

## SHEIKH ZENAD RECONSIDERED

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### Introduction

From an archaeological point of view, northern Lebanon, more precisely the region between Tripoli and the Lebanese-Syrian frontier, is connected with J.-P. Thalmann's long-term excavations at Tell 'Arqa, focusing on the investigation of pre-Hellenistic, especially Bronze Age, levels (see J.-P. Thalmann, 2006). The important results of this research are not only valid for the entire *Gap of Homs*, but also for the regions beyond making Tell 'Arqa one of the "type sites" for the development of the Bronze Age in northern Levant (fig. 1) <sup>1</sup>.

1 The plain of Akkar and the Gap of Homs.



Recently, J.-P. Thalmann has demonstrated in detail that the site was part of a wide-reaching settlement system including not only the southern Lebanese section of the *Gap of Homs* but also its northern part, which is today on Syrian territory (J.-P. Thalmann, 2006, vol. 1, p. 209ff., vol. 2, pl. 2). One of the archaeological sites mentioned in the Akkar plain is Sheikh Zenad <sup>2</sup>, located right on the coast. The place is not of immediate importance for the occupational history of the Bronze Age, but was apparently an important settlement site from at least the Late Iron Age until Late Roman/Early Byzantine times. It is also one of the few unexcavated tells in the coastal zone of northern Lebanon that has been little affected by modern destruction – making it special in that way as well.



## Site and setting



2 Southern part of the plain of Akkar.

3 Satellite map of Sheikh Zenad.

Sheikh Zenad is located in the north-western section of the plain of Akkar, about 3 km<sup>131</sup> south of the Syrian-Lebanese frontier post of al-Arida, right on the Mediterranean coast (fig. 2). Thus, the site belongs to the central part of the *Gap of Homs*, the most important traffic route between the Mediterranean and the hinterland of Syria. The gap is formed by a nearly triangular cut between the northern spurs of Mount Lebanon and Jabal Ansariyah, the Syrian coastal mountain range, which then runs eastward as a narrow strip opening onto the plain of Homs (fig. 1). The western part of that area consists of the plain of Akkar, which is bounded in the north by Tartus and in the south by the village of Khane<sup>3</sup>. The southern part of the plain of Akkar, to which Sheikh Zenad belongs, is the largest coherent agricultural zone of the Lebanese coastal region and is today completely cultivated.

Sheikh Zenad lies west of the road connecting Tripoli and Tartous along the coast, continuing south to Gaza and Port Said and north to the Taurus mountains. The site consists of the modern village of Sheikh Zenad, the ancient settlement or tell of the same name, and a necropolis, which belonged to the settle-

ment on the tell. The village and tell are separated by the Nahr Estouene, a river that flows all year round and empties into the Mediterranean sea. The modern village is located north of the river and the tell which is bounded to the east by the river course (fig. 3). The tell extends over approximately 120 x 80 m and is ca. 6 m high. About 300 m north of the modern village, also to the west of the main road, there is a small necropolis, the shaft-tombs of which were sunk into the sterile rock.



## Research history

So far, Sheikh Zenad is mainly known because of the necropolis. It was discovered in 1924 during the construction of the road from Tripoli to Tartous and excavated in a short campaign (C.-L. Brossé, 1926, p.<sup>132</sup> 199ff). The shaft-tombs contained stone sarcophagi with rich grave gifts



