

The second project: Excavation work in al-Andarin, ancient Androna

Al-Andarin, the ancient Androna, is one of the largest ruined sites in the central Syrian desert/ steppe (Pl. 2.17). With its two enclosing walls, ten churches, two bath complexes, a large *kastron* (*castrum*) and numerous house structures, it covers an area of 155 hectares. In 1997, excavation work began in al-Andarin / Androna as a collaboration between a Syrian, a British and a German team.

Three years after the publication about the excavation work of the German team in October 2015³⁵, the journalist Karin Leukefeld, accompanied by Syrian military, went to al-Andarin / Androna. She sent me the photos of the destruction of nine campaigns worth of excavation work by the Islamic State. The photos of the ruins of the excavation house and the mountains of rubble of the main rooms of the *Kastron* blown up with dynamite now hang on the wall in front of my computer next to the older photos.

The west gate and the high rooms on the west side of the *Kastron*, which we had restored in 2004 (Pl. 27. 29. 30b), were at the centre of destruction. However, it was not the remnants of the apse arch of the main church, the landmark of Androna³⁶, which stood about ten metres high, but the parts of the *kastron* that had been preserved up to a height of six metres, which were blown up. During her second visit to Androna, Karin Leukefeld discovered that the gate on the south side of the *Kastron* had not been destroyed.

In spring 2006 'The day of the Desert / Steppe' was celebrated in Androna. The mayor of Hama published a brochure for the festival guests, the photos of which show exactly the parts of the *Kastron* that were destroyed in 2016. The question arose whether there might be a connection between the 2006 event and the 2016 activities.

1996. Return to Syria; preparation for excavation

In the years after 1980, when the director general of the Syrian Directorate of Antiquities Ali Abu Assaf and the former director of the Archaeological Institute in Damascus Michael Meineke inquired whether there were still plans for an excavation in al-Andarin, my personal situation had changed profoundly compared to the 1970s. In my answer I did not speak of these changes, but re-

ferred to the fact that the publication of my work in the Limestone Massif was still blocked. Despite my best knowledge of how problematic it would be to organize an excavation in a site of ruins without infrastructure, I kept the doors open and did not cancel. After the long-awaited publication of Volume 1 of my first project³⁷, my head slowly returned to Syria.

In 1996 I decided to fly to the Directorate of Antiquities in Damascus for preliminary talks. During the talks in Damascus not only excavation work in al-Andarin / Androna were discussed. Considerably older, the excavation management in a 155-hectare ruined site was now problematic for me. I first presented my thoughts on a possible project in Qasr ibn Wardan: Survey and documentation of the excavated and restored buildings with a team of architects and excavation of the military camp located there. Unfortunately, the director general at the time, Sultan Muhesen, did not consider such a project worthwhile, as the site was already a tourist centre. The reaction to the planned excavation project in al-Andarin / Androna (henceforth always Androna), was positive. However, the start of the excavation was made dependent on the organisation of international cooperation, in which, according to the Director General, a French team should definitely be involved.

I could well imagine working with a team of British and a team of Syrian archaeologists. Cyril Mango told me, when I phoned him to enquire about possible collaborators in Androna, that his wife would be very happy to work with a team from Oxford and a meeting was immediately organised for the summer of 1997. I then contacted Abdalrassak Zaqzouq, the director of the museum in Hama. When he responded positively to my proposal for cooperation, I postponed all questions about the participation of a French team until the start of the excavation work.

After the talks in Damascus, I submitted an application for the excavation in Androna to the Thyssen Foundation and it was approved for three years. I enrolled Ulrike Hess, who had already worked on the Limestone Massif, as excavation architect. The geodetic documentation of the site was done by a team from the Technical University of Karlsruhe, the processing of the small finds was to be in the hands of Peter Knötzele and Marion Seibel, and Ina Eichner as well as the excavation technician Holger Hirth were recruited as close collaborators for the excavation sections.

The most important collaborator in organising the work before the excavation began was Ghassan al Shamat from Damascus, whom I had met there, at

the German Archaeological Institute. The following problems had to be solved before the excavation began:

- The accommodation of the excavation team in a house not too far away from Androna.
- The daily supply of drinking water and food for the team.
- The drilling for groundwater, which – even if it should be salty – was necessary for the toilets, kitchen work, etc.
- The recruitment of workers in the villages of the region and – ideally – also the hiring of a cook.

All these considerations were closely linked to the essentially problematic geographical location of the ruined site (Pl. 17). Like all places in Inner Syria, it was difficult to manage from Damascus or from Aleppo and Hama: The asphalt road to Aleppo was in miserable condition and the asphalt road to Androna's largest neighbouring villages – Homeh and Masluchiyye – had only been completed a few years before our project began. The region between al-Hamra and Masluchiyye was officially under the administration of Aleppo. But already after the first campaigns in Androna, all decisions were made in favour of the commissioner as the official government representative, as well as the hiring and payment of the guards at the ruins site from Damascus – albeit in consultation with the director of the museum and the mayor of Hama.

It quickly became apparent that only some of the problems could be solved before the first campaign began. So it was decided to start the geodetic documentation of the site and the documentation of all tangible findings on the surface with a small team.

The antiquities guard of Androna at the time, Abu Mamduch, had offered his house for rent because his family was living in tents. The house was ruinous: piles of empty arak bottles, broken windows and doors, defective power lines, filthy walls, the electric pump of the well had disappeared years ago and there was no toilet of any kind. So I went with Ghassan to Hama to buy the building materials for the house and the planned toilet house, the purchase of an electric pump and large supplies of drinking water, beer and all the necessities of life.

My first visit before starting the excavation was to the building complex of Qasr ibn Wardan, where I had not been since 1979 (Pl. 10). On the drive to Hama, I had already noted with appreciation that the asphalt road had been

completed and now led beyond the neighbouring village of Androna to Masluchiye. The dirt road to Androna, which turns off from this road shortly after the village of Homeh, was so difficult to drive on, that the acquisition of an off-road vehicle was added to the list of absolute necessities.

After Ghassan had organised the team for the restoration of the house in Homeh and the construction of the toilet house, I went back to Damascus. I introduced the members of the German team and the plan for the planned work in Androna to the Antiquities Commission and flew back to Germany with the preliminary contract for an international team working in Androna.

1997. Trip to Syria in spring. Survey and geodetic measurements in summer

I was only too aware from the outset that looking after my son during the months of excavation would be a challenge to be solved every year. I therefore travelled with Julian to Syria in the spring of 1997 to show him the place where I would be staying for several months in the coming years. After a few days in Damascus, the journey led first to Qasr ibn Wardan and then to Androna. During the subsequent stay in Qal'at Sim'an, we realised that the trip would have to be continued at a later date. It was planned for the years after the completion of the excavation work...

