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## **QALA'T TIBNIN: ARCHAEOLOGY FOR A FUTURE CONSERVATION PLAN**

In the winter of 2000 Hans Curvers agreed with our friend Ferdinand Smit that an image of Qala't Tibnin on the cover of his dissertation "*The Battle for South Lebanon*" would serve as an appropriate historical benchmark. His tragic death abruptly changed our intentions and ended more than twenty years of discussing all the historical, present and future issues of the region. To share our respect for the cultural time-depth of Qala't Tibnin (fig. 1 and 7), we compiled this historical essay from our reports to the General Directorate of Antiquities.

Time is central to the study of the past. By definition the past cannot be present and yet the traces of the past surround us. Historians and archaeologists spend a large part of their career on the presentation of the past in the present whether through survey, studying the archives, or excavation and conservation of ancient remains.

In observing excavated material the archaeologist is faced with a set of problems: how to observe the ancient vestiges in an objective and controllable way; how to bridge the distance between the present context of the remains and the original context of creation and use; what can be done about the destruction and disappearance of ancient vestiges; why do we bother about these problems of the past and the present? The first question has been addressed by generations of archaeologists and the answer was found in detailed ('scientific') archaeological investigation, which is necessary to arrive at a data-set of high quality. A more 'objective' premise would provoke an extraneous philosophical debate.

Creating a bridge between the past and the present has been dealt with less systematically. A main concern among archaeologists has been the risk of ideological distortion of the past for present and future purposes. Although more down to earth, the conservational approach towards archaeology has suffered from the lack of planning procedures, legislation and funding.

Our reports on the archaeological project in Tibnin considered the characteristics of the site, its relation to the present and the efforts to create a link with the past in a future setting. Various scenarios linking past and present have been proposed to the authorities, including their respective advantages and disadvantages. These have not yet been taken up.

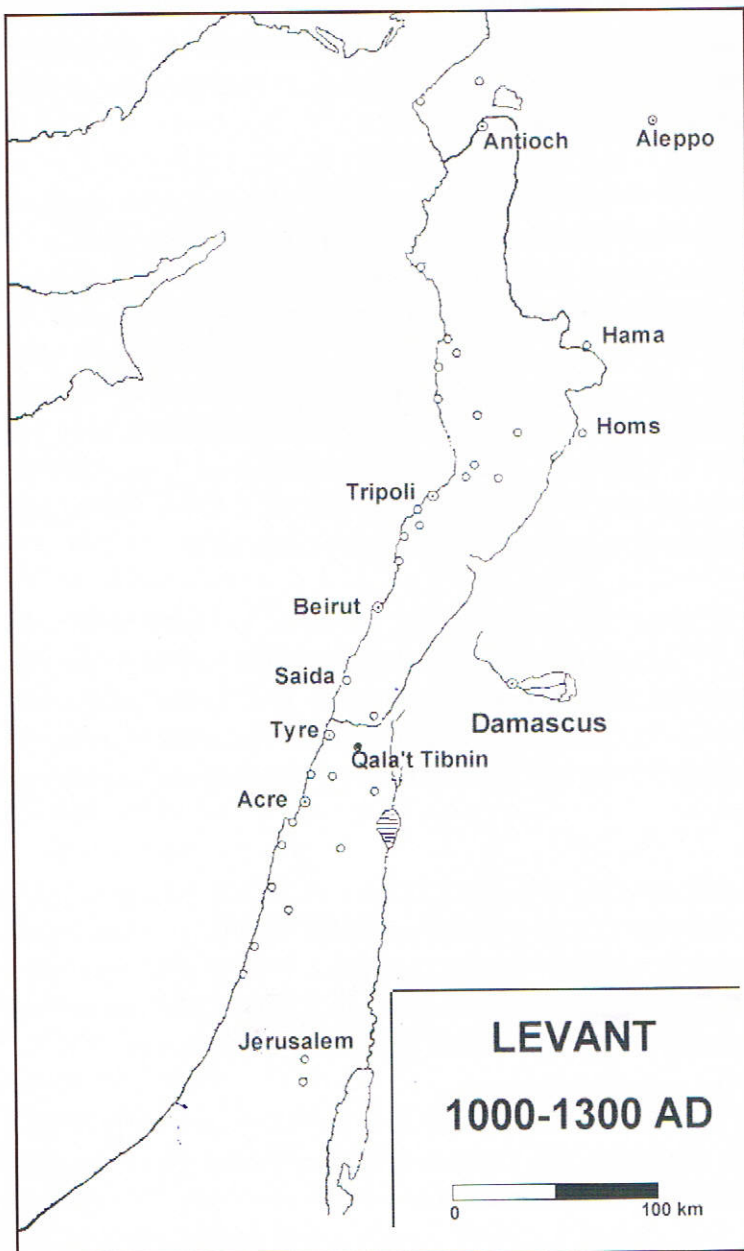
The reports include a more thorough analysis of the site's architectural history and technology. These studies provide ample opportunities for future investigations, development and conservation of the site (Feilden and Jokilehto

1993). The goal of this essay is to provide an assessment of the intrinsic value of the site, to discuss its authenticity and its historic value for the region.