4 Rhyton in the shape of a pig's head (Photo: Beirut National Museum).

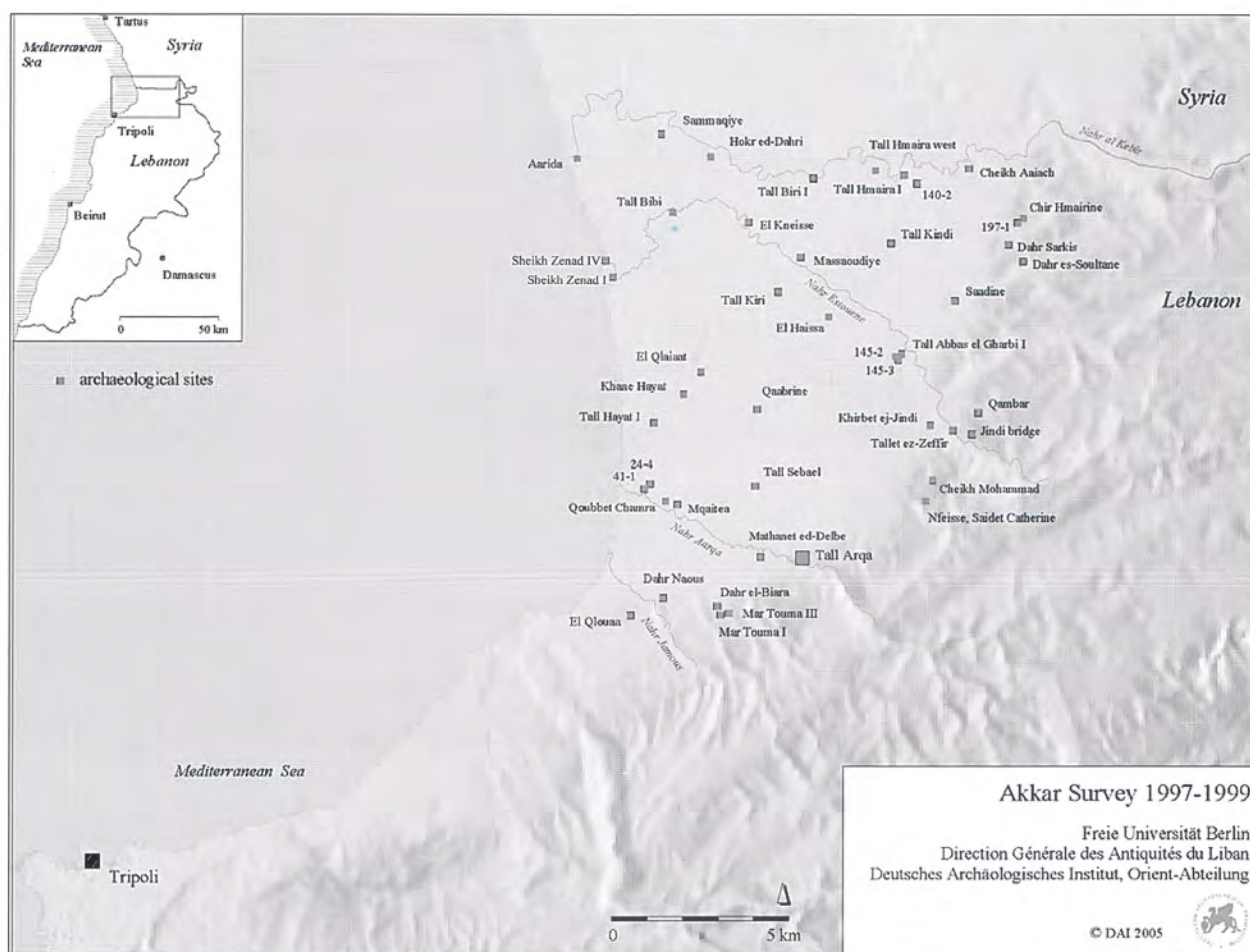
dating to the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. The most famous find is a rhyton in the shape of a pig's head (C.-L. Brossé, 1926, pl. XL) now on exhibit in the Beirut National Museum (fig. 4). In addition to this discovery, there were numerous documented imports of Attic black-burnished ware (C.-L. Brossé 1926, pl. XL bis) indicating, like the rhyton<sup>4</sup> and numerous other finds, that the site was of some significance. The dating of the finds to the Iron Age III, that is to Persian or Late Phoenician times, makes the site contemporaneous with Amrit and Sidon/Temple of Eshmun, to mention just two of the most important sites of this period. In the succeeding decades after the discovery of the site, there has been no further investigation, but philologists began to turn their attention to the necropolis and also to the tell, suggesting that Sheikh Zenad was Maisa, a station mentioned by Assurnasirpal II on the occasion of his campaign towards the Mediterranean in 875 BC (E. Gubel, 1992, p. 103)<sup>5</sup>. Due to political

circumstances, research activity in the coastal and border regions of Lebanon was interrupted for many years, but in the late 1990s, it once again became possible to approach the site. In the course of the German-Lebanese survey of the Plain of Akkar, which was conducted in 1997 and 1999, Sheikh Zenad and its entire surroundings were documented (K. Bartl, 1998-1999; 2002; K. Bartl and A. Saif, in preparation).

