

A lead seal of Qinnasrīn

قنسرین

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This seal has a phrase in three epigraphic lines with a single word in each line, it reads in Arabic from top to bottom as follows:



Fig.1 Tonegawa Collection

خَلَا
أَرْضِ
قنسرین

To facilitate the discussion, we will first deal with each word separately starting from the bottom up. For the top word, as we shall see, is the more contentious in meaning and the key to trying to understand the possible function of the seal.

The third word at the bottom is clearly the geographical *jund* name of Qinnasrīn, **قنسرین**. It must first be said from the start that exactly the same type of lead seal, in distribution, epigraphical style and content exist for two other *jund* name places, that of al-Urdun, **الأردن** and Filistīn (Palestine) **فلسطين** both published in the Goussous Collection¹.

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¹ Goussous, respectively p. 230 & 231. Amitai-Preiss pp. 136-37. For a Palestine, Porter n°11, p29..

The *jund*, garrisoned military administrative areas, were established, it seems, very early in the Arab conquest, some sources attribute it as early as the short period of Abū Bakr 11-13/ 632-634, but with more probability they were first initiated in the time of 'Umar b. al-Khattāb 13-23/634-644. From their respective allocated areas of control each *jund* drew pay, provisions and were implicated, at least as an ominous coercive force, in the collecting of due taxation. Qinnasrīn was the northernmost *jund* just below the long frontier zone, *Thughur al-Sham*, this last being more usually than not a militarily active, embattled and variable frontier zone facing the Roman/Byzantine Empire.

The Greater Syria region, *al-Sham*, had five *jund* areas each having a coastline with the Eastern Mediterranean. The exact map of each *jund* is impossible to delineate with any precision except as a general area. From south to north, was first the *jund* of Filistīn (Palestine) whose capital was Ramla² and whose territory also included Illyá (Roman Jerusalem), next right on its north was that of al-Urdun³ which extended from the coast to the east of Tabariya up to the sea of Galilea. Next, further up, was the largest *jund*, that of Damascus, it also contained the capital of the vast Umayyad empire, as a dominant *jund* it extended south all along the east of the Jordan river down to the Red sea. It had to its north the *jund* of Hims and above that of Hims was that of Qinnasrīn. The *Jund* of Qinnasrīn seems to have been detached or formed latter than the others during the period of Yazid I 60-64 /680-683.⁴

It is interesting to note that these *Jund* struck large quantities of fiduciary copper coinage, *fals*, in multiple name places. A type of small value coinage probably used, at least in part, for their own immediate intendancy needs.⁵

The second word in the center is *ard*, **ارض**, that is “land of” of Qinnasrīn, **قنسرین**. The expression *ard*, is also the word that precedes the similar lead seal of al-Urdun, **الاردن** and Filistīn (Palestine), **فلسطين**, both contained in the aforementioned Goussous Collection. The term also appears in very different Umayyad seals of Ba'albak, **بعلبك**⁶ and from the Iberian Peninsula/ al-Andalus in the form of the “peace treaty of the land of Jayan” (Jaen), **ارض جيان مصالحة**⁷, these last are probably near contemporaneous in epoch to the three previously discussed. The use of the term *ard*, **ارض** seems to precede, time wise, that of *iqīm*, **اقليم** or the other Arabic synonyms for province or region.⁸

The starting word has reasonably been read in both the Goussous seals referred to and in the present one as **خلال**⁹ and is best defined in that text and dictionaries, somewhat vaguely, as “the leader of his clan”, **السيد** **في عشيرته**¹⁰ So the tentative translation of the seal could then be, “for the leader of his clan in the land of Qinnasrīn” or, if plural, “for the leaders of their clans in the land of Qinnasrīn”¹¹. The tribally structured *jund* would necessarily have to function with an internal top to bottom command structure, at this early stage it would still be a rather flexible, one very much structured as in the semi egalitarian pre-imperial Arabian *mala`*. A type of configuration that could at times prove to be quite turbulent and difficult to manage, but one that would necessarily need to be reestablished to become operational.

² Ramla was founded circa 705-717 CE by the then Umayyad governor of Palestine/Filistīn, Sulaymān b. 'Abd al-Malik, who would later become the ruler of the Umayyad Arab Empire, 96-99/715-717.

³ Not to be confused with British administrated colonial Transjordan or its derivative, present day Jordan.

⁴ Amitai-Preiss pp. 133. Sourdel, Djund, in Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nds ed., vol.2, p. 601..

⁵ The *jund* struck fiduciary copper coinage, *fals*, in various localities. That of Filistīn struck them in its capital al-Ramla, **الرملة**. Walker n°846-879, p. 255-259, Illyá, **إيليا**, (Jerusalem), Walker n°P.124. p.235°, Baisán, **بيسان**, (ancient Sythopolis), Walker n°Bel. 4, p. 240, Jabrīn, **جبرين**, Walker n° 782, p.241. That of Damascus in that city, **دمشق**, Walker n°812-845, p.248-255, Ba'lbakk, **بعلبك**, Walker n°764-777, p.236-239. That of Hums in Hims, **حمص**, Walker n°795-811, p.244-147. That of Qinnasrīn, in Halab, **حلب**, Walker n°784-784, p. 243, Sarmin, **سرمين**, Walker n°833, p.264.

