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Mura di legno, mura di terra, mura di pietra: fortificazioni nel Mediterraneo antico

a cura di Gilda Bartoloni e Laura Maria Michetti

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MAURA SALA

THE MIDDLE BRONZE AGE STONE GLACIS AT BYBLOS

Different types of fortification works have succeeded one another at Byblos since the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC (Early Bronze II), when the city was established and the earliest stone wall was built¹, followed in the Early Bronze III by a buttressed city-wall (the *rempart à redans*)², reinforced by a red earthen glacis³. The latter was enlarged and refurbished repeatedly, according to different building materials and building technique, since the following Middle Bronze Age (henceforth MBA), until the Persian Period, giving the northern rampart an overall thickness of ca. 40 m (*Fig. 1*), and the eastern rampart a thickness of more than 50 m.

The MBA fortification works at Byblos were traced during M. Dunand's excavations on both the northern side of the site (from the North-Western Gate to the north-western corner of the Crusader Castle), in some probes carried out underneath the latter, and on the eastern side (between the Castle and the North-Eastern Gate)⁴. They followed the elliptical contour of the preceding EB III city-wall and glacis on the northern, eastern and southern side, enclosing an area of at least 5 hectares, with two main city-gates: the North-Western Gate (the so-called "Port Gate"), and the North-Eastern Gate (the so-called "Land Gate").

1. MBA RE-URBANIZATION AND RAMPARTS IN THE LEVANT

After the urban crises of the Syro-Palestinian region in the final centuries of the 3rd millennium BC⁵, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC a renew urban growth spread quickly on the coastal plains of the Levant, and along the routes/valleys connecting the coast with the inland. A number of sites in northern Levant recovered from the stress/collapse of the end

¹ LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 70-71, 160-161, 291, 309, figs. 80-81, plan II.

² DUNAND 1937-39, pp. 421-424; ID. 1973, pp. 47-48; LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 289, 291-293, figs. 138, 142-143, 155, plan III.

³ LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 293-294, 311-312, plan IV;

and see NIGRO in this volume.

⁴ CONDÉ 1964, pp. 42-43; DUNAND 1973, pp. 47, 71-72.

⁵ AKKERMANS - SCHWARTZ 2003, pp. 282-287; PALUMBO 1990; ID. 2008.



Fig. 1 – Byblos: view of the juxtaposed fortification works on the northern side of the site; in the foreground, the EB III buttressed city-wall; behind it, the juxtaposed glacis dating from the EB III to the Persian Period.

of the EBA with no break in the urban growth, as in the case of Byblos itself⁶; while in Southern Levant most of sites were abandoned or reduced to villages, and the beginning of MBA (MB I) witnessed a real re-urbanization process.

With the dawn of the MBA, numerous sites along the Levantine coast were first occupied, or re-occupied, from Alalakh/Tell Atchana and Ugarit/Ras Shamra in the north, up to Ashkelon in the south⁷. Many of the coastal sites were also fortified early in the period (such as Byblos, Beirut, Akko, Tel Nami, Tell el-

Faliq, Zurekiyeh, Yavneh-Yam, Ashkelon), with both mudbrick walls on stone foundations, glacis, or even freestanding ramparts, which usually traced an elliptical layout⁸. Ramparts/glacis were erected out of sloping beaten earth and/or brick layers, capped with mud plaster, mudbricks, or well-prepared crushed limestone and chipped stone materials. Occasionally, on the Levantine coast (where the highest rainfall required most durable and weather resistant materials), the outer face of the glacis was capped with a cobblestone revetment⁹, with an incline of 30-40 degrees, as found at Achziv, Burga and Ashkelon.

During the MB II-III the ramparts/glacis system continued to be in use, progressively spreading in the inland and in the highlands, along with some changes in the layout and new refinements in the building technique: on the one hand, the rectilinear plan started to be favored; on the other hand, both massive core walls and revetment walls built up of cyclopean masonry were employed.

A similar development can be traced in the MB I-III stone glacis at Byblos.

⁶ As it concern Byblos, after the destruction which affected the city and its main monuments in 23rd century BC (DUNAND 1937-39, p. 306; ID. 1952, p. 88; ID. 1950-58, p. 898; LAUFFRAY 2008, p. 373), the settlement should recover quickly and maintained its key role in the trade networks, as attested by the refurbishing of all the main sanctuaries of the city, and the quotation of a Byblos ruler ("Ibdâdî", *ensi* of Byblos) in a Mesopotamian text from Drehem, dating

from the reign of Amar-Sin, ruler of the 3rd dynasty of Ur (SOLLBERGER 1959-60).

⁷ AKKERMANS - SCHWARTZ 2003, p. 296; COHEN 2002, pp. 70-97, 107-128, 137-139. Unfortunately, the evidence from the northern Levantine coast is still fragmentary.