The inventory and documentation of the existing remains were obtained through clearing several crucial areas and photographing all extant remains. Important new insights into the present state of the site were obtained. The remnants observed range from the Late Bronze/Iron Age till the present day.

The data for the first draft of the conservation plan was drawn from four survey sessions on site. The inventory was made during a six-week project supervised by the Directorate General of Antiquities and supported by the Municipality of Tibnin. The collected data has been made available to all parties involved in the decision-making process regarding the cultural ruins of the castle of Tibnin (Le Toron). This essay is meant to inform readers of a wider circle about the historical values of the castle.

1 Location of Qala't Tibnin.



Throughout various travel reports and historical records Tibnin stands out as a village dominated by the presence of a historical monument (fig. 1). The earliest remains were documented by various travellers visiting the region. In the Lebanese inventory of archaeological sites two in particular are mentioned (Wescombe and Copeland 1965).

**Tibnin I** 1.18 km on the Tyre – Bent Jbeil road. Site is 800 m. asl. II. On BL, but no finder is mentioned; Karge (1917), who mentions the town only in passing, is wrongly given as the reference. III. Acheulian material was found on the surface. There is indeed a small collection of bifacial material in AUB, identified years ago by Père Fleisch as Acheulian, and Père Hours reports seeing a small collection marked 'Tibnine, Hajji Khalaf', in the *Institute de Paléontologie Humaine, Paris* (p.c. 1966). IV. No new information, (Copeland and Wescombe 1965, 87).

**Tibnin II** I – IV. Several megalithic sites were found in this region by Père Mader (ZDPV, 1914, vol. 37, p. 20), as mentioned by Tallon (1958). See also Turville Petre (1926), (Copeland and Wescombe 1965, 87).



The presence of Paleolithic human occupation was confirmed during a visit to the wadi near the north-east crossing of Tibnin's main road. After a visit to the Khan we stopped to inspect a cave/*abri* on the northern bank of the wadi. On floor of the wadi we observed a variety of sherds and flint material.

The surveyors working on the Western Palestine Survey, organized under the auspices of the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, described the archaeological remains around Tibnin quite extensively (Conder and Kitchener 1881). The survey was executed in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of a project to inventory Palestinian lands. The survey used the Litani river as its northern limit. This policy seems to confirm British intentions to include the hinterland of Tyre in the Palestinian territory (Smit 2000:43, n. 54). It is largely thanks to this survey that there is a well-documented perspective on the status of the ancient monuments in the area at that time.

**Tibnin** A village, built of stone. The Mudir of the district resides in the castle (see section B). The inhabitants are about 450 (Guérin says 600) Metawileh and 250 Christians. There is a Maronite chapel in the village. It is situated on a hill, and there are figs and arable land around. The water supply is from large birkets and twenty

to twenty-five cisterns in and around the village. (Conder and Kitchener 1881, 95).

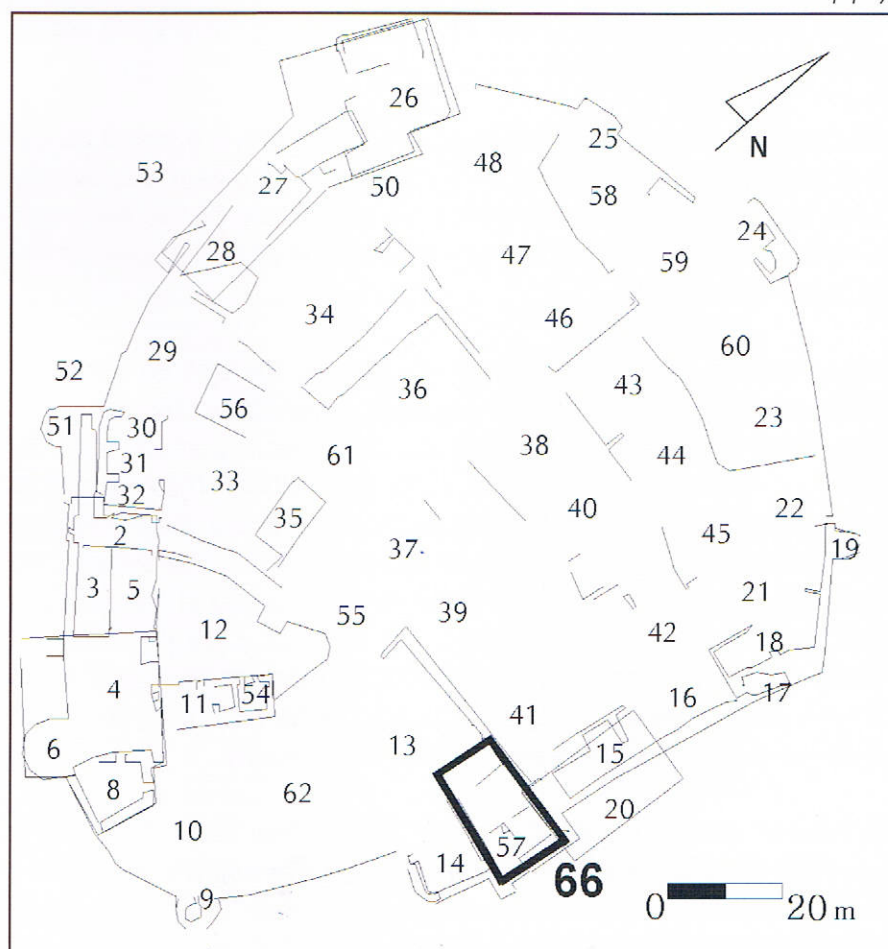
The features described by the British surveyors are still present in the village. Elderly villagers often referred to the presence of cisterns. However, the *birket* has become the victim of Tibnin's more recent expansion and has given place to yet another landmark, the Municipality building. The 19<sup>th</sup> century chapel has not been located yet, but the modern church is situated on a hill near the *Hosn Tibnin*.

