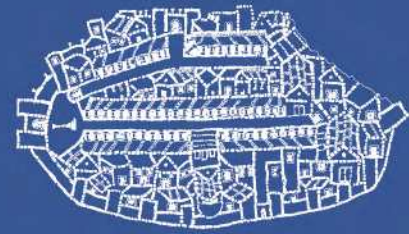


**Abhandlungen des Deutschen  
Palästina-Vereins**



Jens Kamlah and H el ene Sader (Editors)

ADPV 45,I

# ***Tell el-Burak I*** **The Middle Bronze Age**

With Chapters Related to the Site  
and to the Mamluk-Ottoman Periods



Harrassowitz

Abhandlungen  
des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins

Herausgegeben von

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und  
HERMANN MICHAEL NIEMANN

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## Chapter 4

# The Marine Survey (2004)

By RALPH PEDERSEN

At the request of the excavators of *Tell el-Burak*, Dr. RALPH PEDERSEN surveyed the waters adjacent to the tell with the aid of team members IBRAHIM NUREDDIN and DAISY KAMEL. The objective of the survey was to ascertain the existence or absence thereof of an associated harbor-age or related maritime activities.

### 4.1. Sea Conditions and Bottom Morphology

The sea at *Tell el-Burak* is a high energy zone. Rolling waves from the west are constant and produce an underwater surge, disturbing the sea-floor and creating drifting clouds of silt that combine with florae and faunae to obscure visibility. The silt stays suspended in the water for a period, eventually settling to the bottom. Deposits of silt are found throughout the area blanketing the seabed in some places and filling depressions in others. The silt is not compacted, indicating that there is no long-term deposition of sand.

The sea-floor consists of solid bedrock lying in gently undulating plains, broken at various points by ledges and gullies. It slopes gently downward from the shore reaching depths of 4 meters at a distance of approximately 500m from land (Fig. 4.1). The surges caused by waves are still felt at these depths.

Patches of sand of widely varying sizes are found throughout the area. There are numerous pockets in the bedrock reaching depths of 30cm or more, particularly in the areas closer to shore. They often contain sand, rounded pebbles, and cobbles, and, on occasion, pottery sherds. A number of large rocks or small reefs are also found off *Tell el-Burak*.

Further out, starting at approximately 100m distance from the shore, the sandy patches become larger, while the same bedrock, boulders, and gullies continue out into the deep sea. Long, narrow, shallow sandy areas occur frequently, running at right angles to the coast and appearing as channels carved by the surging currents. Loose sand has filled these channels but, given its consistency and the high energy of the water, the sand probably shifts frequently in and out of the channels.

The dynamics of the *Tell el-Burak* seafront have been disturbed by the modern construction of a **jetty**. Aligned with the northern edge of the tell, the jetty has interrupted the natural south to north flow of sand, resulting in a buildup of deposits in front of the tell and a corresponding erosion of the beach north of the tell and jetty. **This erosion may eventually threaten the northern edge of *Tell el-Burak* and the adjacent private gardens.** The jetty may also account for the silty conditions to its south, where sand is being trapped.

The southern area consists of a small shallow bay that terminates to the south at what appears to be a cape when viewed from the tell. Along this southern edge, the sea-floor adjacent to the shore differs from the rest of the area in that it consists of cobbles with a scattering of large rocks and boulders.