On 14th August, I travelled by Range Rover to Venice and after arriving in Izmir, I then took the Turkish shipping line and drove via Konya to the Syrian border station Bab al-Hawa. Before starting work in Androna, I had to present the work plan for 1997 to the Antiquities Commission in Damascus and fill out the forms for the German team to collaborate with the English team. The Director General Sultan Muhesen promised to send a commissioner to Home and to support the cooperation of a Syrian team from Hama – meanwhile the question of the participation of a French team remained open.

With Ghassan I went first to Hama for preliminary talks with Abdalrassak Zaqqouq and then on to Qasr ibn Wardan to discuss with Abu Hussein (Sheikh Ali al Sharif) the question of the involvement of local workers.

The first campaign in Androna in the summer and autumn of 1997 was entirely devoted to geodetic documentation and the study of the surface features of the huge site. After Ghassan and I had picked up the two geodesists and the architect at Aleppo airport, the launch of the campaign was celebrated at the Ramsis

Hotel. Afterwards, we went shopping in the souk: The Range Rover was fully loaded with mattresses, bedding, pots, dishes and large supplies of tea, coffee, rice and drinking water. Since Ghassan had fortunately come with his own car, we were all able to drive to Homeh together afterwards.

Starting 18th September our small team with the newly arrived Syrian Commissioner Nissar Eleki was extended for a few weeks by Marlia Mundell Mango, the future leader of the British team, who was accompanied by her husband Cyril Mango. Although the daily routine was a bit tricky, as Ghassan had gone back to Damascus and we had to organise the journey to Androna and our stay with only one car, the atmosphere in September was good.

The work of the geodesists was accompanied by the detailed journal of Ulrike Hess with the precious documentation of the survey and her extensive recordings of individual objects. I explored the 155-hectare site kilometre-by-kilometre, recording tangible findings on the surface day after day until I was exhausted. It took me a few days to realise that the numerous round mounds of rubble we encountered in the central regions of Androna belonged to former 'Trulli' (Bienenkorbhäuser), i.e. were remnants of the post-settlement of the site. When, on the paths in the northern part of the village, I came across a church that was not yet known and encountered the raised features of the outer wall, that does not exist in Howard Crosby Butler's publication³⁸, I realised that all previous publications had only covered a small part of the large settlement (Pl. 18).

We had moved into the renovated house of the former guardian of antiquities in August 1997. Fortunately, the construction of the toilet house and the well with electric water pump had been completed before August, but the daily food and all necessities for the work in Androna had to be organised with daily trips to Hama and Aleppo.

We contacted the five Bedouin families in the village with invitations and gifts and informed them that we were looking for a cook and two workers to support the work in Androna. A month later a cook was found in the neighbouring village of Masluchiye, but no one in Homeh was willing to support the work in Androna in return for payment. In conclusion, it was probably this situation and the strenuous work in the ruined village that led to considerable tension between the two geodesists and the architect. Two young geodesists and an experienced female architect, almost twice their age, in a difficult situation that was extremely strenuous in a place without infrastructure. It was

only after Ulrike Hess fell ill and left Androna in 2004 that Karsten Malige told me that the rift between him and the architect was so deep that since 1997 all work on the master plan of the settlement had only been discussed through intermediaries. Karsten Malige only returned to Androna in 2004 for further documentation on the town plan.

The neighbouring village Sammakiya and the Sammakiya family

During my kilometre-long walks through the ruined site, I met a member of the Sammakiya family in mid-August 1997, who not only gave me a copy of the map showing the extensive lands around Androna, but also addressed the history of the site in the first half of the 20th century with important information about this former property of his family.

When the ruined settlement was repopulated after about 1930, numerous beehive houses were built, especially in the centre, with intensive use of elements of the ancient buildings. In the late 1960s, Androna became state territory and all secondary structures were demolished – despite protests in surrounding villages. Numerous Bedouin tribes subsequently did not recognise that Androna could no longer be used privately, and we had problems with the ‘use’ of the ruined site throughout the excavation period.

Much of the Sammakiya family’s wide-ranging land could no longer be used after the land reforms and some members of the family emigrated to Canada. The family’s house in Sammakiya, the neighbouring village of Androna, was left vacant and a watchman tended the residential complex with the only tree we encountered in the Androna area in 1997.

I had no idea at the time that the return of the family, who had left for Canada in 2002, and the subsequent recultivation of their lands by Adnan Sammakiya would also have a profound effect on the situation of Androna.

Recruitment of local workers and hiring new antiquities guards

When I told Abu Hussein, the sheikh of Qasr ibn Wardan, about the problems in finding local labour, he advised recruiting workers in the settlement of Djenad, some 40 kilometres from el Homeh. They were better than the men from the villages around Androna – precious advice.

In the years to come, these workers, driven every day from Djenad to Androna by large pick-up truck, were extremely important for the success of the excavation work in the Kastron. Without these experienced men, we would not

have managed the uncovering of the 5–6 m high excavation layers with thousands of basalt blocks and fired bricks.

Abu Hussein had thus not recommended men from his village or from neighbouring villages of Qasr ibn Wardan. I was able to reconstruct from his scarce information that he suggested hiring the men from Djenad as excavation workers because of the good experience Kamel Schehade had made with these workers in uncovering and reconstructing the buildings of Qasr ibn Wardan.

The atmosphere in Homeh was problematic: two of the five brothers who ruled the place with their families had surrendered to arak. A third was struggling to find tenants for his newly completed house. Marlia rented his house for the coming year and asked Ghassan, who had come to Androna again for a few days in September, to build a toilet house for her also.

The fourth brother, in whose house we stayed, was officially the antiquities guard of Androna.

We learned how he interpreted this task when we returned from shopping in Hama: He had taken advantage of our absence to secure ancient objects that he had looted in the course of his guardianship and buried next to a pillar in the courtyard of the *Kastron*. He was caught, sent to prison and hoped we would ransom him. Aid came from Abu Hussein, the Sheikh of Qasr ibn Wardan, whose influence in the region was great enough to secure his release without money (Pl. 10b).