#### **Kul'at Tibnin**

The residence of the governor contains about twenty Moslems. It is immediately above the village, (Conder and

Kitchener 1881, 95). The site is identified by Benjamin of Tudela (1163 AD) with ancient Timnatha. It appears to be the Tamena of the hieratic MS called travels of Mohar. Benjamin of Tudela places the tomb of Samuel the Just here, perhaps the same sacred place now called

2 Qala't Tibnin :  
area numbers.



*Neby es-Saddik, half a mile north-east of Tibnin. In 1561 AD Gerson of Scarmela mentions here two marble pillars over the supposed tomb of Shamgar (Judges III, 31). Uri of Biel (1564 AD) writes the name of the place Timnin, (Conder and Kitchener 1881, 96).*

The presence of a sacred high place is assumed on the basis of the various discoveries of pre-Crusader remains such as columns and other architectural elements of a monumental nature.

**Neby as-Siddik** (*ruins at*)      *A small square with ruined buildings north of Kulat Tibnin, probably used as an outwork like Hosn Tibnin, (Conder and Kitchener 1881, 96).*

We explored the hill designated as Nabi as-Sadiq several times but no remains have survived. Another subsidiary or auxiliary feature of the Tibnin defensive system is located on the hill west of the castle mound. We surveyed the remains and included the 1960s Lebanese army trenches in our plan.

**Hosn Tibnin**      *A square enclosure, with a ruined round tower at each angle, used as an outwork to Kul'at Tibnin; Arabic work, perhaps built by Dhahr al-'Amr when he rebuilt the castle, (Conder and Kitchener 1881, 137).*

Amin Maluf's compilation of references of Arab historians is a report on the Crusades from the local perspective. In the epilogue he tries to explain the background and principles of this period in the history of the Arab and Western worlds. He refers to Ibn Jubayr's description of his last days in the Near East (Maluf 1984, 263).

*Upon leaving Tibnin (near Tyre), we passed through an unbroken skein of farms and villages whose lands were efficiently cultivated. The inhabitants were all Muslims, but they live in comfort with the Franj — may God preserve us from temptation! Their dwellings belong to them and all their property is unmolested. All the regions controlled by the Franj in Syria are subject to this same system: the landed domains, villages, and farms have remained in the hands of the Muslims. Now, doubt invests the heart of a great number of these men when they compare their lot to that of their brothers living in muslim territory. Indeed, the latter suffer from the injustice of their co-religionists, whereas the Franj act in equity.*

Paul Deschamps wrote an article based on his two visits to the site (Deschamps 1934, vii, 117). He was inspired by a massive western wall of the castle being the only substantial remainder of the Crusader period (Deschamps 1934, 118).

*En 1936, avec M. Pierre Coupel, je visitai dans le Sud de Liban et en Galilée plusieurs ouvrages fortifiés tel que le château de Mer de Saïda; en avant de cette ville, le château de Belhacem et plus loin,*



*en grand garde, fut reconnue la grotte-vigie appelée la Cave de Tyron située au flanc d'une falaise au sud de la chaîne du Liban; plus au sud, à l'est de Tyre, le château Toron, (Deschamps 1934, vii).*

*J'ai visité deux fois le Toron, dont le site répond bien au 13 vieux nom français qu'on lui a donné: Toron signifie éminence isolée. Il se dresse à l'entrée de la plaine de Tyre sur un sommet à 870 m d'altitude. De là on aperçoit le château de Beaufort.*

*A part la muraille dont j'ai parlé, son enceinte en petit appareil n'a rien conservé de l'oeuvre des Croisés. On n'y voit même pas de pierres remployées. Bien que le Toron ne puisse faire l'objet d'une étude architecturale, j'ai cru devoir en évoquer le souvenir d'en résumer l'histoire, cette place ayant eu une grande importance stratégique au temps de Croisades.*

A more recent reference to the castle of Tibnin and of its auxiliary defensive system can be found in the lavishly produced publication of Lebanese castles of Nordiguian and Voisin (1999, 414-415). It is significant that the authors of this work refer to the Conder and Kitchener survey report for a plan of the site. The description hardly exceeds the chapter that Paul Deschamps dedicated to the history of the site and it is strange that he is not mentioned in their bibliography. Instead they refer to Dussaud, Deschamps and Seyrig (1931).

