

SINNABRA (OR KHIRBAT AL-KARAK)

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In February 2019, the second excavation season at al-Sinnabra continued delineation of an early Islamic palace. In reality or quiet hope, the aim was the discovery of the mosque of al-Mu'āwiya (the Umayyad caliph, 661–680). The aim of this season was to trace more remains of the hypostyle building that was partly revealed last year. Following the finds of the previous season, we concentrated in two areas related to the two rows of column bases. In addition, a narrow probe in the large spoil heap covering the western part of the hall (which revealed no traces of construction at floor level). Further examination of the northern area indicated extensive damage through erosion and modern interventions. Therefore, we concentrated our efforts around the columns on the southern part of the hall and on its eastern border.

A HYPOSTYLE HALL

The main building of the site is a palace structure within a fortified wall, which we called *qasr* (fig. 1). Beyond its north wall, we discovered a third row of column bases, just below the level of the

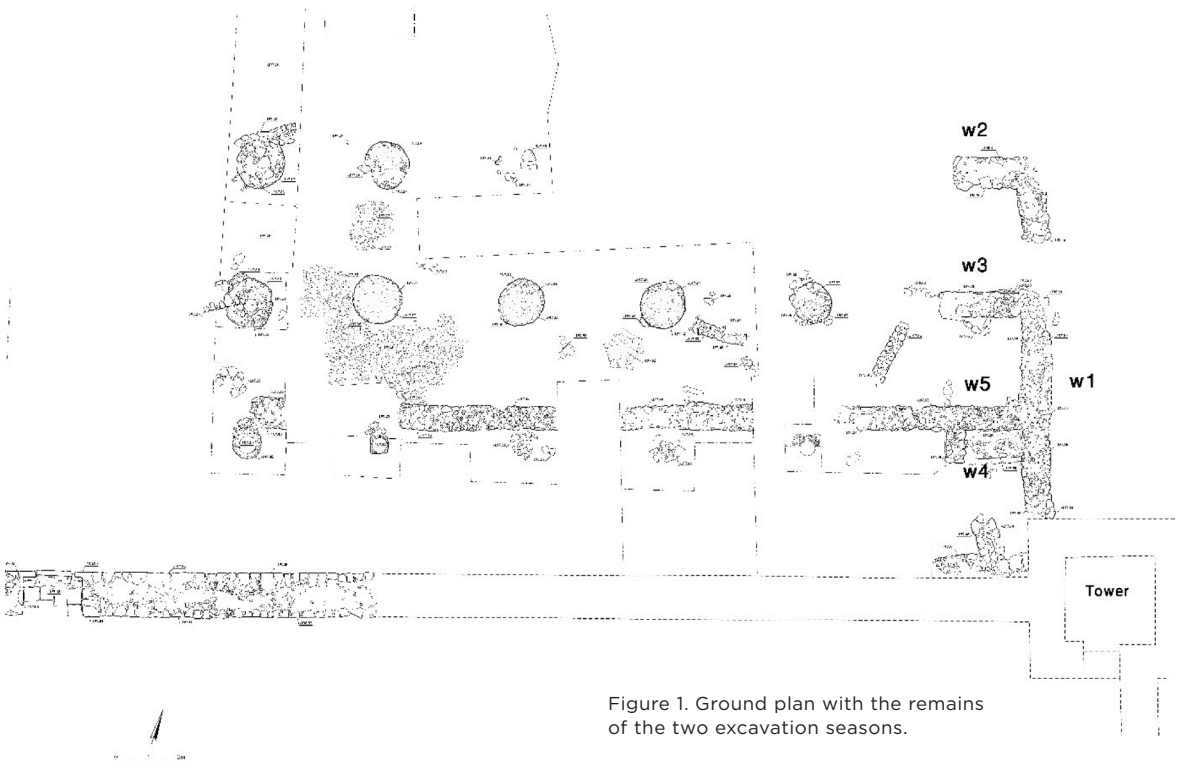


Figure 1. Ground plan with the remains of the two excavation seasons.

gravel pavement. This row is composed of three reused marble bases and two built bases, and more importantly, these bases were built at similar intervals to those of the two northern rows and they are aligned with them. An eastern wall was discovered with three east–west walls on the same lines of the bases. Three west–east walls were also exposed (fig. 1, w2–4), attached to the eastern north–south wall (fig. 1, w1). The eastern wall and these short walls appear to be the eastern edge of the hypostyle hall. Another east–west wall intersected with the column bases; this wall (fig. 1, w5) probably predates the hall (fig. 2). The bases seem arranged to create a rhythm of 4 m bays. The columns begin at a 4 m interval from the northern wall of the *qasr*, suggests suggesting that the northern *qasr* wall was a common wall for both structures (fig. 3).

BELOW: Figure 2. Column bases, looking east.
OPPOSITE: Figure 3. Air view of the trenches.



Some earlier wall fragments may be dated to the Hellenistic era from ceramic finds. These materials were covered with a layer brown earth mixed with small pebbles, containing mixed materials and some types of Arab-Byzantine coins.

