

HADIR QINNASRIN

Donald Whitcomb

The Hadir Qinnasrin project began in 1998 with an extensive survey of the immediate vicinity of the village of Hadir and the walled ruins of Chalcis at the village of al-ʿIs. These sites are located about 25 km (10 miles) south of Aleppo, just east of the main road connecting Aleppo with Hama, Homs, and Damascus. The survey was augmented by two sondages on the northern periphery of Hadir; one of these, area K, revealed a single two-room house with characteristics common to typical tents of the bedouin. The dating evidence in both ceramics and coins suggests occupation in the eighth century. One interpretation of this trench is as evidence of early Islamic sedentarization of the edge of the *misr*, or administrative center for the Islamic state in northern Syria. This hypothesis was suggested in the 1998/99 *Annual Report* and has since been expanded in an article to be published by *Archéologie Islamique* this fall. The results from the excavations at Hadir Qinnasrin in 1998 clearly pointed to the identification of Qinnasrin in dating and cultural characteristics. Like the research program at Aqaba, conducted by the Oriental Institute from 1986 to 1995, the Hadir Qinnasrin project will advance our understanding of the nature of the Islamic city, the beginnings of a new phase of urbanization in the Middle East.

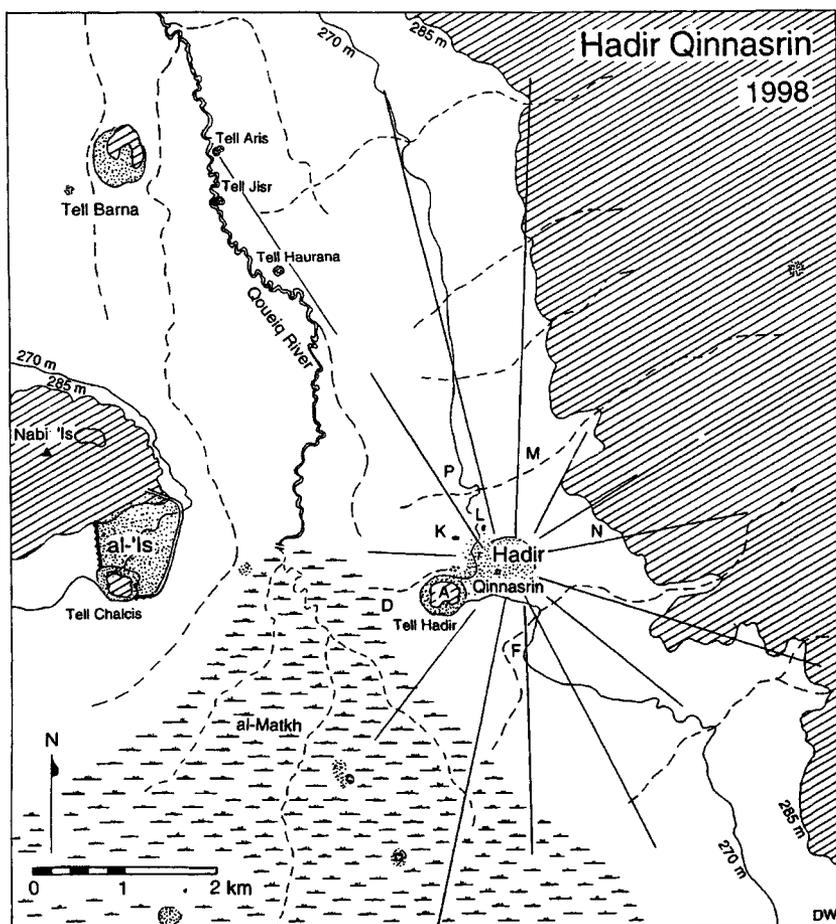
On the other hand, the site of Hadir Qinnasrin has exposed problems in our understanding of pre-Islamic history in this region. The first aspect involves the classical city of Chalcis, some 4 km west of Hadir (see map). Chalcis was a classical city of some culture and sophistication, as suggested in the Syriac story of Rabbula who came from an aristocratic family in Qennishrin. The story was expounded by Glen Bowersock at the Hama conference in 1999; beyond the relation of Christian conversion is an implication of the existence of a separate Qinneshrin and its association with Arab tribes. This ties into the idea that by the latter half of the sixth century, the Banu Tanukh and Banu Tayyi' had settled at Chalcis. The Byzantine historian John Haldon notes, "... substantial Arab settlements already existed near a number of cities [in Syria], and prior to conquest, very considerable numbers of Arabs ... were based at these sites, serving the

Romans as federate or allied troops.” This suggests that Qinnasrin may be viewed as a military camp, a *hadir*. Such camps no doubt also served as extramural commercial centers for the Arab-dominated caravan trade. To Irfan Shahid, the *hadir* was an ethnic suburb with permanent architecture, the locus of tribal sedentarization. In the case of the *hadir* of Chalcis, this camp retains its name in the modern town of Hadir.

