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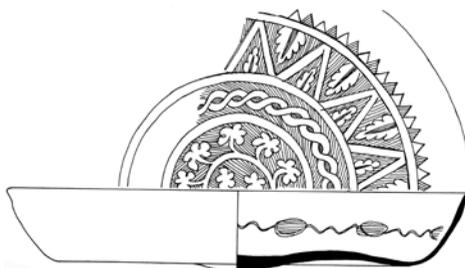
HADIR QINNASRIN

Donald Whitcomb

The report on the Hadir Qinnasrin excavations for 2000 outlined the major discoveries in terms of excavation areas, chronological refinements, and culture historical implications. The excavations seem to confirm that Hadir is the administrative center called Qinnasrin in the early Islamic period. Qinnasrin was the center from which the entirety of north Syria was ruled and from which the yearly campaigns into Anatolia, via Mar'ash, were conducted (see separate report on Individual Research). Qinnasrin has a great potential for delineating the structure of the early Islamic city and its urbanistic development. More importantly, the initial excavations have demonstrated the possibility of a pre-Islamic Arab camp (*hadir*) and its transformation into a city, literally the settlement of nomads in the seventh century.

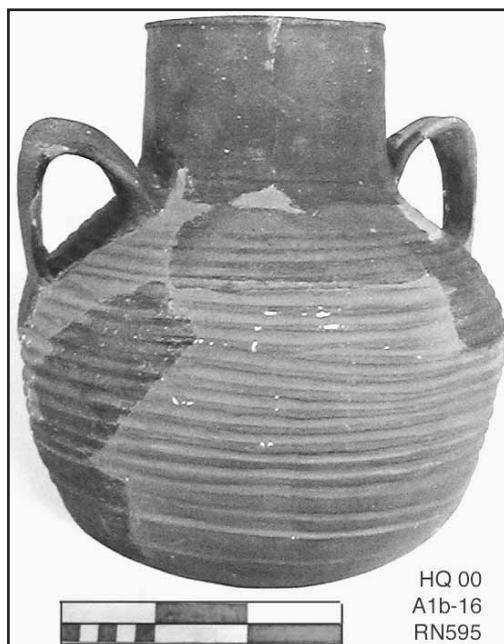


Conservation laboratory, Damascus, Syria

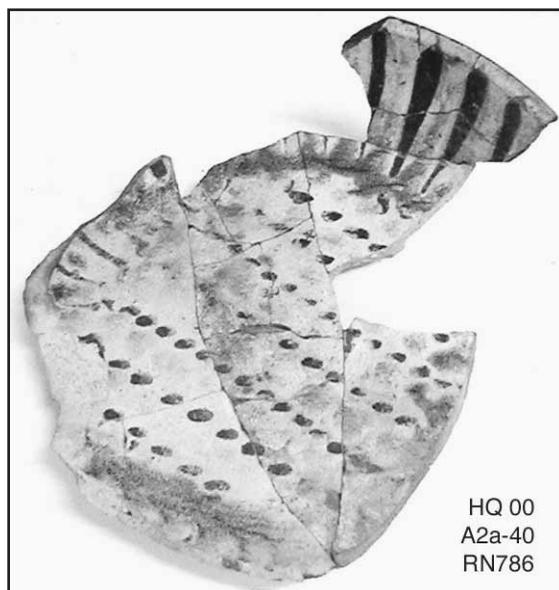


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Drawing of incised glass bowl. Hadir Qinnasrin, Syria



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Early Islamic ceramics from Hadir Qinnasrin, Syria

For this reason, the chronological distinctions found in stratigraphic excavations during 2000 were extremely important. The earliest Islamic occupation showed clear cultural affinities with the classical cities of Levantine Syria, especially with Apamea and Antioch. This continuity was hardly unexpected; what is more interesting is the transformation into a second cultural phase within the early Islamic period. Sometime around AD 800, a shift may be observed toward trade with the Euphrates region, as exemplified by contacts with Raqqa and Rusafa. This transition is also documented stratigraphically until the late tenth century, when Qinnasrin is known to decline, a loss of importance in competition with nearby Aleppo.

This interpretation from the Oriental Institute excavations was clarified when the author spent most of March 2001 in Damascus. The occasion for this visit was to study artifacts retained by the Syrian Directorate General of Antiquities. The conservation laboratory had not been idle, but under the leadership of Dr. Amr al-Azm most of the vessels were beautifully reconstructed. One of the greatest surprises was the glass vessels, particularly a fine cobalt blue bowl with incised decoration. This bowl precisely parallels examples from Raqqa, and even farther afield in Nishapur in northeastern Iran and even in Chinese tombs; all these examples are closely datable to the ninth century, as is our humble Qinnasrin piece. Obviously many more surprises are to be made at Qinnasrin and one may note that not all discoveries are made in the field.

The third season for Hadir Qinnasrin was frustrated as so many other projects seem to be. Although not exactly a salvage project, the rapid expansion of the town of Hadir continues to obscure much of the early Islamic (and possibly pre-Islamic) mounded area. As the 2000 season amply demonstrated, this makes the lower town of the Bronze Age also less accessible (the mound of Tell Hadir, surveyed by an earlier Italian expedition, remains apparently protected). A project to examine the oldest portion of Hadir, centered around the mosque and cemetery, has been postponed for the next field season. The intention is to map the locations of numerous architectural elements, carved on both limestone and basalt, found within the

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*Molded vessels from Hadir Qinnasrin, Syria*

modern town. This will result in a distributional map that may lead toward the most likely locations for future excavations. As in the 2000 season, archaeology in Hadir Qinnasrin is a form of urban archaeology, asking and (so far always) receiving permission to dig in private courtyards. Increasingly it is obvious that our questions will involve deep soundings in confined spaces — and therefore careful planning — to recover answers on this important period of archaeology in Syria.
