

HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCHES IN SYRIA FOR PREHISTORIC SITES

Yazan Hamed / PhD Student

*PÁZMÁNY PÉTER CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY*

1 Mikszáth Kálmán tér, 1088 Budapest, Hungary

Abstract. *Despite the natural geographical borders of the Levant, its central location between the continents of the world made it a meeting place and communication center for many ancient civilizations. On the other hand, its location made it a center for conflicts between empires throughout the history. This fact resulted in a huge material legacy dating back to many ancient eras, including Pre-historic times and therefore has always been an important center for many archaeological missions in the recent past until now.*

Key words: Syrian archaeology, Pre-historic period, prehistoric sites, Levant.

1. Introduction The geographical location, as well as the environment, had a great influence on the patterns of the different groups in the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan). If some natural features constitute geographical barriers and differ in form and nature from one region to another but the connections existed in the various ancient historical stages.

The Levant occupies a middle geographical location that made it a place of meeting and interaction between the civilizations of Asia, Europe and Africa. The natural environment gave it another advantage in terms of environmental diversity resulting from the difference in terrain. But the population was in Constant communication with the major civilizations that arose in neighboring regions, especially in Egypt, Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq, Mesopotamia), Anatolia, and others. Ancient discoveries and writings confirm the cultural ties between the Levant and

other regions. Research conducted in this country also indicates that it has been inhabited since the earliest Stone Age similarly to the case in the coastal region, the desert, Yabroud near Damascus, and the mountainous and southern region of Syria. Kingdoms were formed during the historical eras after the discovery of writing at the end of the fourth millennium BC, during the Bronze Ages (the third and second millennium BC), such as Mari in Tell al-Hariri, Ugarit in Ras al-Shamra, Ebla in Tell Mardikh, and Qatna in Tell al-Mushrifra they were formed during the first millennium, the Iron Age, the Aramaic kingdoms in the Syrian interior and the Phoenician kingdoms on the coastal region. Of course, there are many cities that have not been studied because they are occupied by the current residents and it is impossible to move them to another place without conducting the required studies.

As for the southern region of the Levant (Palestine and Jordan), Western researchers, took a place from the nineteenth century, relied in their knowledge of the Holy Land on the information contained in the Holy Bible, especially in the Old Testament book “The Torah,” in addition to what was stated in the reports of travelers, explorers, and geographers, where it began Westerners conducted random archaeological excavations in various areas, then a number of institutes were established in Europe and the United States of America to study the sacred area and uncover its antiquities. Before organized missions such as Albright were formed. Albright W.F.: 1966, who excavated sites mentioned in the Old Testament. After World War I, the Allied countries shared influence in the Levant. Syria and Lebanon were under the French mandate, and Palestine and Jordan were under the British mandate. During that period, the number of archaeological missions increased and ancient settlement centers were discovered in the region. We will present the most important of them In this study, as it is not possible to mention all the Heritage sites in Syria. The General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums has more than ten thousand registered sites in Syrian territory, and before the war broke out in Syria in 2011, there were more than one hundred and twenty excavation and exploration missions working in Syrian archaeological sites. Therefore, we will choose some important sites from them to cover some of the features of the civilizations that rose on Syrian soil.

2. History of archaeological research in prehistoric times

Excavations in Syria have generally shown that they are not ancient and were initially the result of simple and limited individual works. But the first stage of systematic and scientific research into the Syrian Stone Age dates back to the thirties of the twentieth century (the last century) with the discoveries of the German researcher Alfred Rust (A. Rust) in the Sakfta Valley in Yabroud, who came to Syria and excavated from 1930-1933, and discovered three Rock caves were given numbers 1-2-3. In the first shelter, traces of Homo sapiens and Neanderthals were found, stacked on top of each other at a thickness of more than ten metres, collected over a period of time that lasted between about 200 and 60 thousand years BC. This excavator identified 25 archaeological layers, each of which represents an independent civilization, dating back to a human group that frequented this shelter over that long period of time. While traces of the Upper Paleolithic were found in the second shelter, and in the third shelter, remains of the Mesolithic and New Stone Age were found, indicating a rare continuity in that region. Mr. Rost published the results of his excavations in Yabrud in a book in German, "Finds of the Magha'ir of Yabrud" (Die Hohlen. Fubd Von Jabrud).

