

HADIR QINNASRIN

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The second season of archaeological investigations at Hadir Qinnasrin, 25 km south of Aleppo, took place from 19 August until 14 September, a period of four weeks of fieldwork. This project is a cooperative investigation by the University of Chicago, the University of Paris (Sorbonne), and the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities. During this season the French could not participate, but this cooperation will continue in the future. The Syrian participants were Ms. Fedwa Abidou from the Aleppo National Museum, Mr. Omar Mardihi, and Mr. Yusef al-Dabiti, with the topographic assistance of Mr. Atef Abu Arraj from Damascus. The following results would not have been possible without their constant assistance. The team from the University of Chicago included the author, Dr. Alexandrine Guérin, and four advanced graduate students (fig. 1).

Summary of First Season, 1998

The town of Hadir, located about 4 km east of Tell Chalcis, has expanded in the last few decades to encompass much of the low mounded area of the early Islamic city. The initial survey, or better a reconnaissance, of the town and its periphery was necessarily a matter of chance observations within empty lots, gardens, and fallow fields. The oldest portion of Hadir appears to be centered around the mosque and cemetery; its contours and dense accumulations of sherds suggest the occupation mounding of an earlier urban center. Numerous architectural elements, carved on both limestone and basalt, are found within the modern town, including a long stone, possibly a lintel, within the cemetery bearing a Kufic inscription. Sherd collections from the northwest slope of the town, an area currently known as Rasm al-Ahmar, were especially promising. Although no architectural remains were visible on the surface, two small soundings, areas L and K, proved remarkably successful (the results of this season are published in D. Whitcomb "Archaeological Research at Hadir Qinnasrin, 1998," *Archéologie Islamique* 10 [2000, in press]).

The ceramic collections from these sondages are divided into two phases. The earlier phase I came from layers deposited within the stone walls of these rooms and indicates an occupation during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. A single, very early Abbasid coin may confirm this dating (this was a *fals* of Salih ibn Ali, minted in Aleppo, c. 758). Other coins include two of Heraclius, c. 630–641, and may be more typical currency of this phase. The main occupation of the 1998 sondages, phase II, is characterized by specific brittle wares, basins, lamps, and jars (with amphorae), which are paralleled in late Umayyad and Abbasid contexts at Qasr al-Hayr al-Sharqi, al-Rusafa, and especially Tell Aswad (al-Raqqqa). Perhaps most interesting are the glazed wares, usually a polychrome on simple forms; Watson has recently described this ceramic as the "yellow-glaze-family" at Tell Aswad. While there is some controversy over this ware, a



Figure 1. Excavation team at Hadir Qinnasrin 2000

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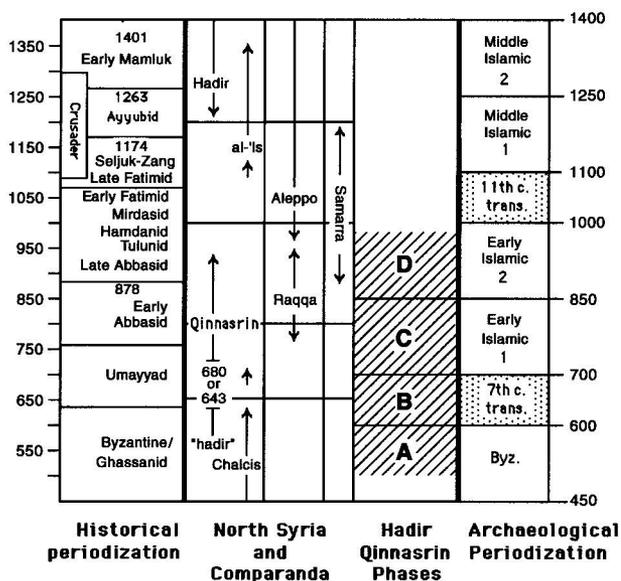