Already in the first days of the survey of the surface findings, I had to realise that the finds in main buildings had changed profoundly compared to my first stay in 1979: Stunned, I stood in front of the deep looted excavation hole in the centre of the main church; in the south church, the central nave had been cleared out, the capitals I had recorded in 1979 had disappeared; in the Archangel Church, the rupture of a wire rope had prevented the looting of a lintel. Numerous plundered holes in the *Kastron* completed the picture. I had understood that the problem of looted excavations would also accompany us in Androna from the beginning.

In Hama I had to negotiate the hiring of not one but three antiquities guards, which means that each excavation team had to handle the payment and responsibility for one guard.

What was the situation at the end of the first campaign? The survey of the settlement had been completed in outline and the main buildings had been

plotted with the tangible information on the surface. However, it was not clear when the geodetic survey work could be continued: The overall plan of Androna had to be supplemented by the numerous mounds, under which mainly house buildings were suspected. Thus it was mainly the aerial photographs with which I was able to give a first-hand impression of the dense settlement of the 155 hectares settlement during lectures in the following years (Pl. 19).

We had complemented the shopping in al-Hamra, the largest town in the region (Pl. 17), with what was on offer in the supermarket and in the Armenians shops. In Sroudj, Ghassan had made contact with Chalid al Taki with his large pick-up truck and thus solved the problem of daily transport for the workers for the coming year. The experience of the first few months had shown me that in future I should be in Syria around two weeks before the excavation team arrived to prepare for the campaign: I would stay in Qasr ibn Wardan or Sroudj and, together with Chalid and Ghassan, transport large quantities of drinking water and beer, sufficient coffee, sugar and tea, as well as cheese and jams from Hama to Androna.

At the end of the first campaign, I went to Damascus on 30th September together with Marlia and Cyril Mango, took my work report to the Antiquities Commission and then drove from Bab al-Hawa via Konya to Izmir. Before sailing to Venice, I called Julian as often as possible and was miserable about not being back until 12th October – too many days after his birthday on 5th October. In all later campaigns, I was able to organise the excavation work so that I was back in Heidelberg on 5th October.

1998. First excavation campaign; drilling for groundwater

The beginning of the first excavation campaign was organised differently than in 1997: The transport of the car by ship – this time it was a Landrover – was undertaken by two female employees of the excavation. I was able to fly to Damascus on 12th August, sign the work contract for the excavation at the Antiquities Commission and then drive with Ghassan via Hama and Qasr ibn Wardan to Homeh. On arrival at the rented house, we were in for an unpleasant surprise: The expensive electric pump had been removed by Abu Mamduch and sold. The wretched condition of the house we had restored pointed to the tent of the guardian's family, which was set up right next to the house.

When I went to the supermarket in Hama with Ghassan to buy a new pump and some groceries, I told Abdalrassak Zaqzouq, the future leader of the Syrian

group in Androna, about the condition in which we had found the guardian's house and earned a big grin. After only a few minutes in the museum courtyard with a good coffee, I went back to his office and asked what regulations had to be observed when building an excavation house.

It became obvious that we would have to stay in Homeh in 1998 and organise the construction work from there. Already on our way back via Qasr ibn Wardan and Sroudj the preliminary talks and preparatory work for the construction of the house started: Abu Hussein gave the address of the man who would drill for water, an uncle of Chalid offered to manage the construction of the house with his work group, and in Qasr ibn Wardan Abu Hussein would contact the blacksmith for doors and windows. What remained was to decide on the place where a house could be built without any problems, to have Ulrike Hess draw up the construction plans and to organise the necessary funds. As we celebrated the quick decision with Ghassan on the terrace of the guardian's house with a few bottles of Almaza, a refreshing beer, everything still seemed unreal. First, we had to return to the present and prepare for the arrival of the excavation team.

Before the excavation work began, the specialist who had been brought in drilled for water. The water was only clear and no longer extremely salty at a depth of about 70 metres (Pl. 20a). From the very start, it was a treasure: of course, it was not drinking water, but it offered brief refreshment after dusty work and it allowed construction work to begin before the excavation work started.

Building the excavation house

Ulrike Hess had drawn the plans for the excavation house and on their basis the construction work was organised parallel to the excavation work (Pl. 20c. 21). Since Chalid from Sroudj was in charge of the delivery of cement and the production of cement blocks on behalf of the government, it was clear that the house had to be built with cement blocks (Pl. 20c). We soon buried our dream of building several 'Trulli' with mud bricks, as it was met with rejection from the beginning.

The purchase of a generator, which was urgently needed for all the work at the site, was unexpectedly difficult. We had been advised not to buy a product from China under any circumstances and after a long search we found a

5000 W-generator imported from Germany to Aleppo. At the end of September, the rough construction of the two toilet and shower rooms, the study and the kitchen was completed (Pl. 20c). The water for the showers and the kitchen was stored and heated in large water tanks on the roof. Thanks to a donation from the Chancellor of Heidelberg University, the initial construction work was paid for without any problems. All the subsequent construction work – the living quarters with their iron doors and metal grids for the windows, the large terrace with covering (Pl. 21a) as well as the furnishing of the storage rooms – I then somehow managed over a period of four years, despite all the refusals of my applications for support (Pl. 21b).

The English team had rented a house in Homeh for all campaigns and did not want to participate in the construction of the house by building their own living quarters. However, they paid for the costs of two rooms in the excavation house for the storage of their tools and excavation finds.

Already in the first excavation campaign, we were lucky to recruit a cook, Umm Saleh, from Sammakiya, two kilometres away, who was the good soul of our team in all subsequent campaigns (Pl. 39a). The most important provisions could be purchased daily in the neighbouring villages; potatoes, rice, tomatoes, peppers, eggs, olives, garlic and onions. While the boxes of beer and drinking water as well as butter, milk, different kinds of cheese and jams were bought once a week in Hama and the perishables were stored in the cooling boxes brought from Germany.

The cook who had supported us in 1997 during the difficult first campaign had, as a former dependent agricultural worker and under pressure from the family of the former guardian of the antiquities, been forced to deliver the money she had earned to them. The son of the guard – who I had just hired as an excavation worker – told us with a proudly swollen chest that he had paid a dancer in Hama for a whole night with the money. The fact that he was immediately banned from entering the excavation site for all campaigns was only the beginning of a development that had set in after the land reform in the years 1963–1966: the tensions between the individual villages – there were no common groups for breakfast and work – characterised every excavation campaign.

The relationship between the large Bedouin families and the formerly dependent small tenants played an important role in the organisation of the excavation workers. Tensions were particularly pronounced between the men from Djenad who were employed in the uncovering of the kastron and the members

of the Bedouin families from Sammakiya and Homeh, who worked for the German team in the uncovering of the large house complex and in works around the outer wall. In the British and Syrian teams, a group from Sammakiya joined workers from Qasr ibn Wardan, Sroudj and Tufaha (Pl. 40a).

