

# UMM QAYS: PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE 2008 SEASON

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## **Introduction**

Between August and October 2008, an archaeological team from Kokushikan University, Tokyo, Japan, conducted a second season of excavation at Umm Qays, ancient Gadara, in the lower city north of the main street or *decumanus maximus*, near the Early Roman gate (**Fig. 1**). The team was directed by Prof. Ken Matsumoto, Director of the Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq. The excavated area extends over a wide area north of the main street, inside City Wall. The goal was to explore the nature and extent of the basalt wall which was discovered last season.

## **The Mosaic Pavement and Basalt Wall**

The foundation of the basalt wall (**Fig. 2**) was excavated during the 2007 excavation season, and was the subject of further exploration this season. Upon excavation, it became clear that this wall is part of a huge structure associated with a mosaic pavement. Approximately 40m. of this east-west wall was excavated; its eastern end hadn't been reached by the end of the season. The wall turned to the north and was constructed of limestone blocks approximately 0.45m wide; the mosaic pavement was laid alongside it. Erosion has probably destroyed its north-west end, but in the north-western part of the excavated area almost three courses of stonework were preserved. Bedrock was reached at grid N11.

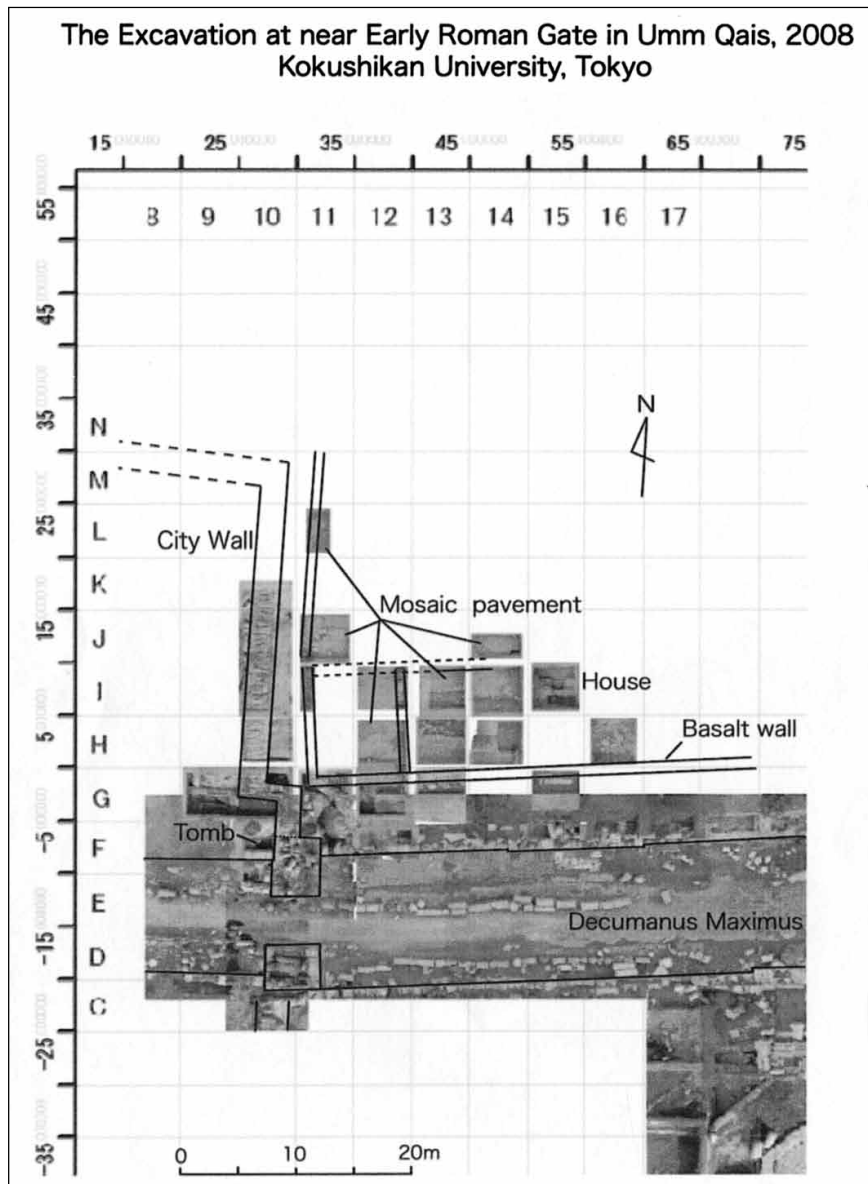
Excavation in the area north of the main street revealed a mosaic pavement, which was damaged or destroyed by military installations in squares I15, I14, J14, I13, H13, H15 and G16. These probably date back to 1967 (**Fig. 3**). It was decided to remove some of these installations, which exposed a hard, thick layer of white cal-