**Tebnin** (...) *Description: désigné par un terme fréquemment utilisé chez les Provençaux pour désigner une colline de forme arrondie, le "Toron" du Liban-Sud se présente sous forme d'un sommet de colline ceint d'une muraille flanquée de cinq tours circulaires, de trois tours quadrangulaires, dont l'une d'elles, massive, devait être assimilée au donjon.*

*Les remaniements successifs ont laissé des traces qui s'imbriquent les unes aux autres. Parements à petits moellons, à gros blocs grossièrement taillés et bossages de récupération.*

*Sont autant de remaniements difficiles à dater faute de preuves archéologiques. Que reste-t-il du château médiéval? Certainement l'allure générale de l'enceinte, la tour massive à l'Ouest, une tour carrée à l'est et des soubassements au niveau de la porterie ottomane. Une église Notre-Dame avait été édifiée par les Francs à l'intérieur de l'enceinte castrale. Il n'en reste rien d'apparent. Sur la colline, à l'ouest du village, signalons un fortin arabe, le Qalaat al-Hosn, composé d'un carré flanqué de quatre tours d'angle.*

During our initial archaeological inventory of the site we observed many large blocks that we considered to be *in situ*, as the plaster was still present, as were the parallel lines applied to its slightly off-set finishing. We can only conjecture about why specialists like Deschamps or Voisin did

not take note of the more ancient ubiquitous blocs than the 18<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of the castle.

Our observations were confirmed in 2003 when the General Director of Antiquities, Frédéric Husseini, coordinated a meeting with a German scholar Mathias Piana, who was also convinced that the castle of Tibnin included more *in situ* remains than previously reported.

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3 Qala't Tibnin :  
elevation wall 66 N.

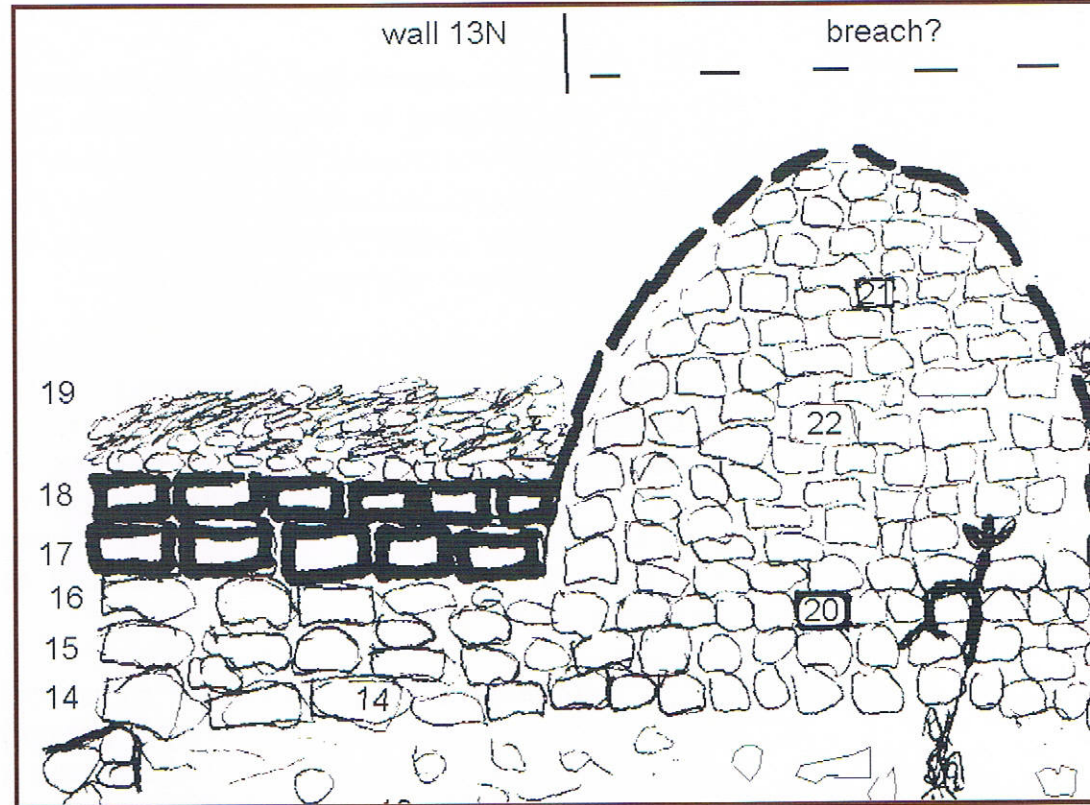


FIG. 3 (SKETCHED ELEVATION OF N WALL 66):