⁸ MAZAR 1992, pp. 175-179; BURKE 2008, pp. 48-50, 78-81, tab. 15.

⁹ BURKE 2008, pp. 55-56.

2. THE MB I COBBLESTONES GLACIS AT BYBLOS

The earliest MBA (MB I) fortification work at Byblos was a cobblestone glacis, laid against the outer face of the previous EB III rampart¹⁰, thus maintaining the original elliptical layout of the EBA city¹¹.

The MB I glacis consisted of a less than one meter thick earthen fill, with a stone cap roughly constructed with limestone and sandstone cobbles and stones, and a moderate slope less than 40 degree¹²: larger blocks were used in the lower part of the glacis (up to 3 m high to the NW), while cobbles were employed in its upper mantle (*Figs. 2-3; D in plans and sections*).

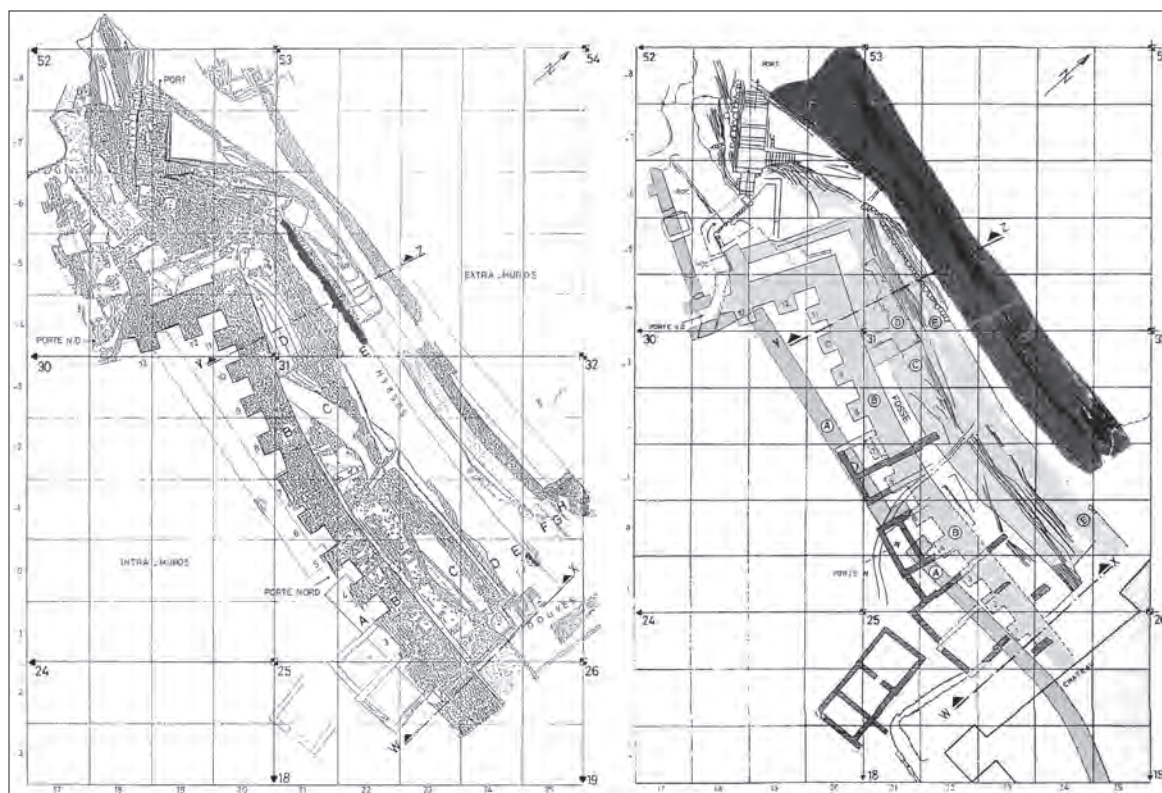


Fig. 2 – Byblos: detailed and schematic plans of the successive fortification works on the northern side of the city: the EB II city-wall (A); the EB III buttressed city-wall and glacis (B, C); the MBA cobblestone glacis (D); the MBA “Hyksos” glacis (E); the later glacis (F, G, H, I) (after LAUFFRAY 2008, figs. 155 and 163).

¹⁰ LAUFFRAY 2008, figs. 156-157 and 171a.

¹¹ MARGUERON 1994.

