

A HISTORY OF SYRIA IN ONE HUNDRED SITES

edited by

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Cover Illustration: View of the excavation at Hummal site
© The Syro-Swiss mission on the Palaeolithic of the El Kowm Area

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103. Tell Damir (Raqqa)

Anas Al Khabour

(Gothenburg University, Sweden)

In July 2007 the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, Raqqa Department, started the first season of excavation at Tell Damir, directed by Anas al Khabour, Director of the Raqqa Department. In 2009 the Raqqa Department continued the second excavation season lead by Mohammed Jajan, director of the Raqqa Museum.

Tell Damir (36°15'58.03"N, 38°59'46.51"E) is situated in a fertile area of the Balikh valley, 38km north of Raqqa city. The site is situated 287m a.s.l. and is accessible from the west by the old Balikh road and from the east by taking the newer Balikh road. It is divided in two parts, separated by the river into Tell Damir Sharqi (eastern) and Tell Damir Gharbi (western), with a total area of 60ha (Figs. 1 and 2).

The eastern section

In the northern part of the site, the Syrian mission excavated Trench A3 (3 x10m). We discovered a wide

wall B1 (2.5m thick) made of bricks, each measuring 30 x30cm, that extended east-west. The wall had been damaged by modern tombs. In the eastern part of the site we found a semicircular tower with stairs leading up to the tower and the wall, which is 2.25m high and covered by plaster.

Under this wall (B1) we found another (B2) one, made of limestone, which runs parallel with B1. In this area we excavated a square (A20), in which we recorded a pottery kiln and also found a considerable quantity of slag. There were no small finds, only two coins which dated to the Classical period.

The western section

At the western side of the site, in Tell Damir Gharbi, we excavated Trench A4 (8 x10m), where buildings were visible on the surface and where we found part of the walls belonging to a large building (wall C1).



FIG. .1 TELL DAMIR IN THE BALIKH VALLEY.

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FIG. 2 EASTERN AND WESTERN SECTIONS OF TELL DAMIR.

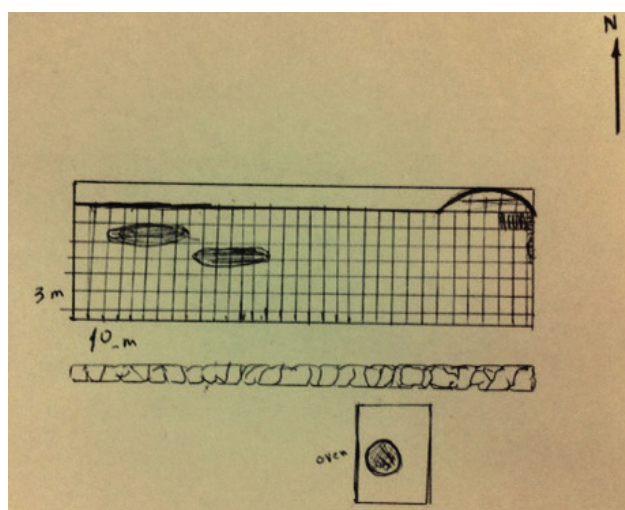


FIG. 3 SKETCH OF ROOM C5 SHOWING LOCATION OF OVEN.

This building consisted of many rooms and spaces. The excavated section (made of bricks, 30 x 40cm) forms part of the external walls of the building, which were 3m thick and ran in an east-west direction. We documented two rooms: one in the west (C4) and one in the east (C5).

Room C4

Room C4 is rectangular in shape (3.80 x 3m); its entrance is in the northern wall that leads to an open space or

central courtyard. (We excavated the western wall of room C3.) The floor was covered with plaster, the same material that covered the internal walls, and which was made in situ.

Room C5

Room C5 (Fig. 3) is a rectangular in shape (3.5 x 2.5m); its entrance, as in room C4, is to the north of the central square (C8). Again, like C4, we found plaster covering the internal walls and the floor. We also found evidence of a oven/furnace with pipes beneath ground level at the entrance, indicating that this room might have been a bathroom or kitchen.

Central courtyard

Situated to the north of rooms C4 and C5, at the centre of the large building, we found a courtyard (Fig. 4). Some of its walls were made of mudbrick (between the entrances to rooms C4 and C5), and the western wall and floor were plaster covered. We also discovered here a section of a raised bank running parallel with the western wall. It is thought that the structure belonged to an important person, or was used as an administrative building during the Islamic period at Raqqa in the early Abbasid period. We found no important small objects to give a fixed date for the building or its function. The finds consisted of small ceramic and pottery pieces. The excavation

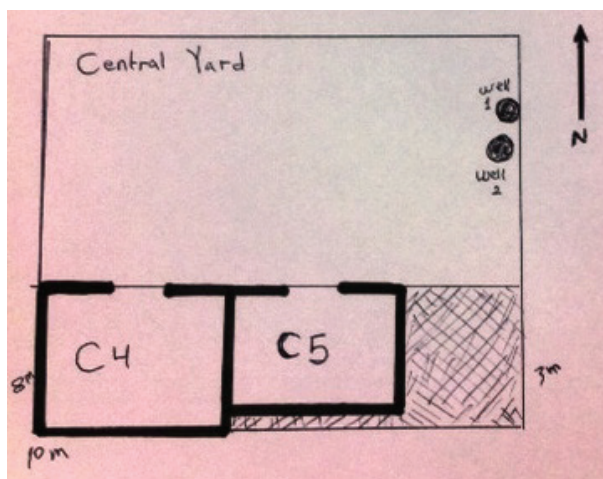


FIG. 4 PLAN OF THE CENTRAL COURTYARD.



FIG. 5 CERAMIC VESSEL FROM TELL DAMIR.

reached the floor of the building. There we documented some glass pieces and bronze articles. To the east of the courtyard we found two wells: the first was 8.5m deep, its interior constructed of stone and brick and its upper section contained a 60cm ceramic pipe.

In general terms, the small finds obtained from the first seasons of excavation consisted of large quantities of ceramic and glass pieces, beads, two coins and a pottery vessel (Fig. 5).

The population of Damir worked in agriculture, assisted by its location close to the river Balikh. We identified a considerable quantity of charred grains that indicate that the site was very well suited to agriculture, especially

wheat, barley and cotton. In addition to agriculture there were other traditional industries, such as the making of pottery and porcelain. The colours of the pottery and its floral and geometric decoration indicate that it was a sophisticated industry.

The plaster industry flourished in Damir. Plaster in this region was characterized by spreading a large quantity of white marl on the ground and then burning it, as people do today on the site.

It is possible that Damir was also an important trading centre, judging by its location as a part of the Diyar Mudar region, near the important trade route from Baghdad and linking Samarra, Sarrin, Khrab Sayar and Madinat al-Far, the closest point to Damir. It then continued along the road to Raqqa, capital of Diyar Mudar, or to Aleppo, after crossing the Euphrates near Qalaat Najim, where the route heads north towards Antakia, or south towards to Damascus.

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