The classical city of Chalcis was probably always associated with a military camp. This was a military aspect no doubt appreciated by the Byzantines, who had made Chalcis the key point for the *limes chalcides*, their defense of the eastern frontier. No doubt these same factors attracted the forces of the Ghassanids and Lakhmids for the battle at Chalcis in 554. The Ghassanids had operated in Syria as Arab clients to the Byzantines for much of the sixth century. The Ghassanid phylarch Arethos (Harith ibn Jabala) won a decisive victory over Mundir (ibn al-Nu'man), the Lakhmid who died in this battle. This victory may be the battle day known as Yawm Halima, according to Shahid's analysis of the battle. Harith's son, Jabala, also died in this battle and a *martyrion* for him was constructed near Chalcis at the *qastra*, or fortified place, near an important spring. A Greek source gives two topographic features, the Arab camp or *parembole* (or *hadir*) and a small hill in the midst of the camp.

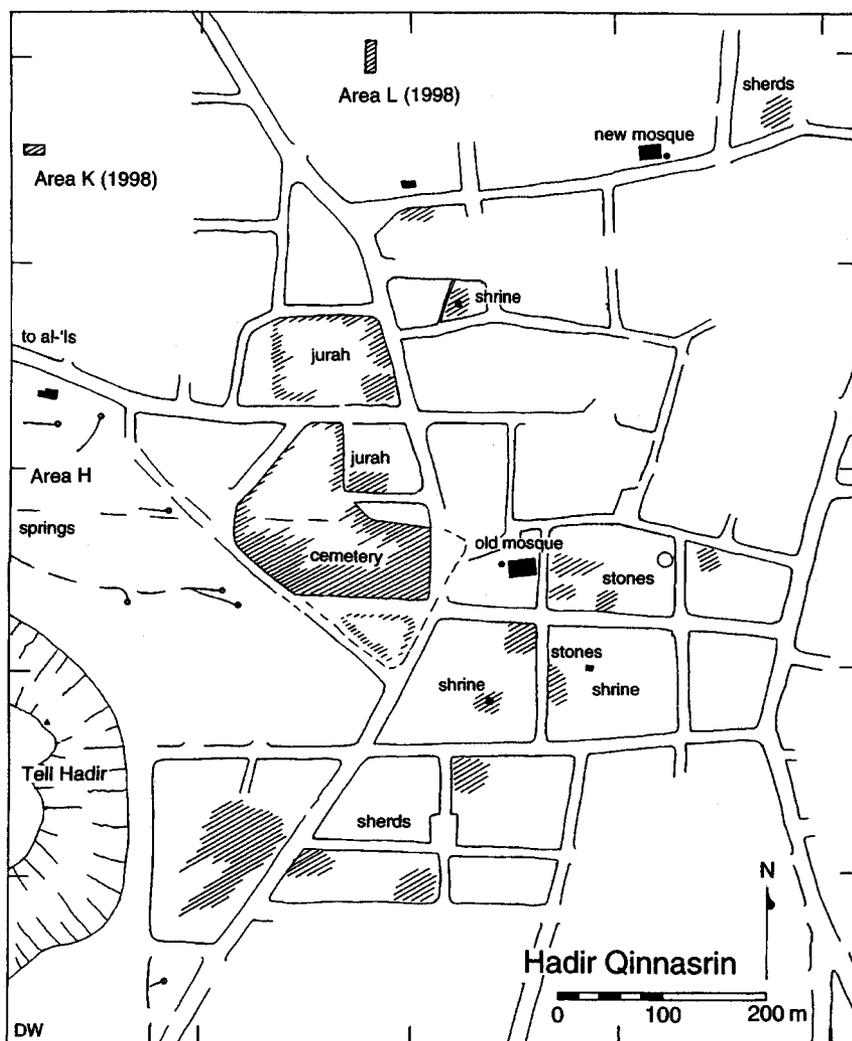
It may be suggested that this fortified camp was located at the site of Hadir Qinnasrin, where one finds an important spring (seven sources according to local accounts) and an overlooking mound, the Bronze Age tell. The radial roads, at least twelve vectors laid out with planned precision, focus on a site slightly to the east of the old mosque in the town (where numerous basalt construction stones are still to be found). This may be hypothesized to be the *martyrion* of Jabala ibn Harith and possibly a victory monument for the battle of Chalcis.