cite underneath. This deposit contained considerable quantities of plain white tesserae, many in clusters adhering to their original cement. Only scattered remains of mosaic patches associated with the paved foundation remained *in situ*. The original paving in the eastern part of the structure was a mosaic floor, paved with large plain white tesserae, which had unfortunately been completely destroyed during construction of the military installations. However, a partially preserved polychrome mosaic floor was excavated along the western part of structure (**Fig. 4**). The western part of the excavation area was entirely covered by a mosaic pavement. An almost complete floor was excavated in square H12; it was set within a double frame, with a central pattern that was hardly damaged. The colors of white, black, red and grey were used (**Fig. 5**).

Along the eastern end of the main mosaic floor, in squares H12 and I12, several rectangular alignments of well-cut limestone were found running north-south. These stones are bonded to the south-west end of the basalt wall (G12), which confirms that the mosaic pavement was an integral part of the basalt wall. The exact function of these stones is uncertain. However, the stones seem to separate the eastern and western mosaic pavements of the structure. Another extension of the mosaic was found in square J11, located in the north-west of the excavation area, which has been partly cleaned. This showed that small-sized white and red tesserae were used in this mosaic pavement. Large quantities of roof tile, and marble fragments with several iron nails were found in the thin soil layer that covered the north-west part of the mosaic pavement.

## **Residential Area**

There are two main domestic areas which



1. Map showing the excavated area near Main Street.

have been excavated at the site; both are located south-west of the Acropolis Hill and have been dated to the Late Hellenistic to Early Roman periods (Kerner 1997: 287-289). The recently excavated domestic area is in the lower city, located on the northern slope overlooking Lake Tiberias.

Underlying the destroyed foundation of a mosaic pavement, a thick layer of very hard calcite, sloping down from west to east and containing large quantities of small and medium basalt chippings, was excavated. Its nature and extent indicated that this layer was a fill that had been deposited over the entire excavated area.

It was decided to remove this layer completely, which exposed the remains of a series of walls (Fig. 6). The main wall was located under the eastern balk of square H15, ran north-south and was built of both basalt and limestone. It is part of complex of four walls, forming the sides of a square structure consisting of two rooms adjacent to each other. These were partly excavated; the walls varied in height from 0.40 to 0.50m and were built of large and medium sized limestone and basalt blocks; small chippings of basalt and limestone filled the spaces in between. The interior faces of the walls display extensively preserved white plaster over a thick layer