## Results of the survey

The survey of the southern plain of Akkar is aimed at documenting all extant archaeological monuments. In addition to the visible tells, most of which have modern occupation, their surroundings were surveyed as were the river-banks and the hills along the southern and eastern borders of the plain. In the course of the survey close to 100 sites were mapped (fig. 5). These were divided into multi-period tell sites, single-period settlements, agglomerations of artefacts, caves, tombs, necropoli and ancient quarries. According to the size of the settlement and based on written sources, Tell 'Arqa was the centre of at least the southern portion of the plain, spanning from the Early Bronze Age to the time of the Crusaders. In some periods, for example from Roman to Middle Islamic times, it was the centre of the entire plain. Other important centres were Tell Kazel (L. Badre *et al.*, 1994; L. Badre and E. Gubel, 1999-2000) and Tell Jamous - both in Syrian territory. During the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age





5 Akkar-Survey 1997-1999: map of the most important sites.

II, Tell Kazel, Sumur of Egyptian texts of the 14<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries BC and Simirra of Assyrian texts of the 8th century BC, was presumably the centre of the plain of Akkar because it was the seat of the Egyptian and, later, the Assyrian governors of the coastal region.

With a maximum size of 4 ha, the settlements in the southern plain of Akkar are small; however, some like Tell Hmaira, Tell Kiri and Qaabrine, have a long occupation sequence going back to the Late Neolithic period.

The larger settlements spread rather regularly over the plain <sup>6</sup>. Judging from the finds, the hills on the borders were only occupied at a relatively late date, that is, since Hellenistic-Roman times. It is striking that there are hardly any settlements on the coast. No traces of occupation were found in Arida at the mouth of the Nahr al-Kabir on the Lebanese-Syrian border, at the mouth of Nahr 'Arqa, or on Nahr Jamous. The only settlement between Khane <sup>7</sup> in the south and Arida is Tell Sheikh Zenad at the mouth of the Nahr Estouene <sup>8</sup>.

The tell is in the centre of a larger area containing archaeological remains. The area extends over ca. 1.2 km from north to south and ca. 500 m from east to west. During the survey we discerned the following units (fig. 6): Sheikh Zenad I: settlement on the tell plus the fields in the north.

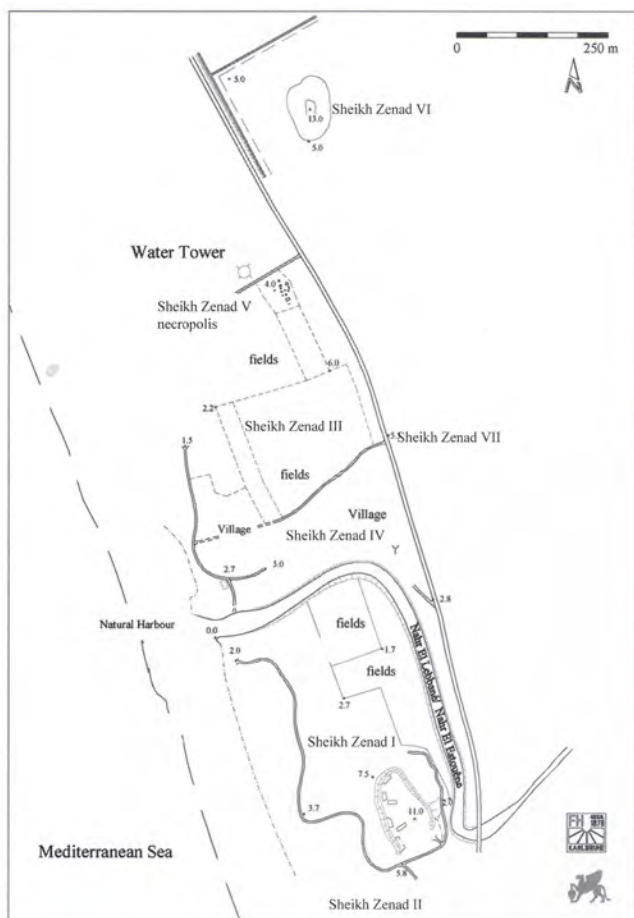
Sheikh Zenad II: scattering of sherds south of the tell.

Sheikh Zenad III: fields with scatterings of sherds north of the modern village.

Sheikh Zenad IV: modern village Sheikh Zenad.

Sheikh Zenad V: ancient necropolis (excavation in 1924, new survey





6 Map of Sheikh Zenad.

7 View of Tell Sheikh Zenad from the East (Photo: K. Bartl).

8 View of Sheikh Zenad, the Estouene river and the village from the South (Photo: K. Bartl).

in 1997).

