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<http://idw-online.de/en/news284370>Cooperation agreements, Research projects
Geosciences, History / archaeology
transregional, national**Archaeologists from Mainz University uncover ancient governor's palace in Turkey****International excavation project discovers hitherto undisturbed cremation sites**

Within the scope of an international rescue excavation project, a team of four archaeologists specialized in Middle Eastern affairs headed by Dr. Dirk Wicke (Institute of Egyptology and Ancient Oriental Studies) have unearthed parts of a Neo-Assyrian governor's palace dating back to 900-700 B.C. in a two-month excavation program amongst the ruins on Ziyaret Tepe Hill. The discoveries were extraordinary. The site in the south-east of Turkey (Diyarbakir province) is at risk from the construction of the Ilisu Dam. For several years now it has been investigated by teams from the universities of Akron (Ohio), Cambridge, Munich and Istanbul in a joint excavation project. Sponsorship from the research funds of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz in 2007 and 2008 gave its archaeologists the opportunity to become involved in this international and multi-disciplinary project. There are plans to continue the project for another three years. The Upper Tigris region came under the sway of the Assyrians in the middle of the second millennium B.C. They established their provincial capital in Tuschan which is identified today as Ziyaret Tepe. According to historical inscriptions by the Assyrian ruler Assurnasirpal II it is certain that the construction of an administration palace in Tuschan dates back to the year 882 B.C. The excavation sector of the Mainz team includes the area around the acropolis, which must have been subsumed by the governor's palace. Parts of the private residential area and a courtyard have already been uncovered. The main rooms were well equipped - amongst the findings were colorful wall paintings and a facility for an oven on wheels. Tiled bathrooms with proper sanitary fittings are proof of the high living standards at the end of the first pre-Christian millennium.

But the most unusual discovery was the excavation of cremation sites within the extensive courtyard area. Five have been found to date, two of which were undisturbed and contained opulent burial objects. In the rectangular graves of approximately 1.50 m x 2.00 m in size, for example, a considerable layer of ash and burned bones as well as numerous bronze vessels, sumptuous stone and ivory receptacles, carved ivory inlays, seals, and pearls were found. These items show the high status the people buried here enjoyed. They are believed to have been residents of the palace. These objects are very similar to those found in the Assyrian towns of Assur and Nimrud in modern day Iraq.

In addition to the cremation remains found this year, a rare treasure trove of more than 20 bronze vessels was discovered under the paving stones in the courtyard. These include a jug, a wine ladle, a sieve, several bowls and cups, mostly made from embossed bronze. These are now waiting to be restored. This will reveal their elaborate ornamentation which can already be made out under the corroded layer.

The archaeological research project at Ziyaret Tepe (Turkey) undertaken by the Middle East Archaeology Institute of Mainz University, which was set up 10 years ago, adds a new field archaeological portfolio alongside the excavations in Haft Tappeh and Tchogha Zanbil (Iran). It enables its students to work in the region in which they specialize and makes them part of an international research project.



discovery of a rare treasure trove of more than 20 bronze vessels under the paving stones in the courtyard
photo: by courtesy of the Ziyaret Tepe Archaeological Project



revealing the multicolored Assyrian plastering
photo: by courtesy of the Ziyaret Tepe Archaeological Project