House 1), which are suggestive of a reorganization of the settlement, probably in the second half of the ninth century B.C.

LEVEL 6A–B

Whereas in Iron Age I, architectural remains are few, during Iron Age II they are abundant. House 2 from Level 6C was enlarged and several new structures were built. Important is the reuse of some Late Bronze Age II stone paved floors (TWE-A-F04209 and F00428; fig. 7c). For the construction of House 1, some Level 7C walls of House 2 were removed by the cutting of deep foundation trenches. Other Late Bronze II walls were used as foundations directly below new walls, as for example in Houses 4 and 5. Most impressive is House 1, which is well constructed and comprises multiple rooms, up to 50 m² in size.

Typical ceramics from Level 6A include pear-shaped storage jars,⁸ red painted plates with rounded rim, and an increasing number of Cypriot imports (white painted, black slip) and local imitations of the latter. A fabric (Fabric 3A) with gray core and walls is relatively popular in this level and was exclusively used for hole-mouth vessels (cooking pots?). The decorative patterns on craters and storage jars are now restricted to Cypriot motifs such as winged lozenges or simple bands and lines. The ceramic material remains very similar in Level 5, even though the transition from Level 6 to Level 5 is marked by an architectural change. Level 6A ended near the end of the eighth century B.C. without an apparent destruction or break in habitation.

3. GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

During the 2004 season, a geophysical survey was conducted in order to place the excavated architectural remains in a wider urban context (fig. 8).⁹ The geomagnetic results show the city plan of the ninth–eighth century B.C. (Level 6A–B). Dominant on the plan are several large urban (possibly public) structures.

Two main street orientations are distinguishable. The first is axial with a central street running from the southeast, where the main entrance gate of the city must have been located, to the northwest, where the ancient temple area is currently being excavated as field B. The Iron Age II residential area, in field A, was connected with this central passage by an excavated street (fig. 7c). A second street orientation follows the shape of the tell and has therefore been termed radial. The radial street crosses the central street twice and passes along the edges of the highest parts of the tell.

4. HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Late Bronze Age II occupation levels (7A–B–C) comprise a wide variety of architectural constructions and, in addition to a range of local ceramics, imports from all over the eastern Mediterranean. Among the more remarkable small finds are several seals from the Middle and Late Bronze Age and a Hittite-Luwian hieroglyphic inscription from a Late Bronze Age II context. The material culture of Late Bronze Age Tweini suggests a web of international relations. In the fourteenth/thirteenth century B.C., Tweini, most probably ancient Gibala, formed part

⁶ Adnan Bounni, Elisabeth Lagarce, Jacques Lagarce, and Nassib Saliby, "Rapport préliminaire sur la première campagne de fouilles (1975) à Ibn Hani (Syrie)," *Syria* 53 (1976): 276, fig. 27.

⁷ Badre and Gubel, "Tell Kazel (Syria)," p. 133.

⁸ Marie-Louise Buhl, *Sūkās 7: The Near Eastern Pottery and Objects from the Upper Strata*, Publications of the Carlsberg Expedition to Phoenicia 9 (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1983), fig. 4.38.

⁹ Conducted by Glese, Grubert, & Hübner – Freiburg, Germany.

