

## LEBANON

### Tyre (Sour)

From its beginnings as a Phoenician city in the 2nd millennium BC Tyre was important when it ruled the seas and founded prosperous colonies such as Cadiz and Carthage. According to legends, purple dye was invented in Tyre. Mythological history associates the name of the European continent with *Europa*, the sister of *Cadmos of Tyre* who is credited with the introduction of the alphabet into Greece. In classical times, Tyre was an important hub in Mediterranean maritime commerce due to its impregnable island location off the coast.

The construction of an artificial dyke carried out during a siege resulted in the accumulation of sands, permanently connecting the former island with the mainland. After the Roman occupation Tyre became a splendid urban centre and kept its importance until early Christian times. Its historical role declined at the end of the Crusades. In 1984 Tyre was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1984 on the basis of two distinct areas of important archaeological remains. The first area, located in the west on the historic island towards the sea (Al-Mina) and close to the historic town centre, is called the Ancient City with its streets laid out on a grid pattern and with baths that include a reconstructed colonnaded avenue, the so-called arena, palestra, and the Crusaders' castle and Crusaders' cathedral. The second area called El Bass is located on the mainland to the east and comprises the ancient necropolis, a monumental arch along a Roman/Byzantine avenue with an aqueduct and the world's largest hippodrome from ancient times.

As a consequence of the outbreak of the civil war in 1974 the site remained unprotected for years, serving as military post or refugee camp at different times. In 1988 UNESCO initiated an International Safeguarding Campaign for Tyre, but the situation was only marginally improved with the formal end of military action in 1991, since the ongoing political crisis prevented effective protection and management of the property. The exact perimeter of the site was not specified at the time of the inscription and the status of legal protection as well as the physical condition of the site re-

mained undocumented for many years. The main threats affecting the property have been addressed in various State of Conservation reports:

- Lack of comprehensive documentation, site management and conservation plan;
- Structural weakness of exposed archaeological remains;
- Insufficient monitoring and maintenance;
- Urban development pressure, partly uncontrolled;
- Expansion of the historical northern port affecting the archaeological maritime remains;
- Planning of a National Highway connecting the city to the capital Beirut.

In September 2006, an expert mission to Lebanon examined the state of conservation of the World Heritage sites of Baalbek, Anjar, Tyr and Byblos to investigate any damage that might have been suffered during the military conflict of July–August 2006. For Tyre the mission noted that no direct damage had been recorded at the site of the Ancient City close to the sea. However, at the El-Bass site (Necropolis and Hippodrome) the bombardment of a building approximately 150 m from the site had caused damage to a part of the frescoes of a Roman funerary cave. In general, the mission noted the lack of maintenance, the decay of exposed structures due to a lack of rainwater regulation and the decay of porous and soft stones. The mission also inspected the route of the future South Lebanon highway and recommended that the geophysical prospection already undertaken by the General Direction of Antiquities should be continued and that preventive excavations be carried out before the establishment of the final route, foreseen for 2011. In recent years, based on the result of environmental impact studies the harbour project has been adapted to a tourist marina and a marine protection zone has been designated to protect the submarine archaeological remains. Geophysical prospection has been undertaken on the proposed motorway route using classic and geophysical means to identify the zones at risk and, if necessary, to provide a basis for a request for changes in the execution of the motorway. In 2005/06 a small portion of the planned highway route was intensively surveyed with combined magnetic and georadar methods. Besides, the digital map for the establishment of the

South-eastern view of the El Bass site along the hippodrome (photo: G. Toubekis)





North-western view of the El Bass site along the hippodrome with high-rise buildings next to the hippodrome (photos: G. Toubekis)



Northern view showing remains of the ancient aqueduct and the reconstructed monumental arch (El Bass site)

complete archaeological record for the site has been updated on a geographical information system (GIS) with available geographical data.

In the light of the latest research results the Director General of Antiquities (DGA) asked for an extension of the moratorium concerning constructions in the potential archaeological zones. Urban development pressure in Tyre is high and leads to an urbanisation of the remaining free land plots inside the city. The DGA undertakes geophysical prospections in Tyre on a case-by-case basis in order to determine the archaeological potential of these land plots. During the UNESCO/ICOMOS monitoring mission to Tyre in February 2009 the highway project which could threaten the cultural heritage was also inspected. For the time being, the highway construction has been halted, although the highway has reached the district of Tyre and is planned to be continued in the near future. The DGA has surveyed the planned route and requested a modification of the originally proposed outline, because a set of rock-cut tombs from the Roman period located at a foothill at some distance from the city would have to be destroyed by a planned interchange. As a result of this intervention the plan has been changed: The interchange is now located further north and the highway lane has been redirected some 150m towards the west.

However, due to the circumstances the surveys undertaken by the Directorate of Antiquities have only been executed on a very small surface of the total area that will be affected by the highway. Geophysical findings have indicated underground archaeological potential of land plots along the planned route, but these have not been investigated further with test trenches to confirm the geophysical result. Furthermore there are impressive physical remains of the ancient Roman aqueduct (covered completely with modern constructions) situated in very close vicinity to the planned highway route. According to topographic surveys undertaken in the 19th century, it can be assumed that further archaeological remains do exist underground close to or directly inside the outline of the planned highway route.



Modern construction on top of the ancient aqueduct

Since no precise property boundary exists, it has to be assumed that the designated protected archaeological areas documented in the Urban Plan are to be considered essential components of the World Heritage site. Among others, the physical remains of the aq-



South-eastern view across the open excavation area with high-rise buildings (Al Mina site) (photo: G. Toubekis)



Exposed steel reinforcements from previous reconstructions. Columns could be struck by lightning during storms and thus be destroyed further

ueduct and the unearthed ancient Necropolis constitute important components of the World Heritage site. The design study for the proposed highway project provided by the Ministry of Transport lacks essential technical information. An impact assessment on cultural aspects has not been included in the design process; nor has a detailed traffic plan been presented. The current highway route directly touches the designated archaeological protection zones.

Under these circumstances, a direct threat to the site cannot be ruled out until the geophysical survey is completed, indicating no threat to the archaeological remains. The archaeological inventory map of Tyre is to be finalised and technical details on the dimension of the highway construction and its possible impacts should be studied and evaluated.

Georgios Toubekis  
ICOMOS Germany