At the second stage, it was conducted by the Dutch researcher Van Liere, who conducted a preliminary survey in various regions. During which he discovered many sites, the most important of which was Al-Lataminah in the Orontes Basin, which represents an intact camp floor dating back more than half a million years.

The third phase was characterized by salvage excavations in the 1960s and 1970s before the construction of dams in the middle Euphrates Basin. As for the fourth and final phase, which began in the early nineties of the last century, excavations took place in dozens of sites, especially in the Al-Koum region in the desert, the most important of which are the Nadawiya site dating back to the Paleolithic Age, the Umm Al-Tilal site, and the Dederiyeh Cave northwest of Aleppo in the Afrin region, which It dates back to the Middle Paleolithic. There are discoveries in the Khabur Basin and the Upper Euphrates, where many of the aforementioned sites were uncovered.

3. Wahat Al-Koum

The Kom Oasis is located halfway between the city of Palmyra and the Euphrates River. This oasis consisted of an important group of diverse local water points linked to natural springs, with

approximately sixty springs in a small area, which allowed for the establishment of habitation since the Paleolithic period. The beginning of systematic research was through archaeological surveys carried out by Jacques Covan in 1978, and starting in 1980, Loren Copeland, Francis Orr, Sultan Muhaisen, and Jean-Marie Letonsurer conducted systematic discoveries that revealed the richness and importance of this region.

Excavations for Paleolithic sites began in 1989 at the Nadawiya site (Ain Askar) and later at the Al-Hamal site by a Syrian-Swiss team from the Universities of Basel and the University of Damascus in cooperation with the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Syria (which is The responsible party for antiquities in Syria). A team from the University of Paris visited the site of Umm al-Talil, in an area of 400 km² and more than 140 sites dating back to the Paleolithic era. It was found that this vast oasis is an exceptional archive, due to its length and distinguished preservation from the beginning of its settlement of the Levant until the present day. (Muhaisen Sultan, 2009)

4. Dederiyeh Cave

This cave is located on the left bank, approximately 60 km north of the city of Aleppo. A joint Syrian-Japanese archaeological mission was carried out between 1989 and 2011, and archaeological excavations showed a long history of settlement in the cave, starting early 400 thousand years ago until late in the Stone Ages, where Neanderthals lived, and the most complete skeletons of Neanderthals were discovered in the world. (Akazoa, T, Muhesen, S, 2003)

5. Qaws Qazah in the Damascus countryside

It is located near the town of Maaloula, north of Damascus. It was discovered by a team from the German University of Tübingen, led by Nicholas Conard, in the year 2000 to 2006. The site contained antiquities, some fluorescent tools, and burials dating back to the Paleolithic and Middle Stone Ages, and even the Neolithic Age.

6. Abu Hurairah site (Raqqah Governorate)

It is located in the Euphrates Basin in an area that was flooded with water from the Tabqa Dam on the river. Excavations took place in 1972 and 1973, as part of the archaeological rescue campaign that took place during the construction of the dam. When dams were built on the Euphrates River, the Syrian government Requested UNESCO to assist in a rescue campaign. To study the area that would be flooded with dam water, dozens of universities and research centers came together to contribute to this campaign.

This site is considered one of the largest prehistoric villages. Its importance is due to its large area and ancient civilizational sequence. It documents a transitional stage in human life from the stage of hunting and gathering fruits and plants to agricultural life (the transformation of man from the state of a consumer of what nature provides to a producer of food through agriculture and domestication Some pets). (Van Loon, M,1968)

7. Al-Muraibet site (Aleppo)

This hill is located To the east of Aleppo city of the city of Aleppo, on the left bank of the Euphrates River. The hill was discovered by researcher Van Loon from the University of Chicago - USA - then archaeological excavations were carried out by Professor Jack Covan, and continued from 1971 - until 1974, before it was submerged. The hill with water from the dam built on the riverbed.

