

Field Survey in Thrace

Three seasons of survey work preceded the excavations at the Assyrian site of Ziyaret Tepe in southeastern Turkey. The site, located some 60km from Diyarbakır, featured late Neolithic, early Chalcolithic, middle Assyrian, and neo-Assyrian remains, with an extensive lower town area that almost certainly represented Tushan (though it possibly could be equated with Sinabu or Tidu). Excavation seemed especially appropriate in light of the planned Ilisu Dam construction and the likely immersion of large areas of the site.

The first season of excavation was in 2000, during which remains of a monumental neo-Assyrian building was uncovered, as well as a cobbled courtyard surface. Additional neo-Assyrian and other structures were found, in addition to a gate complex. The mound's stratigraphy showed that the Assyrian remains had been constructed on the site of a third millennium settlement.

In 2001 the work was again focused on the outer town, with a new major residence with a cobbled stone pavement uncovered as further areas were excavated. The monumental building was also worked on more.

The aims of the next season in 2002 were to continue work on the residence and to subsequently produce a plan for the entire building, which the team were successful in doing. They uncovered four rooms at that site, one containing pithoi and another with cuneiform tablets and other fragments which proved to be 'economic texts', recording daily transactions about deals and loans. They believed the structure to be the residence of a well-to-do merchant or senior official. A magnetometry survey of the lower town was conducted and new area was opened for excavation, revealing some later material which proved difficult to date.

In 2003, the fourth season of excavation, they focused again on the lower town, in addition to initiating work on the southern city wall. The high mound in the lower town revealed more of the building plan, as well as some bronze fragments. Remains of a building south of the courtyard were found. The collection of cuneiform texts found previously was added to this season with six more recovered. The ridge found encircling the lower town was studied and determined to be the remains of a city wall. The geomagnetic survey was continued on the lower town; by the end of the season about 1/3 of the lower town had been successfully surveyed.

The fifth excavation season was undertaken between July and early September 2004, with 500m² opened in total. The building on the high mound in the lower town was completely excavated, and the room where the tablets were discovered was opened up to reveal a chequerboard pavement with an interesting pattern. Another building revealed a brick pavement overlaid with a plaster painted in a black and white pattern, under which a drainage system was found. Two soundings were carried out, and the wall was investigated further to better understand its construction phases. Finally, the geophysical survey was continued on the lower town, using both magnetometry (advantageous because of the speed of the method, but less effective inasmuch as processing and interpreting the data was difficult) and resistivity (slower to conduct, but with very high quality results).

2005 and 2006 were study seasons during which publications were prepared.

The project was re-established on a larger scale in 2011, aimed at continuing the exploration of the significant Ziyaret Tepe site before it was inundated. During the 2011 season, excavations continued on the lower town, where work on the high-status residence and city wall was continued and work was initiated on a monumental gateway (a feature that had been discovered through the resistivity

survey). A cylindrical seal with a tree motif was discovered, and some graves and grave goods also proved to be interesting. An area determined to be an administrative complex was also excavated, yielding finds like pithoi, clay tokens, a huge stone duck weight weighing exactly 30kg, and another clay tablet archive with cuneiform inscriptions, this one with some very significant texts.

Magnetometry, resistivity, and ground-penetrating radar surveys were carried out in an attempt to understand the site's geophysicality and an overall picture of the city's ancient organisation. This became ever clearer, and the ancient street plan could begin to be partially reconstructed.