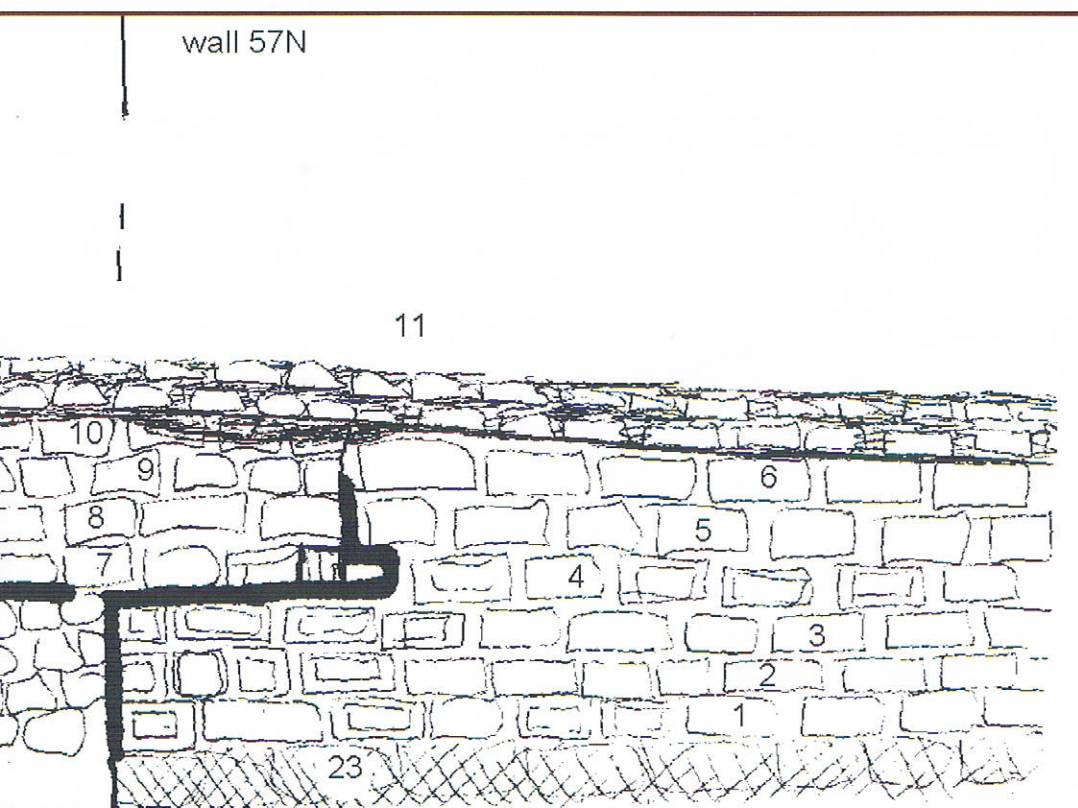
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| 1-4   | courses with bossed blocks, large size                                     |
| 5-6   | courses of large blocks with smoothed surface                              |
| 7-10  | medium-sized blocks with rather rough surface                              |
| 11    | long rectangular stones for vault  |
| 12    | early wall in north-western corner   |
| 13    | fill with an occasional cobble   |
| 14-16 | three courses of rough medium-to large-sized blocks                        |
| 17-18 | well-dressed medium-sized blocks   |
| 19    | small, irregular blocks in mortar to create the ceiling of the cross vault |
| 20    | exit of drain (?)  |
| 21    | exit of ventilation (?)  |
| 22    | blocking of vault/former passage (?)                                       |

In order to describe the various rooms, courts, towers and entrances systematically we numbered all recognizable areas on our 1999 plan. In addition to the inventory of architectural features on the site we also explored the slopes of the castle. The ceramics retrieved from the western and eastern slopes provide a good insight into the occupational history of the site (Fig. 7).



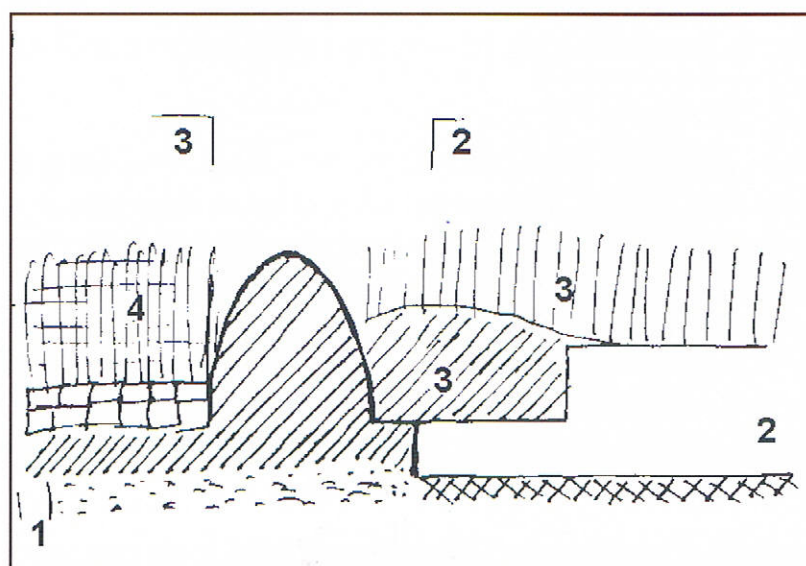
An area of special interest is Area 66. It is located in the south eastern part of the castle (fig. 2 - 4). It consists of a large rectangular hall in which three central columns support the cross vaults. Thanks to the necessary removal of the many fig trees by the DGA team, we were able to include the area in the Tibnin 2000 investigations. Subsequently we removed the rubble from a 1 – 1.5 m trench along the north, east and south walls exposing them for documentation.

