

PROJECT REPORTS

THE AMUQ VALLEY REGIONAL PROJECT

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Tell Atchana (Ancient Alalakh) Survey 2000

As the Oriental Institute's Amuq Valley Regional Project (AVRP) near Antakya (ancient Antioch) came into its sixth year of investigation, the increasingly successful surveys and surprising finds from the excavation of Chalcolithic Tell Kurdu prompted us to explore questions that would aid us in conceptualizing the significance of these and other sites within the broader Amuq Valley. A study season was scheduled for Tell Kurdu, while plans were put into place for the preparation of a second planned excavation site at Tell Atchana (AS 136) in the near future. At its inception, the research design in the Amuq was methodologically envisaged as a regional project, with concurrent excavations at a variety of different sites and environmental zones. From many perspectives this season was the right time to re-examine the relationships of the over 248 sites during specific periods of dense settlement and transition. One such pivotal period is the second millennium BC, the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, a time of intense globalization and international relations. Thus in the summer of 2000 my team and I focused attention on the survey of the last remaining previously excavated site, Tell Atchana/Alalakh, the capital of the Amuq. The AVRP survey and study season ran between 27 June and 1 September 2000.

The site of Atchana is uniquely poised to answer a number of compelling questions, some of which proved archaeologically elusive during earlier excavations by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1930s and 1940s. For example, how did this region, called the kingdom of Mukish in the Late Bronze Age, iterate with the Hittite Empire when the only archaeological cognates so far consist of a few written documents and Hittite artifacts? Another question consuming most of my professional career has been the origin of complex technological (especially metallurgy) systems and how these systems changed and articulated with the rise of regional states. The geoarchaeological and archaeological surveys led by Tony Wilkinson suggested that by phases H/I (the end of the third millennium BC) the main settlement of the plain exhibited a major shift towards the southern edge, dominated by Tell Tayinat and, in the early second millennium, Tell Atchana — suggesting a move catalyzed by interregional exchange. This formed the core hypothesis of our investigations into economies based on wealth finance — that is, traders, metallurgists, and craft specialists.

For scholars investigating these problems, the site of Atchana is a bonanza. The sumptuous luxury finds (fig. 1) and deposits of raw ma-



Figure 1. Lapis lazuli figurine. Level II temple. Atchana

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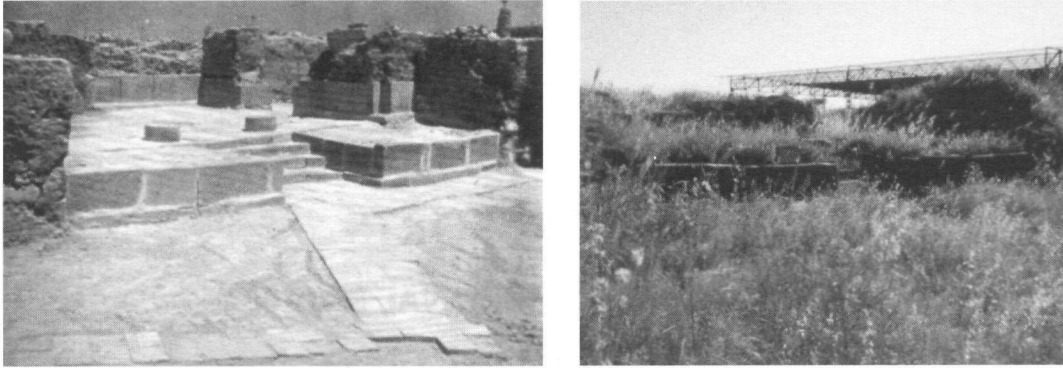


Figure 2. Photographs comparing (left) state of forecourt and facade of level IV palace entrance at Atchana/Alalakh after excavation and (right) its condition in 2000

materials such as ivory, metal, and obsidian stored in several rooms of the palace and temple structures underscore the importance of public-sector craft workshops and the production of artifacts of power and prestige.