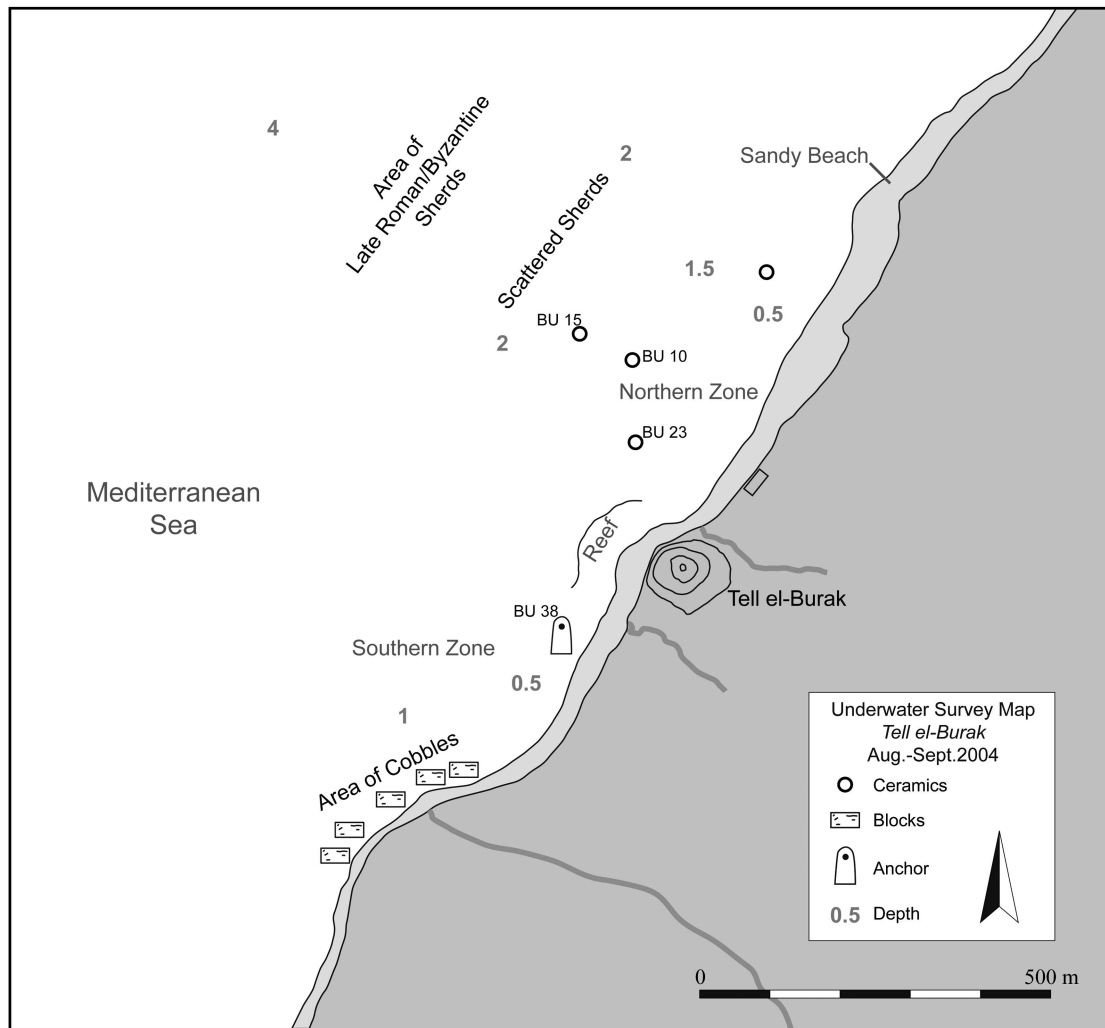


Fig. 4.1. Map of the survey area at *Tell el-Burak* (R. PEDERSEN; drawing by L. GILIBERTO).

## 4.2. Methodology

Beginning with the area north of the tell, the sea-floor was informally divided into areas approximately 15 meters south to north and 60m west into the sea to guide the team. Furthermore, areas extending out an additional 400m were included to search for possible deep water anchorages. Similar areas were demarcated along the shore south of the tell.

The areas were visually searched by random criss-cross patterns as sea conditions allowed. Every few meters, sand-filled pockets in the rocky bottom were investigated for artifacts. This random sampling enabled large areas to be covered quickly while increasing the likelihood of discovery.

### 4.2.1. The Northern Zone

Besieged by rolling waves and breakers, the sea-floor north of the tell is bedrock broken in various locations by clefts and pockets. Bivalves (mussels) blanket much of the area.