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All foundations in the trench were laid bare except for the south-western corner. Here, modern visitors had created a stepped access into the basement. The huge volume of soil that had accumulated over the years as well as the new access to the basement highly influenced our decision to leave the south-western corner as it was.

Wall 66 N revealed the use of a variety of building elements throughout its history

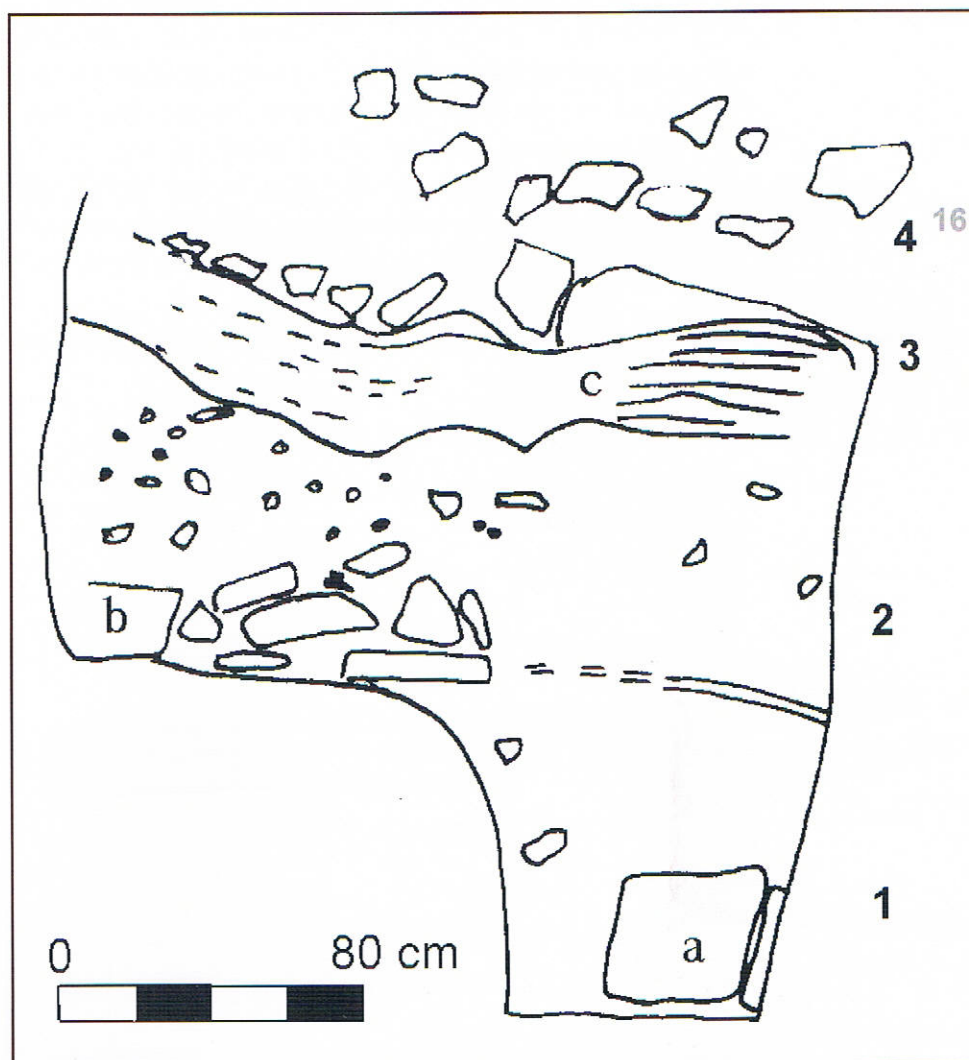


4 Schematic elevation of wall 66 N.

(fig. 3-4). The basement measures 1980 x 880 cm. The maximum height from the present surface above area 66 to the bottom of the trench along the foundations is 6 m. We assume a maximum height between four and five meters for the original basement or hall. The elevation of wall 66 N and other observations is summarized in the diagram.