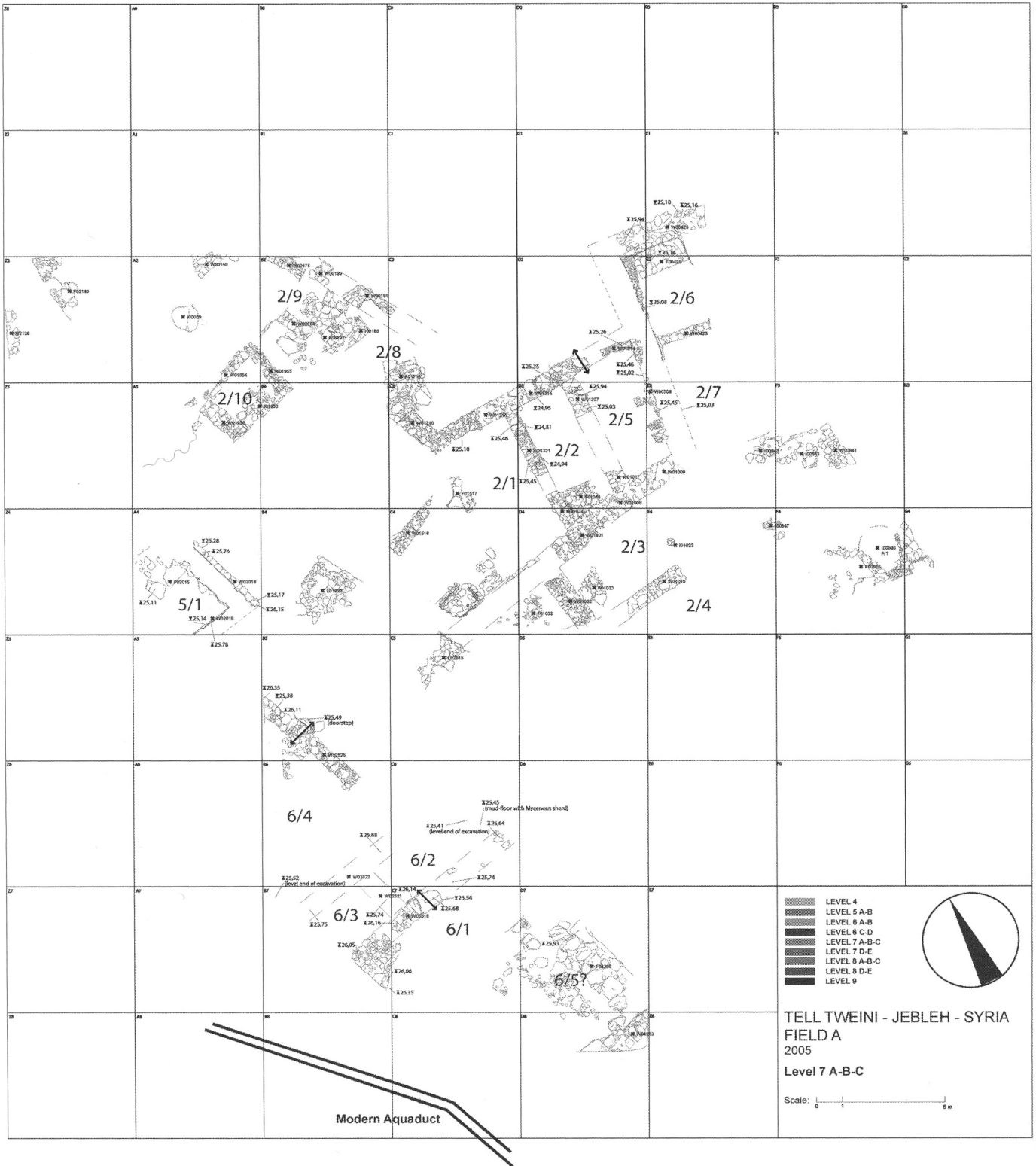


Figure 7a. Architectural plans — sequence of occupation from Late Bronze Age II through Iron Age II (plans by K. H. Bäumlér, H. Hameeuw, S. Saleh, and B. Verstraete).

