



MISIÓN ARQUEOLÓGICA EN EL VALLE DEL MEDIO ÉUFRATES (SIRIA) PROYECTO UNIVERSIDADE DA CORUÑA - DGAM

In September 2004 an agreement between the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of the Ministry of Culture of Syria and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of A Coruña (Campus of Ferrol, Spain) was signed to create a joint Syrian-Spanish archaeological mission.

The main aim of this new project is the study of a region in Syria highly overlooked by contemporary archaeological research. This region consists of a section in the middle valley of the Euphrates river, located in the province of Deir ez-Zor. The geographic limits of the section under study are the following ones:

- Location within the province (*muhafaza*) of Deir ez-Zor.
- Northern Limit: Hanuqa/Halabiya (100 km to the south of ar-Raqqa).
- Southern Limit: Tall as-Sin (10 km to the Southeastern of Deir ez-Zor).
- Eastern and Western limits: 7 km to each bank of the Euphrates river.

The zone defined by these limits is 60 km long and 14 km wide, therefore comprising a total of 840 square kilometers.

The precedents

The middle valley of the Euphrates has been the object of several archaeological surveys from the 1970s. To date, four surveys have been undertaken by various archaeological teams:

-1976-1977: region between Deir ez-Zor and Meyadin (J.J. Roodenberg, Holland).

-1978-1979: region of Terqa-Tall Ashara (K. Simpson, USA).

-1982-1985: region between Deir ez-Zor and Abu Kemal (B. Geyer and J.Y. Monchambert, France).

-1983-1984: region between Tabqa and Halabiya (K. Kohlmeyer, Germany).

The publication of the results of these researches shows that the section of the Euphrates (60 km) located between Hanuqa/Halabiya and Deir ez-Zor remains unknown from an archaeological point of view. No survey has been made in the zone. In fact, according to all the available maps there are no identified archaeological deposits in this region, as the following example shows: in a map of Syria published by G. Lehmann in his recent book *Bibliographie to der und Surveys in Syrien archäologischen Fundstellen und Libanon* (2002) the existing emptiness between the city of Deir ez-Zor and Halabiya can be clearly observed. This emptiness, without a doubt fictitious, is merely due to a lack of research.

Archaeological research in this area is of vital importance, since it has never been the object of serious and systematic study. Recently, in 2003-2005, a Finnish team has made investigations in the zone, but they have been concentrated in the region of Gabal Bishri and the right bank of the Euphrates between Deir ez-Zor and Halabiya

Therefore the historical relevance of this sector of the Syrian Euphrates has not yet been recognized and is habitually represented by mistake as a simple thread of union between other sections of the river. Nevertheless, it has been a very active zone from a commercial point of view due to its strategic geographic position between the affluents Balih and Habur.

In fact, this project intends to study the use given to the Gorge of Hanuqa throughout the various historical periods. However, our scientific interest is mainly focused on the study of the Ancient and Middle Bronze Ages (III and II millennia BCE), particularly on the reconstruction of the northern border of the syro-mesopotamian kingdom of Mari between the date of its foundation, ca. 2900 BCE, and the date of its destruction by Hammurapi of Babylon, 1760 BCE.