Figure 2. Table of historical and archaeological periodization

was followed by a second phase of settlement in the early Abbasid period (phase C), apparently mainly pre-Samarran in date. There was no indication of tenth century or later occupation in the areas excavated. The architectural plan of area K shows a structure of two rectangular rooms, made first in mudbrick and then duplicated in stone cobbles. The smaller of the rooms has a couple of ovens and storage vessels. The southwest wall of both rooms was very fragmentary with a series of column bases and seems to have been mostly open. These features add up to a very specific house form, a type derived from the "black" tent used by Arab tribes in the recent and immediate past. The translation of a nomad tent into more permanent material is not so uncommon. Ethnographic study of nomad tribes in Syria has documented a temporary house called a *ṣībāt*, used for seasonal occupation and very similar to the remains uncovered in area K.

The literature on Arab tribes in Syria is extensive, especially an administrative interest in settlement of "nomad" groups. In his study of the archaeological evidence of nomads, Cribb makes an important point that the nomad camp is always, despite its appearance to occasional outsiders, a highly structured spatial arrangement of residential units. In the case of Qinnasrin, it seems likely that the form of the *ḥāḍir*, the original camp structure, influenced the development of the settlement. Such camp settlements were part of the common experience of tribes in Arabia and brought with the Tanukh and Tayy tribes when they entered Syria. The early Muslims must have found this a conducive environment when they entered Syria and founded their *amṣār*. The *amṣār* were more than camps, however, but founded as urban administrative centers upon Arab urban models. The sites of Anjar in Lebanon or Aqaba in southern Jordan may contain reflections of these models and their adaptations. When the early Muslims rejected settlement in Aleppo and Chalcis in favor of Hadir Qinnasrin, they might have selected the familiar ethnic pattern of Arab tribes and at the same time initiated a fundamental step in the

pre-Samarran dating and orientation toward Levantine production centers seems to be likely. A small percentage of these glazed sherds has simple sgraffiato decoration; these sherds occur on the surface of the site and may be considered the latest ceramic development discovered in these excavations. Phase II may be dated from the later eighth into the very early ninth century, a dating confirmed by one Abbasid coin (a *fals* of Abbas ibn Muhammad, governor of the Jazira, c. 772–775).

Both of these excavations yielded results consistent with the hypothesized settlement: the ceramics and coins clearly indicate an initial occupation in very late Byzantine or transitional Byzantine/early Islamic period (phase B; see fig. 2). This



Figure 3. Incense burner of carved stone (RN 817). Hadir Qinnasrin

development of the early Islamic city, an urban type to have wide influence in the formation of Muslim communities in Syria and throughout the Middle East.

Second Season, 2000

The archaeological research program at Hadir Qinnasrin intended to examine for the first time the process of settlement in the early Islamic period, the structure of a pre-Islamic *hāḍir* and its transformation into a *miṣr*. There was also a possibility that an earlier stratum would reveal a Ghassanid ritual center, as suggested in the research of Shahid (1992), and archaeological evidence for this Arab kingdom. The second season began to test these hypotheses on the history of Qinnasrin. Thus, both specific monuments (and even inscriptions) and more generalized evidence of processes of settlement and urbanization were sought within the modern town.

An investigation of possible locations was undertaken in 1999, beginning with the cemetery, which was clearly part of the early Islamic town but obviously unavailable for excavation. Beyond its walls on the north was the Jurat al-Nasara, the declivity or hollow of the Christians, which is indeed a pit where early occupation could be investigated (once modern trash was removed). Of more interest was the south side of the mosque, where several open lots revealed numerous large stones, usually basalt, from archaeological structures. Private houses on the slightly mounded area south and east of the old mosque usually have a few capitals and columns (one of which bears the name, Eusebios). All of these factors give a strong indication of buildings belonging to the late Byzantine (Ghassanid) or early Islamic *hāḍir* and *miṣr*.