The role of Qinnasrin as a military center was a function that the Sasanians may have adopted in 614, when they captured Syria (as well as the Levant and Egypt). The lack of Sasanian evidence in major cities may be explained in a location in rural camps in preference to urban garrisons. The Muslim leaders must



Map showing relationship of Chalcis and Qinnasrin

ARCHAEOLOGY



Plan of the town of Hadir and traces of its archaeological remains

have appreciated Chalcis as a Byzantine military center on the road from Antioch toward the Euphrates, the key of the *limes chalcidis*, the eastern frontier (contra the Sasanians). During the Muslim conquests in northern Syria, the Treaty of Chalcis allowed the Byzantines to evacuate their military forces and civilians from the region (in 637, according to Kaegi). Thus Qinnasrin continued its role as a central place, a large, well-watered valley (a *hima*, a state pasturage), and a convenient assembly point for large numbers of troops bivouacked in preparation for the yearly campaigns into Anatolia.

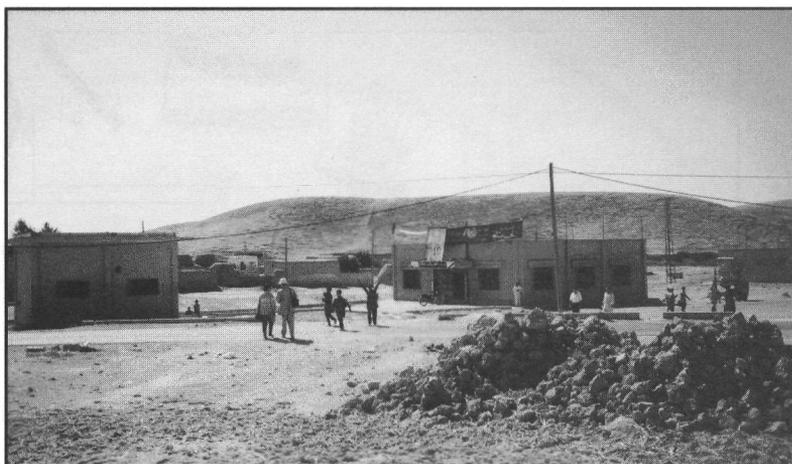
More than a simple military garrison, the Jund Qinnasrin must have evolved administrative functions appropriate for a rich province of the early Islamic state, a province which included the cities of Antakya (Antioch), Afamia (Apamea), and Halab (Aleppo). The state of these cities during this period is a matter of some debate; in the case of Aleppo, the apparent lack of attention paid to it after the Muslim conquest suggests that it was a minor center during the early Islamic period and revived only as the Hamdanid capital in the tenth century. Qinnasrin was founded by Mu'awiya while he was governor of Syria in 643 or, according to other reports, by his son, the caliph Yazid I in 680. Both Mu'awiya and Yazid built upon the achievements of

their Ghassanid predecessors and employed many Ghassanids in their administrations (and indeed married Ghassanid ladies). As with so many aspects of the new Islamic state, its relationship to the past remains problematic and solvable only through archaeological research.