Sheikh Zenad VI: conical small tell without sherds.

Sheikh Zenad VII: scattering of sherds east of the main road, northeast of the village.

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Sheikh Zenad I is the tell settlement of less than 1 ha in area (figs. 7-8). The surface is disturbed by a number of dug-out tank trenches left from the Civil War. The debris of the tell had been dug out from the trenches and heaped to form a kind of artificial embankment along the outer edge of the site. Those activities revealed some hewn stones, suggesting massive stone structures possibly erected in Hellenistic or Roman times. The east side of the tell facing the river was heavily bulldozed in order to build a road. The lower-lying areas around the tell are slightly terraced. Concentrations of sherds appeared particularly in areas immediately bordering the tell, while the region to the north, used mainly for agriculture, hardly yielded any surface ceramics at all. At the southern edge of the tell, in a lower-lying part of the ancient settlement, there are few modern structures<sup>9</sup>.

Although the finds are so unevenly distributed, the structure of the site suggests a settlement with a small upper town or acropolis and a more extensive lower town covered by fields today. Based upon this presumed layout, the ancient settlement would have been much larger than may be inferred from the tell settlement, possibly covering ca. 7 to 8.7 ha (350 x 200/250 m). That would make the place one of the biggest sites of the



region in Antiquity. In comparison, Tell 'Arqa at the base comprises ca. 7 ha (J.-P. Thalmann, 2006, p. 7). Possibly, part of the modern village across the river belongs to the ancient settlement as well, as is suggested by the topographical situation of a raised settlement centre and by the scattering of sherds. If such were the case, this would increase the area<sup>135</sup> to 8-9 ha. Towards the west, the place is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea with a flat sandy beach. The settlement does not lie directly on the coastline but is separated from the sea by a 50-100 m wide strip<sup>10</sup>. The shore is very shallow and easily accessible. About 100-150 m to the west, a small rocky reef running exactly parallel to the coastline rises from the sea. It has several small passages making it part of a natural harbour sufficient for the protection of small boats, similar to those in use for fishing nowadays (fig. 9)<sup>11</sup>.

9 Coastline with reef north-west of Sheikh Zenad (Photo: K. Bartl).

10 Coastline southwest of Sheikh Zenad (Photo: K. Bartl).



Sheikh Zenad II is a small area between the southern end of the tell and the next bay to the south (fig. 10). Some sherds were found here as well, but we may assume that this area did not belong to the proper settlement. The reef also separates this bay from the open sea, making it into another favorable berth for small boats.

Sheikh Zenad III consists of several large fields with some scatterings of sherds. A few ancient buildings away from the core of the settlement may have been situated here.



Sheikh Zenad IV is the modern village of the same name. About 100 m west of the main road, the village rises slightly to form a small elevated area. As sherds were found here as well, we may presume that part of the ancient settlement was situated north of the river, maybe not contemporaneous with the tell, but possibly dating to later periods.

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Sheikh Zenad V is the ancient necropolis comprising 18 shaft-tombs, and despite the vegetation, is still visible in the landscape ca. 50 m west of the main road (fig. 11)<sup>12</sup>. The shafts, some of which are connected below ground, are hewn into the rock at right angles and go down to a maximum depth of 2 m. The walls are carefully smoothed. There were no



archaeological remains in the immediate surroundings, but small scatterings of sherds were found in the fields to the west and south-west, which then continue over into Sheikh Zenad III.

Sheikh Zenad VI is an almost oval, tell-like rise within extensive, fenced-in private grounds (fig. 12). Since there were no sherds on the surface, its function is not entirely clear, but its regular conical shape makes a natural rise rather improbable, especially since there are no rocky ridges or similar rock formations in the coastal zone.