Hadir was divided into quadrants: The northwest or Rasm al-Ahmar was area A (figs. 4, 13), where soundings K and L and several sherd collections had been made; the northwest was area B, where architectural fragments had been noticed; the southwest or area C contained the cemetery and Jurat al-Nasara; and the southeast or area D was the highest mounding of the town and revealed both numerous architectural fragments and sherd collections (figs. 4–5). The methodology for this season was the excavation of two fairly large areas and a series of smaller soundings in other parts of the town. As in previous research, this involved getting permission to dig in private courtyards. The success of this season would not have been possible without the generous

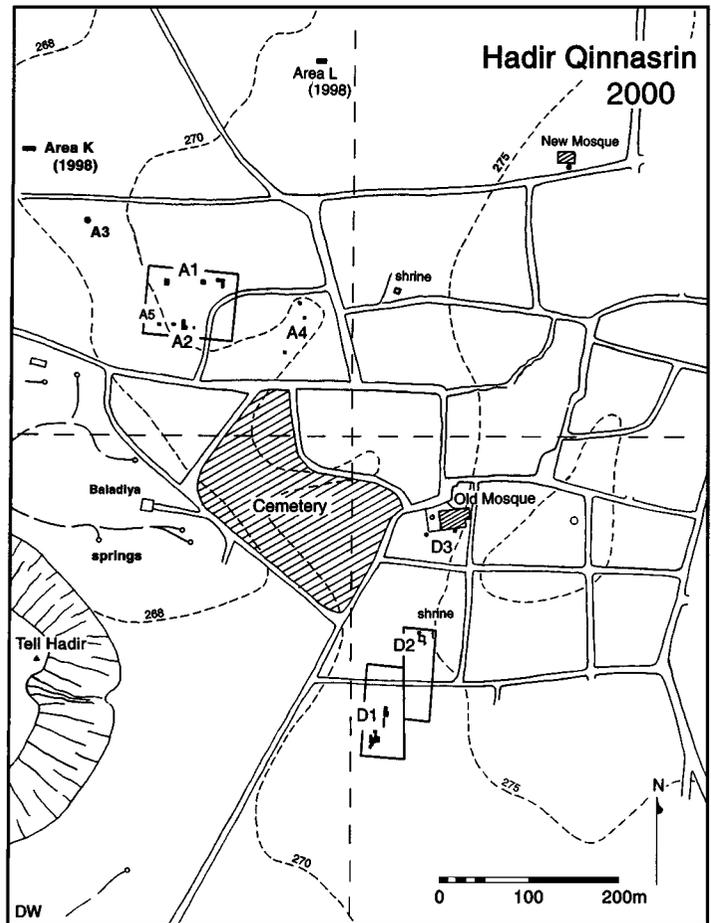


Figure 4. General plan of HQ with 2000 season excavations

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understanding and often enthusiasm offered by officials, Shaykh Ibrahim al-Aswad, and the people of Hadir.

In the Shadow of the Bronze Age Tell: Area D

The first phase of excavations concentrated in the southeast section of the town of Hadir. A large field of trenches was placed on the land of Mr. Omar Suleiman, called area D1. The north portion of this area revealed substantial architectural remains, with a curious construction technique of alternating courses of cobbles and bricks (some of which are much older roof tiles; see fig. 6). This system has been associated with Hamdanid construction on Aleppo citadel. Artifacts associated with this building confirm this dating of late Abbasid or Hamdanid occupation (phase D), but with a consistent presence of earlier Abbasid and Umayyad in the vicinity.

