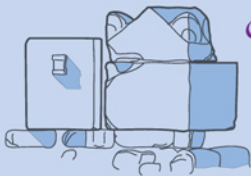


Tell Arqa



Archaeological and historical background

The ancient mound or tell of Arqa is more impressive in height (30 to 40m of archaeological sediments) than it is in surface area (not over four and a half hectares at the summit). The highest point of the mound, 147m above sea level, has a commanding view of the Akkar plain, as well as the entire region, stretching from Tripoli in the south to the island of Arwad (ancient Arados) in the north.

It seems that Arqa was first settled during the Neolithic period and continued to be occupied during most phases of history until the end of the Medieval period. A lower city established north of the tell during the first millennium BC expanded greatly during the Roman times, comprising an area of 40 to 50 hectares. Rock-cut tombs of the necropolis occupy a vast portion of the hills south of the tell, and range in date from the third millennium BC to the Medieval period. Today, all the visible tombs are empty as a result of looting in antiquity or in more recent times.

Tell Arqa and plain of Akkar

Arqa is situated at the southern end of the plain of Akkar, which is presently marked by the Nahr el-Kebir (Eleutheros of classical antiquity) along the border of Lebanon and Syria. Its resources in the past were fully exploited by Arqa and neighbouring sites. The importance of Arqa is partly related to its strategic position at the western end of the homs Gap, the principal corri-



General view of the site

dor leading from the coast into the Syrian hinterland by way of the Djebel Ansariye in the north and the Mount Lebanon range in the south.

Between the Neolithic period (6th millennium BC) and the beginning of the Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC), human occupation was concentrated on the hills. Ancient sites were sparse in the plain, and limited in both importance and in time. Only at the end of the Early Bronze Age did the plain of the Akkar witness a period of unprecedent prosperity.

At a time when Byblos (Jbeil) was an active port that maintained close ties with Egypt and the large urban centres of Syria like Ebla, Arqa was a modest and politically autonomous town with its own mode of development seemingly unrelated to events taking place outside the immediate vicinity.

At the End of the 19th and beginning of the 18th century BC, the Egyptian "Execration Texts" refer to Arqa and the northern coast of Lebanon. The entire region of Akkar was active and prosperous during the first half of the second millennium BC, a situation that



changed dramatically during the Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC) when human occupation declined at most sites. The sole exception to this phenomenon is Tell Kazel (ancient Simira) on the Syrian part of the plain to the north.

The Bronze Age (3000-1200 BC)

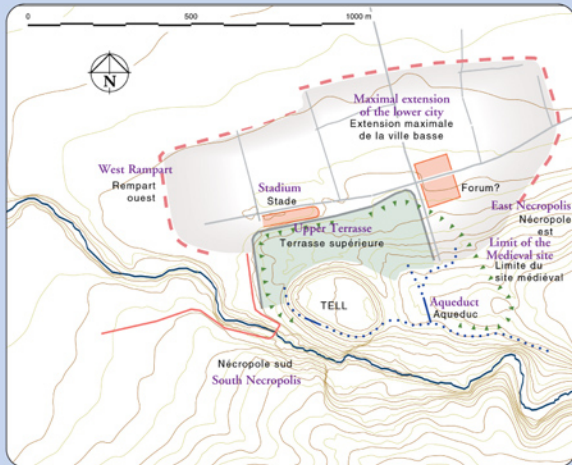
Early Bronze Age

The architectural remains of levels 16 and 15 are an accurate representation of the dwelling quarters during the Early Bronze Age (2400-2000 BC). Houses built in stone and mudbrick are situated on both sides of a concentric street that runs parallel to the edge of the tell. A row of contiguous rooms provided sufficient protection for the site, which was not otherwise fortified. Most of the houses had a second floor. The ground floor, practically without any doors and only accessible from the upper level or from the terraces, seems to have been reserved for storage. Some of the rooms of this floor were reserved for jars containing grain, or were divided into compartments by narrow brick walls. During the course of excavation, some of these compartments were found filled with charred grain.

These houses were violently destroyed by fire and immediately rebuilt on the same plan. Contemporary conquests are known at other sites in the Akkar region from this time, and though Arqa is not specifically mentioned in texts from this period, we can probably attribute these devastations to the kings of Akkad in Mesopotamia, since we know that Sargon I and his grandson Naram-Sin invaded the Mediterranean coast ca. 2300/2250 BC

Middle Bronze Age

At the beginning of the second millennium BC (level 14, Middle Bronze Age I), the living quarters on the edge of the tell were replaced with potters' workshops.



Plan of the site

Potters (Bronze Age I)



Around the middle or end of the 18th century BC (level 13, Middle Bronze Age II), the site developed vigorously and was fortified for the first time. The rampart continued in use until the beginning of the Late Bronze Age (1550/1500 BC) when a square tower made from large hewn stone blocks was added to the older fortification system. Although the dwellings of this period are poorly preserved, a number of burials were found, belonging to infants buried in jars or to adolescents and adults put into pits dug in the ground. The dead adults were buried with pottery vessels and long bronze toggle pins that held together a coat or the



Silos Bronze Age

shroud in which the dead were wrapped. The tombs in which the children were found contained small pottery vases (bowls and juglets) as funerary offerings.

Late Bronze Age

The site was later destroyed by a severe fire, which based on the pottery, occurred during the first half of the 15th century BC (level 12). The destruction of Arqa and neighbouring sites ca. 1460/1450 BC is mentioned in Egyptian annals dated from years 30 to 42 of the reign of Thutmosis III. This destruction marks a decline in the importance of Arqa.