Phase 1 (fig. 4) is only the tip of the iceberg concerning the discoveries made in sounding 66 NW situated in the north-western corner

of area 66 (see below). Phase 2 (fig. 4) is represented by part of a wall consisting of building elements only observed in wall 66 N. We assume that they represent integrated parts of pre-Crusader or the earliest Crusader construction architecture (the latter suggestion I owe to discussions with Mathias Piana,

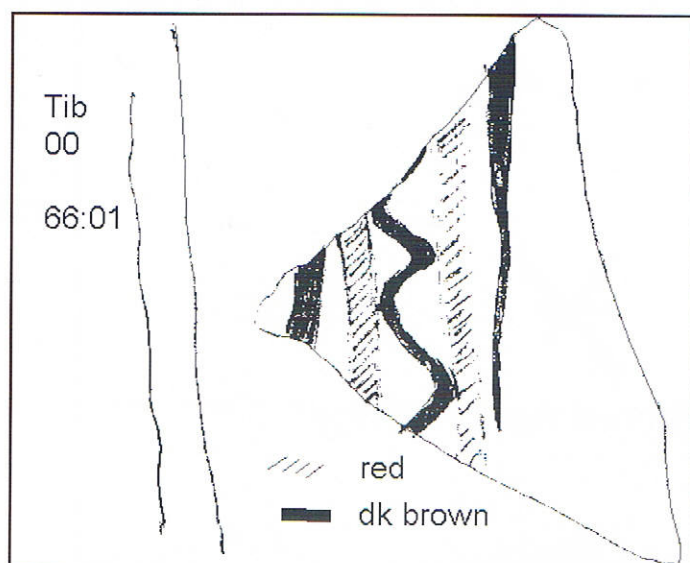


who is not convinced of the first option). Phase 3 (fig. 4) is the construction attributed to Le Toron of the Crusader period. Phase 4 (fig. 4) is the 18<sup>th</sup> century reconstruction of the castle, in which the corridor was blocked and area 66 reached its present day layout with the central columns and the cross vaults.

These cross vaults, most likely to be dated to the 18<sup>th</sup> century rebuilding of the castle, are of irregular size. The eastern wing of vaults originates at a lower level from wall 66 N. The difference in height between the bottom of the vaults on wall 66 N and the central pillars is ca. 100 cm. We assume that the difference in dimensions between the two wings of cross vaults suggests that the builders had to deal with various pre-existing features. Although these features may have been in ruins since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the builders decided to integrate the pre-existing vestiges into their construction.

For a first assessment of the history of the site the activities in the basement became increasingly important. The sketched elevation of wall 66 N reveals many secrets of the building history of this area. The developments observed on this wall can help us understand the building history of the south-eastern tower of the castle.





6 Qala't Tibnin:  
Sounding 66 NW sherd.

During our first visit in 1999 we were shown some ancient remains, *spolia*, in the walls of area 66. Closer examination during the Tibnin 2000 project which included a limited clearing of a section in the north-western corner of that area and, subsequently, analysis of the photographs, suggests that the history of area 66 starts in the second half of the second millennium BC. Finds on the eastern and western slopes between the castle and the modern municipality building support this observation. 17

The features exposed in the section of the north-western corner, below the walls, instigated a limited sounding. The vestiges in sounding 66 NW revealed the earliest architecture thus far exposed at the site (fig. 5). An investigation of the north-western corner was started after completion of the 1 – 1.5 m wide trench. In contrast to the other walls, the section of the trench revealed a soil deposit that consisted of alternating brown and black layers (thickness ca. 1 cm each; see figure 5.c).