11 Necropolis of Sheikh Zenad (Photo: K. Bartl).

12 Aerial view of Sheikh Zenad VI.

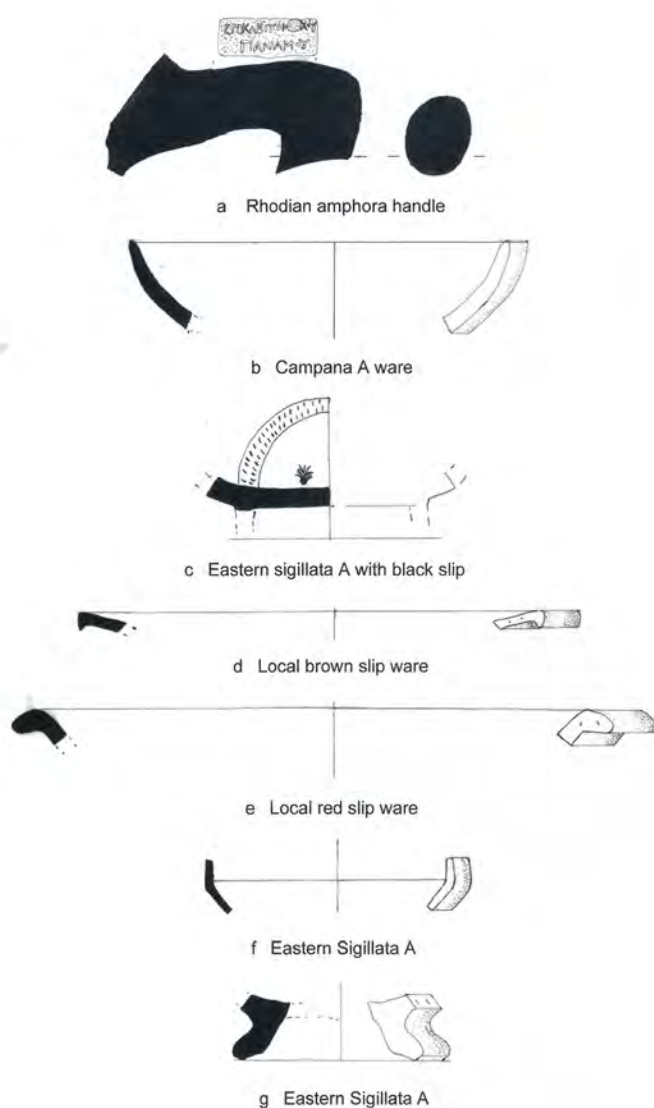
Sheikh Zenad VII is another area with scatterings of sherds, beyond the main road to the east of the village. The small quantity of surface material might suggest that a single ancient building was erected here.

### Dating

The surface material of Sheikh Zenad reveals the following periods of occupation:

- Iron Age II (8<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC)<sup>13</sup>.
- Iron Age III (5<sup>th</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC).
- Hellenistic period (end of 3<sup>rd</sup> – middle of 1<sup>st</sup> century BC).
- Roman period (middle of 1<sup>st</sup> century BC – end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).
- Late Roman/Early Byzantine period (4<sup>th</sup> – middle of 7<sup>th</sup> century AD).

The five periods of occupation are represented by different quantities of



13 Hellenistic and Roman pottery from Sheikh Zenad.

scale 1:2

sherds (fig. 13). Material from the Hellenistic and Roman periods is most frequent, and the quality of the *Sigillata* is strikingly high <sup>14</sup>. Black-slipped sherds of Hellenistic lamps and vessels are relatively frequent as well. In contrast, Iron Age II and Iron Age III are represented by very few pieces. The most striking find was the fragment of a lekythos dating to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC (K. Bartl, 2002, fig. 10). There is also much less material dating to the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period. The Islamic periods are hardly represented at all, with the exception of some glazed sherds – a factor arguing for the abandonment of the settlement during the medieval periods. The time of abandonment cannot be ascertained, but it might have happened towards the close of the Late Roman/Early Byzantine period or at the beginning of the Umayyad period.

### Summary

Based on its location, size and structure, as well as the extraordinary quality of surface material, Sheikh Zenad must have been an important site from at least the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. If one also takes into account the site's favorable natural

conditions, one can also imagine occupation in earlier periods – despite the lack of finds. The next settlement sites on the coast – Khane in the south and Tabbat el-Hammam (R. Braidwood, 1940) in the north – are ca. 14 km and ca. 20 km distant respectively, and one might presume that Sheikh Zenad played a central role for the long-distance routes touching the plain of Akkar. Archaeological excavations would be the first step in the verification of such far-reaching hypotheses.



**Rhodian Amphora**

a)

Sheikh Zenad I /018.1 (*Slope 2*)

Nr.: AS 97/ 28

Form: Handle of a vine amphora with a rectangular eponymic stamp:

"EPI KLEITOM[A]COU PANAMOU".

Fabric: Fine texture, the clay contains some white (possibly lime) particles

Colour of the fired clay: 7.5 YR 6/6 (reddish yellow)

Date: 200-180 BC.

