SOVIET ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN SYRIA

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Abstract

From 1988-1991 teams from the Institute of Archaeology of the (Soviet) Academy of Sciences undertook large-scale fieldwork in North-Eastern Syria, particularly in the province Haseke. Excavations of a multi-layer settlement at Tell Hazna I have revealed a complex of constructions of the early 4th-end 3rd mill. B.C., including massive walls and a building in the form of a truncated pyramid. Its architectural features and pottery series are fully comparable to those of other settlements investigated in recent years in the same area (e.g. Tell Takkay and Tell Bdery). Excavation of Tell Hazma I continues. Preliminary investigations of the nearby Tell Hazna II have produced ceramics of the Halaf culture and of the archaic Hassun culture (end 7th-6th mill. B.C.).

In the spring of 1988 a mission from the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences began large-scale field works in north-eastern Syria. Despite the discovery of many famous monuments in Tel-Halaf, Tell Brak and Chagar Bazar those regions had been only superficially investigated by archaeologists, while it was evident that they were potentially very rich in that sense. It is therefore only natural that we are witnessing at present a remarkable activation of field work in that part of the country carried out by missions from England, Holland, France, Germany, USA, Japan, Poland etc. Already important results are visible and we are happy to say that the Soviet expedition has taken part in these achievements.

The main efforts of Soviet archaeologists were concentrated at a place north-east of the town of Haseke (administrative centre of the province of the same name), near the villages of Hazna and Alavi. Here in the years 1988-1991 were carried out large excavations of a multi-layer settlement of Tell Hazna I. In the year 1991 we began the excavations of a second one—Tell Hazna II.

Tell Hazna I is a large mound (17 m. in height) with a diameter of 150 m. Investigated were the southern and western slopes of the hill, an area of 1500 m². Here was brought to light a complex system of constructions, mainly interdependent and dating to the 3rd mill. B.C. They are positioned on the

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interconnected terrasses of the mound. The first (lower) one is bordered by a massive wall most probably of a, defensive character. The thickness of the wall is 3.3 m. and at present more than 20 m. of it has been brought to light. It is made of thick layers of clay and from both sides is coated by clay plaster. The date of the construction can be assigned to the early dynastic period. In the year 1991 a little below 13.8 m. from the top of the hill were discovered the rests of a massive structure dating to the earlier (Uruk) period. The centre of the whole complex was a building in the form of a truncated pyramid. The measurements at its base are 6.4-5 m. The walls of the pyramid were made of raw bricks (48 × 28 × 7 cm.) and are now 2 m. thick and 8 m. high. They were many times strengthened and remodeled. On the outer side were still traces of a greenish clay plaster. Under the upper ground of the pyramidal chamber with vaulted ceiling (2.4 × 2.2 m.) was found.

This tower was from every side bordered by massive constructions of the same complex. Noteworthy is a massive wall with semi-columns on the front side. Like the tower itself it was based on a socle. The bases of both structures are on the same ground lay (13.6-14.0 m. from the hilltop). To the east of the above-named wall we started excavation of a second monumental tower which most probably formed part of the same temple complex. To the south of the second tower were brought to light the remains of another crude brick wall 2.6 m. thick.

The construction of the whole complex began in the Uruk period, which is confirmed by ceramics from the same layer, but it was extremely long-lived and was in use till the early dynastic period. To that time can, among others be dated an adjoining structure investigated in 1991 and extraordinarily well preserved. It is situated by the north wall of the first tower and measures 2.5 × 2.3 m. The mud brick walls of the building are almost completely preserved to the original height of 3 m. The foundation is situated at a depth of 10 m. from the top of the hill. The ceiling of the building was of a semi-vault type based on a "bracket" triangular in section, attached to all the walls. The height of those "brackets" was 1.6 m. Near the eastern wall was brought to light a brickwork structure, most probably an altar, which makes possible the identification of the building as a sanctuary and an integral part of the temple complex.

To the north of this complex and over the whole length of the slope is situated an extremely interesting area, now under investigation. Its construction is situated on the next, upper, terrace. This terrace was fortified to the

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