Intensive Surface Survey at Atchana/Alalakh

Two main objectives were targeted for the 2000 survey. The first was to determine the periods of occupation throughout the extent of the saddle-shaped $750 \times 350 \times 9$ m mound, especially its latest period of occupation. Since Sir Leonard Woolley excavated only the northern third of the mound (levels XVII–0), the southern two thirds of the tell presented features not yet explored. The second objective was to investigate the possibility of a lower town extending into the fields surrounding the site. Recent investigations in Turkey have found that outer towns are commonplace on large Bronze and Iron Age sites. This is especially true at Troy, Kultepe-Kanesh, Titris, and Boğazköy-Hattusha. Woolley, too, had earlier speculated about an outer town ramparts, but was unable to explore these ideas with excavations. A careful mapping of the density of artifact scatters in the fields surrounding the tell could potentially identify the presence of such a feature.

A number of tasks were successfully accomplished during the 2000 season at Tell Atchana. (1) All of Woolley's trenches and spill heaps were located and mapped, (2) the state of the architecture and the status of the site after fifty years of abandonment were documented with copious photographs (figs. 2–3), and (3) an intensive surface survey of the crop fields was conducted surrounding the site and the southern mound unexcavated by Woolley. With the understanding that any future investigation at Alalakh would involve a substantial conservation effort, a photographic record of the current state of the standing monuments was completed. Effort was made to illustrate the previously excavated rooms from the same directions as published photographs in the original reports. The Yarim-lim and Niqmepa palaces that housed the central administration and religious core of this kingdom are now in danger of collapse and any further research on this mound would need to address site preservation and careful mapping of the structures. The high rainfall has promoted the outgrowth of lush vegetation undermining the buildings constructed of mudbrick faced with basalt and limestone orthostats.

The parallel transect survey of the mound and systematic counts of sherd scatters in fields surrounding the mound revealed denser concentrations of sherds on the north and northeast sides of the mound, in an area approximately 100 m out from the site (fig. 4). The area coincides with Woolley's observation that there may be an outer town wall running parallel on that side of the

mound. While other erosional factors off the mound may produce such a field scatter, the evidence gathered by the Oriental Institute survey is suggestive of the presence of a “lower town” in the fields below the mound now hidden by considerable alluvial accumulation. Intriguingly, examination of Corona satellite imagery from the early 1970s also reveals the dense sherd scatter as a dark feature north of the mound itself. A preliminary examination of the sherds collected in this area revealed that they were primarily Middle and Late Bronze Age, with a few Roman pieces.

Remote sensing teams from the Kandilli Observatory at Bogazici University in Istanbul led by geophysicist Cemil Gurbuz confirmed the existence of subsurface structures in the fields off-site and pointed out new areas to be positioned for potential future excavation. Geomagnetic field gradient measurements using EDA Omni Scintrex Envimag Gradiometer, Georadar measurements using RAMAC/GPR as well as other geophysical methods were made available for this project. If indeed there is a lower town, then the site is potentially several times larger than was heretofore thought. Future processing of the sherd collections as well as an intensive assessment of the remote sensing data will amplify the periods of occupation and other site-size nuances.

Future Directions in the Amuq

The upcoming seasons will provide the opportunity to develop more fully several important branches of research in the Amuq Valley that are already underway. First of all at Atchana, a careful 2 m wide cross-section from Woolley’s Palace IV deep sounding is proposed to clarify some of the problems outlined in recent chronological discussions prominent in the literature. Some of these hinge on reconstructions of the local genealogy, synchronisms with external king lists as well as ceramic and glyptic parallels.