¹² There is no agreement on the dating of the erection of the cobblestone glacis: Lauffray distinguishes two *ouvrages* (i.e. construction phases), and ascribes both of them to the EB III (LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 293-294; C and D in plans and sections); conversely, Burke assigns the two juxtaposed cobblestone glacis to the

beginning of the Middle Bronze Age (MB I; BURKE 2002, p. 196), as also Dunand apparently did in his final publication (DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CCXII: n. 37). What seems mostly reasonable is that the *first* red earthen rampart with a cobblestone revetment, built against the exterior face of the EB III buttressed city-wall, dates back to the late EB III; while the *second* earthen rampart, covered by a new glacis made of cobbles, was a

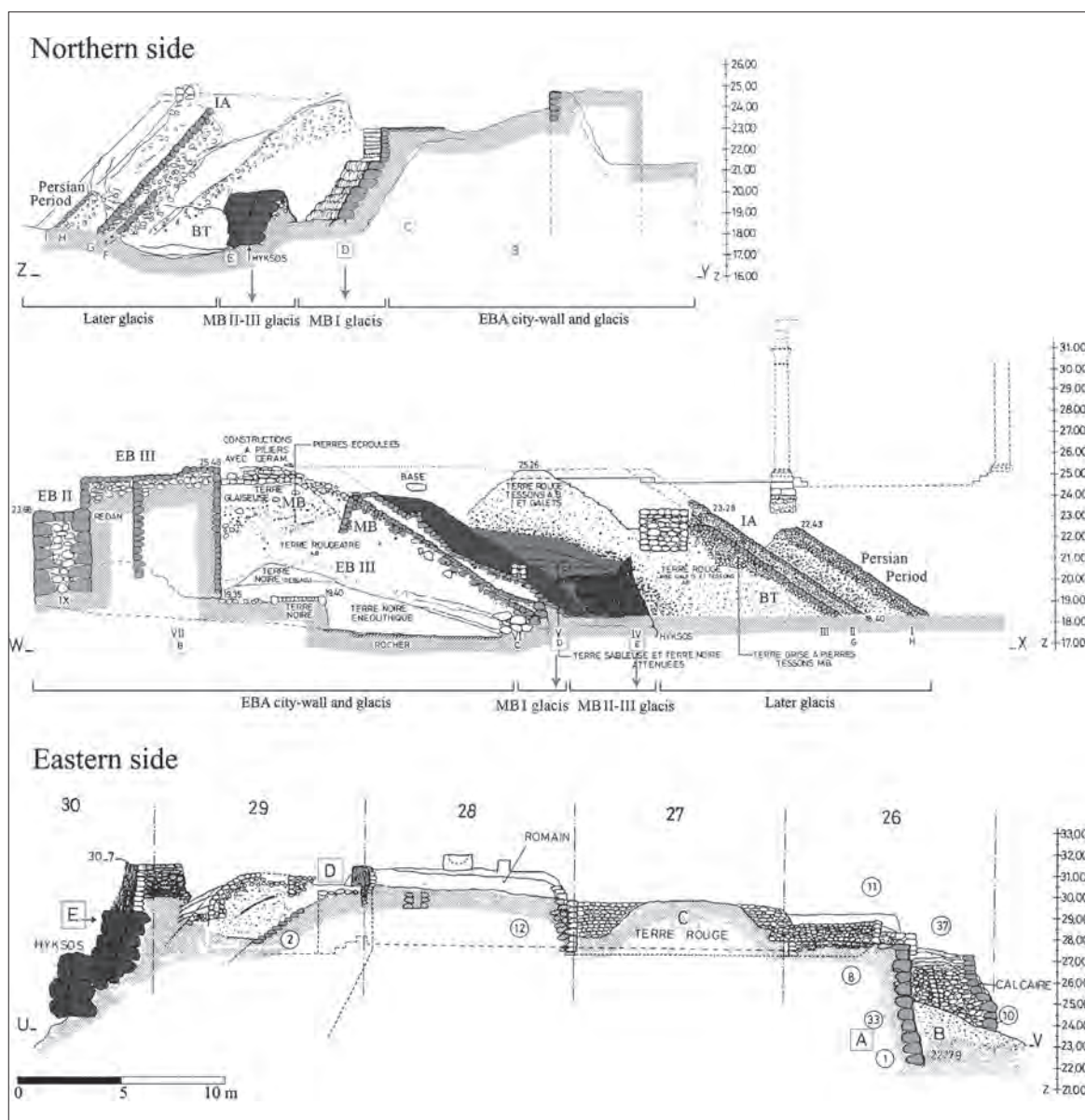


Fig. 3 – Byblos: sections of the juxtaposed fortification works on the northern and eastern side of the site (after LAUFFRAY 2008, figs. 156-157 and 171a).

Similar cobblestone-capped glacis have been excavated in other MB I coastal sites, such as Achziv¹³, Burga¹⁴, and Ashkelon¹⁵.

refurbishing dating back to the beginning of the MBA (as the presence of MBA sherds in the highest part of the fill seems to testify; DUNAND 1955, p. 19).

¹³ PRAUSNITZ 1975.