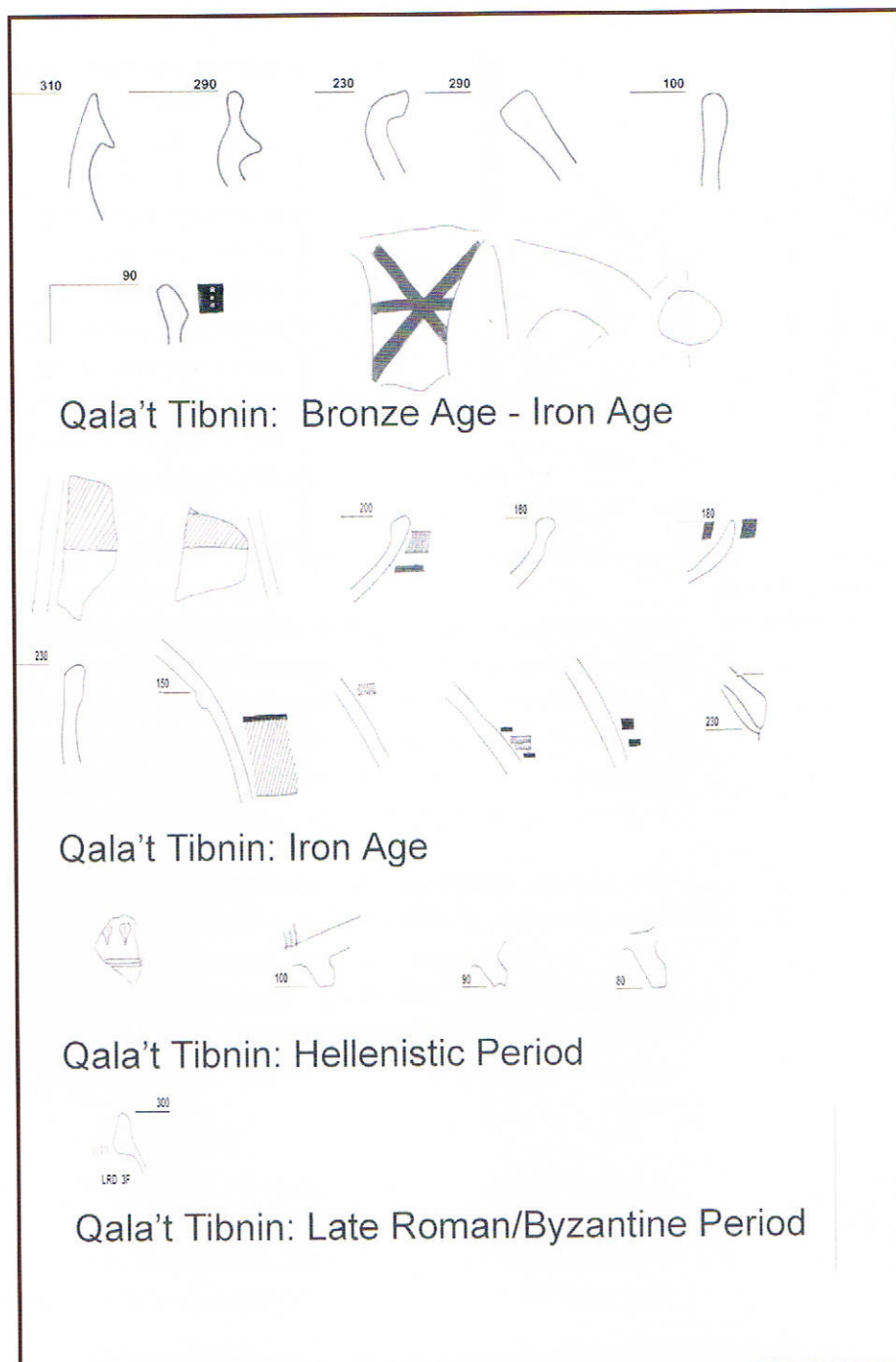
The sherds retrieved from levels 1-3 include Late Bronze and Iron Age I characteristics. In the catalogue of sherds retrieved from the western slope many comparisons can be found in the assemblages of Tyre and Sarepta/Sarafand. The dates obtained from these comparisons suggest an LB-Iron date. The main characteristics are the bichrome painted decorative patterns applied to several vessel fragments and the rims of the cooking ware.

A body sherd in sounding 66 NW (fig. 6) is one of the few retrieved; it is a good example of an LB-Iron transitional ceramic assemblage. We discussed this find with Francisco Nuñez, working on a dissertation on Levantine Iron Age and who is currently studying a Tyre assemblage:

*Concerning the Tibnin sherd, this kind of decoration is typical of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age periods. It fits well with the other sherds you showed me in Beirut. So, a transitional date between these two periods would be fine in my opinion (let's say XII-XI century) (communication by e-mail on February 13, 2001)*

Nuñez refers to his previous assessment of sherds collected during the Tibnin 2000 project. At the time he isolated various sherds as being characteristic for that period as well. These sherds were retrieved from the eastern and western slopes of the castle.

The lowest level over bedrock (fig. 5:1) revealed a stone related to another only just visible in the northern section of the very small sounding. We interpret these two stones as a wall.



Phase 2 (fig. 5, 2) seals the wall (?) or phase 1 with its subsequent accumulation of fill. A floor or surface indicated by a white line in the section reaches an alignment of stones interpreted as a wall with a north-west orientation. It runs almost parallel to the west section of the sounding.

Phase 3 (fig. 5, 3) consists of a deposit of alternating brown and black layers (ca. 1 cm thick).

Phase 4 is a thick deposit of fill with occasional cobbles. It resembles the layer referred to as 13 (fig. 3). At the end of the season we wanted to back-fill the trench when we discovered a wall in the north-western corner of area 66. The deposit with the cobbles can be found on both sides of this wall.



Phase 5 consists of large blocks seemingly integrated into wall 66 W. As more remains emerged as part of the walls of area 66 (see above) we assume that these remains represent a fifth phase in the north-western corner of area 66.

Future investigations in area 66 should include the recording of the elevations of all walls. During the Tibnin 2000 project we photographed the walls to allow preliminary analysis of the area. Furthermore, should area 66 be completely emptied of its fill (south-western corner) and rubble a full assessment of its foundations would allow a further investigation of pre-Crusader architecture in this area. 19

In 2003 we collaborated with Mathias Piana and investigated several areas of importance for a better understanding of the history of the castle in the Crusader period. In this essay we have tried to stress the value of the long-term human occupation of the site. Situated in the hinterland of Tyre it offers the possibility of gaining access to the Iron Age deposits in a non-urban setting.

The conservation plan for the site could include its use as a garden. In recent years cultural events have taken place at the site. The people from the village and beyond have gathered during summer evenings to enjoy open-air concerts. Inside the building the opening of a cultural center could allow the site to become an integral part of daily life for the inhabitants of Tibnin. It would give back the monument a function in daily life and guarantee the appropriate maintenance of the monument.

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