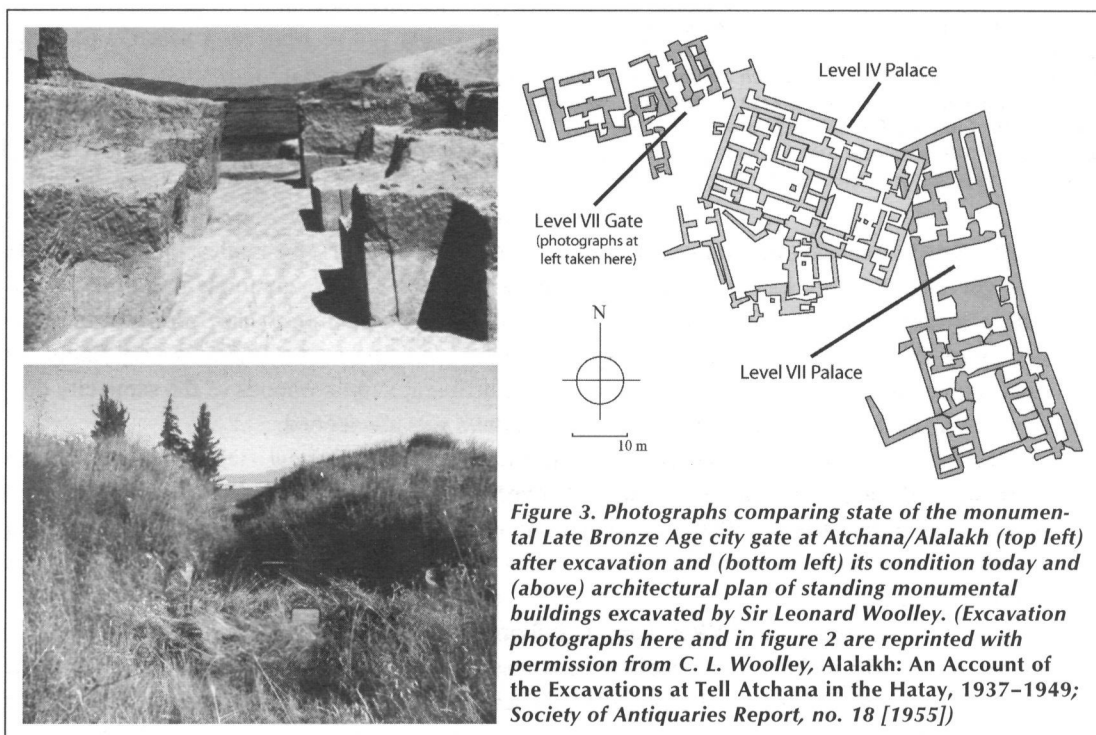


Figure 3. Photographs comparing state of the monumental Late Bronze Age city gate at Atchana/Alalakh (top left) after excavation and (bottom left) its condition today and (above) architectural plan of standing monumental buildings excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley. (Excavation photographs here and in figure 2 are reprinted with permission from C. L. Woolley, Alalakh: An Account of the Excavations at Tell Atchana in the Hatay, 1937–1949; Society of Antiquaries Report, no. 18 [1955])

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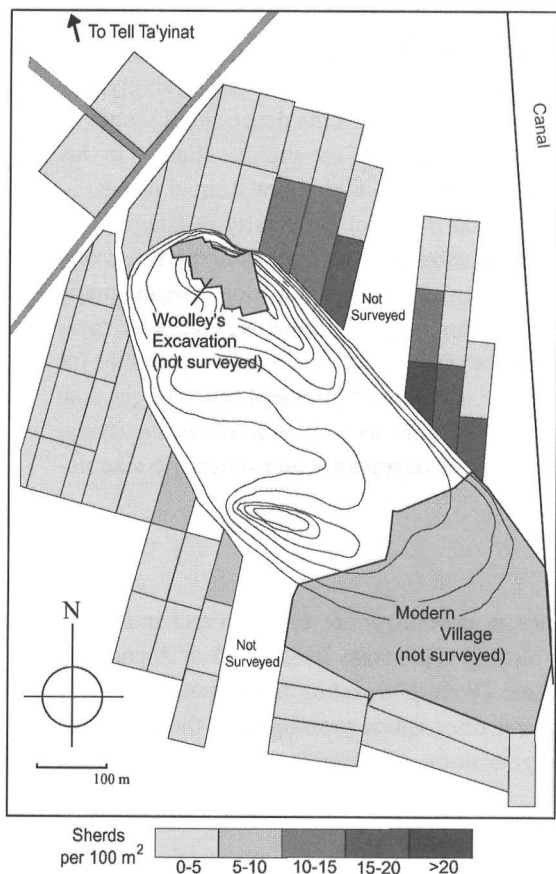


