

## Aşvan Project

In 1968, with the construction of the Keban Dam underway, Middle East Technical University and the Turkish government co-founded the 'Keban Project', with the purpose of preserving historical artefacts and information from the regions that would be flooded upon the dam's completion. Two sites were given to the BIAA for their excavation: 1) Pağnik Öreni, which was handed over to Richard Harper to direct and 2) Aşvan (or Muratçık) village, under David French.

After an initial survey of the area around the village, eight potential excavation sites were located, the most obvious being Aşvan Kale. The goals of the excavations at the site were to rescue historical items, reconstruct the occupation sequence, excavate the ground plans of architectural structures, and understand the context for the structures excavated. Their strategy was to focus either on small areas for stratigraphical details, or larger areas with less attention to stratigraphy, and then to water-sieve selected units.

In 1968, work was carried out between 20 August and 9 October. Surface finds indicated a range from the Early Bronze Age to Medieval period, and they first excavated a phase belonging to Medieval times. Roman structures and materials were also discovered. The team initiated and successfully used a dry-sieving system throughout the excavation.

In 1969, excavation work continued between 8 June and 5 October. Early Bronze Age material was discovered and could be divided into earlier phases featuring red and black pottery, and later phases with black burnished items. The Roman period was discovered to have two building phases, and to contain pottery, tools, and bronze ornaments as well as plant and grain remains. On 28 September the so-called "Aşvan Hoard" was discovered: a pot containing 48 silver coins. All but one belonged to the reign of Ariobarzanes I Philoromaios, 96-63 BC.

In 1970, the work at Aşvan took place between 26 July and 4 October. Excavation focused on four of the seven primary sites. The main site, Aşvan Kale, was under Stephen Mitchell's direction, and a number of burials and pottery and coins from Medieval periods were found. Steven Diamant directed a sounding at a small mound called Çayboyu, which was dated to around the fourth millennium BC, based on the findings. Anthony McNicoll worked at Taşkun Kale, where they focused on exploring the kale and the church. At Taşkun Kale, Svend Helms directed excavation work that focused on stratigraphy and architecture; the many finds at this site included pottery, worked stone, flaked stone, metal, bones, and carbonized bone. The focus was on getting a chronological sequence for the materials excavated at these four places, which spanned about 5000 years.

In addition to excavation work, a new research programme was introduced to Aşvan in 1970. David French felt that in order better to interpret and understand the archaeological results it would be advisable to set up a group of studies, dubbed the "Aşvan Project". He felt this would better accomplish the Keban Project's aim of rescuing historical materials; Aşvan could then salvage both antique items as well as relevant information. Though many difficulties were acknowledged, such as a very limited time for research, the fact that the village had already been largely abandoned by the inhabitants, and the introduction of modern technology to the village, it was still concluded that a project of this type would be valuable, and that any recovered information would be better than none. The first area to be studied as part of this new project was archaeobotany and agriculture, with Gordon Hillman, who had read about the Keban Project in *The Times*, taking charge of botanical work, aided by students from Reading University. A village studies project was undertaken by Alwyn Riddell who, together with Tamara Winikoff McNicoll, created plans of village houses. Patrick Dick and his wife took the opportunity to explore for six weeks whether computer-analysis techniques

could be applied successfully to excavation work. Epigraphic material in the region was searched for by Alan Hall.

Between 4 July and 2 September 1971 work continued on both the excavation front and the research front. At Aşvan Kale excavations began in the middle of August and lasted about a month, yielding a large stash of Medieval pottery and animal bone, a late Roman structure of unclear date, some small finds from the Hellenistic levels, and carbonised grain and pottery from the Iron Age period. At Çayboyu they worked for 12 days, finding many carbonised grain samples and pottery, and processing the refuse through a water-sieve. Between 8 July and 12 August work continued at Taşkun Kale, where the kale continued to be excavated, revealing a second Medieval phase with a defence wall and two small towers. Also, stone walls from two different phases were discovered at the sondage, and the church was found to have three phases. At Taşkun Mevkii, they focused on extending the excavation in order to get structural units, finding pottery, metal, worked bone points, seals, and other materials in the process.

As far as research within the Aşvan Project was concerned, work continued in all areas. Gordan Hillman put together plant reference collections with over 4,000 specimens of pressed plants, in addition to processing plant remains from excavated sites and undertaking studies of the botany of the modern area. The research on agricultural technology was expanded by David Williams, and data was collected both in the village of Aşvan and at markets in surrounding areas; it was significant inasmuch as it revealed more about the man/environment interactions and the relationship between the tools and the activities they assisted in performing. About two hundred agricultural tools were drawn and recorded with their names and prices. Michael Harrison continued studying the ornithological habitats of birds in the region, observing and charting migration routes and catching and ringing 190 specimens for study. An environmental study, whose aim was primarily to rescue any data that would be destroyed upon the dam's completion, was undertaken by Gerald Hall, Sam McBride, and Alwyn Riddell.

Beginning 22 July and ending 22 September 1972, excavation and research was continued at Aşvan. Stratigraphy and occupation sequences at various sites in the region, such as Kurupınar, Çayboyu, Taşkun Mevkii, Taşkun Kale, and Aşvan Kale, were explored and a correlation attempted.

Four new fields were introduced to the Aşvan Project, specifically: a study on geography and geomorphology by Malcolm Wagstaff that looked at the physical features influencing occupation in the past; Conrad Cleasby and Andrew Slade's survey of the land; an exploration into the site's social organization as understood by observing household structures and activities by Matina Weinstein; and finally, Sebastian Payne's study of animal bones, which helped to determine whether animals were domesticated. Hillman's botany project continued, with the sorting of plant remains from archaeological sites and a collection of samples of modern crop products in the village. He also estimated the highest possible population numbers possible for the region. An experiment that looked at the water-sieve's efficiency was done by Michael Akam, while Jean Revell began research on rock samples from the village. Finally, George Willcox initiated the collection of modern wood specimens, in addition to the grain and seed samples.

The final season of the Aşvan excavations and project took place between July and September 1973. At Taşkun Kale excavations occurred between 18 July and 5 September. At the kale, a number of pithoi and tandirs were found, along with six bronze coins. The church excavations brought forth evidence of a previous occupation in Classical times; blocks from this earlier structure had been incorporated into the later building. A two-week operation primarily for cleaning took place at

Taşkun Mevkii. Any finds were moved to the depot at Elazığ, and a study programme was planned for 1974.