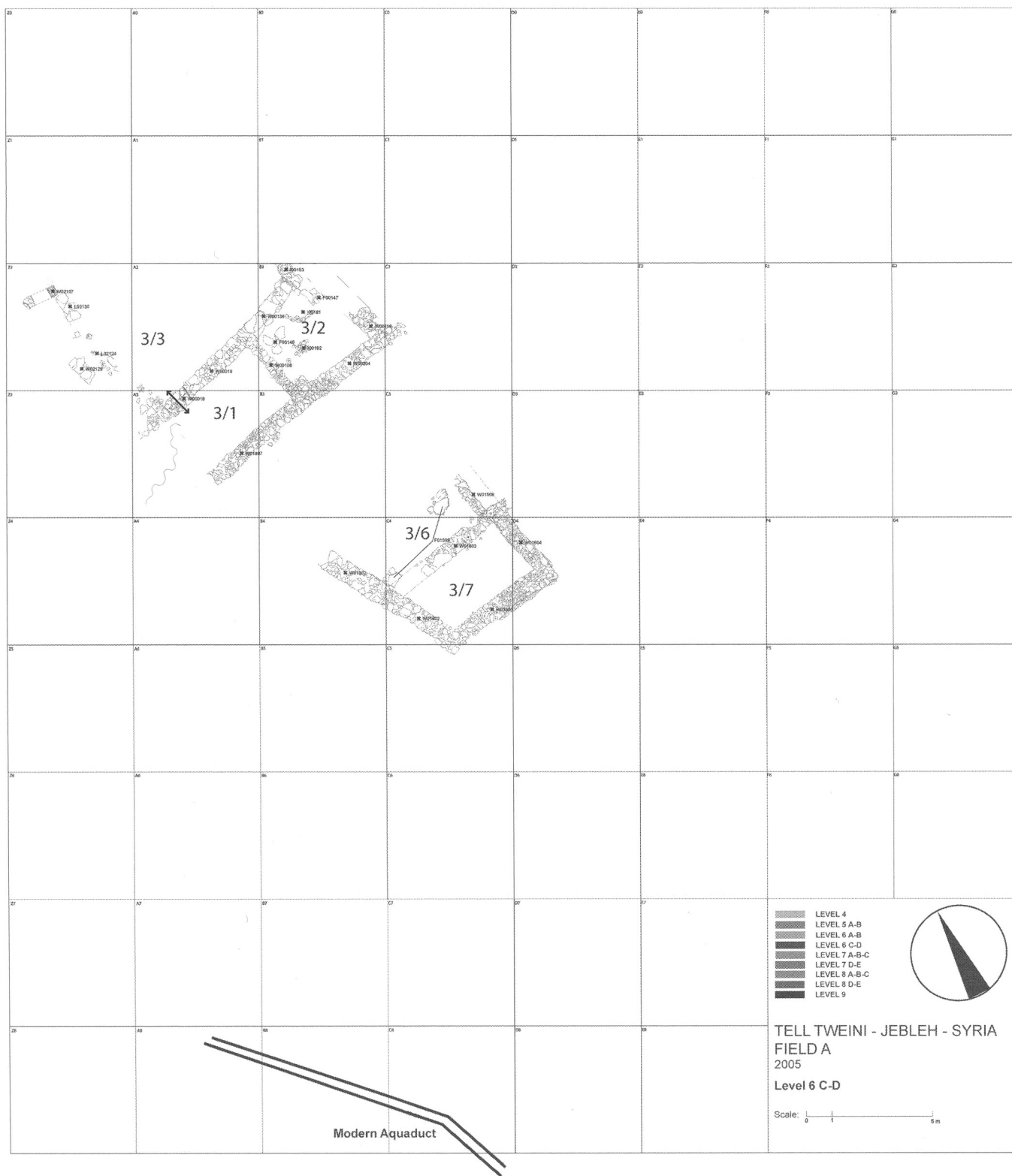


Figure 7b. Architectural plans — sequence of occupation from Late Bronze Age II through Iron Age II (plans by K. H. Bäumlér, H. Hameeuw, S. Saleh, and B. Verstraete).