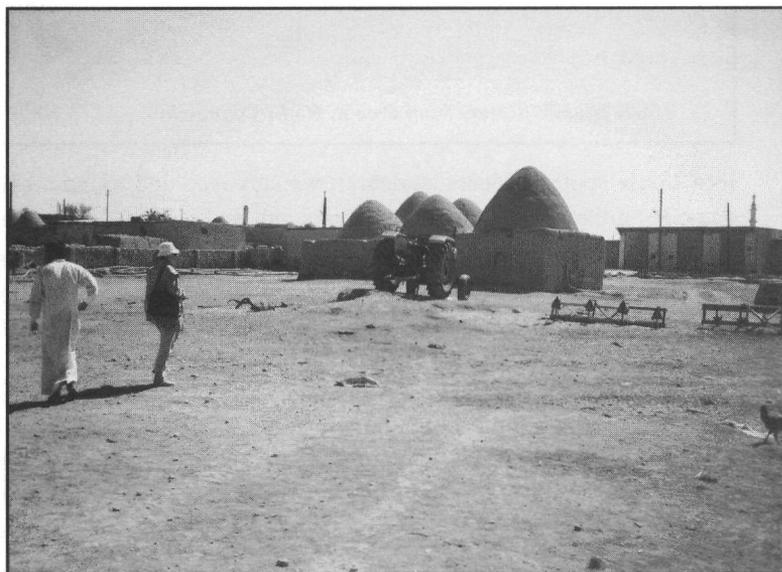
Research in 1999

From the initial examination of Chalcis in 1990 to the first sondages in 1998, the focus of archaeological research has become increasingly clear. The first hurdle was the differentiation of the classical walled city of Chalcis at the town of al-ʿIs (Tell Chalcis on the map) from the early Islamic capital of Qinnasrin located at the town of Hadir. The survey and sondages of 1998 revealed an added complexity of a Bronze Age mound southwest of the Islamic town, attracted by the same springs (Tell Hadir on the map). This Bronze (and Iron) Age tell has been surveyed by Italian archaeologists in conjunction with Ebla, located only about 40 km to the south. The size of this mound and continuity of its occupation should make it appropriate for future investigation; no doubt a simple step trench and fragments of sealings would inspire a needed breakthrough in ancient urbanization.

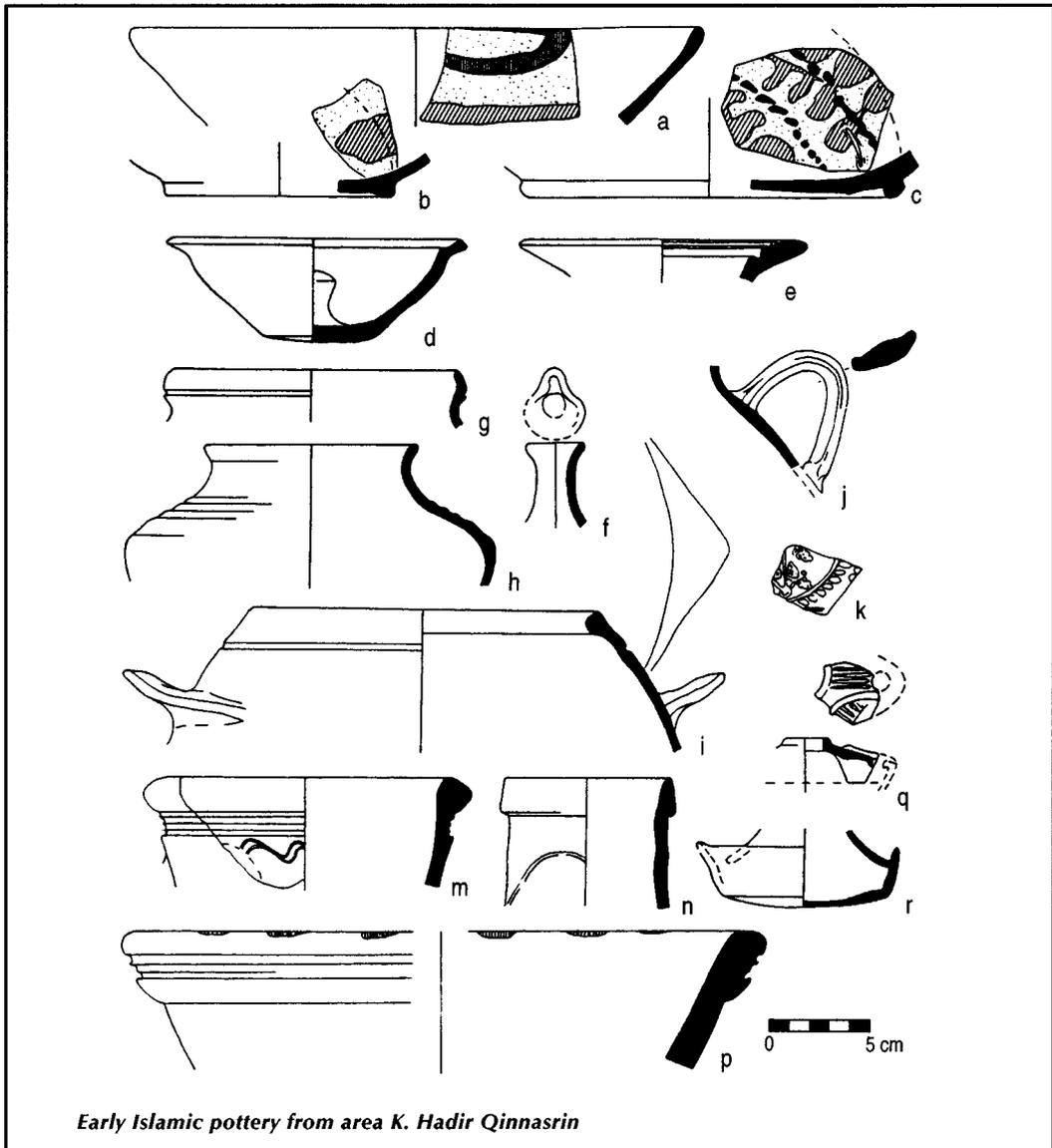
Most recently, an examination of archaeological remains within the town of Hadir revealed Islamic artifacts and apparently pre-Islamic monuments. This was accomplished through a systematic walking tour, armed with good maps of the town, noting down its “antiquities” with Ms. Fedwa Abido and Mr. Omar Mahmud, both of the Aleppo Museum. The obvious beginning was the cemetery, clearly part of the early Islamic town but obviously unavailable for excavation (see map). 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 sported large stones from archaeological structures. With the assistance of Katherine Strange and Col-