The edges of the building exposed on the northern side of the *qasr*, be it a mosque or any kind of a hypostyle structure, still need to be defined. Due to the erosion on the northern side, no efforts are recommended on this side. While the eastern wall may be further defined, the width of the hypostyle hall needs to be determined. Its western wall would seem to be still hidden beneath the spoil -heap of the previous excavations. As hypothesized from the size range of other early mosques (fig. 2), there may be a remnant of the northern wall, still preserved in the area. This would justify a brief further season on this possible early mosque.





EASTERN WALL

During the conservation of the site throughout the year some traces of a north-south wall were revealed on the eastern edge of the mound, parallel to the *qasr* wall. Therefore, a small trench was opened to track this wall. This wall seem to be a retaining wall to a walk way that extended along the eastern border of the *qasr* (fig. 4).

BATHHOUSE

As reported last year, in February 2018, during our excavation season, a team of conservators launched a long-term maintenance project that lasted for almost a year. Among other things, they have brought to light some forgotten corners of the site, including the Umayyad bathhouse and parts of the palace itself (fig. 5).

During the conservation works, the bath was cleaned and some details were revealed in them, mainly of the central pool and the two bathtubs on the south side of the main room. Moreover, the cleaning works revealed two building stages of the western wall (fig. 6). It seems that an

extension was attached to the lower course of the wall that came to create a base for the benches along the wall. This addition even covered the edges of the marble pavement, in this manner preserving some of the marble tiles, one of which bears a Greek inscription.

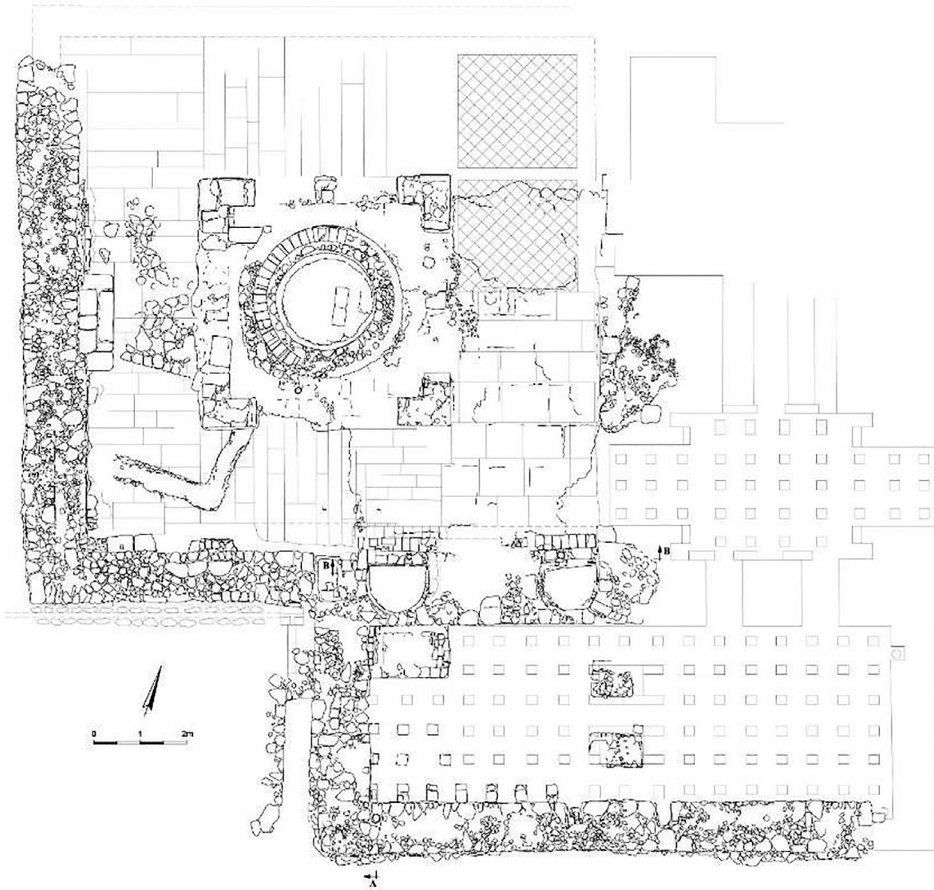
ABOVE: Figure 4. Eastern walkway and supporting wall, looking east.

OPPOSITE TOP: Figure 5. General view of the *qasr*, from the west, after the conservation works. The bathhouse is at top right, above a large Bronze Age structure.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: Figure 6. Detailed plan of the bath after cleaned by the conservators.



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PROGRAM FOR NEXT SEASON

The edges of the building exposed on the northern side of the *qasr*, be it a mosque or any kind of a hypostyle structure, still need to be defined. Due to the erosion on the northern side, no efforts are recommended on this side. The eastern wall, partly exposed during the fifties of the twentieth century, can be re-examined. The same can be said about the western wall that may be still hiding beneath the spoil-heap of the previous excavations. Therefore, we would like to return to carry out a final, brief, two-week probe before the end of this calendar year.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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