¹⁴ KOCHAVI *et al.* 1979, pp. 142-143.

¹⁵ VOSS 2002; BURKE 2002, pp. 237-243.

3. THE MB II-III “HYKSOS” GLACIS AT BYBLOS

The so-called Dunand’s “Hyksos” glacis was erected in the MB II within a further refurbishing and reinforcement of the city defenses.

It consisted of an earthen fill of intermingled dark brown earth (*terre brune*) and sand layers, laid against the outer face of the preceding cobblestone glacis, and covered with a renewed glacis made of big *kurkar* (calcareous sandstone) blocks, more than 1 m wide, to form a 60-degree slope at the foot of the rampart, while smaller blocks should be employed in the upper courses (*Figs. 2-3; E in plans and sections*)¹⁶. A similar construction, in fact, has been pointed out in the MB III/LB I stone glacis at Ugarit¹⁷.

The “Hyksos” glacis again followed the contour of preceding fortification lines, but it neatly differed from them in its building material (huge sandstone blocks) and technique (up to a steep 60-degree slope). It was at least 8 m high and it reached an overall thickness of ca. 25 m at its base on the northern side, and 45 m on the eastern side, incorporating the pre-existing EB II-III ramparts.

The use of huge blocks (“cyclopean masonry”) in the construction of the MB II-III Byblos glacis resembles the stone-faced glacis of other MB II-III sites along the Levantine coast, such as Beirut¹⁸ and, later, Ugarit¹⁹.

4. THE MBA CITY-GATES

Two main gates continued to provide access to the city during the MBA: both the North-Western and the North-Eastern Gate, in fact, were maintained in use.

The North-Western Gate, the so-called “Port Gate”²⁰, featured a double flight of stairs descending the rampart to the north-west and the north-east, and providing access from the Acropolis (where the royal palace stood) towards the port, on the one hand, and the surrounding lower town, on the other hand. In the MBA a new stone ramp leading down to the port was realized.

Also the North-Eastern Gate, the so-called “Land Gate”²¹, was kept in use²². The gate passage was raised and the gate was provided of a new exterior access ramp²³. This gate went out of use in the following phases, since the “Hyksos” access ramp was covered by the latest three glacis (*Fig. 4*)²⁴.

¹⁶ DUNAND 1950-58, pl. CCXII: n. 42; Id. 1955, p. 19; Id. 1961b, p. 84; LAUFFRAY 2008, figs. 156-157 and 171a.

¹⁷ LAGARCE 1984, pp. 156-157.

¹⁸ BAIDRE 1997, pp. 48-50.

¹⁹ LAGARCE 1984, pp. 156-173, figs. 6, 18.

²⁰ LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 295-296, fig. 159.

²¹ DUNAND 1973, p. 47; LAUFFRAY 2008, pp. 303-309, figs. 164-172.

²² DUNAND 1964b, p. 33.

²³ DUNAND 1950-1958, pl. CCXII: n. 43; 1961b, 84-85, pl. III:1.

²⁴ DUNAND 1961a, p. 79; 1964a, pp. 26-27.

5. THE LATER GLACIS

The “Hyksos” glacis was, in turn, concealed and encompassed by the juxtaposed glacis of later periods. The glacis was, in fact, reconstructed at least three other times during the following Late Bronze and Iron Ages (Figs. 2-3: F, G, H). In the Persian Period, Byblos eventually became a vassal of the Achaemenids (539-332 BC): they reinforced again the city fortifications with a renewed glacis, the last one still visible today (Fig. 5).



Fig. 4 – Byblos: the MB II-III (“Hyksos”) entrance ramp leading to the North-Eastern Gate; in the foreground, the later glacis (after DUNAND 1961, pl. III:1).



Fig. 5 – Byblos: general view of the two latest (Assyro-Babylonian and Persian) glacis on the northern side of the site, from east.

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RIASSUNTO

Dagli inizi del III millennio fino al V secolo a.C., successive e imponenti opere di fortificazione protessero il centro della città di Biblo. Le fortificazioni gublite, messe in luce sui lati settentrionale, orientale e meridionale della città antica, rappresentano uno degli esempi più articolati di sistemi difensivi nel Levante pre-classico. Agli inizi del II millennio a.C., quando Biblo svolse il ruolo di volano nel processo di re-urbanizzazione del Levante, soprattutto della regione costiera, il circuito delle fortificazioni venne rinnovato: dapprima, con l'erezione di un *glacis* rivestito in ciottoli; in seguito, con la costruzione di un più poderoso *glacis* in pietra. Entrambe queste opere difensive offrono interessanti informazioni sull'impianto planimetrico, la concezione architettonica e la tecnica costruttiva dei nuovi sistemi difensivi del Levante nel Bronzo Medio I-III.

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