Out of this conflict-ridden situation, the experience with the excavation workers from Djenad stands out as a positive: In the Baath Party's land reforms (1963–1966 and 1966–1970)³⁹, they had received a piece of land. As poor but independent small farmers, they were so experienced in handling basalt stones and layers of earth in the excavation layers of the kastron that it can be said without exaggeration: they were the most important workers in the excavations in the kastron.

Even before the excavation work began, I encountered a situation I had not expected: at the beginning of September, large black limousines arrived from Saudi Arabia with refrigerators, stereos, etc., which were delivered to the Bedouin families and paraded from house to house for days. We learned that each Bedouin family was not only supported with 'luxury goods' but also with several thousand dollars every year. I could not imagine a greater contrast than that between the villages in the North Syrian Limestone Massif and the villages of the Androna region.

1998. First activities of the three excavation teams

I have presented the focus of the three excavation teams in the excavation publication and will only briefly discuss the projects of the first campaigns here: The British team excavated the 6th-century bath complex (Pl. 23a), with the investigation of the cistern in front of the south side of Androna, began the preliminary work for the extensive investigations into the water system of the entire region⁴⁰.

The Syrian team unearthed the structure to the west of the bath, which was puzzling in terms of its function (Pl. 23b). It was already clear after the first campaign that it was a second bath complex, and after the discovery of an inscription this result led to the Omayyad period in Androna⁴¹. The works were started by Abdalrassak Zaqqouq, the director of the Hama Museum, and continued in 2000 by his successor Radi Ukhdeh.

The German team began with the uncovering of individual sections of the Kastron (Pl. 26), the enormous complex in the centre of Androna⁴². All sides of

rooms of the *kastron* were covered by a layer of earth; only on the west side had the lintel of the west gate remained visible over the centuries (Pl. 22a).

2000. Expansion of the activities of the three excavation teams

After expiration of the financial support by the Thyssen Foundation, I submitted an application to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for funding of the excavation work for six more years. After the application was approved in 2000, the excavation activities were expanded: preparations were made for the excavation of a house complex in the northern part and of two gateways of the outer wall – one in the northern and the other in the southern part of the site (Pl. 18). The official commissioners of the first campaigns were Nissar Eleki, Whafa Zaqqour and Wa'al al Haffian (Pl. 38b). Before the expansion of the activities, together with Marlia Mango, I had asked Bernard Bavant if he, as the leader of a French team, would be interested in working in Androna – unfortunately, he was tied to his work in the Limestone Massif.

At the same time, the work programme of the British team changed: After the excavation of the bath complex and the investigation of the cistern in front of the southern side of Androna, the extensive survey of numerous sites in the region began.

The Syrian team completed work on the Omayyad bath complex in 2001 and began excavation of a house dated to AD 582⁴³.

The work situation of the three teams was extremely different. The early Byzantine bath complex (Pl. 23a), which had been almost completely removed and was only slightly more than one meter high, as well as the Omayyad bath complex (Pl. 23b), which had been preserved at a low level, stood opposite the rooms of the double-stored *kastron*, which were up to 6 metres high (Pl. 31a. b). Later it became apparent that the rooms of the house complex were also higher than the two bath complexes (Pl. 24. 25).

These different situations led to the Damascus order for the restoration of the exposed rooms of the *kastron* and the house complex in 2004 – I will come back to this later.

In the preceding, the tensions between the local workers from the neighbouring villages of Androna were mentioned. In all the excavation campaigns, these problems were not transferred on to the members of the German excavation

team. The contacts with the local workers and their families were not just good, they were the prerequisite for the success of the individual campaigns. I emphasise this because in Androna I learned to separate the antiquity theft by some local workers from the overall experience with all local workers.

Members of the German excavation team; contacts between the three teams

With the extension of the activities of the German team after the first three excavation campaigns, the team members changed. Holger Hirth and Ina Eichner (Pl. 38b) led the first campaigns of excavation work in the kastron. Ulrike Hess (Pl. 41a) worked closely with them and produced the overall plan of the kastron (Pl. 26), supplementing her documentation from 1997. Peter Knötzele and Marion Seibel were in charge of the pottery and small finds until 2001 (Pl. 38b) before Güler Ateş took over in 2003 (Pl. 40).

The direction of the house excavation by Ina Eichner passed to Fedor Schlimbach after 2004 (Pl. 42). During these years of expansion of the excavation work to widely dispersed areas of Androna, Christian Ewert was in charge the documentation of the soundings on the inner wall ring, the basalt circuit-wall (Pl. 40b). The documentation of the gateways of the outer circuit-wall (Pl. 26) was undertaken under changing direction between 2003 and 2006⁴⁴.

When the restoration work began in 2004, Karsten Malige returned to Androna and began to complement the overall plan (Pl. 39b). The last extension of activities began in 2005 with the uncovering of the church in the courtyard of the kastron and its mapping and graphic documentation by Oliver Hofmeister (Pl. 41b)⁴⁵.

The contacts to the Syrian team were easy to organise at the outset, because I already knew Abdalrassak Zaqzouq from the years of my first project. In the campaigns following the uncovering of the bath complex, shared living at the excavation site would have been an improvement. But a second excavation house could not be realised. Official representatives came to Androna three times to discuss a power line from Homeh to the excavation site – without success. In the event of a new start in Androna, the basic problems associated with the construction of the house would have to be solved.

Following the expansion of the activities, interaction between the German and British teams was considerably reduced. Due to the size of the ruins, the excavation at Androna was divided into three widely spaced building complexes.

The British team left very early for their various survey sites. I was only able to travel to Homeh once a week to share information. The Arabist Robert Hoyland and the architect Richard Anderson were instrumental in the contacts between the two European teams (Pl. 35b). Joint restaurant visits and excursions to nearby ruins took place at larger intervals (Pl. 35c). Only at the end of each campaign did all three groups meet at the farewell party in our excavation house.

1997–2007. Problems of the ruined site: Bedouin tents, thousands of sheep and car tracks

I already mentioned in the introduction that the Bedouin tribes did not acknowledge that Androna could no longer be used for private purposes. Our struggle against hundreds of sheep in the ruins in spring, the use of individual rooms in the ruins for sheep shearing, the erection of tents for large families in spring and, especially, against the transit traffic of cars through the ruins was only successful for a short time. It was Abdalrassak Zaqzouq, who had enough experience with the post-settlement of the ruined site, who supported us. But after he resigned from leading the excavation after only one year, I was left to negotiate with individual Bedouins – with a very different result.