2. Foundation basalt wall (square G11).

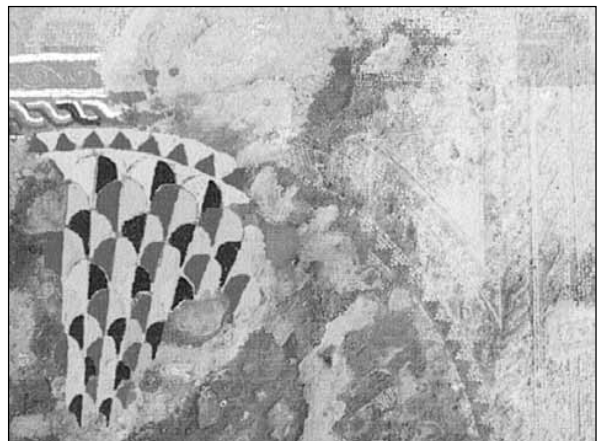


3. Defensive as a fortification on top of calcite layer (I15).

of mud plaster. The most significant plastered wall, situated in squares H15 and I15, was built of well-cut, large limestone blocks. Three courses of the wall remained; its unexcavated interior face seemed to be covered by a thin layer of fine, white lime plaster. Another rectangular room with an entrance and plastered corridor was partly excavated. The only entrance for the rooms was found in the north-east corner of the main eastern wall in square I15, and led to a room to the west. The doorway, 0.50m wide and 1m



4. Mosaic Floor , Main Carpet (H12).



5. Image design of Mosaic Floor (H12).



6. Top view showing the plastered rooms (H15 and I15).

high, was completely blocked, probably during later phase (**Fig. 7**). The fill inside these rooms was a thick layer of compact reddish soil, with several fallen large limestone blocks retaining traces of white plaster (**Fig. 8**). Numerous fragments of collapsed cornice and soft lime plaster



7. Blocked doorway in main eastern wall (I15).



8. Debris inside room, including fallen blocks and plaster (I15).

were found; they probably belong to the ceiling. Fragments of colored plaster were found in the room fills, and provide evidence of decoration. However, none of the colored plaster fragments were *in situ*. The decoration consists mainly of wide horizontal bands of red, yellow and pink on a white background, which may have been part of large geometric design. The pottery from the fills included fragments of Megarian ware, roughly dated to around the late first century BC-early first century AD.

Excavation in square I15 reached a possible floor level at the base of the structure (**Fig. 9**). This consisted of small and medium stones, covered with a layer of compact white clay. It was decided to excavate a probe near the north-west plastered wall, located in the middle of square H15, in order to reach the foundations and recover some material with which to date the wall. Underlying this possible floor level, several east-west alignments of rectangular limestone and basalt blocks were found; these blocks averaged 0.40 by 0.60m in size. One was removed, and an east-west wall of large, well-cut limestone blocks was excavated. It was noticed that this wall extended along the eastern parts of squares H15 and I15, upon which the main east wall of the rooms was erected. According to its location, construction and orientation, it is probable that this wall represents an earlier phase of construction. Furthermore, it seems that the occupants of these rooms reused this earlier wall as a foundation, for their structure.

Further to the north, excavation revealed huge basalt wall (**Fig. 10**), located under the northern balk of square I15. The wall survives to a maximum height of 0.80m. The upper courses were probably removed and reused by the Army



9. Room compacted soil level (I15).



10. Basalt wall, and its foundation cut into floor level. Note the fortification's foundation to the left (H15).

for military purposes. The bottom of the wall was reached, where traces of ashy material were noticed. It became clear that the wall's foundation cut into the room's floor. The exact function of this wall is uncertain. Owing to the limited area of excavation, military installations and presence of irremovable mosaic patches, it was difficult to expose and date an entire house plan. This will be attempted next season.

### Square H16

It was decided to excavate a square, H16, located east of square H15 in order to expose a blocked doorway and debris from square H15. This included various architectural fragments, e.g. blocks, limestone column drums etc. Moreover, it was noticed that these fallen stones (**Fig. 11**) included a complete Ionic basalt column which had fallen from east to west, indicating that these stones originated from a fallen structure located in square H15 to the east.