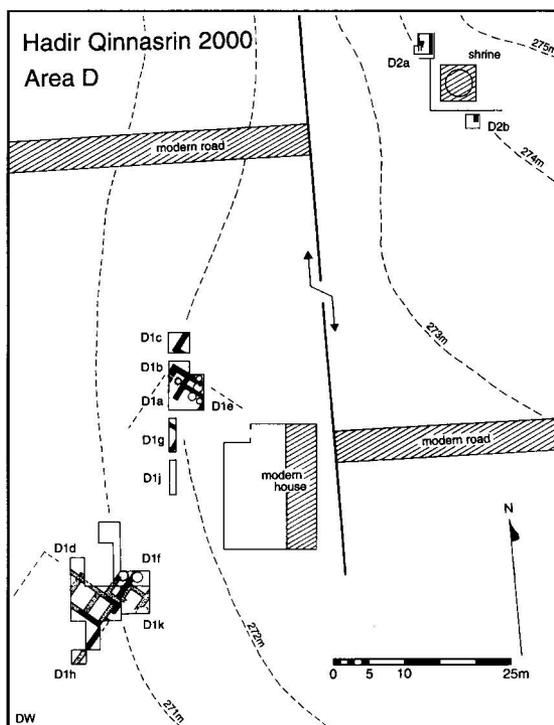


Figure 5. Southern area of excavations. Area D, Hadir Qinnasrin



Figure 6. Stone and brick walls in area D trench. Hadir Qinnasrin



Figure 7. Foundations in lower portion of area D. Hadir Qinnasrin

The south portion of this area confirmed this analysis. In this lower section, only the foundations of a very large building were discovered, possibly the substructure for a khan or caravanserai (fig. 7). These conglomerate foundations were sunk into deep accumulations of ash (over 2 m in depth). Artifacts found within this ash were consistently early Islamic (Umayyad and Abbasid; phase C), though no associated structures were found. This latter aspect may indicate a temporary occupation in this area peripheral to the main center. Artifacts from the surface and from several pits were late Abbasid in date; one particular pit produced an enormous amount of lustre glass (RN 359b) and a cobalt glass bowl with incised decoration (RN 359a; this latter has close parallels in Raqqa and elsewhere). More surprisingly, this pit also contained a complete bronze pan (RN 814; fig. 8) and at least three chalk incense burners (RN 817; fig. 3).



Figure 8. Complete bronze pan (RN 814). Hadir Qinnasrin

Beneath Shrine and Mosque in Area D

Directly north of these trenches, two sondages were placed at the base of the tomb of Sheikh Khalaf, said to be about 600 years old. The presence of numerous basalt architectural fragments of late Byzantine style within and around the shrine suggested a much earlier date. A trench (D2a) descended to over 3 m in depth, with a succession of stone walls antedating the shrine (fig. 9). The strata indicated a sequence of Ottoman, Mamluk, and Ayyubid levels; at the base was a floor and fragments of walls, with the same distinctive cobble and brick style found in area D1. Artifacts were likewise dated to the late Abbasid period, but unfortunately the trench became too dangerous to continue.

Through the assistance of Shaykh Ibrahim, two similar test trenches were placed in the private garden behind the *qibla* wall of the old mosque of Hadir. This mosque appears to be an Ottoman construction, though more than one architectural phase is visible. The trench southwest of the mosque (D3b) encountered the graves of a cemetery and work was immediately stopped. The other trench (D3a), immediately south of the *mihrab* of the mosque, was excavated over 3 m in depth; a series of large Ottoman pits was dug into earlier strata over most of the trench. At

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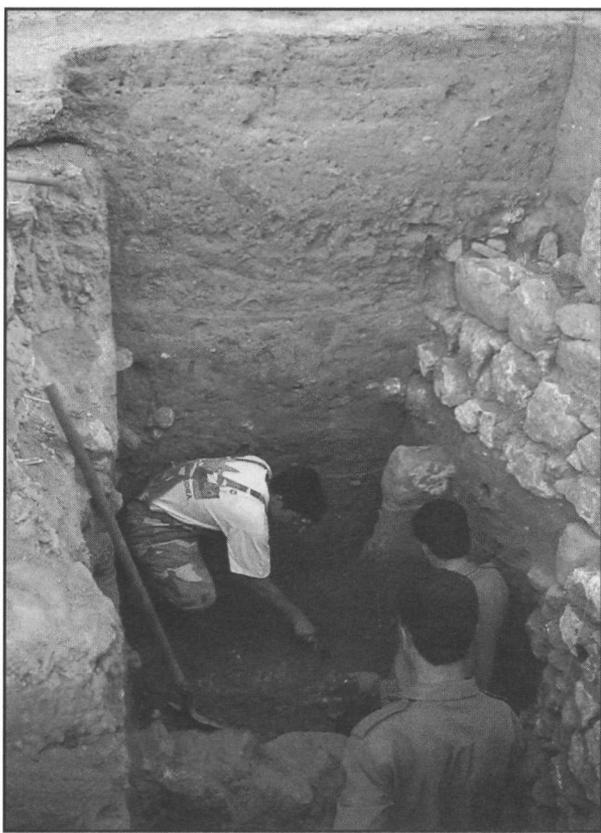