We were thus forced to block access to uncovered rooms with stones as best we could at the close of the excavation. Even the western outer wall of the kastron was only uncovered to its full height in the last two campaigns in order to record the overall impression of the building in photographs (Pl. 22b). None of the three guards protected the site after the excavation was finished – the rich sheep farmers determined the rules. In the event of a possible continuation of the excavation work in Androna, the housing situation of the guards would have to be improved at the outset so that they could live at the excavation site after the end of the campaigns.

The fight against the constant car traffic through the site was hopeless and it remained futile because although some measures were discussed in the institutions in Hama, not a single one was realised.

2001. Car accident before start of excavation; attack in New York
on 11th September 2001

I picked up the Landrover Defender, which had been transferred by two staff members, at the Bab al-Hawa border station at the beginning of August. We drove via Aleppo to Maslouchiye, a neighbouring village of Androna. A few kilometres before Androna, the right rear tyre burst and the car crashed down a slope, overturning twice. Luckily, the two students were not injured. Mudira was sitting at the wheel and was taken to hospital in Aleppo with multiple whiplash injuries and haematomas on her legs and arms. On the fourth day, Hussein from Qasr ibn Wardan came with a chauffeur – both dressed in dazzling white – and I was transported to Androna, lying comfortably in the van – wonderful.

When I arrived at the festively decorated excavation house with a neck brace and damaged legs, I was welcomed by a more youthful team: The excavation architect Ulrike Hess had brought two young architects from Munich to assist her (Pl. 41b) – great. Despite the enormous problems associated with the ‘disposal’ of the crashed car and my daily struggle in police stations, the mood on the dig was almost cheerful – we had survived and everyone was highly motivated.

This changed with the attack in New York on 11th September 2001. Victory celebrations were held in all the villages around Androna. As even my long-time co-worker Ghassan welcomed the victory celebrations, the whole team became acutely aware of the disconnect between us and all those with whom we were in daily contact. The events had an even more radical effect on the British team: Negative attitudes towards British and Americans were now no longer latent, but erupted openly. The Oxford team’s excavation campaign was aborted.

2002. Return of A. Sammakiya; cultivation of the lands
surrounding Androna

Due to the car accident, the excavation campaign of the German team was cancelled in the following year. Prior to our return to the campaign in summer 2003, the arrival of Adnan Sammakiya had changed the overall situation of Androna. In 2002, the boulder-strewn track leading to the site had been replaced by a fully developed asphalt road at his request. In front of the western entrance

to the excavation site, the road turned off to the large house complex that Sammakiya had built in front of the northeastern side of Androna (Pl. 36a. b). In only one year, an administration house and several traditional houses had been built as living quarters. The luxurious interior of the residential wing and especially the large water basin in the inner courtyard of the building complex were not only a surprise, but also shocking: in the water-scarce region, an open pool whose owner invited us to swim (Pl. 36b): what was the function of this complex, built with a lot of money?

Adnan Sammakiya told me that he had emigrated to Canada after the Ba'ath Party land reforms (1963–1966 and 1966–1970), which largely affected the utilisation of his land. In the 1980s and 1990s, land ownership laws were further amended, state farms privatised and export and import regulations liberalised. Investors were intensively encouraged⁴⁶. These were the economic and agricultural shifts when Adnan Sammakiya returned from Canada as a rich man.

Adnan Sammakiya's plans were far-reaching and focused on establishing plantations on the family's lands. For the drip irrigation of the plants, he had water dug up to a depth of about 700 m and was convinced that he had found underground streams – an account that did not convince me. In 1997 I had visited an estate (owner: Hasch Halul) that was irrigated with electric pumps from a 500 m deep well. So I thought it more likely that the precious, very deep and ancient water reservoirs of the region were tapped. I had seen too many villages in central Syria that had to be abandoned after excessive exploitation of the groundwater with electric pumps. Despite my scepticism, I keenly followed the progress of the planting of the lands, as this work had a direct impact on the situation in Androna.

The activities of Adnan Sammakiya involved the lands in front of the north and east side of Androna. A member of the Sammakiya family had already shown me in 1997, on a map showing the family's land holdings, that the estates to the north and east led right up to the walls of Androna. The British team had already uncovered the remains of a stylite column at the beginning of their survey⁴⁷. It was only a few metres from the northern enclosure wall. How could the surroundings of Androna be protected?

In the summer of 2003, a year after he started planting, Adnan Sammakiya met with the mayor and the excavation team leaders at the Hama Museum. A contract was drawn up to ensure that the lands in front of the north and east sides of Androna would not be part of the agricultural activities. The contract was still not signed after 2007, but the lands to the east and north of the ruined

site remained open at the distance stipulated in the contract. The British team was able to continue its survey.

The first negative news about the progress of the project reached me in early 2004: the large number of already set plants had, as was reported, been torn out by youths (?) from the villages in the region. They had to be re-purchased and replanted. The mood behind these actions and the essentially negative attitude in the region was also experienced by the German team during the 2004 campaign: The Sammakiya family invited the German team to dinner, but some members of my team did not want to go because workers from Sammakiya village had given negative accounts of the landowning family. What had happened? Adnan Sammakiya had provided our cook's youngest son with school bags etc. for primary school, but he refused to go. The cook's pay was judged too low and no workers from Sammakiya were hired to work on the land. We observed that the primary schools with the obligatory basketball hoops, which were built throughout Syria in the 1960s, were only too often visited by a small number of primary school pupils. And it was easy to imagine that the rejection of the family after whom the place was named Sammakiya had a long history. When I asked how much he paid for Umm Saleh's work, Adnan answered evasively: "*According to the usual rates*".

But the destruction of the crops, while leading way back to the traditional struggle of the Bedouin tribes against the agricultural use of land, was closely linked to the negative consequences of the land reforms in the preceding decades.

Even before the start of the excavation at Androna, I was a frequent guest in the family of the sheikh of Qasr ibn Wardan (Pl. 10b), already mentioned several times. They lived in the mud-brick house of the Antiquities Commission, which was only a few steps away from the early Byzantine building complex. Abu Hussein remained my most important contact person in all excavation campaigns, although he was not a supporter of the work at Androna. Representing a tradition for which sheep rearing was paramount, he took charge of a few hundred sheep each year and was given a share of the profits after they were sold.

