JERICHO MAFJAR PROJECT

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After three intensive seasons of excavations at Khirbet al-Mafjar near Jericho, new information and discoveries have become a significant trove that demand a redefinition of the old monument of Qasr Hisham. With this in mind, Dr. Hamdan Taha, my co-director and the Director of the Department of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, suggested we stop digging and start publication. We have a team of Palestinian archaeologists and students who have lived, worked, and studied this magnificent site with archaeologists and students from Chicago (and elsewhere). I was reluctant to lose this momentum, not to mention the promise of new discoveries. I suggested a compromise — no digging, but surveying using new technologies. Hamdan was intrigued and agreed. Two perfect investigators could lead us into this world of modern research, Dr. Andrew Creekmore and his wife, Dr. Eleanor Moseman (fig. 1). Andy had been a student of Gil Stein and has worked with him in Syria; he came highly recommended. What seems important in remote sensing is above all experience, in setting up the survey fields, quality control over the work, manipulation of the data, judicious

Figure 1. Andy and Ellie using the ground-penetrating radar in remote survey, area 1 (RS 1)

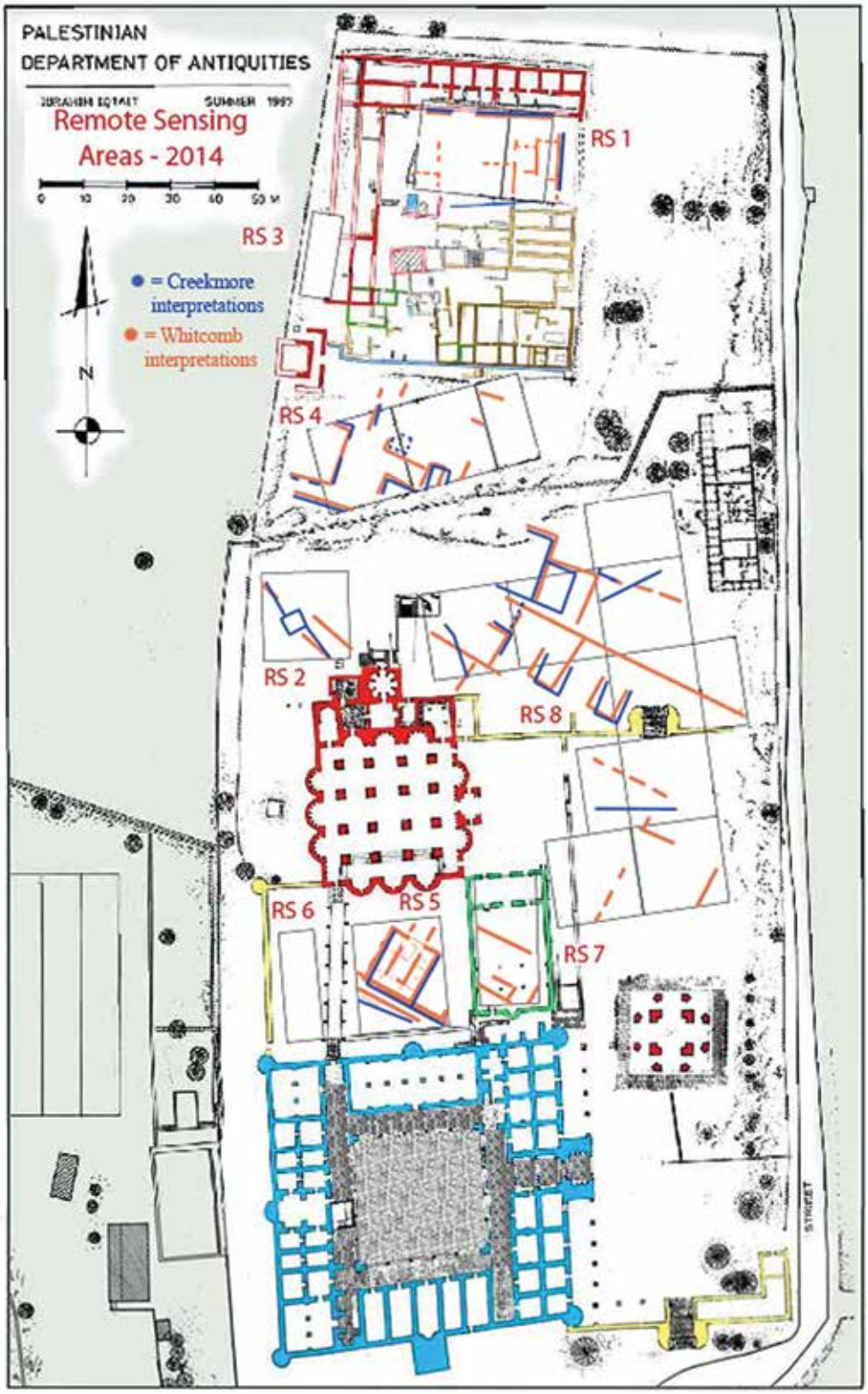

Figure 2. Remote-sensing areas investigated in 2014, with preliminary interpretations

