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Tell Afis, an Aramaean Capital of Syria: Excavations and History

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Presentation

Sixteen years ago the second edition of *The Italian Excavations of Tell Afis (Syria): from chiefdom to an Aramaean state* was printed, aiming to offer a general description of the main results of the annual excavation campaigns in Tell Afis.

New discoveries were added that enhanced our knowledge of the history of the community of this site over the course of 4 millennia; but only three archaeological campaigns could be accomplished in 2008-2009-2010 which also, however, produced new important documents.

October 2010 was our last campaign in Tell Afis and was dedicated to digging the layers under the Iron I Temple on the acropolis, the main monumental building of the renewed town that became the capital of the Aramaean kingdom.

The political crisis in Syria came abruptly and the country was isolated, no longer accessible to scholars or archaeologists. Many areas became object of spoliation, illicit excavations and museum looting, a dramatic situation for the cultural heritage of Syria that accompanied the scenario of danger and death which confronted the Syrian people. During these crisis years studies on the findings from the excavations were intensified with the intention of disseminating the archaeological heritage of Syria and the important role of the civilisations that gave this Near Eastern country its identity. More attention was given to presenting the data, the pottery and other objects and to providing information on materials that may have disappeared from the museum of Idlib and mission house's deposits. This was the only way to keep "save and alive", to document the archaeological evidence that could not have survived the crisis.

This new edition aims to offer a sort of guide across the history of Tell Afis as revealed by the archaeological documents brought to light in more than forty years of excavations. During this long period after the first activities carried out in the seventies by the University of Rome "La Sapienza", the Universities of Pisa, Bologna and lastly Florence carried out a summer campaign and often a winter campaign every year. The multidisciplinary project included archaeologists, epigraphists, anthropologists, paleobotanists, the team of restorers and topographer, and many students from Syrian, European and American universities also took part in the field campaigns, often preparing dissertations on archaeological materials and data from Tell Afis.

We owe the success of the research and excavations at Tell Afis to the much appreciated support of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of the Arab Republic of Syria, to the Directors and the officials of the various sections of the Directorate who, in these forty years, granted us friendly cooperation and facilitated our work in the country. The officials of the museum of Idlib and many inspectors offered their constant and generous assistance during the work and, lastly, the workers of the village of Afis who laboured at all times with commitment and constancy.

The excavations were sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAECI), and we express our gratitude to the Ambassadors in Damascus and Consuls in Aleppo with their staff who sustained us during these years. The Universities of Bologna, Florence, Pisa, Rome “La Sapienza”, the Foundation OrMe, Fondazione per l’Oriente Mediterraneo and the Ministry of Universities and Research financed the project of Tell Afis.

For many years our lives were spent in Syria with all these people, with friends, students, and colleagues. They went on to follow different paths, in Syria and outside the country, in isolated regions of Syria as Idlib now is, or in its famous cities, Damascus, Aleppo and Hama as well as in other countries such as Italy, France and Turkey. The historical and archaeological heritage of Syria represents an identity for all of them, with different cultures, regional aspects, various languages and religions that still today constitute the rich patrimony of the peoples of Syria.

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