During the 14th century BC (late Bronze Age II), Arqa is mentioned in the el Amarna letters, clay tablets written in Akkadian, which represent diplomatic correspondence between the Egyptian administration of Amenophis III and his son Akhenaton, and the vassal kings of Syria and the Levantine coast. Among the corpus of letters sent to the Pharaoh by local Levantine Kings are those requesting help against the tribes of the Hapiru, who under their local chiefs Abdi-Ashirta and his son Aziru, were attempting to unify the north of Lebanon and the Akkar plain by either killing or evicting all the local kings of the region. In one letter, Rib-



Roman Aqueduct

Abdi, the king of Jbeil (Byblos), informed Pharaoh about the death of the king of Arqa. After that the Kingdom of Amurru would eventually form the part of an alliance with Hittites against the Egyptians.

The Iron Age (1200-330 B.C.)

At the end of the Late Bronze Age (1200 BC), Arqa enters a long period of Oblivion (Iron Age I). As a result, Arqa avoided the turmoil and destruction that took place in the Levant as a result of the collapse of the Bronze age palace economies and the invasion of the "Sea Peoples".

Iron Age II

Gap in occupation lasted until the middle of the 19th century BC (Iron Age II), when together with other cities of the Phoenician coast Arqa became the centre of a small kingdom mentioned in an inscription of the Assyrian King Shalmaneser III in 850 BC. The king of Arqa, along with "10,000 men and 20 chariots", took part

in the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. as part of a coalition made up of the kingdoms of Damascus, Hamath and Israel, who were fighting against Assyrian imperial expansion.

Dating to this period (level 10) are the remains of a small sanctuary containing several courts equipped with benches and hydraulic drainage systems, and a small square cella with an altar. Even if those ruins are modest and badly preserved, they are still very important because examples of the religious architecture are rare in the Phoenician world. On the slopes of the tell were found a number of cremation burials in amphorae urns, a burial custom known among the Phoenicians but rarely attested archaeologically in the Levant.

Arqa is cited abundantly in texts describing the conquest of the northern Phoenician coast by the Assyrian monarch Tiglath-pileser III in 743-738 BC. The Assyrian annals not only mention the capture of Arqa, but also the deportation of its inhabitants. Evidence of this conquest is attested on the site by the thick destruction layer covering the sanctuary (740 B.C.). After that, Arqa is no longer mentioned in ancient writings until the Roman period, when it is mentioned again as a political centre or a city that had its own proper identity.



Jugs

Iron Age III

Under Assyrian and Babylonian control, but particularly in the Persian period (6th-4th centuries BC), Phoenician towns and cities witnessed a period of relative autonomy and increased prosperity. The coastal cities of Tripoli, especially Arwad, developed themselves as maritime and commercial powers. At this time (level 9), Arqa was only a small village under the control of either Tripoli or Arwad.

The Hellenistic and Roman Periods (330 B.C.-323 A.D.)

During the 3rd century BC, the entire Phoenician coast up to the river Eleutheros (Nahr El Kebir) was controlled by the Ptolemies of Egypt, with Arqa serving as a military outpost on the border with Seleucid Syria. Once Arqa passed into the hands of the Seleucid capital of Antioch, it regained its local and regional importance.

A series of structures that comprise over one meter of accumulation testify to a period of active occupation on the tell (levels 8 and 7). While these buildings form only a modest habitat with several workshops (e.g. dye works, weaving), the large number of imported ceramics, Rhodian amphorae, and coins of neighbouring cities testify to a thriving economy.

During the period of Roman Imperial rule at the beginning of our present era, the city of Arqa developed of the city remained on the summit, whose remains are buried on the eastern side of the tell under the Medieval fortress. The Temple was apparently dedicated to a local goddess, a Semitic Astarte assimilated to Venus, represented as a veiled woman in the position of Venus mourning the death of Adonis. She was also the goddess of fertility and a celestial divinity, whose cult was associated to those of Byblos and Baalbeck.





Street

In the second century AD, Arqa was promoted to the rank of a Roman colony and came to be known as Caesarea of Lebanon. At the time of Alexander Severus, who was born in Arqa in 205 AD, the city benefited from the imperial favours bestowed upon it. The city grew to cover an area of 40 to 50 hectares. Intensive examination of the local topography, the results of geophysical surveys, and meticulous mapping of the Tell's surroundings permit a schematic tracing of the city plan: along the east-west axis of the city was the decumanus (the main east-west road of a Roman city) and a stadium. Also preserved is a seven Kilometre segment of the aqueduct that brought water to the city. Occasional clandestine discoveries have revealed remains that evoke the richness of this Roman city. These include a collection of beautiful mosaics that adorned a marvellous Roman villa dated to the 4th century AD.

The Byzantine Period (337-636 AD)

Toward the end of the 4th century AD, the tell was surrounded by a Byzantine era rampart built entirely of stone blocks and flanked by large square towers (level 6). This rampart was found damaged in all areas excavated. The interior of the tell was densely occupied by numerous public and private buildings, but were later destroyed by an earthquake during this period.

The Medieval Period

After the Muslim conquests, Arqa became an important fortress protecting Tripoli. Its Strategic location, thick double walls and high towers made Arqa an important stronghold. Arqa and Tripoli managed to hold out and were not finally taken by the Crusaders until 1108/1109, almost ten years after the fall of Jerusalem. At this time, Arqa became a dependent of the County of Tripoli, one of the important Latin states in the Levant. In 1266 AD, it fell in the hands of the Mamluk Sultan Baybars.

Important remains from the period of Crusader occupation are still on the tell. The remains of the older Byzantine rampart were flanked by square towers and protected by a glacis, a moat, and a second wall. This rampart was destroyed –perhaps first to provide building material for the construction of Tripoli during the Mamluk period and then again to provide stones for houses in the neighbouring villages. After the Mamluk period, the tell was abandoned.



Bronze Age III

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