Inhabitation at Tell Al-Mureibt extends for 2000 years, from 10,200 - 8,200 BC (BC B, C). It was determined through excavations that the Neolithic Revolution (the New Stone Age revolution) and the Nolta (spread of agriculture) are called the changes that occurred since the end of the ninth millennium BC. Birth, which lasted for several thousand years, proved through excavations that there were profound transformations in human thought, a “revolution of symbols” that was the driving force for the emergence of agriculture and animal domestication. The results obtained by a team were collected in a special study published in 2008 after his death, and this site appears to be the oldest place where humans practiced agriculture. (Van Loon, M,1968)

8. Jorf al-Ahmar (Aleppo)

It is considered one of the most important settlement sites in the Upper Euphrates Basin, north of Muraibet on the left bank. Settlement at the site dates back to the period between 9500 - 8700 BC.

The site was discovered by Tom MacLellan in 1980. Emergency excavations took place at the site due to the construction of a new dam on the course of the Euphrates River, by the joint Syrian-French mission, directed by Daniel Stordor and Bassam Jamous, between the years 1995-1999. It was found that there was a group of collective works. It was carried out as in the construction of houses on terraces that were planned, created and used collectively. These communal buildings were built and supported by small walls and were semi-developed underground, and the oldest ones were divided by radial walls. (Stourdeur, D, Bassam, J, 1996)

9. Jadah Al-Maghara (Aleppo)

It is located on the course of the Euphrates River. It was studied and excavated as part of rescue campaigns before the Tishreen Dam was erected on the course of the river, managed by Eric Colenco (NRs, France). Excavations at the site resulted in the discovery of archaeological layers, most of which date back to the ninth millennium BC. (Coqueugniot , E, 1998) (Dja,de el Mughara, 1997)

10. Tal Haloula (Aleppo)

It is located near the city of Manbij, northeast of the city of Aleppo. The site consists of a Hill with 11 meters high, above the valley. It was excavated by a team from the University of Barcelona, led by Miguel Molest, in cooperation with the General Directorate of Damascus, within the framework of the international rescue campaign for the archaeological and historical heritage threatened by the construction of the Tishreen Dam. In the Upper Euphrates Valley, after the study it was found that the site dates back to the Neolithic Age (pre-pottery B periods), which is a settlement phase covering more than two thousand years from 7800-5400 BC. (Molist, M, 1997)

11. Al-Ahimar Sukar, Al-Hasakah

It is located in the Khabur Basin in Al-Hasakah Governorate. The settlement dates back to the Neolithic period (Pefor P0ttery Neolithic B). The site was discovered in 1991, and excavated by a mission from the University of Tokyo for eleven seasons, in the period between 2000-2010, and covers the period from 7300 - 6500 BC. A series of important discoveries contributed to significant progress in the emergence and development of ancient farmer societies, as architecture was identified, the use of flint tools, and the making of dolls, especially for the mother goddess, and some antiquities such as pottery vessels dating back to the Pre-Hassouna period, which shed light on reconsidering the general framework of the era. Neolithic in Syria. (Karen, 2018)

12. Sher Hama

It is located northwest of the city of Hama in central Syria, at a distance of 125 km. The site was discovered in 2005 during archaeological surveys and Was later excavated between 2006 and 2010. The site was excavated by a German mission led by Karin Barthel from the German Goethe Institute in Damascus.

The chronology and settlement at the site covers almost the entire seventh millennium BC, from 7000-6200 BC. Then, buildings consisting of rooms, warehouses, female dolls, and small and large pottery vessels for storage were uncovered. (Karen, 2018)

13. Tal Al-Abr, Aleppo

The hill dates back to the Ubaid and Uruk eras, in the fourth millennium BC. It is located on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River, 55 km south of the town of Jarablus, located on the Syrian-Turkish border. Its name indicates that it was once a crossing point on the Euphrates River from the right bank to the left bank. The excavation of the hill by a joint Syrian-Japanese mission revealed sequential archaeological layers tracing the details of the development of slave pottery at the site, in addition to colored pottery. Then, facilities were uncovered that were linked to the activity of potter-makers, such as ovens, worker's rooms, and warehouses. (Hamada, 1989)

14. Shaghar Bazaar (Al-Hasakah)

An archaeological hill located in northeastern Syria in the fertile plains with the waters of the Khabur and its other small tributaries. Dating back to the Halaf era and later, the site was first excavated by Sir Max Mallowan in 1943 under the supervision of the British era. A new, advanced project was started at the site in 1999 by a joint mission from the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums in Syria and Linge University. (MallonmME, 1947) (Syria in 100 archaeological sites, 2018)

