

## Excavation of a 9,000-year-old Water Well in Mesopotamia

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### 【Background】

The Mesopotamia Plain is well known as the birthplace of ancient civilization. Our study focuses on the Neolithic sites of northeast Syria in order to learn more about how early farming cultures developed, as the first step in their progress towards civilization.

It is not a simple task to find remains of such early sites in Mesopotamia because they are often hidden under the remains of later large-scale cities or buried under thick layers of alluvial soil. However, through a wide-scale survey conducted over three years in the 1990s, we discovered the Tell Seker al Aheimar site, one of the earliest farming sites in the area. Excavations, which began in 2000, are still continuing.

### 【Results】

From our nine years of excavations, we learned that a farming settlement first appeared here earlier than 9300 years ago,

that the settlers probably migrated here from the Anatolian mountain area and that they underwent many changes in their society after settling in this area. The pottery has been dated as the oldest in this region, and the find of a large clay goddess figurine may be evidence of a cultural tradition that would eventually evolve into the Mesopotamian civilization.

During the 2008 excavation, we found the remains of a water well about 4 meters deep in a stratum dated to about 9000 years ago (Fig.1). Since the site is located near a large river, it was a mystery as to why the inhabitants needed a well. One possible explanation is that sanitation was already a problem for the inhabitants of the settlement. As the settlement grew and population increased, the river might have been polluted with waste from livestock and people. The well may have been part of an effort to prevent polluted water from becoming a health hazard to

the people of the community. Therefore it may be the oldest example of a well being dug to gain access to a clean water source.

### 【Outlook】

We will widen the scope of our research into the well such as determining changes in the water table level in past ages and reconstruction of the ancient environment through soil analysis. Research is also in progress on ritual traces associated with the well that have been unearthed in the excavation.

We have also presented the results of our studies to the local public. In August 2008 the goddess figurine was placed on special exhibit at the National Museum of Damascus in Syria (Fig.2). We are currently preparing an exhibit on our research into the ancient well, to be shown at the same museum.



Fig. 1: Excavation of the well at Tell Seker al Aheimar site

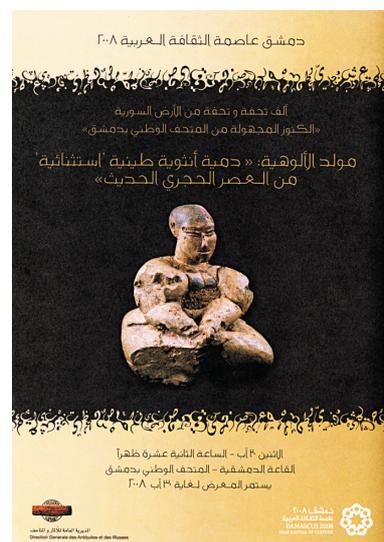


Fig. 2: Cover of leaflet of exhibit of goddess figurine

### Related Grants-in-Aid for Scientific Research:

FY2001-2003 Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B): "Archeological Study of the Origins and Expansion of Early Farming Settlements in the North Mesopotamia Plain"

FY2004-2007 Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B): "The Origins of Early Farming Cultures in the North Mesopotamia Plain"

FY2008-2009 Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B): "Reconstruction of Social Change and the Paleoenvironment in Neolithic Mesopotamia, 7000 BC"