

EXCAVATIONS OF THE ITALIAN MISSION AT ARSLANTEPE (MALATYA). SEASON 1961

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A first campaign of excavations, promoted by the Centre for Antiquities and Art History of the Near East, has been carried out at the great mound of Arslantepe near Malatya.

Head of the expedition was Prof. Piero Meriggi, of the Pavia University; the staff included the author of this article, as Field Director, Dr. Tea Coco for the post-Hittite Archaeology, arch. Giovanni Joppolo for the architectural problems and Mr. Augusto Falessi as restorer. The Mission received the most effective and kind collaboration from Mr. Hasan Tahsin Uçankuş, Assistant to the Museum of Kayseri, who officially represented the General Direction for Antiquities of the Turkish Government;

The mound of Arslantepe is an artificial formation (hüyük) as a result of interrupted accumulation of occupational debris due to communities permanently established in this site which is included in an oasis system extending along the right hand bank of the upper Euphrates. Specifically, these communities took advantage from the existence of underground water and springs at the foot of the hüyük.

The building system of mud bricks, usually followed in the hot countries of the East since the Neolithic age, mostly contributed to the formation of the mound; the dwellings easily collapsed and they were frequently replaced.

A survey of the locality was made by H. H. von der Üsten (*Explorations in Hittite Asia Minor* (1927-28, Chicago, 1929, pp. 92-95), but regular excavations were carried out on the mound from 1932

to 1939 by L. Delaporte (*Malatya, La ville et le pays de Malatya*, Rev. Hitt. et Asian. II' 12' 1934; *La troisième campagne de fouilles à Malatya*, Rev. Hitt. et Asian., V, 34, 1939). A detailed account on the architectural remains found in the neo-Hittite levels has been given by the same author (*La porte des Lions*, Paris 1940). Further excavations were carried out by C. Schaeffer and his assistants during the years from 1947 to 1951 in order to determine, as it is shown by the deep trenches still visible in the central area of the Hüyük the exact sequence of the archaeological periods since the earliest stages of the settlement. The results of these latest investigations are still not sufficiently known (Cfr. *Compt. Rend. de L'Acad. des Inscript. et Belles Lettres*, 1948, p.341 ss.; 1951, p.325 ss.).

Considering these facts, the new excavations of the Italian mission were located in an independent area, in order to exclude at the moment any topographical connection with the archaeological remains discovered by the French expedition. Actually, the general coordination of the researches would be possible on the basis of a scientific collaboration with the French Archaeologists which is from all points of view both desirable and legitimate.

Originally a rectangular area 9 mt. wide and 40 mt. long was chosen for the excavations; successively, the excavation area was extended North until it reached the present day margin of the mound. The North East side of the mound showed a vertical cut made by the workers who

traced the road around the hill and by the peasants who used the earth to fertilise their fields because of its organic content. This cut proved extremely helpful to investigate on the beginnings of the settlement, as far as levels fairly close to the base of the formation were reached there. A deep excavation on this area brought to light a number of coarse ware sherds showing shapes of bowls with thickened rims and flattened bottoms; no handles were found. Sherds with burnished grey surface or red slip were also discovered.

The stone industry is conspicuous, including blade and flake tools from flint or obsidian, polished hammer-axes and mace-heads; a quern made from volcanic rock was also discovered. It seems that the whole complex must be attributed to the late calcolithic (early in the third millennium) as it is known from a number of settlements on the plateau, including Alişar (Cfr. H. H. von der üsten, *The Alishar Hüyük. Seasons 1930-32, Part 1, Chicago, 1937*). The excavation area on the upper part of the Hüyük, after the removal of the superficial levels, showed soon some topographical and stratigraphic details. Evidence of occupation during the Islamic age was revealed by the presence of glazed pottery in which frequently delicate green-coloured patterns were displayed. From a stratigraphic point of view, the first archaeological level was represented by rectangular dwellings with rough stone walls sloping towards North East; some of these habitations had ovens either in clay or in stone with baked clay pipes for the expulsion outside of the smoke. Beside one of the ovens two iron implements for the making of bread, a knife and a large quadrangular spatula, were found.

On the floor of one of these dwellings were two large storage jars in fragments with a series of ridges around the body: this kind of vessel was widely used during the Roman-Byzantine age. Both the struc-

tural elements and the typology of the pottery in the first level indicate a period whose beginning, although uncertain, could be included in the 1st century A. D. The actual romanization of this region is not clearly documented by characteristic findings: however, the initial stage of this period could not have occurred before the Neronian Parthian war and its conclusion could coincide with the Sasanian invasions of the 7th century A. D.

In the South-Western part of the area very few remains of the Roman-Byzantine period were found. On the other hand numerous round holes, dug into the 2nd archaeological level, revealed to have been used as silos by the Roman-Byzantine people. The lack of buildings in the first level permitted deep excavations in this area, where at least four architectural phases were recognized all of them belonging to the second half of the 1st millennium B. D. (2nd level). A well preserved edifice is to be noted there, whose walls of mud bricks around 1 mt. height were placed on a basement of large, regular sized stone blocks.

Along the Northern confines of the Hüyük was discovered a big defence wall of square bricks reaching to a width of 6,50 mt. This impressive masonry work overlapped presumably the structures of the "Gate of the Lions" excavated by Delaporte and marked the limits of the citadel in a time after the neo-Hittite period. The structure of this brick-made wall reinforced by wood piles proves to have been penetrated by fire. Remarkable remains of collapse on the inside and outside of this wall and other signs of combustion were discovered throughout the excavation area and constitute a considerable stratum of devastation on which the 2nd archaeological level has been formed.

The pottery found in the 2nd level shows variety of shapes and decorative patterns. Storage vessels with thick rims are predominant and also large flat-bottomed

bowls, jars and *oinochoai* with ring handles, and pots with lateral tubular spouts; there are numerous examples of red slip polished ware. The decoration consists of ridges, grooves and incisions on the dried surface, impressions of small circles or made by a stick, forming horizontal bands of simple geometric patterns. A painted decoration, reddish or brown on the natural clay surface, sometimes occurs.

Through the analogies with Alhisar (in which appears a thick layer of destruction covering the levels of the Phrygian age), it could be presumed that also at Arslantepe the

wide traces of the fire mark moment closely connected with the events which caused there the formation of similar deposits. Actually, at Arslantepe no sherds of Phrygian age come to light above the remains of the burning, which may be due to an incursion of the Cimmerians in the 7th century B. C. This combustion layer-reached during the excavations of the Italian Mission in 1961 -which separates the remains of the second half of the 1st millennium B. C. from the lower strata, represents a point of considerable importance for the interpretation of the stratigraphic sequence.