11. Debris of square H16, fallen stone, Ionic column in the right corner.

### Squares G15 and G16

These two squares were opened in the southern part of excavation area, in order to expose the extension of the basalt wall foundation. In square G15, excavation revealed a staircase (**Fig. 12**) leading from the northern stylobate of the street to the north. It was attached to the outer face of the basalt wall, and was 2.70m wide. Three limestone steps were preserved *in situ*, with more being scattered across the excavation area. The full extent of the staircase to the north could not be determined, and no remains of an associated structure were found. The function and date of this feature is still obscure, although the stairs probably belong to a later phase of construction. Further evidence of a later phase(s) of construction appeared in square G16, where several simple walls were constructed of reused architectural fragments, e.g. shaft column, capital and large blocks. These were associated with a compact light brown surface, from which a large quantity of animal bones was recovered. The most interesting discovery in this square was an inscription (**Fig. 13**) found on a limestone column framed by a *tabula ansata*.

The excavation of a house in the lower city has resulted in promising discoveries, which will hopefully shed light on the settlement plan and early residential history of ancient Gadara.

### Phasing

#### Recent Activity

The excavation area appears to have been intensively used by the Army. Several military installations and pits were identified. These



12. Staircase (G15).



13. Latter phase of construction. Inscription on lay out shaft column bottom of figure (G16).

cut into archaeological deposits, causing widespread destruction of the mosaic pavement and bringing earlier material to the ground surface. All of the military installations and pits extended down as far as the top of the white calcite deposits, which were utilized as floors.

#### *Constructional phases*

The thick layer of white calcite deposits contains a large quantity of limestone and basalt chippings. The layer slopes down from north-west to south-west and extends as far as the top of the main, east wall of the plastered rooms. It covers a large amount of the excavated area, which suggests that it was deposited to cover or conceal the collapsed plastered rooms. It is possible that it served as leveling fill for a later mosaic floor.

The huge basalt wall, which runs east-west through square I15 in the northern part of the plastered rooms, is associated with a later phase of construction. Its foundations were excavated and found to be associated with ashy deposits derived from firing activities. The wall cut into a possible floor level in the northern plastered room. Its function remains uncertain; further exploration of this area will be one of the aims of next excavation season.

The remains of east-west and north-south walls, constructed of large and medium blocks of soft limestone, suggest that these walls originally belonged to an earlier structure, and were subsequently covered and reused to level the floor and act as foundations of the plastered room.

#### **The Finds**

Almost all excavated deposits were sieved, and a rich variety of finds and objects listed, documented and computerized. They will be published as a separate appendix once analysis and classification is complete. Brief descriptions are however provided here.

*Roof Tile:* Many hundreds of red roof tile fragments and iron nails were found in a thin soil layer just above the mosaic floor. However, none of them were found *in situ*, especially in the north-west area of the floor. A study of their sizes and shapes could shed light on details of roof construction.

*Marble:* A considerable number of green, white and red marble fragments, thick and thin alike, were found in different areas close to the upper surface of the mosaic floor. The most significant of these were numerous decorative and inlay fragments, some representing leaves or flowers. These probably belong to a geometric design similar to that found in the church excavated at Pella (see Smith and Day 1988: 95, Pl. 24A-C).

*Plaster:* A substantial amount of plain white wall plaster remains *in situ*. Only a few pieces of painted plaster were recovered; these include red and yellow fragments, some of which have geometric designs represented by thin bands of red and yellow on a white background. Several pieces probably belong to a ceiling cornice.

*Glass:* Many pieces of glass were found, but few came from well stratified deposits. These await analysis.

*Metal:* Several iron nails were recovered from the mosaic floor surface and plastered rooms. Other metal finds include pieces of slag, which await analysis.

*Coins:* Seventy one coins were recovered during the excavation. Of these, five were well preserved, but none were useful in dating the mosaic floor and plastered rooms.

*Inscription:* One soft limestone column, with nine scratched Greek letters framed in a *tabula ansata*, was found in square G16, in a simple structure located behind the northern stylobate of the main street. The column was reused as part of a wall. It awaits analysis.

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