Figure 9. Deep sounding in area D2a with Alexandrine Guérin. Hadir Qinnasrin

the base of the trench, just above bedrock, were several stones and clear traces of robber trenches indicating a wall and associated floor of the early Islamic period. The orientation of these features differed from that of the mosque and appeared very interesting. Unfortunately, the depth of overburden did not allow expansion of this sondage.

Return to Rasm al-Ahmar in Area A

The second part of the 2000 excavation season turned to the northwest section of the town of Hadir, an area known as the Rasm al-Ahmar. This did not surprise the inhabitants, several of whom related the local tradition that this was the area where Khalid ibn Walid first camped when he attacked the Byzantine city of Chalcis. This folk memory would seem to be confirmed in the results of the 1998 trench and the results of this season. A series of large trenches was placed into an abandoned yard, called area A1. The lower layers encountered Early Bronze Age materials consistent with the main period of the large mound of Tell Hadir, located to the south; mudbrick walls of these layers may represent parts of the lower town associated with the main occupation of Tell Hadir.



Figure 10. Katherine Strange and Elena Dodge in trench A1b. Hadir Qinnasrin

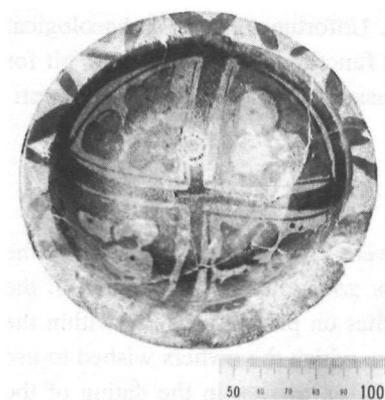


Figure 11. Glazed bowl with Lustré decoration (RN 821). Hadir Qinnasrin



Figure 12. Storage jar of brittle ware (RN 595). Hadir Qinnasrin

Two of the trenches, A1a and A1b, produced remains of mudbrick structures, very difficult to interpret, but clearly associated with early Abbasid and Umayyad artifacts (see fig. 10). The range of ceramics is indicated in a transitional style of red ware jar (RN 567) and a molded juglet (RN 785; identical to those found at Raqqa). Trench A1b revealed a deep pit filled with Samarran and earlier ceramics: a fine lustre ware bowl (RN 821; fig. 11), a lustre sherd (RN 819), cobalt glazed ware (RN 788), a brittle ware jar (RN 595; fig. 12), and a large basin (RN 827).

One of the trenches, A1c, produced stone walls in two phases of this same early Islamic date (as witnessed in a molded jar, RN 822). The doubled walls and orientation recall the structures in area K (1998). This architectural style seemed to continue in a larger architectural complex located immediately to the south; this was area A2, in the yard of Mr. Khalid Shlash. These shallow foundations and floors were very early Abbasid and Umayyad in date (phase C), but the nature of the complex could not be determined with certainty (an industrial complex associated with glass production remains a possibility). Examples of the glazed ceramics are the splash ware bowls (RN 628 and 786), while unglazed ceramics include an incised jar (RN 620). A chalk gaming board with red and black paint was found in this area (RN 818).