⁶ Stephen Album Rare Coins. Auction 25. May 19-21, 2016. Lot 213.

⁷ Sénac /Ibrahim, n°30-32, p.86.

⁸ This early, time wise, use of the word *ard*, **ارض**, “land”, in the same seal in relation with the last word of the seal **خلال**, “leaders or chiefs”, would make us think this seal as of a relatively early period and, to date, only specific in this combination to the pivotal area of Greater Syria/*al-Sham*; the very heart, mind, and political administrator of the Great Arab Empire.

⁹ Since the letters of this word has no diacritical points for distinguishing vowels or some consonants it could have been read as **خلال** that is anklets worn usually by women. A meaning which would have not made much sense on these seals.

¹⁰ Goussous p. 230-231. See also, Porter p. 29 & Amitai-Preiss pp.136-137.

¹¹ Without diacritical points either a singular or a plural could be read.



So now, speculating as to their function, these seals could be payments, 'atā', for the diverse commanders of the clans, or sub groups, the secondary ramifications always present within the actual body of any tribal structure. Even though a tribe or tribal confederation¹² which may present an apparently monolithic ideological façade in front of any other opposing or competing tribal entity will nevertheless, inevitably, from within its own body be subject to internal positional tensions and competitiveness between the different groups and, of course, the prominent or aspiring individual personalities vying for power within that same tribal structure.

If these seals were for compensatory sums, probably in actual coinage, for the elites within the tribal *jund* it would be logical that these sealed amounts would have to be accompanied by a parchment or papyri specifying the sum of its contents and the exact name of to whom they were directed. All denoting a complex administrative system which would indicate, if this assumption is at all correct, that many more of these seals should be appearing in the near future once the due attention of archaeologist and historians has been drawn upon this type of apparently mundane material evidence¹³.

Lastly of note is the fact that of the five *jund* mentioned for the whole of the Levant area we now have the exact same type seals for three of them: the *jund* of Palestine, that of Jordan and now the present one of Qinnasrīn. So to date we are only missing the possible ones from the *jund* of Hims and Damascus. Though, as an afterthought, perhaps Damascus being the capital of the extensive Arab empire, one extending at one point from Sind to Southern Gaul, it would logically garrison a much larger, selected and privileged *jund*. One that probably functioned, in close conjunction with the surrounding *junds*, as the empires strategic military reserve and could have administratively been managed differently and perhaps be more privileged than the other four *junds* of the Greater Syria/*al-Sham* area.

It is precisely from these five important *jund* areas, with the addition of that of Misr, (Egypt) that Hishām b. 'Abd al-Málik (105-125/724-743) would levy and urgently dispatch a large army in a failed and disastrous attempt to crush the 123H Berber rebellion of North Africa. The army sent was probably the largest ever assembled by the Umayyads. Its thorough defeat in Maghreb al-Aqsa was an existential catastrophe that would so damage its military capacity as to probably mark the beginning of the end of that dynasty. A segment of that defeated army, after many tribulations, was finally allowed, under the command of Balj b. Bišr, to disembark on al-Andalus on the stipulation that it help defeat the Berber rebellion also raging there. This mainly Greater Syria *jund* lead by the said commander diligently and successfully did exactly that by crushing the Berber rebellion in al-Andalus. These "Syrians", as they would generically be called in the Arabic chronicles, would not be destined to ever return to their respective districts in the Levant, but after much turbulence, would be resettled in al-Andalus in accordance to their *Jund* origin: that of Qinnasrīn in Jaen, that of al-Urdun in Malaga, that of Filistīn in the triangle of Sidonia, Algeciras and Jerez, that of Hims in Seville and Niebla, while that of Misr in Ocsonoba (Faro), Beja and Tudmir.¹⁴

¹² The rapidity of the formation of the early Arab Empire seems to have dispersed and fragmented over wide areas the original tribal groups that formed the initial *jund* units. This inevitable fragmentation over wide areas could have led to a necessary identitarian re-composition in the form of the turbulent Mudar/Yemen cleavage. One which seems to functionally first emerge in the period of Mu'áwiya I (41-60/ 661-680), the dynastic founder of the Umayyads. A cleavage that seems to be based more on perceived than real genealogical entities, ones that nevertheless compete against each directly for power, prestige and material gain within the structures of the Arab Empire. One could say in modern terminology that the Mudar versus Yemen function and compete against each other as armed political entities for the rewards and fruits of imperial dominance.

¹³ It is surprising and telltale that practically none, with perhaps one exception, of the Umayyad seals up to date published have been found in archeologically defined stratifications.

¹⁴ The *jund* of Misr (Egypt) seems to be the only one that was separated by such great distance. Ocsonoba and Beja are on the south-west area of the Iberian Peninsula with a seaboard to the Atlantic Ocean while Tudmir was south-east facing the Mediterranean Sea. This could have had its possible reason to the apparent Mudar/ Yemen divide within the Misr *jund*.

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