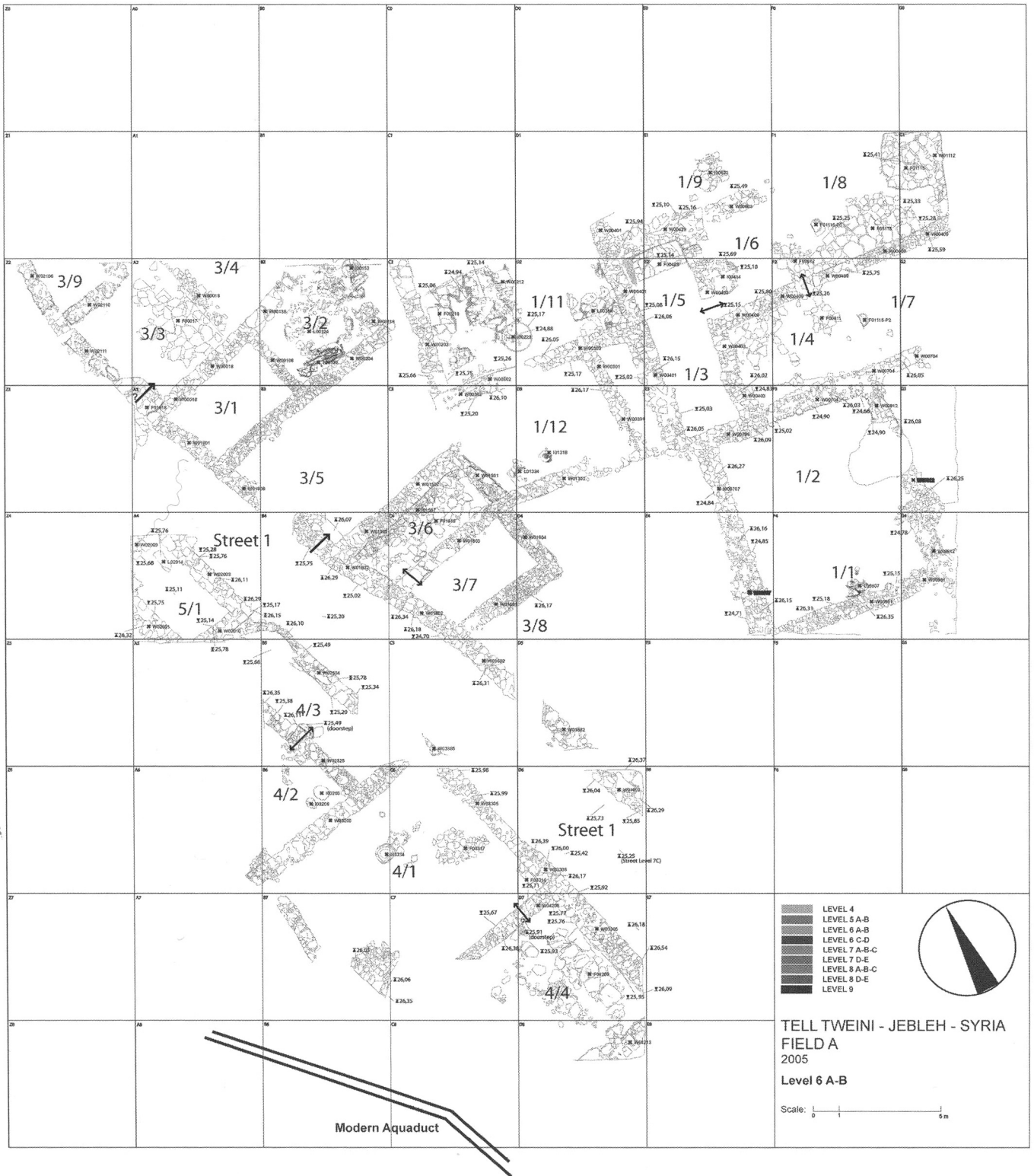


Figure 7c. Architectural plans — sequence of occupation from Late Bronze Age II through Iron Age II (plans by K. H. Bäumlér, H. Hameeuw, S. Saleh, and B. Verstraete).

