

From Gadara to Tall Kneḏij (Mesopotamia)

By: Stefan Heidemann, University of Jena (Germany) and Hans-Christoph Noeske, University of Frankfurt (Germany)

A new coin find from Tall Kneḏij in the north Khabur valley (Syria) sheds light on the relationship between Gadara in the Decapolis (Jordan) and settlements in the Roman eastern military border zone.

Tall Kneḏij lies about 20 km south of Hassake on the western bank of the Khabur. Since 1993 a German mission of the Vorderasiatisches Museum Berlin under the direction of Evelyn Klengel-Brand and Lutz Martin has been

excavating the site, which was settled - with interruptions - from the 3rd Millennium BC to the 13th Century. AD. In the 1st Century. BC Tall Kneḏij formed a small village within the classical region of Mesopotamia. Its ancient name is unknown. The Parthian-Roman burial no. 77 was comparatively rich, and produced a lot of artifacts. On one of the left ribs of the corpse a corroded copper coin was discovered (fig. 1a, b). In spite of its very poor

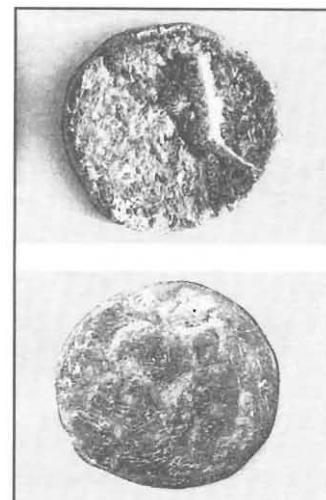


Fig. 1a: City coin of Gadara found on Tall Kneḏij.



Fig. 1b: Another specimen of the same type in better state of preservation.

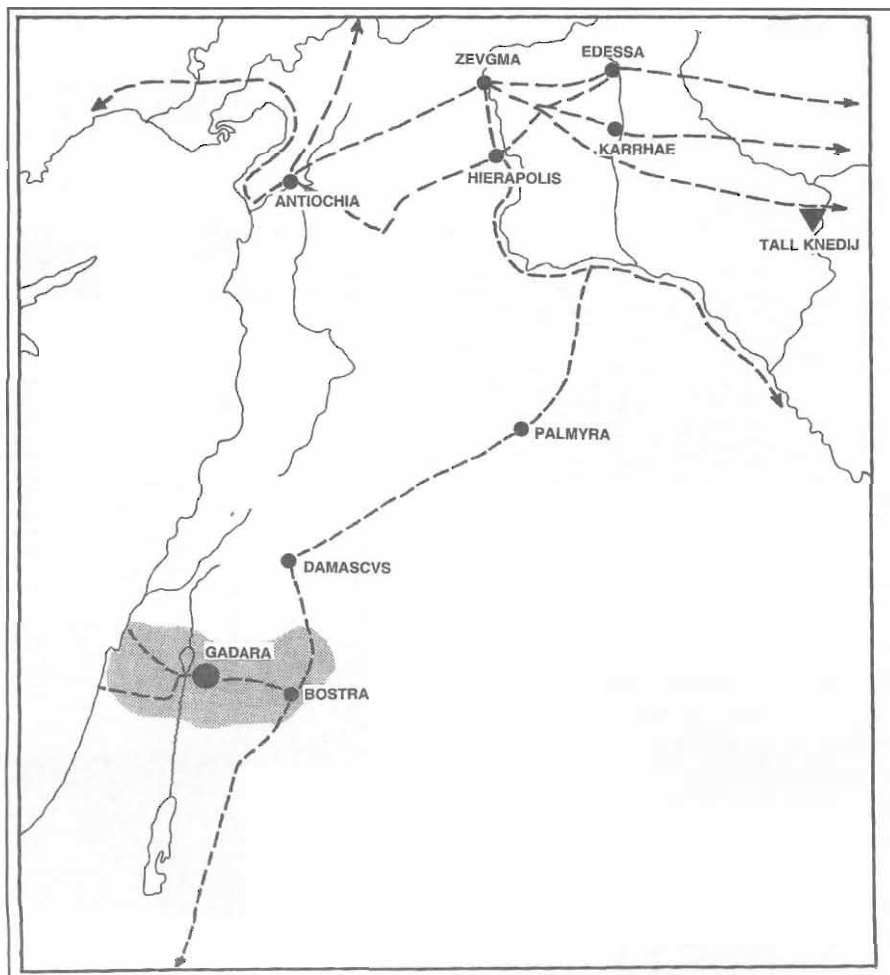


Fig. 2: The circulation area of the city coinage of Gadara and the military roads of northern Syria/Mesopotamia.

preservation the identification of the coin was successful. It was minted at Gadara in the Decapolis between 47 and 39 BC. On the obverse the bust of Tyche facing to the right is visible and on the reverse a *cornucopiae* and inscription (SNG-ANS 6, no. 1287-1290).

Copper coins were civic coinages destined only for local circulation. The recent find belongs to a restricted circulation area in northern Palestine and Arabia, but Tall Knedij is about 700 km from Gadara, its place of origin (fig. 2).

A possible interpretation of a "local" coin travelling so far can be achieved by a comparison with finds of "foreign" coins in the region of Galilee, Samaria and the Decapolis.

There are very few, and they always come from the same places, such as

Alexandria in Egypt and the urban centres situated on the important military roads in northern Syria and northern Mesopotamia, like Antiochia, Hierapolis, Zeugma, Carrhae (Harran), and Edessa (ar-Ruha, Urfa). Therefore the connection between the cities of the Decapolis and those in northern Mesopotamia primarily had not an economic but a military character.

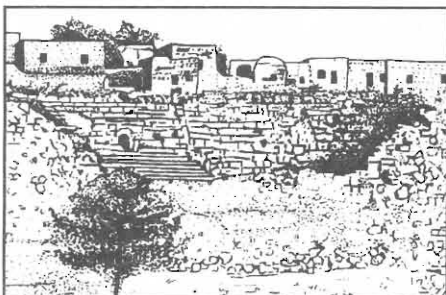
From the Decapolis the road led via Damascus and Palmyra to the north and east, and connected the garrisons of

Bostra and the Syrian desert border with the military camps in northern Mesopotamia.

So the coin from Gadara in Tall Knedij is a counterpart of the occasional imported coin of northern Syrian and Mesopotmian origin into the region of the Decapolis. It reflects the movements of soldiers or military units between the Phoenician and Arabian cities in the south and the cities and villages in the north-east on the Roman-Parthian border. ■

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