The situation of Chalid al Taki from Sroudj, our most important employee, was very different: The large pick-up truck with which he collected the workers from Djenad every day had been provided to him by the government and he had to pay for it over many years. He had taken over the transport of cement

and the production of cement blocks. He built a large house for his family out of cement blocks, planted a small olive grove and vegetable patches, and held an important position in his village. For Abu Hussein and his eldest son Hussein (Pl. 41a), who specialised in hunting and training falcons, the bond with the government was a break from Bedouin tradition. Chalid was a role model for the youngest of the sheikh's sons, who envied his daily activities and income. Talking to Chalid, I learned that Abu Hussein's son unfortunately lacked the start-up capital for a small shop on the road. After consulting Abu Hussein, I decided to pay him this capital as an advance payment for future work on the excavation – this was a big mistake. The cost of building a small shop on the road was no more than a new room at the Androna excavation house. It was quickly completed, but it remained empty for the next few years because the money for the first goods was not raised.

As was to be expected, news of the whole affair had spread in no time and not only our cook expected an advance payment for her son's wedding, but also some workers saw an opportunity in such advance financing of their wages in Androna. I had made a mistake and could not really correct it in any of these cases.

2003. Continuation of the excavation

The next campaign did not take place until 2003: I had cancelled the campaign of 2002 to treat my accident injuries and finally had some time for teaching. When I came to Damascus in July 2003 to prepare for the excavation, I learned from the General Directorate that the requested continuation of the urgently required geophysical documentation had not been approved⁴⁸. The second information came from the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus: for the television production "*Schliemanns Erben*" ("*Schliemann's Heirs*"), the documentation of the excavation in Androna was not only recommended, but strongly suggested. The third piece of information was important for all future work in Androna: not only in Damascus had the introduction and widespread use of mobile phones changed the street scene. The acquisition and use of mobile phones was so cheap that Ghassan immediately equipped me also, and he prepared me to be ready to meet all excavation workers with a mobile phone. Before travelling on to Androna, I was able to submit the re-planning of the excavation campaign to the Antiquities Commission. I came to Homeh on the asphalt road that led to the house of Adnan Sammakiya. My first thought was: if

only it had existed in 2001, when I suffered from every bump on the miserable slope with a neck brace and damaged legs. And the second thought led me back to the North Syrian Limestone Massif, where after the construction of many small asphalt roads as part of the tourism promotion programme, the theft of antiquities had increased. Pick-up trucks could now drive right up to the churches and load up whatever seemed to be good for sale. The rotten dirt track had made it difficult to get to Androna, whereas the asphalt road increased through-traffic and made it easier to transport interesting objects. I immediately drew up a list of all the objects that were to be brought to the museum in Hama at the end of each campaign.

The excavation work had just begun when the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) informed us that a television crew would be arriving at the ruins in a few days. Questions about the inclusion of the British and Syrian teams in the filming remained unanswered. I could only comfort myself with the fact that the British team was not interested in participating because they had started their survey outside Androna. The combination of excavation work with filming was somehow managed, despite all difficulties. We were preparing a lavish farewell party when a call from the Department of Antiquities summoned me to Damascus at an impossibly early hour. It was not only the harsh tone in which I was informed that restoration work would have to be carried out in Androna next year, but especially the ban on excavation work during the restoration.

After that depressing conversation at the General Directorate of Syrian Antiquities, I drove back to Androna completely exhausted and began to think of ways to circumvent the ban on excavations and to finance the restoration. During the farewell party with the film crew, I was not able to explain to my co-workers on the *kastron*, the house and the outer wall, how restoration could make sense at such an early stage, and what possibilities there were for financing, nor could I explain my gloomy mood to the director of filming – all possible solutions were still up in the air.

Only after arriving in Damascus at the end of the excavation campaign was I able to discuss with Karin Bartl, the director of the DAI, for which excavated rooms of the *kastron*, the house and the outer wall restoration might make sense at such an early stage, and what possibilities there were for funding. My application to the Foreign Office for support for the restoration was approved and I only had to work out a plan that would be accepted in Damascus.

2004. Restoration work in Androna

The restoration work in August 2004 focused on the west wing of the *kastron*: the west gate with the flanking towers and the high ramp house mainly constructed in basalt (Pl. 27a. b). For the rooms of the house complex built in mud bricks in connection with basalt elements (Pl. 25a) as well as the north gate of the outer wall, I had proposed as a provisional measure before detailed documentation, the structural consolidation of the mud brick walls with fired bricks from the *kastron*. A team from the Technical University of Potsdam was recruited for the complex restoration of the west gate (Pl. 39b), and the Antiquities Commission provided the largest crane available (Pl. 27). Abu Mohammed from Suweida was responsible for working of basalt ashlar that were used to restore the upper ashlar layers of the towers and the ramp house.

I was grateful for the support in all matters concerning the planning and execution of the restoration by Medjd Hjaz, staff member at the Museum of Hama, and Wa'al al Haffian, the commissioner on the excavation campaign in 2003 (Pl. 38b).

I had argued for the continuation of excavation work involving the uncovering of the vestibule that connects to the inner courtyard of the *kastron* (Pl. 25a), on the grounds of the 'sightseeing plan' for tourists desired by the Department of Antiquities. Fortunately, no official representative of the Department of Antiquities in Damascus was able to assess the extent of this excavation work, since no one had visited the site until 2004.

After the completion of the restoration works in the *kastron* and the house complex, new priorities were developed for the last two campaigns: In the *kastron*, the uncovering and overall recording of the church of the inner courtyard began (Pl. 32c). The investigation of the inner courtyard and the living quarters on the north side of the house was started. The second gate excavation of the outer wall was begun, and the overall plan of the settlement was supplemented by height surveys of the entire site of the ruins from 2004 onwards⁴⁹.

The reorientation was preceded by personnel changes in the excavation team, which represented a break in the overall course of the excavation project. When the old excavation team met again in spring 2007 for follow-up work at the excavation site, everyone was aware that the filming and above all the restoration work had such an impact on the overall programme that, in retrospect, the work of the years 1997–2001 represented the focal point.

2005. Situation of the house excavation after the uncovering
of a floor mosaic

When a magnificent floor mosaic was revealed during the 2005 house excavation, it was immediately clear that it could not remain at the site (Pl. 25b). Through the museum in Hama, a team specialising in floor mosaics from Ma'arret en Nom'an was called to Androna, and its transport to the museum in Hama was managed before the end of the campaign. Visitors came from the surrounding villages and even from Hama and Aleppo. For the first time at the excavation, I experienced local staff talking about a find: *"Such a mosaic costs a lot, the man was wealthy"*. In previous campaigns, I had not been able to convey that the buildings that were being uncovered, are part of their history.