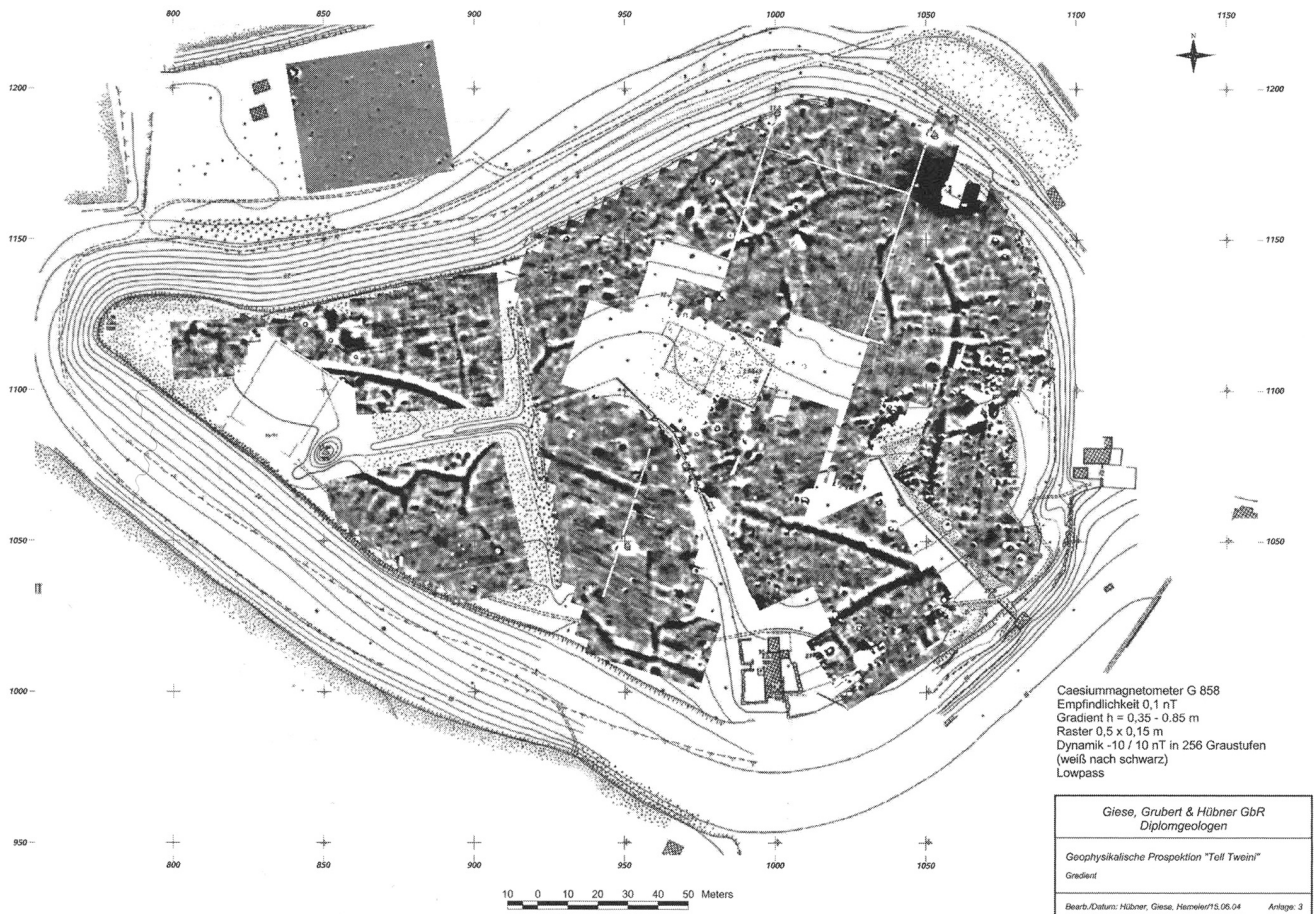


Figure 8. Results of the geophysical survey.

of the Ugaritic kingdom and was located at its southwestern border.¹⁰ In the archives of Ugarit, Gibala is mentioned in the treaty between the Hittite king Mursili II and Niqmepa, king of Ugarit.¹¹ Around 1200 B.C. the state of Ugarit, and most of the ancient Near Eastern networks of the Late Bronze Age, collapsed because of the invasion of the so-called Sea Peoples. Massive destruction layers of the Sea Peoples have not yet been found at Tweini, even though some floors showed traces of burning.