**Campana A ware**

b)

Sheikh Zenad/ Tell

Nr.: HR 70

Form: Rim fragment of a bowl

Fabric: Campana A

Colour of the fired clay: 5 YR 5/4 (reddish brown)

Colour of the slip: 2.5 YR 2.5/ 1 (reddish black)

Date: 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.**Eastern Sigillata A with black slip**

c)

Sheikh Zenad I /018.1 (*Tr. 6/1*)

Nr.: AS 97/ 393

Form: Base fragment of a plate with roulette pattern and palmette stamps on the inside

Fabric: Eastern Sigillata A

Colour of the fired clay: 7.5 YR 7/6 (reddish yellow)

Colour of the slip: 2.5 YR 2.5/1 (reddish black)

Date: Beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.**Local ware with brown clay and slip**

d)

Sheikh Zenad I/018/1 (*Tr. 1/1*)

Nr.: AS 97/401

Form: Rim fragment of a fishplate

Fabric: Fine sandy clay with some tiny dark and black particles

Colour of the fired clay: 10 YR 7/6 (yellow)

Colour of the slip: 5 YR 4/4 (reddish brown)

Date: Beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.**Local red slip ware**

e)

Sheikh Zenad I/018.1 (*Field 1/3*)

Nr.: HR 33

Form: Rim fragment of a fishplate

Fabric: Sandy clay with possibly some lime particles and grey dots

Colour of the fired clay: 7.5 YR 5/6 (strong brown)

Colour of the slip: 10 R 5/6 (red)

Date: ca. 200 BC.

**Eastern Sigillata A**

f)

Sheikh Zenad I/ 018.1 (*Tr 6/1*)

Nr.: HR 68

Form: Wall fragment of a cup (Hama 21)

Fabric: Eastern Sigillata A

Colour of the fired clay: 10 YR 8/2 (very pale brown)

Colour of the slip: 2.5 YR 6/8 (light red)

Date: 50 BC-50 AD.

g)

Sheikh Zenad I/018.1 (*Terrace*)

Nr.: HR 31

Form: profiled base fragment (Hama 24)

Fabric: Eastern Sigillata A

Colour of the fired clay: 10 YR 8/3 (very pale brown)

Colour of the slip: 10 R 5/6 (red)

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.



1 I thank J.-P. Thalmann for numerous valuable hints concerning the occupation of the plain of Akkar in antiquity.

2 Former transcription: Cheikh Zenad (C.-L. Brossé, 1926).

3 Earlier maps mention the village as Abdé.

4 This vessel is one of the few finds from the necropolis that have been preserved.

5 The sequence of places is as follows: Mahalata, Kaisa, Maisa and Arwad. Possible identifications with modern place names are Tripoli, Qalamun, Sheikh Zenad and Ruad respectively.

6 It must, however, be born in mind that several larger areas in the plain could not be investigated, because they were covered with fenced-in orchards. Because of intensive irrigation the fields could only be partially surveyed. As we came upon several ancient small settlements that were almost completely destroyed by agricultural activities, we may assume that the results of the survey reflect just a selection, but probably a representative one, of the real settlement activities.

7 This place is identified with the Greek founding of Orthosia (K.-P. Todt, in preparation). So far, there has been no archaeological investigation in this area, which is completely covered by modern buildings.

8 The region north and south of Sheikh Zenad was, and still is, traditionally used for salt-production. In the north, rectangular earthen walls still indicate

the position of the salterns where the water evaporated. South-east of the settlement, salt is obtained from a shallow lagoon.

9 According to the Lebanese Department of Antiquities, the tell has long since been put under protection and cannot be built on.

10 During our investigation, large quantities of the fine white sand from this strip were being illegally carried off with trucks.

11 One might compare it to the small harbour of Tartus where the boats heading for Arwad lie. However, a short underwater investigation has not come up with any further archaeological remains for Sheikh Zenad.

12 However, it was not possible to rediscover all 24 tombs found in 1924 (C.-L. Brossé, 1926, fig. 2)

13 I owe this information to the evaluation of the Iron Age in the plain of Akkar by A. Chaaya (A. Chaaya, in preparation), who also accompanied the first survey campaign as the Lebanese partner.

14 My thanks go to Ch. Römer-Strehl on whose evaluation of the material the present summary is based (Ch. Römer-Strehl, in preparation).



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