Figure 4. Map showing number of potsherds per 100 m sq. in agricultural fields surrounding mound of Tell Atchana. Geomorphological research demonstrates that the plain has risen 3 m since the Late Bronze Age, which accounts for low sherd densities in most fields. Higher sherd density on northeast may indicate presence of partially buried lower town. Map by Jesse Casana

Generally the core of a clear understanding of chronology at any site is pottery. Utilizing the Late Bronze Age ceramic sequence at Atchana has been hampered by the uneven presentation of the local ceramic corpus in the final published report. As is typical of older excavations, mostly whole pots have been reported. Subsequent chronological discussions have often relied upon the absence and presence of various Mediterranean imports, while Atchana sequences are used to date Aegean and eastern Mediterranean sites — circular reasoning at its best. To clarify the situation and supplement the ceramics acquired during section cleaning, any charcoal found will be collected for potential dendrochronological examination and shipped to Peter Kuniholm at Cornell University for calibration curves and precision radiocarbon dating. With the proposed column cleaning, a refined sequence can be derived providing some resolution of the nature of the Mediterranean and Aegean imports.

A topographical map of Tell Atchana and its surrounding fields is scheduled for 2001 using the topographic map produced in Woolley's publication as a benchmark. The precision of the Total Station will be employed to modify the published site plan and Woolley's trenches will have to be accurately positioned within this map. A large, modern, and still growing village (Atchana village-

Varisli Koy), obscuring the southeastern edge of the mound covers the southern third of the site and will need to be accurately plotted. This work will be done in conjunction with a similar mapping program at Tell Tayinat, located 700 m north, directed by Timothy Harrison from the University of Toronto. Tayinat, excavated by the Oriental Institute in the 1930s, is very likely the twin settlement of Atchana; these could be seen as different neighborhoods of the same city during the Early Bronze Age and Iron Ages when Alalakh was abandoned.

The excavations at Tell Kurdu will continue in 2001 with new field directors. Fokke Gerritsen and Rana Özbal of Northwestern University will take the lead at this important Ubaid period Chalcolithic site (c. 5000 BC). Several new trenches are planned especially of the Halaf period in the northern sector of the mound, which yielded several exciting large-scale buildings in the 1999 season.

In other branches of the AVRPP, Tony J. Wilkinson will continue his supervision of the 2001 survey which will include a reconnaissance across the foothills of the Amanus Mountains, the Delta of the Orontes River, and especially relevant for the contextual assessment of Alalakh, a special Oriental Institute project of spatial analyses which employs Geographical Information

Systems (GIS) to analyze settlement patterns and their interactions with the local environment spearheaded in the Amuq by Jesse Casana.

The last and final scheduled activity for the Amuq is the establishment of a dig house, laboratory facilities, and depot. Private donors have already contributed \$44,000 to this project, and the Oriental Institute is allocating its resources to the effort.

In conclusion, the AVR program is now addressing problems that are missing in the earlier excavations, while continuing the projects begun since 1995. Some of these issues have compelling implications for other regions, including the important transition from the Early Bronze Age to the regional states and empires of the second millennium BC. Attention is now turning to full analysis of surface collections and to a second phase of survey work on specific sites such as Tayinat and Atchana.

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