In the following period of decline during Iron Age I, only poor architectural features are attested at Tweini. It would appear that the city underwent a process of limited continuity and reoccupation of Late Bronze Age structures similar to that observed at other Syrian coastal settlements at the end of the second millennium, such as Ras ibn Hani,¹² Ras el-Bassit,¹³ Tell Kazel,¹⁴ and Tell Sukas.¹⁵ At Tweini, the earliest Early Iron Age I reoccupation is founded on the remains of Late Bronze Age structures and reuses several walls.

Due to the limited nature of the archaeological evidence, information on urban development at the beginning of the Iron Age is restricted. Throughout Iron Age I the tell seems to have been only partially inhabited, as shown by the first construction phase of House 3 (fig. 7b). For the end of Iron Age I, several occupation floors are attested and a large variety of ceramics and objects were found in situ¹⁶ (Room 3/3). Whether this discontinuity of habitation is a result of intentional destruction is not clear. At around the same time, in the middle of the ninth century B.C., the Temple Area at nearby Tell Kazel burned down¹⁷ and at Tell Sukas similar destruction is ascribed to the Assyrians,¹⁸ who campaigned repeatedly in coastal Syria between 858 and 844 B.C. After the mid-ninth century B.C., the urban plan of Tweini was profoundly changed. New, big houses are constructed directly above the Late Bronze Age remains. A new city plan with large streets and both public and private buildings is laid out across the entire tell. The revival of urban culture at Tweini and in the coastal region of Northern Phoenicia may be linked to a developing economic network connecting Cyprus, Phoenicia, and the Syrian interior. Imports of Cypriot ceramics at Tweini attest to this improving economic situation.

¹⁰ Joachim Bretschneider, Michel Al-Maqdissi, Klaas Vansteenhuyse, Jan Driessen, and Karel Van Lerberghe, "Tell Tweini, Ancient Gubala, in the Bronze Age," *Ägypten und Levante* 14 (2004): 219–20; and Wilfred van Soldt, *The Topography of the City-State of Ugarit*, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament* 324 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2005), pp. 64–71, 88–91.

¹¹ RS 17.235+335+344!+379+381+457 and PRU 4, pp. 71–76.

¹² Adnan Bounni, Elisabeth Lagarce, and Jacques Lagarce, *Ras Ibn Hani I: Le Palais Nord du Bronze Récent, Fouilles 1979–1995, synthèse préliminaire*, Bibliothèque Archéologie et Historique 151 (Beirut: Institut français d'archéologie du Proche-Orient, 1998), p. 101.

¹³ Paul Courbin, "Bassit," *Syria* 63 (1986): 187.

¹⁴ Leila Badre and Eric Gubel, "Tell Kazel (Syria)," p. 198; Emmanuelle Capet, "Tell Kazel (Syrie), Rapport préliminaire sur les

9^e–17^e campagnes de fouilles (1993–2001) du Musée de l'Université Américaine de Beyrouth, Chantier II," *Berytus Archaeological Studies* 47 (2003): 117.

¹⁵ John Lund, "Tell Soukas," in *Le royaume d'Ougarit: Aux origines de l'alphabet*, Les dossiers d'archéologie 10 (Dijon: 2004), p. 63.

¹⁶ Joachim Bretschneider, Tim F. Cunningham, and Karel Van Lerberghe, "Gibala: The First Two Excavations 1999 and 2000," *Ugarit-Forschungen* 31 (2000): 109–11.

¹⁷ Leila Badre and Eric Gubel, "Tell Kazel (Syria)," pp. 197–98; and Emmanuelle Capet, "Tell Kazel (Syrie)," p. 117.

¹⁸ Poul Jorgen Riis, *Sūkās I: The North-east Sanctuary and the First Settling of Greeks in Syria and Palestine*, Publications of the Carlsberg Expedition to Phoenicia 1 (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1970), p. 161.