Near the shoreline, large slabs of sedimentary limestone can be found protruding above the water or lying slightly beneath the surface. These displayed no discernable evidence of modification by humans. Further from shore, out to 500m, the same type of slab occurs, rising suddenly from the bottom. Associated clefts between the slabs are often sand filled and tend to catch modern detritus – plastic bottles, tires, piping. Large sand fields also can be frequently found in areas 3–4m deep or more.

Artifacts found in the northern area include the neck and a handle of a jug (Fig. 4.2:1), the neck of an amphora (Fig. 4.2:2), and a rim sherd (Fig. 4.2:3), along with a scattering of small body sherds. These were found out beyond the area constricted by the jetty, where the sea reaches depths of up to 1.5 meters. Other small sherds lay scattered about in pockets in areas extending out more than 400m and in depths of up to 4m. Many of these appear to be Late Roman or Byzantine wares.

Closer to the jetty, as one moves southward towards it, the waves and surges become stronger, making the area hazardous to exploration. The combination of jetty and reef edge apparently magnifies the force of the sea, as the waves are compelled into a constricted zone. There is less sand deposition in this area due to the stronger sea conditions. No artifacts were found here or in the adjacent shallow waters to the north.



Fig. 4.2. 1. Neck opening of an amphora (BU10);  
2. Neck and handles of an amphora (BU15);  
3. Rim sherd (BU23).

#### 4.2.2. The Tell Zone

In the sea immediately in front of the tell is a shallow reef lying less than one meter deep and extending approximately 50m out to sea, where the sea-bottom suddenly drops. The sea breaks over the reef, forming a constant series of whitecaps and dangerous surges. Explorations on the reef and in the area immediately to the west of it revealed no signs of artifacts or man-made modifications.

#### 4.2.3. The Southern Zone

The southern zone consists of a shallow wide bay reaching from the reef in front of *Tell el-Burak* to the southern cape. Large clouds of silt combine with rolling breakers to obscure visibility, making for dangerous conditions.

The sea-floor here is much like the other areas – flat bedrock with pockets, clefts, and boulders. Silt overlays much of the bottom in thin, loose layers. No ceramics were found here, although there was, however, a stone anchor found in water approximately 1 m deep, resting on a mix of sand and rock (Fig. 4.3). Heavily concreted, the anchor has been in the sea for many centuries. It probably has been tossed around by the surf over the years and, thus, may not be near the location where it was originally lost. It is unlikely, that it migrated from an area further from shore, as heavy objects in active seas tend to move to deeper areas.

