

West Asia

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This review covers fiscal years 2009–2015, which have been among the most turbulent in the history of West Asian (or Near Eastern) archaeology since the first Japanese mission was dispatched in 1956. For Japan, the turmoil in Syria, which began in 2011, proved a tipping-point. Before 2011 the country was host to the largest number of Japanese missions in West Asia; the Syrian civil war brought those archaeological projects to a halt, however, and imposed pressures on institutions to send those missions elsewhere. Archaeologists who formerly ran projects in Syria are now obliged to undertake research in other, less familiar West Asian countries, including Iraqi Kurdistan, and must justify the aims of these archaeological investigations not only to the public but also to the institutions to which the researchers belong.

Furthermore, since some students and young scholars are prohibited or discouraged by their universities from travelling to certain countries, there is real concern among scholars about not only the current difficulty of organizing missions but also rapidly diminishing opportunities to train students for the future of the discipline. Consequently, we must continue in our efforts to explain the results and significance of our subject area with ever greater passion to win the understanding of the public and fellow academics alike.

Around 2015, new technologies, such as UAV and 3D modelling from SfM, were introduced into Western Asiatic archaeological fieldwork. It will be important to consider fully the advantages and shortcomings of these techniques, which are less expensive and so more cost-effective and therefore likely to spread rapidly. While there is uncertainty as to how these techniques might be utilized academically, it is obvious that these techniques hold significant potential.

The protection and restoration/conservation of archaeological sites and historical monuments in West Asia are topics which have been discussed in Japan since the 1980s, and projects in these areas have been conducted. The recent damage imposed on archaeological sites and historical monuments by so-called Islamic State (IS) was a calculated propaganda tactic aimed at utilizing politically the cultural heritage of Iraq

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and Syria. The general public and scholars alike have been shocked by the images of this destruction, and we may expect increasing requests from local authorities throughout West Asia for restoration/conservation assistance and help with cultural heritage documentation, as well as rescue/emergency archaeological projects related to development during the post-conflict period. Japanese missions working in West Asia must be ready in terms of strategies and human relationships to face and meet these demands.

The following is a summary of the year's fieldwork and research. Reports may also be found in *Ancient Orient Revealed through Excavations: Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of Excavations in West Asia* (hereinafter *Proceedings*) and the *Journal of West Asian Archaeology*, both published by the Japanese Society for West Asian Archaeology (est. 1997).

FY 2009

According to the *Proceedings*, the following reports of fieldwork have been presented: Syria (8), Turkey (1), Jordan (2), Lebanon (2), Israel (2), Oman (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), Egypt (3), South Asia (1), and Central Asia (2) (a total of 24 projects). The number of field projects in Syria this year was outstanding. Three, conducted between 2005 and 2009, were funded by the "Formation of Communities of Semitic Tribes" (JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Priority Area), which focused on the northern flank of the Bishri Mountain near al-Raqqah, Central Syria. The remaining five archaeological projects in Syria were conducted at or in: Tell el-Kerkh (Idlib province), Dederiyeh Cave (Aleppo province), Tell Taban (al-Hasakah province), Tell Seker al-Aheimar (al-Hasakah province), and the North Cemetery of Palmyra (Homs province).

FY 2010

The *Proceedings* included reports from the following countries: Syria (8), Turkey (1), Jordan (2), Lebanon (2), Israel (2), Oman (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), and Egypt (4) (a total of 22 projects). After fiscal year 2010 projects in Syria rapidly decreased, and after 2012 they came to a complete halt. In 2012 the Kaman-Kalehöyük Archaeological Museum in Turkey was officially opened to the public. Together with the nearby Japanese Institute of Anatolian Archaeology (est. 1998), it now represents one of the largest Japanese facilities in West Asia. Also, the large-scale project "Replacement of Neanderthals by Homo sapiens: testing evolutionary models of learning" (JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Innovative Areas: from FY 2010 to 2014) was initiated and has already yielded fruitful results on the Palaeolithic period of West Asia.

TRENDS IN ARCHAEOLOGY IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

FY 2011

The Proceedings included the following reports: from Syria (3), Turkey (2), Jordan (2), Israel (2), Iran (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), Egypt (2), Bulgaria (1), South Asia (1), and Central Asia (2) (a total of 17 projects). This year saw the beginning of the turmoil in Syria; few missions worked, and then mainly in the spring before the situation worsened.

FY 2012

The Proceedings included reports from the following: Turkey (3), Jordan (3), Palestine (1), Iran (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), Egypt (3), Bulgaria (1), South Asia (1), and Central Asia (2) (a total of 16 projects). Missions to Syria came to a complete halt, and one new project opened on the Palestinian West Bank. In addition, one large-scale project commenced: “Ancient West Asian Civilization as the Foundation of all Modern Civilizations: a counter to the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ theory” (JSPS Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Innovative Areas: from FY 2012 to 2016).

FY 2013

The Proceedings included the following reports: for Turkey (3), Jordan (2), Israel (1), Palestine (1), Iraqi Kurdistan (1), Iran (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Oman (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), Egypt (2), and Central Asia (2) (a total of 18 projects). The opening of a new field of research in Iraqi Kurdistan was reported, and by 2014 the first Japanese mission, from University of Tsukuba, had been dispatched to the area. Meanwhile, fieldworks were extended into the Arabian Peninsula (including the Gulf) and the Caucasus.

FY 2014

The Proceedings included the following reports: Turkey (1), Jordan (2), Israel (1), Palestine (1), Iraqi Kurdistan (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Oman (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1), Georgia & Armenia (1), Egypt (4), South Asia (1), and Central Asia (3) (a total of 19 projects). The cultural heritage situation in Syria had worsened, and various meetings and symposiums were held to discuss the matter.

FY 2015

The Proceedings included the following reports: from Turkey (1), Lebanon (1), Israel (1), Palestine (1), Iraqi Kurdistan (2), Bahrain (1), Oman (1), UAE (1), Azerbaijan (1),

Armenia (1), Egypt (6), South Asia (2), and Central Asia (2) (a total of 21 projects). This year, in December, the Japanese Society for West Asian Archaeology organized the (first) International Syrian Congress on Archaeology and Cultural Heritage (ISCACH) in Beirut, Lebanon. The congress, which was funded by donations from the people of Japan and by the Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, was a great success, with the participation of 30 invited colleagues from Syria and some 200 scholars from 15 separate countries.