Preface

Japanese Contributions to Levantine Archaeology

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This special issue focuses on the archaeology of the Levant. It is a good time to present the current state of Japanese research in the area, because our archaeological field work in the Levant started exactly fifty years ago with the excavation of the skeletal remains of a Neanderthal man at Amud Cave, Israel, by H. Suzuki of the University of Tokyo.

In 1964, an excavation at the Bronze and Iron Age city site, Tel Zeror, Israel, was started in commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Society for the Near Eastern Studies in Japan (director: K. Ohata; K. Goto in 1974). This excavation lasted four seasons, and paved the way for further excavations at tell sites in the region. In 1974 excavations at Tell Rumeilah and Tell Mishrifat, Syria, were started by N. Egami of Sophia University and they were succeeded by the newly established Ancient Orient Museum, Tokyo. The Ancient Orient Museum also excavated at Tell Mastuma, Syria, from 1980 (director: N. Egami; S. Wakita from 1993).

Since then, Japanese archaeological research in the region has developed in various directions. After Amud Cave, H. Suzuki extended his prehistoric work to Lebanon and Syria. Other excavations in the prehistoric period in the region were conducted at Douara Cave and Dederiyeh Cave in Syria by T. Akazawa and others, and the excavation at Dederiyeh Cave is presently continuing.

Japanese excavations at Neolithic sites were first conducted at Tell Kashkashok II, Syria, by T. Matsutani (the University of Tokyo) in 1987, and since 1994 he has worked at the site Tell Kosak Shamali, Syria. One of the new generation of archaeologists, Y. Nishiaki (the University of Tokyo), started an excavation at Tell Seker al-Aheimar in the upper Khabur region in Syria in 2001. T. Iwasaki (University of Tsukuba) conducted a regional survey at Rouj Basin, Syria, in 1990, and this work was developed to the excavations at Tell el-Kerkh by A. Tsuneki (University of Tsukuba). In 1998 S. Fujii (Kanazawa University) started the excavations at Qa 'Abu Tulayha West in the southern desert area of Jordan.

After the excavations at Tel Zeror, a new excavation at the Bronze and Iron Age site was conducted at Tel 'En Gev, Israel, by a consortium of Japanese

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universities, the Japanese Archaeological Project in the Biblical Land (director: H. Kanaseki, Tenri University, from 1987; A. Tsukimoto, Rikkyo University, from 1999). Although this excavation ended in 2004, the excavation at the same site was resumed by Keio University from 2009 (director: D. T. Sugimoto). The consortium started another excavation at Tel Rekhes, Israel, (director: A. Tsukimoto) in 2006. In Syria, the work at Tell Mastuma continued until 1995, and its excavation report was recently published. In 1987 work on a sunken ship near Tartus, Syria was carried out. In 1997, Kokushikan University organized an excavation at Tell Taban, Syria (K. Onuma and H. Numoto), which yielded a large number of cuneiform tablets.

An excavation at Palmyra, Syria, conducted by the Research Center for Silk Roadology, Nara (director: T. Higuchi; K. Saito from 2006), is a work on a Hellenistic-Roman period site; it was started in 1987 and has extended the area that it researches and preserves. In 1998 surveys and excavations from the same period at Tyre, Lebanon, were started by T. Izumi of the University of Kyoto, and in 2005 Kokushikan University (director: K. Matsumoto) started an excavation and a training program for the preservation of cultural heritage at one of the Decapolis cities, Tell Umm Qais, Jordan; these works are still continuing today.

Thus, we can see that Japanese archaeological work in the Levant has grown greatly in the last fifty years and that a new generation of archaeologists is emerging. Preliminary reports of the various excavations in West Asia are presented once a year at the Ancient Orient Museum, Tokyo; in 2009 twenty-four reports of separate missions from all over West Asia were presented, and fourteen were from the Levant. It is evident that energetic archaeological work is being conducted by Japanese missions in the region, although research has been affected this year by political events in West Asia and by the great earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

This special issue is intended to be a window on Japanese archaeological work in the Levant. Articles by Kadowaki and Tsuneki focus on the Neolithic period; both are based on the author's own field works in Jordan and in Syria. Onozuka develops a typology of oil presses from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age based on the work at Tel Rekhes, Israel, and Nishiyama suggests a new interpretation of a structure found at Tell Mastuma, Syria. Sugimoto interprets "tree of life" decoration found on Iron Age pottery uncovered from several sites in the southern Levant. Okada observes two different attitudes toward preservation and utilization of church sites in Israel by different agencies from a public archaeology perspective.

It will be my pleasure if the reader gets a sense of the vigorous researches conducted by Japanese scholars in the field of Levantine archaeology.