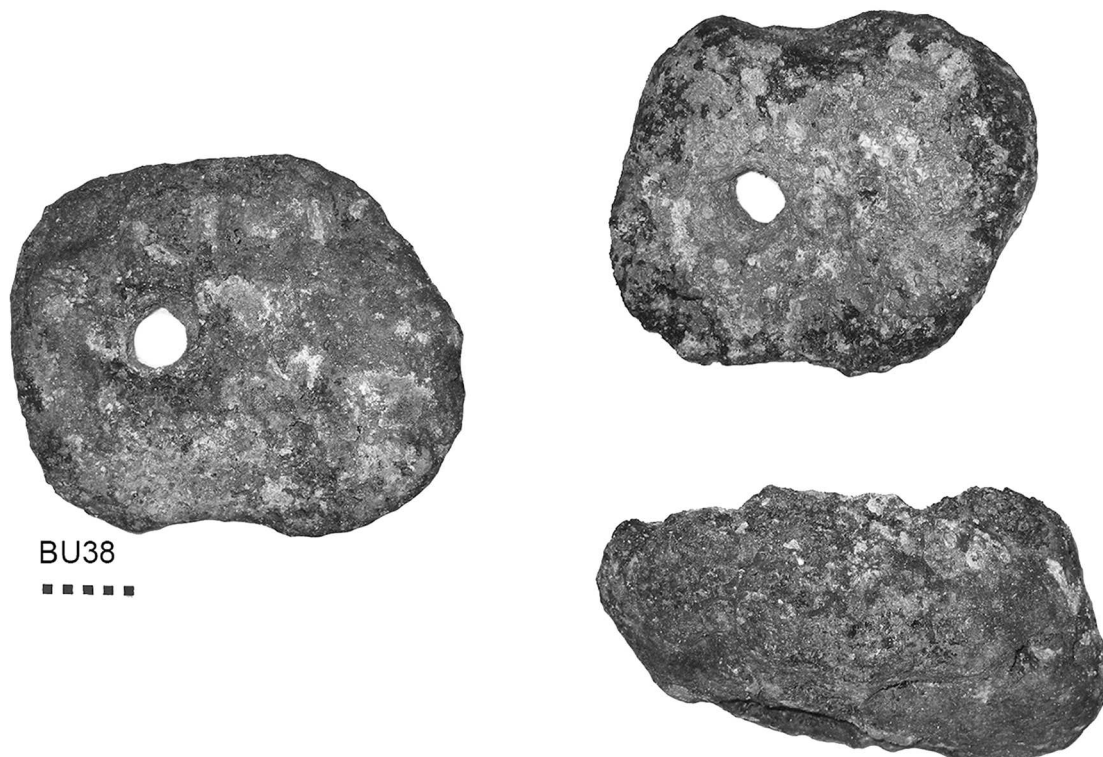


Fig. 4.3. Anchor (BU38).

Along the southern edge of the bay, numerous cobbles and boulders line the sea-floor and shoreline. The cobbles are mostly well rounded, probably from the erosive action of the sea, and show no evidence of being deposited there by humans. At least five of the boulders, however, appear to be cut blocks. Lying along the shore in only a few centimeters of water, the cut blocks are scattered over approximately 200m. There is no pattern to their positions, nor do they appear to be part of any construction. It is probable that they were dumped there at some point.

#### 4.2.4. The MAINBERGER Points

Investigations were conducted at the so-called “sunken city” to ascertain the existence of man-made structures and whether the area contained any offshore anchoring points related to *Tell el-Burak*.

Investigating the MAINBERGER Points (Table 4.1; see MAINBERGER 2001) revealed features that are decidedly curious and can easily be misinterpreted by laymen as structures of human design. They are, however, natural, geological formations, possibly formed by ancient shorelines as the sea dried out and then refilled millions of years ago. The area consists of the same broken sedimentary layers of rock found along the shorelines and further inland throughout the area. These can appear to be roads or plazas, as well as steps, but clearly they are not part of a city or any other man-made construction. The most interesting feature are the “walls”. These are made of cobbles stacked about 50cm high in lengths of one or two meters. There are no adjoining walls or any pattern to their occurrence as to be expected with human construction. It seems probable that at some point, perhaps when the Mediterranean was dry, cobbles were washed into a small ravine or wadi where they sat and consolidated until the sea level rose and eroded away the surrounding land.

Road 1	N33 28.71', E35 18.80'
Road 2	N33 28.72', E35 18.79'
Reef 1	N33 28.68', E35 18.66'
Reef 2	N33 28.69', E35 18.65'
Reef 3	N33 28.75', E35 18.68'
Great Wall	N33 28.75', E35 18.62'
Steps	N33 30.10', E35 19.69'

Table. 4.1. MAINBERGER's points.

#### 4.2.5. *Şarafand/Sarepta*

Two dives were conducted off *Şarafand/Sarepta*. The first began about two hundred meters from shore and headed inwards. The second was in deeper water, at 26m, at a point that the boat captain informed us was a long-used anchorage.