In another section of the town, the large *jarah* or de-

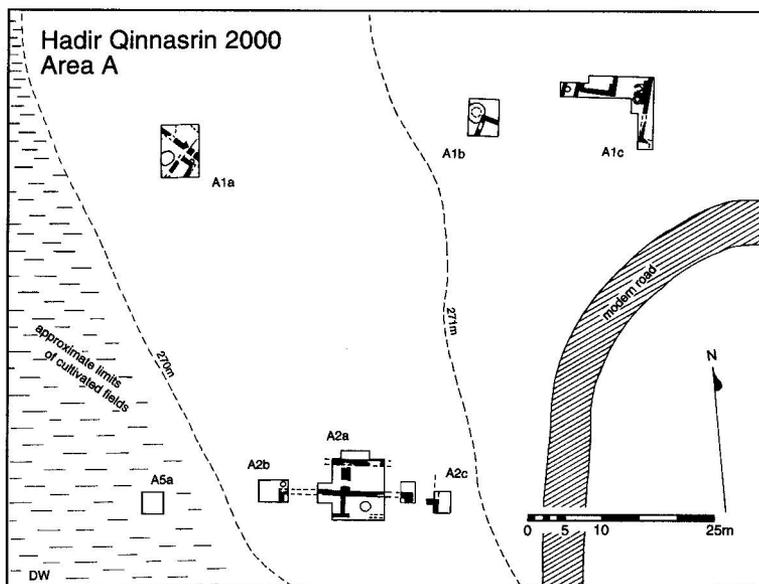


Figure 13. Northern area of excavations. Area A, Hadir Qinnasrin

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pression north of the cemetery was probed (A4; see fig. 4). Unfortunately, no archaeological information was obtained; this may confirm the a postulated function as a central brick pit for the town. This feature is immediately north of the Jurat al-Nasara, which remains to be investigated.

Conclusions

The results of the Hadir Qinnasrin project for this season were very satisfactory. Despite the problems of excavating inside a growing town, the consistent goodwill and cooperation of the people of Hadir allowed large excavated areas and test trenches on private property within the town. All these trenches were later backfilled (excepting those which the owners wished to use for other purposes). The principal historical information (more precision in the dating of the phases awaits study of the numismatic finds, presently stored in Damascus) is that:

1. The northwest section of Rasm al-Ahmar is confirmed as an area of intensive early Islamic occupation, probably the area of the first Muslim settlement at Qinnasrin. Two phases may be deduced in this area: phase B traces the earliest transitional materials which may be generally similar to Dêhès and other late antique/early Islamic sites of north Syria. This is followed by an early Islamic 1 (phase C; c. 700–850), in which early Abbasid materials of the Jazirah become more common. Qinnasrin may make an important contribution toward the delineation of this early Islamic development.
2. The southeast section below the eastern slopes of Tell Hadir is now identified as a part of the early medieval town of Qinnasrin. This phase of occupation of the city is unexpected, given the geographers' descriptions of Byzantine destruction in the tenth century. Once again, this indicates the necessity of archaeological investigation to complement literary accounts.
In this case, phase D (c. 850–1000) is superimposed upon the early Islamic 1 and may illustrate the development of late Abbasid (Samarran and later) materials.
3. The two secondary areas investigated this year (D2 and D3) begin the delineation of an archaeological sequence after the early Islamic period and into the Middle Islamic and pre-modern periods. These soundings were too limited to allow a more detailed chronology.

Two aspects of the history of Qinnasrin are suggested in the limited research of this season; these subjects remain as research goals for future seasons:

- a. The central institutions of the early Islamic *jund* capital of Qinnasrin, its mosque and administrative structures, remain to be discovered.
- b. The nature of the pre-Islamic town with its Ghassanid associations, as indicated by numerous architectural fragments in the center of the modern town, remains to be discovered.

These results of the Hadir Qinnasrin project have been made possible by the generous support and assistance the Directorate General of Antiquities. The project received generous support from the Fondation Max van Berchem, Geneva, and sponsorship of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. It is hoped that this cooperation on a project of immense historical interest may continue for many seasons in the future.