After the appearance of the mosaic, alarm bells immediately rang in my mind. Interest in 'house excavations' would increase during the months of the excavation team's absence. The experience of looted excavations had left too deep an imprint on me. After the events in the years after 2011, I cannot however see a solution in transport to the museum in Hama: We know nothing about its condition after the looting of the museum.

2006. Excavation of the kastron church; celebration of
the 'Day of the Desert /Steppe' in spring

When I came to Androna in July 2006 to prepare the excavation, I encountered numerous glass shards and fragments of chemical toilets in the centre of the village. These 'remains' and the tyre marks of cars and motorbikes on the house mounds were a great disappointment. The antiquities guards reported that in April the 'Day of the Desert/Steppe' had not taken place in Qasr ibn Wardan as usual, but in Androna. Twenty sheep donated by Adnan Sammakiya had been slaughtered for numerous invited guests who had gathered in their cars at the centre. None of these, the antiquities guards, had been invited, but they had cleaned up afterwards as best they could.

The mayor of Hama had published a booklet about Androna to celebrate the festival and they had saved a copy for me (Pl. 32). The local excavation workers gave me the booklet after they had demonstratively crumpled it up in front of me. It showed a view of Qasr ibn Wardan on the front page (Pl. 32a) and contained some colour photos of the west wing of the kastron. An introductory text by the mayor of Hama was followed by an English text by Marlia Mango and my German text. Only one of the colour photos (Pl. 32b) was astonishing: a

montage showed the Syrian President Bashar al Assad sitting on an armchair in the opening of the west gate (Pl. 32b).

The remains of the desert festival and the tracks of the cars had a prior history. I had approached the museum director and the mayor of Hama in 2003 with the general plan of Androna, in which all the criss-crossing car tracks through the ruined town were marked, and asked for support in the battle against through-traffic. Numerous visitors of the desert festival had parked their cars in the centre of Androna instead of on the outside – the reaction to my request could not have been clearer.

The excavation team comments about the photo of the Syrian president were consistently negative at the time: *“The Western Gate does not deserve this”*. In 2006, I could not forget from the experiences in Hama: On the driveway to the luxury hotel built after the destruction of the old city, Abdelrassak Zaqzouq pointed out the ruins of the old townhouses to the right of the driveway, which – he told me – had been left standing on purpose. Every family I visited in Hama looked back with sadness – the events of 1982 had not yet been forgotten.

Situation of the church in the courtyard of the kastron

No excavation site in Androna was as unpopular with the workers from Djenad as the church in the courtyard of the kastron (Pl. 32c). In 2005, after clearing the rubble in the interior, we discovered that a dredger had so extensively destroyed the entire interior, that only a few centimetres of the original church floor remained. I was astonished that even the column bases had been dug up and removed. Had they planned to plant vegetables, potatoes or whatsoever inside? A worker explained to me: *“Column bases sell well. They are used in the construction of new houses.”* So that mystery was also solved.

Adding to the bleak mood at the end of the campaign was the report from Nasser, the team’s foreman from Djenad (Pl. 38a): The government subsidy for fertiliser and diesel fuel that was necessary to run the groundwater pumps, had been discontinued. Since many small farmers were dependent on electric pumps for their water supply, this decision had significantly worsened their economic situation. The problems were exacerbated by a drought brought about by low rainfall in the winter months.

After the end of the 2006 campaign, I spoke to the mayor about the desert festival and asked about the photomontage in his brochure. He spoke about An-

The second project: Excavation work in al-Andarin, ancient Androna

drona now being an important tourist destination following Qasr ibn Wardan, and his brochure was available in the museum for tourists. He did not answer my question about the photo.

2007. Campaign for the processing of the finds

In April 2007, members of the old excavation team met with the architect Oliver Hofmeister to work on the finds in Androna. An old VW Beetle was organised as a rental car (Pl. 33a b) – I could neither get into the car properly nor out again without problems.

The visit from Damascus contributed to the good atmosphere during this campaign: Abdal Rassak Moaz, Director General of the Antiquities Commission, had brought plenty of time to visit the kastron and the early arabic bath complex. He stayed until the farewell meeting, which was celebrated with fresh mushrooms from the mud-brick hills of the house excavation (Pl. 34b), the rocket growing all over the place, white truffles from Aleppo (Pl. 34a) and beautiful spring flowers.

The information from Adnan Sammakiya in 2007 was also positive: the re-cultivation of the land had been completed. I was invited to participate in the first harvest, which was expected in about two years. I had been fascinated by Adnan's overall programme from the beginning – despite the unresolved water supply and the tensions it had caused in the neighbouring villages of Androna and even in my excavation team.

2010. First campaign in the main church of Androna

Under the direction of Fedor Schlimbach, the first campaign to explore the main church of Androna began in 2010. In the summer of 2011, news came from the Antiquities Commission that the antiquities guard of the German team had been dismissed for stealing stones. I suggested Mohammed, the son of Sheikh Ibrahim, as his successor. The representation of the German Archaeological Institute in Damascus, which wasn't yet closed at the time, transferred the money to pay the new guard. Thus, the guardian money was transferred until 2013, when it was discontinued, after the closure of the department and the altered situation of the banks in Syria.

The reason for the guard's dismissal was not surprising for me, based on my experience: he had "*transported away*" the large store of masonry stones, just

over 9000 basalt stones, from the kastron excavations. I was aware that this stone theft had required several pick-up trucks and a larger group of workers, and that the operation did not only involve the guard.

Work in the main church could not continue after the first campaign⁵⁰.

2016. Destruction in the kastron of Androna by the IS

In summer 2018, journalist Karin Leukefeld visited Androna accompanied by Syrian military, and sent me photos of the destruction in Androna by the IS in 2016 (Pls. 28–31). She and her companion remained strictly in the centre of the village, as it was too dangerous to go round the whole site. The ruins of the excavation house were photographed only from a greater distance and the situation of the main church and the two baths were documented with a few photos. The deterioration of the excavation house was already well advanced in 2016 because the large iron doors and windows had been removed and sold in the years after a German excavation team's last campaign in 2010.

In 2015, the members of al Nusra and IS most likely did not live in the excavation house, but in the luxuriously furnished *trulli* in front of the north-east corner of Androna (Pl. 36a). Adnan Sammakiya had already left his residence and the lands before 2015, after the kidnapping of his youngest son and the release after payment of the ransom. In a telephone conversation with his eldest son in 2019, I learned that he does not know the condition the plantations are in.