Hadir near springs with Bronze Age mound in background

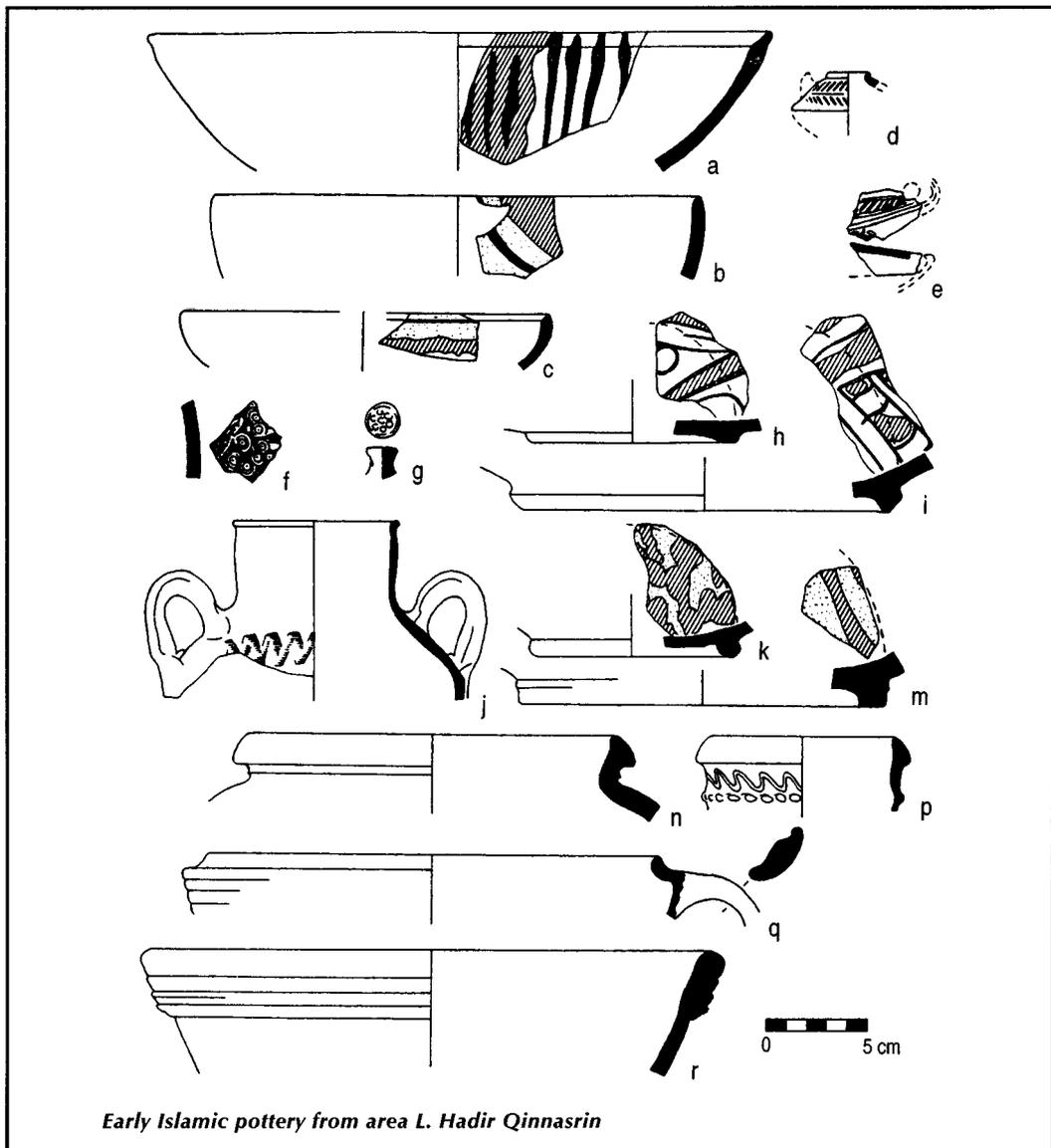


North edge of Hadir with beehive-shaped buildings



leen Coyle (both graduate students), we surveyed and found a number of ancient columns and capitals on the slightly mounded area south and east of the mosque. These were often made of basalt; one capital contained the name “Eusebios.” These architectural elements may be a strong indication of the distribution of late Byzantine, and more precisely Ghassanid, buildings in the center of Qinnasrin. An alternative interpretation may be the incorporation of pre-Islamic spolia recycled in later, Islamic architecture.

The ubiquitous presence of basalt architectural elements makes the lack of previous archaeological investigation puzzling and, given the intense modern development of Hadir, very disappointing. One realizes that even a few years ago much of this site would have been visible or readily uncovered. Fortunately there are still extensive areas within the town that are left open and relatively undisturbed. One of our workmen, Ahmad Kalbun, who understood our preoccupation with potsherds, led us to a school yard and large courtyard south of the old mosque. Visible on the surface were stone walls, ovens, ash, and quantities of glazed sherds; this was



especially gratifying in that our goals are not confined to monumental architecture but will include studies of residential areas, following upon the houses fortunately uncovered in the first season of research.

Ceramic Evidence

The ceramics recovered from the 1998 survey resulted in detailed study by M. Cyril Achard, a student project in the Sorbonne. He was able to outline the periods from the Early Bronze IV through the Middle Islamic and begin rudimentary distribution patterns. His study was limited only by the nature of the reconnaissance; one may hope that this preliminary research provides a basis for his participation in the future surveys at Qinnasrin and its region. On the other hand, the ceramic collections from the sondages, soon to be published in *Archéologie Islamique*, are divided into two phases. The earlier phase I came from layers deposited within the stone walls of

ARCHAEOLOGY