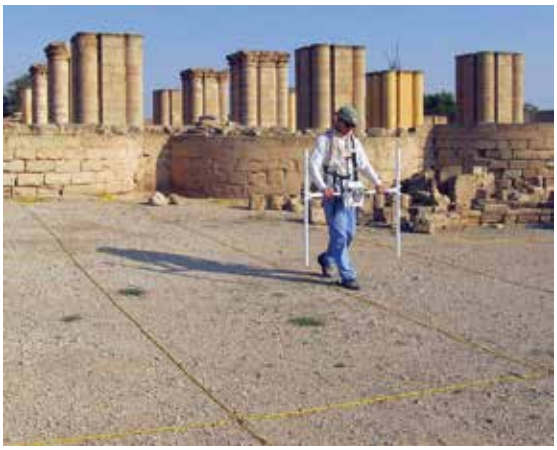

Figure 3. Andy using the magnetometer in RS 5, above the garden house

interpretations (see below), and not the least, manipulating five large and suspicious containers of electronic equipment through customs (and back again). The following report is a preliminary description of the efforts and results of the 2014 season.

We began by setting up fields for survey. The team consisted of Jihad Yasin, Awni Shawamra, Bassam Helmi, Basem Shqair, Ignacio Arce, and my student, Michael Jennings, all "old hands" from previous seasons. There was some adjustment (less so for a younger, new member of the department, Imad Doudeen); we began by walking around picking up stones and especially the smallest fragments of metal (for the magnetometer) (fig. 2). Gradually we all joined in the process of dragging the machines across the ground; the magnetometer carried at a steady pace (fig. 3), while others moved guide ropes; the resistivity meter with its probes shoved into the often hard ground (fig. 4); and most difficult, the ground-penetrating radar dragged across the ground while followed by an instrument-laden reader (fig. 5). The evenings were filled for Andy and Ellie checking their instruments and crunching the data. By the end of the second week, Andy could show some walls appearing in the middle area, between the palatial complex to the south and the agricultural estate, or northern area. He also found time to give a presentation on the remote-sensing techniques to Hamdan and the Palestinian and Chicago team. This information led to increased participation by all in this systematic recording on this site.

Figure 4. Ellie and Basam using the resistivity instrument in RS 8

Figure 5. Andy and Jehad with ground-penetrating radar

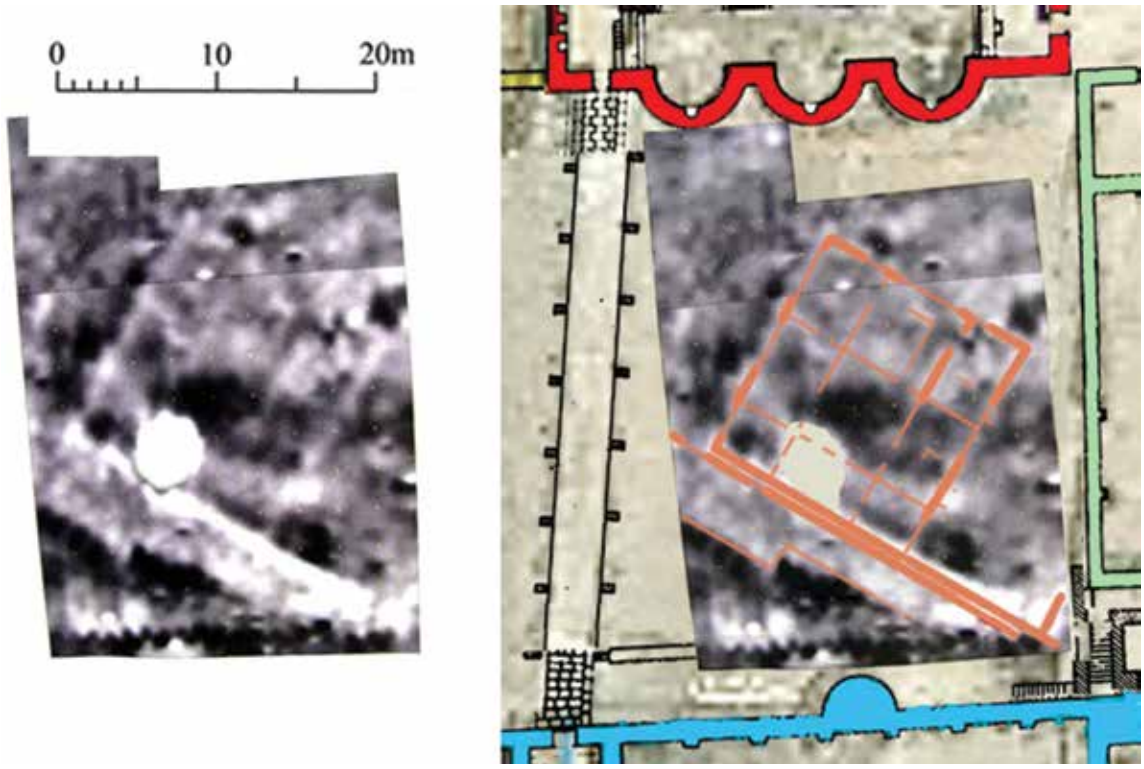

Figure 6. The garden house, RS 5, original magnetometer reading (left) and interpretation (right)