All of Karin Leukefeld's documentation in 2018 and 2019 focused on the kastron. Even without knowledge of the ruined site and the activities of the excavation teams, it was immediately apparent that the destruction affected the west wing of the kastron. The gateway on the south side of the kastron was undamaged. An Arabic inscription on the tower in front of the south side of the west gate records that the 'Free Damascene' were responsible for the destruction.

The west gate (Pl. 29) and all elevated parts of the west entrance, the ramp house, the west hall (Pl. 30b), the latrine and the south hall (Pl. 31) were blown up with dynamite. Since they were built in a layered masonry of basalt blocks and burnt bricks, the dynamite charges probably had to be reapplied to each room. The partially preserved layers of basalt show that the destruction was concentrated on the entrance to the courtyard of the kastron, the entrance to

the ramp house and the ramp ways to the upper storeys, the doors to the large halls and the high north wall of the south hall (Pl. 31a. b). The photo of a mound of rubble with the fragment of one of the basalt doors (Pl. 31c) shows that none of the doors – except the west door – can be restored.

The destruction of the main gate that had been restored in 2004, was not only a shock. It will continue to be painful until the gate is again restored. The lintel with the famous founder's inscription lies together with the inner lintel in the gateway. The facts, that the cross monograms on both lintels were not worked off, the second large gateway on the south side of the *kastron* was not blown up and the activities of the IS did not cover either the church in the inner courtyard of the *kastron* (Pl. 32c) or the main church of Androna, raise some questions. The lintel of the west gate had remained visible for hundreds of years even before the complete excavation of the gate, despite the approximately six-meter-high burial layers of the *kastron* (Pl. 22a). However, the real landmark of Androna was and remains to this day the vestige of the apsidal arch of the main church, which stands about ten meters high.

The questions led back to the brochure published by the mayor of Hama in 2006. The translation of the text written by the mayor in the brochure, which I had received⁵¹, led to something I had not anticipated. The text describes the location and Byzantine origins of the site, cites the last mention of the site in 1225 by the geographer Yakut al-Hamawi⁵² and links the great heritage of the desert to the glory of the wine of al-Andarin in the Mo'allaqat of Amr⁵³. The final message for the 'Day of the Desert / Steppe' is: *"Today's rise of the Ummah (nation?), despite the harshness of the circumstances experienced by the Arabs, has not slowed down the progress and development of our nation. By following the footsteps of Bashar al-Assad, the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, we will become the role model of the nation that has established its ancient glory and will drive the building of its new civilisation. Once again, we welcome you to Hama"*.

For the guests of the Desert Festival, the brochure was a well-intentioned welcome. My question about the image of Assad in the opening of the West Gate is nevertheless not clearly resolved. With the transfer of the Festival from Qasr ibn Wardan to Androna, the importance of the ruined site was recognised. But was the mayor aware of the possible reaction of the excavation staff to the whole operation? It is hard to imagine that members of the IS took the brochure from the museum. For members of the Islamic State, the blowing up of the Western Gate in Androna was one of many actions aimed at destroying as

much of Syria's cultural heritage as possible. The idea that the action in Androna was somehow related to the brochure that circulated among the excavation workers is an unverifiable assumption.

Considerations on the 'Syrians for Heritage Association' and the 'Syrian Heritage Archive Projekt'

One of the motivations for my years of work in the North Syrian Limestone Massif was my experience with antiquities theft. I witnessed it over many years – accompanied by stone looting and illegal excavations – in all the ancient sites I worked at. The destruction in al-Andarin / Androna by the Islamic State in 2016 surpassed anything I had encountered before 2007 – the targeted destruction of the rich cultural heritage hit numerous ancient sites in Syria after 2011⁵⁴.

„In truth, Syria has always suffered – and the regime always tolerated – a limited amount of theft from historical sites, to boost the economy in the poor areas in the north of the country and to enrich the regimes own mafiosi. But what is happening now is on an epic and terrifying scale“⁵⁵.

The programme of the 'Syrians for heritage association', which was founded in January 2018 in Berlin, states: *“Through our cultural heritage we can comprehend our past and anticipate our future. It helps us to rediscover our plurality, restore our sense of belonging to our land and country, and achieve our hoped-for a peaceful future”*.

The reports on the North Syrian Limestone Massif have shown that no civil institution exists that could stop the act of destruction. Likewise, it remains to be seen whether future improvements in the staffing of the antiquities services could at least partially curtail the perfectly organised and brutal antiquities theft – as well as intensive looting and stone theft. The problems of restoration are all too great and will be faced in time of peace by all those interested in Syria's cultural heritage.

The documentation of losses, the archiving of what still exists and what has been preserved in older photos and drawings has begun. In a major project at the University of Paris Nanterre, all older documentation on the Qal'at Sim'an pilgrimage centre is being archived under the direction of archaeologist Micheline Kurdy⁵⁶. The 'Syrian Heritage Archive Projekt' is dedicated to the numerous questions of digitisation and the transfer of the resulting databases within and outside Syria⁵⁷. For the time being, the only possible contribution to the ongoing

The second project: Excavation work in al-Andarin, ancient Androna

international work on creating comprehensive databases is that I have archived the materials of my projects in the institute of my department at the University of Göttingen and made them accessible.

Finally, I would like to return to the initial question about the meaning of approximately twenty years of activity in the North Syrian Limestone Massif and in one of the largest ruined sites in Central Syria. With the comprehensive documentation of photos and drawings of elements of the building decoration, it is possible to complement what is no longer available in many ruin sites. It is not about one or the other capital – oh, again a capital – but about a characteristic of the so-called ‘Dead Cities’: the outstanding skill of local workshops and craftsmen groups and their contact with the large Syrian cities in whose sphere of influence the mountain massif lies.

The situation is different in al-Andarin, the ancient Androna. There, the individual objects that were accessible on the surface had been so largely plundered that clarification of the history of the site could only be expected through the excavation of buildings buried under layers of earth and sand. The excavation work in the kastron and in the two bath complexes was not only rich in results for the early Byzantine period – the 4th to early 7th centuries – it also yielded far-reaching information on the subsequent use of the site in early Arab times in the early 7th and 8th centuries. In addition, the excellent work of the British team made it possible to reconstruct the ancient irrigation system and the foundations of economy and trade.

In my report, I have addressed the problems and necessary changes that would need to be resolved before any possible continuation of excavation work in Androna. However, it would be grotesque to present any further recommendations for resuming excavations in Androna – given the still desperate situation of the people in Syria.