these rooms (mudbrick walls were foundations only, sunk into pre-Islamic strata). The preliminary hope that the Byzantine/Umayyad transitional phase may be distinguished seems unjustified from the limited collections within relatively shallow layers. Nevertheless, parallels with D  h  s and other transitional sites clearly indicate an occupation during this period, i.e., 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, ca. 758). Other coins include two of Heraclius, ca. 630–641, and may be more typical currency of this phase; otherwise a few residual coins of the sixth century were found in all layers.

The main occupation of the 1998 sondages, phase II, is characterized by collections from surface loci in area K and more generally from area L (where there was little or no material from phase I). Specific brittle wares, basins, lamps, and jars (with amphorae) are paralleled in late Umayyad and Abbasid contexts at Qasr al-Hayr, al-Sharqi, al-Rusafa, and especially Tell Aswad (al-Raqqa). Perhaps most interesting are the glazed wares, usually a polychrome on simple forms; this has recently been described as “yellow-glaze-family” by Watson at Tell Aswad. While there is some controversy over this ware, it seems to be pre-Samaritan and oriented toward Levantine production traditions. A small percentage of these glazed sherds have simple sgraffiato decoration; these occur on the surface and may be considered the latest ceramic development recovered 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, ca. 772–775).

One may conclude from the ceramics, and to a less extent from coins, a dating for the periphery of Hadir Qinnasrin to the eighth century, with indications of an immediately preceding phase. The survey ceramics indicate that this earlier phase may be found toward the center of the modern town of Hadir. Thus the ceramic indicators support the implications of the architectural elements in positing a transitional occupation of late Byzantine and early Islamic periods. The potential for distinguishing an assemblage clearly related to a Ghassanid presence would represent an important contribution for Syrian history through the utilization of archaeological evidence.

Putting all this information together, one arrives at the picture of an urban center south and east of the old mosque, which forms the slight rise of a mound and encloses remains of Ghassanid and early Islamic Qinnasrin. The next stage of investigation must turn to excavation to uncover the forgotten history of this lost city. This research will continue in fall 2000 with the cooperation of Marianne Barrucand of the Sorbonne, and with the support of the Directorate General of Antiquities and its able representation by Ms. Fedwa Abido from Aleppo.