The results are very positive, showing clear evidence of sub-surface structures in virtually all the areas studied. With his careful eye of experience, Andy has offered measured interpretations (fig. 6, blue lines), while I offer a more expansive, and wishful (as Andy comments), set of hidden structures (fig. 6, orange lines). For a first example, the Red Building of the northern area (the *day'a*, or estate) has a central area that was never excavated and was assumed to have been an empty courtyard. Both Andy and I agree that north and east walls of the peripheral rooms are clearly visible. I would suggest that resistivity readings indicate walls in the eastern half that may continue the buildings under the stables; likewise, there may be some walls north of the large cistern on the east. The difficulty in excavating the northern area is that most of the buildings were already excavated in the 1960s. We have been re-excavating these structures, hoping for information in partial excavations and in the baulks left behind. The indications from RS 1 (remote survey, area 1) are that undisturbed buildings remain to be investigated.

The middle area (or *wasit*) lies between the northern estate and the southern palatial complex, a broad expanse divided by a modern irrigation channel (through which water flows twice a week). RS 4 was north of the channel in which we see a large building and possible street on the western side and further structures with the same northwest–southeast orientation. This was clear from the ground-penetrating radar (GPR) and was repeated in RS 8, south of the channel. We agree that the GPR reveals a series of isolate rooms that I would assemble into longer walls of building complexes. The same or a very similar wall orientation seems to continue in this massive assemblage of walls and buildings. Curiously,

as we scanned this area with instruments, Jehad Yasin (fig. 4) pointed out lines of stone walls visible on the surface; we had walked over the area a hundred times, never expecting that it was full of structures.

The third grouping of remote-sensing areas might be called the garden or *bustan*, east and south of the new north gate and wall, that is, within the grounds of the palatial complex. RS 8 continues south of the new gate, where Andy notes a road or drain leading from the audience hall entrance. The area is badly disturbed from previous landscaping, but I imagine a number of wall lines in the northern and eastern sections. RS 7 lies within the mosque, which had been heavily damaged. The GPR shows the two northern walls and a line of columns along the western side. A massive reflection in the sanctuary (*haram*) area seems misplaced and might be a mass of fallen materials. The magnetometer readings show a very different story: more wall lines that suggest a structure running beneath the mosque.

These wall lines beneath the mosque seem continuations of a very clear building, perhaps the most exciting discovery of the season. RS 5 lies between the north wall of the palace and the south wall of the audience hall (fig. 6). The magnetometer revealed a massive wall, or doubled walls, running across the south part of the area at an angle. In the center is a rectangular building, ca. 15 × 14 meters, with a central courtyard and rooms around each side, except across the possible northern entrance. This new house stands within an area that was presumed to have been a garden, next to a porticoed walk crossed by the Caliph. This "garden house" seems so perfectly central to the later(?) buildings surrounding it, that it would seem to have a special importance. The house seems part of the walls under the mosque and also associated with the larger building complex in the *wasit* or middle area to the north.

Thus the 2014 project that began as an exercise of almost idle curiosity now stands as an enormous quandary. In the first place, the Umayyad palatial complex is clearly a separate occupational phase; likewise, the northern agricultural estate of the Umayyad and especially Abbasid periods are a distinct phenomenon. An immediate and normal interpretation would be that we have evidence of a new, earlier period of occupation. The first problem is a lack of evidence for such an antecedent period. After our three seasons of excavations, and Baramki's thirteen seasons of digging (and he was looking for — and well-familiar with — Byzantine, Roman, and earlier materials), nothing has been found of these likely phases. There is the possibility that this new phase might be very early Umayyad in date. This follows from a late reference that the region was developed by Sulayman ibn Abd al-Malik, before his brother Hisham imposed his palace and estate on the site. Nevertheless, the first question must remain, why the different and apparently dominant building orientation?

The famous monuments of Khirbet al-Mafjar are elegant testaments to Umayyad architecture and art, studied and enjoyed by generations of scholars and visitors. The excavations of the Jericho Mafjar Project have added an unexpected yet intriguing complexity to the full history of Qasr Hisham. Each season leaves us with yet more questions, exciting questions that may be answered only with more digging.