The goal of the first dive was to examine the sea environment to compare it to that at *Tell el-Burak*. The sea off *Şarafand/Sarepta* is deeper than off *Tell el-Burak*, as here water 3 meters

deep can be found close to shore. According to the captain, there is an area just north of the ancient slip-ways where the sea is 10m deep directly at the shore. While this figure could not be verified, it does indicate that the area of *Şarafand/Sarepta* is known for deeper water. A sherd that includes the stub of a handle and the vessel's shoulder, tentatively dated to the Late Bronze or Iron Age, was found in water 3m deep.

The second dive occurred about 1.5km from the shore in 26m of water. No ancient man-made objects were found.

### 4.3. Analysis and Conclusions

Pottery found in the sea close to *Tell el-Burak* does not necessarily indicate the presence of shipwrecks or the use of the area by ancient watercraft. The sherds found close to *Tell el-Burak* may have been material jettisoned from boats or, just as likely, may be material thrown into the water from shore. Their limitation to the northern area, as none were found south of the tell, may indicate that houses and workshops once existed north of the tell, and that the shore and sea in that area were part of a center of human activity. The lack of evidence of an anchorage in the northern area should not preclude its use as such, however, as small boats could have navigated through the shallows to the beach.

The Late Roman and Byzantine sherds found in the deeper areas further from shore are indicative of seafaring. These are almost certainly the remains of pottery tossed or lost overboard. As there are no levels on the tell belonging to this period, the later sherds have no connection to the site and are simply indicative of fishing or boating traffic in the area.

The discovery of the anchor in the southern area is our only evidence that a boat ever visited *Tell el-Burak*. Its small size indicates it belonged to a small vessel, probably not larger than the local modern fishing boats. Whether the southern area was the principal anchorage for the tell is not known. The absence of sherds indicates that little activity occurred there. The anchor, however, suggests otherwise. The southern bay, while shallow, is usable by small boats, perhaps more so than the northern area. Boats anchoring there would have had to contend with the same waves and surges found today, but small vessels piloted by men familiar with the area's hazards could have accessed the shallows near the beach. Anchoring would entail dropping anchor out to sea and having the boat rest in its lee toward shore, perhaps with a line running from the craft to a stake on the beach to stabilize its movements. With this arrangement, goods from a boat could be off loaded and carried through the surf to land.

The lack of a good natural or man-made harbor at *Tell el-Burak* is unexpected for such a large site. The area's attraction appears to lie in its freshwater springs that formed the basis of an agricultural economy, rather than one based on trade and the exploitation of marine resources. The Middle Bronze Age fortress on the tell is also indicative of the settlement being defensive in nature, ostensibly to guard the water supply and agricultural activities. The choice of the location of the fortress behind the reef reinforces the defensive nature of the site. The shallowness of the reef, at less than 1 m, and perhaps less so if there has been tectonic subsidence in the intervening millennia, provides the fortress with protection against marauders from the sea. Anyone attacking the fortress would have been unable to pull their warships up directly under the tell, as the reef would have ripped open their bottoms. Attackers would have had to utilize the shores north or south of the tell – areas themselves wrought with hazards to the uninitiated – and then lose the element of surprise.



Abandonment of the site for the duration of the Late Bronze Age in favor of *Ṣarafand/Sarepta* indicates changing social conditions. As the metropolitan world of the Lower Bronze Age progressed, international trade grew in importance and, seemingly, the threat of attack by rogues from the sea probably lessened, at least for cities if not ships. Thus, the deeper harborage at *Ṣarafand Sarepta* would have been more favorable to the changing circumstances as ships grew larger and more numerous. The re-inhabitation in the Iron Age of *Tell el-Burak*, with its lack of defensive walls, – in the aftermath of the invasions of the Sea Peoples and the socio-economic upheavals that accompanied those events – demonstrates perhaps the growing importance of agriculture for the region under more peaceful and perhaps centrally controlled, social and economic conditions brought by the rise of Phoenician city-states and later the Persian Empire. Again, the settlement would have relied principally on agriculture and not on maritime pursuits, although the exploitation of the sea as a food source should not be disregarded.



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