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Tell Bashir 4/05 - 20/06/1996

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Tell Bashir 4/05 - 20/06/1996

The site of Tilbeshar is identified with Tell Bashir or Turbessel of the historical texts. The main dates are :

- 962 : the fortress was taken from the Arabs by the Byzantines,
- 1095 : the Crusaders held it as a part of the county of Edessa.
- 1151 : the town surrendered to the Zenguide Nur al-Din, and it passed to the hands of the Ayyubids with Salah al-Din in 1176.
- 1263 : it was destroyed by the Mameluk sultan Baybars.

The survey and the micro-topographical study that we have made in 1996 permitted us to localise the various elements of the site : walls, towers, entrance doors and streets. Moreover, several plans of buildings have been drawn near the center of the southern lower town and some days have been devoted to the cleaning of the entrance door of the citadel.

Urbanism

The different city walls

The difference of levels between the surrounding plain and the summit of the rampart of the northern lower town is around 10 m. The soundings A et C realized on this rampart, revealed several buildings phases of construction, dating from the XIth to the XIIIth century, using stones or with a basement in stones and an upperstructure in mud bricks.

The wall of the pitch at the foot of the citadel survives, in the eastern area as big blocs separating the constructed area from a virgin space, close to the base of the mount. In its north-western side, the pitch is still visible as a depressed area between the citadel and the northern lower town.

Some of the towers guarded the junction between the city and the pitch walls, on the east and on the west, respectively. The basement of the western tower is made of big blocks of sloping uncoursed stones.

The city wall dominates the southern lower town, in some parts, with an altitude of 10 to 15 m above the town. Remains of walls, built with stones

similar to those of the northern lower town, still survive at the top of the rampart.

Several towers have been observed : the first of which is to the north, the second to the south of the area we drawn and a third one to the south west, to protect the door.

The gates are situated at the junction point of the main streets and the city wall, more precisely that is to the north-east (gate of Edessa - Urfa), to the south-west (gate of Aleppo and Antakia) and to the west (gate of 'Aintab - Gaziantep).

The streets

The streets can be followed on the site because their borders are made of real walls, with two sides, or by lines of big stones, or heap of little stones, more or less in order however with little depressions in between.

The street of the west-east axis is not clearly visible on the site. The entrance, and the beginning of the street could be at the same place than the track which actually cross the site. This has been partly confirmed by the discovery of a street, in sounding A, as my colleague has mentioned before. The street probably continued, after the crossing, into the living quarter, in the center of the southern town.

The design of the street in the south-east axis can be seen in the central part of the southern lower town.

The south-western street can be followed on few meters outside the southern rampart. It limits the living quarter in the east, , and to the west, an area without any apparent structure, apart from a square building. After the crossing, the street continues in the north-east direction.

It crosses the street of the south-east axis at another junction, probably in the east of the citadel and then goes along the rampart of the northern town, till it reaches a depression, which is the only possible entrance to the northern lower town. Then it goes on to the east, probably reaching the Sajour river, which can be crossed actually by a badly preserved stone bridge, the date of which we assigned to the medieval period.

The western - south-eastern street and the south-western - north-eastern street could then be the two main axes of the city, leading from one gate

to another and crossing at the center, just at the point leading the way to the citadel, meaning that a street directed to the north takes you to a small mount, in the axel of the entrance door of the citadel, where could have existed a bridge to cross the trench of the fortress.

The southern buildings

We made the relevé of somehow fifteen buildings, in the center of the southern town. They form several groups, of two, three or four units. Between them, the empty spaces are sometimes closed by a wall. The rooms are of various sizes, located on the sides of large courtyards. One of those buildings, situated in the south, had thick walls (0,70 to 1,50 m) with two entrances, on the eastern and western sides. There are circular holes in the southern part unlike the northern part, which is totally flat. Regarding its design and orientation, which is quite different from those of the other buildings, this building can be considered as a mosque.

The period of the medieval ceramic of the survey of this area, is assigned to XIIth - XIIIth centuries (the turquoise glazed ware, the siliceous paste, the common local ware : jars, cooking pots and jugs).

The great amount of *sgraffiato* and green - yellow glazed ware on white engobe shows an important phase at the end of the ayyoubid period, that is before the middle of the thirteenth century. Finally, the chinese porcelain, the smoker pipes and the Miletus ware leads us to conclude that the site was still inhabited during the ottoman period.

The entrance door of the citadel

The access to the citadel, in its latest period of settlement, was from the southern side.

Strong rectangular towers, protected the gate. The walls of which are 3 (on the small sides) and 4 meters (in front of the slope) in thickness.

The entrance was from the eastern tower, larger than the western one (respectively 12,40 m and 10,10 m long). The ramp, between the two towers, has a slight slope, and is made of black and white blocs of stone, drawing a square in front of the entrance. The ground of the entrance, 2 m

in width, is horizontal and higher than the ramp. The porch has benches on the sides. The door is bordered by pilasters, and the central passage is squared by pedestals, of 10 cm height, followed by the vestibule which is larger and which gives way to the interior of the citadel after a slight angled curve. At this point, the outer wall of the fortress is 1,70 m large.

The sides of the walls are made of stones which were probably used in another previous building, and they are relatively good coursed stones, sometimes with bossage, however the inside of the wall is made of a block of stones of various sizes.

The ceramics finds show that this door was destroyed in the middle of the XIIIth century, as it is confirmed by the textual informations.