15. Tal Al-Karkh (Idlib)

Karkh Hill is considered one of the largest archaeological hills located in northwestern Syria. It is a huge complex located to the south of the Al-Ruj Plain in Idlib Governorate. It was excavated by Akira Tsuneki from Tsukuya University in Japan. The hill was settled for long periods extending from the Neolithic period until the Byzantine period. The site provides information on how agricultural villages appeared in the region, based on plant remains and animal bones. Excavations at Tell Al-Karkh indicated the existence of a livelihood resource for the first settled societies, which seem to have followed the same path from the hunting and gathering stage (Natufian stage) to the agricultural and herding stage. (Tsuneki A, 1999)

16. Tal Al-Sabi Abyad (Raqqqa)

It is considered one of the most important prehistoric sites in Syria. It was excavated by Peter Akkermans from the Dutch University of Leiden. Twenty-five organized archaeological excavations and research showed a long and continuous series of settlement, the like of which was not known in any other site from the Neolithic period until now 7100 - 5500 BC, unique buildings were identified such as the burned village, ancient pottery in its early stages, rare management tools through seals and their prints, tombs and buildings from the Neolithic period, in addition to fortified Assyrian architecture. (Akkermans P, M, shwartz,G, 2003)

17. Tall AL Ramad

Tall AL Ramad is a hill located 25 km southwest of Damascus in the eastern Qatana Valley, on the slopes of Mount Hermon. Its area exceeds 3 hectares, and the thickness of the archaeological layers in it reaches six meters. The hill was called the Tall AL Ramad because of the color of the hill resulting from the abundance of ash, while it was previously called Tall Qatana.

The hill was known for the first time when the Frenchmen Prevost and Conpin visited the hill in the 1930s. Then, Mr. Conpin conducted a sounding in conjunction with a French army officer (Pouteau), and collected many samples and artifacts.

A French excavation mission was formed in the 1960s and was directed by Henri de Contanson, and work continued Between 1963-1973. Antiquities dating back to the Neolithic era were uncovered, distributed over three layers: 6250-6000 BC, 6000-5800 BC, and 5800-

An agricultural settlement was discovered on the hill. The people of this settlement

lived in adjacent houses in the form of huts, some of which were circular in shape. Before the site turned into a pastoral settlement, its Population relied on raising animals after agriculture declined. (De Contenson, H, 1995)

18. Habouba alkabira

Urbanization developed in the second half of the fourth millennium BC, and settlements were found in a network of villages and small cities that were administered by large cities. This phenomenon spread in northeastern Syria, the Euphrates Basin and southern Iraq, where huge buildings, temples, and walled cities were located, including the city of Habouba.

It is located on the right bank of the Euphrates River near the village of Habouba, 80 km east of Aleppo.

Excavations began as part of rescue campaigns before the area was flooded with the waters of the Tabqa Dam in the seventies of the twentieth century. It was excavated by a German team from the German East Association from 1969 to 1974, and a city emerged that was built according to a prior plan, surrounded on its three sides by a wall with towers at equal distances and symmetrical gates. The city's streets were designed criss-crossing. As for the huge buildings used as administration or temples, they were in the nearby Tal Qannas and Mount Aruda. (Strominger, Eva, 1975)

19. Намокar

Tell Hamukar is located in eastern Syria on the eastern edge of the Khabur Basin, on the trade route between Mesopotamia and western Syria. Excavations began in 1999 by a joint Syrian-American mission from the Oriental Studies Institute in Chicago and the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums, directed by M. Gibson from 1999-2001, then resumed in 2005 under the direction of Clemence Rachel.

C.Reichel and continued until 2010. The discoveries contributed to the reconsideration and the emergence of cities at the beginning of the fourth millennium BC in this site or the contemporary Tell Brak. (Gibson M, Reichel, C, 2000)

20. Conclusion

Given the huge tangible and intangible heritage that the Levant region in general and Syria in particular possess, dating back to various ancient times, it still needs a lot of national and international efforts in the field of archaeological research. This is due, firstly, to the huge material heritage, secondly, to the relatively small number of archaeological missions operating in the region, and thirdly, due to The war conditions led to the obstruction and cessation of the work of many archaeological missions, which also led to damage and destruction in some important sites. All of these factors indicate the necessity of intensive work at various scientific and administrative levels to preserve and document what can be saved after the war.

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