



RESEARCH CENTER FOR WEST ASIAN CIVILIZATION



The University of Tsukuba

The preliminary foundation stage of the Research Center for West Asian Civilization was nominated for a “Pre Strategic-Initiative” by the Organization for the Support and Development of Strategic Initiatives, University of Tsukuba, Japan, in 2010. It opened as a provisional research center and aims to establish itself as an inter-disciplinary research center focusing on the ancient civilization of West Asia by 2013. Its main activities are centered on the following four operations.

1. Field Project support

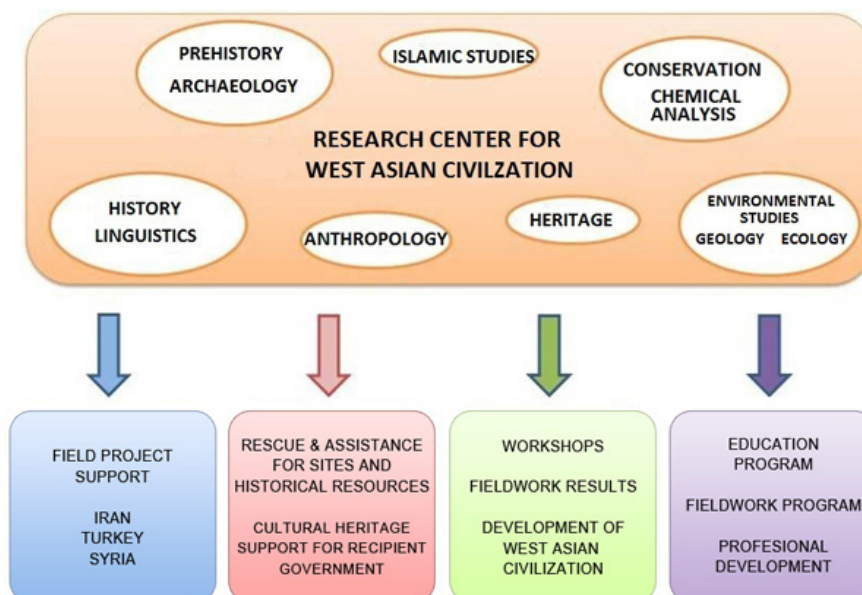
The center supports a wide range of field projects, which have so far been conducted by individual researchers of the University of Tsukuba, in various West Asian regions such as Iran, Turkey and Syria. It aims to facilitate and mediate communication between each project and function as a research center which assembles the latest academic information as well as technical know-how to conduct field research in the region.

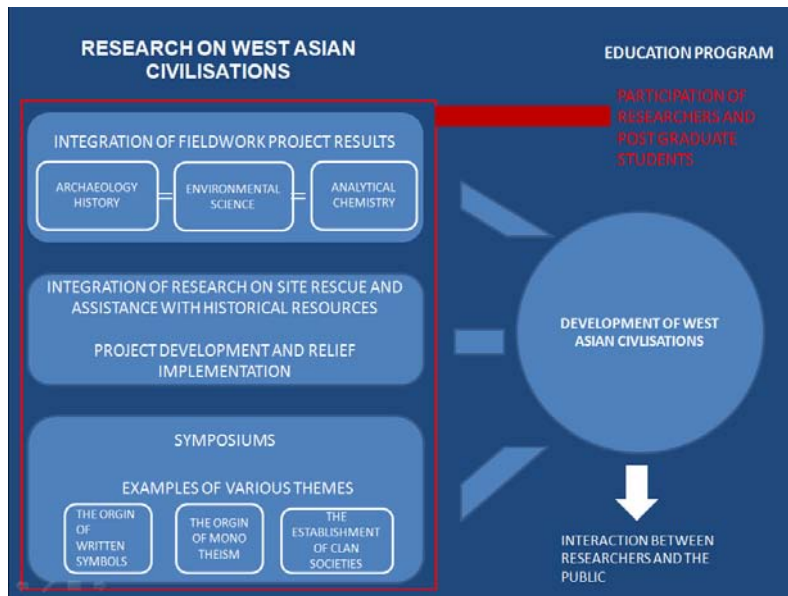
2. Rescue and assistance for sites and historical resources

In response to requests from West Asian nations the centre plans to facilitate rescue projects for cultural heritage under threat and contribute to the conservation and research of archaeological sites and historical resources.

3. Workshops on West Asian Civilizations

International symposiums and local workshops are organized on a regular basis. This provides an inter-disciplinary setting for researchers working on the ancient civilization of West Asia from different fields of study, including human science, in particular archaeology, history and linguistics; environmental science mainly geology and ecology; and chemical science involving material analysis and conservation of cultural property. In addition, the center promotes the exchange of researchers through the invitation of foreign researchers to Japan and by supporting Japanese researchers visiting overseas.





4. Education Program

Field research education programs are organized for post graduate and undergraduate students through which the students are expected to acquire practical knowledge of field work. In addition, students can participate in the workshops and symposiums where they can obtain feedback of their research from professional researchers.

In modern times the regional, political, economic and cultural differences of West Asia have often been treated in an adversarial manner by the rest of the world. This background bias against Islam by western societies and the opposition to western discourse by West Asia is reflected in this clash of civilisations and in the representation of western culture as a scapegoat. In Japan, Islam and the Middle East have mainly been understood through western filters with the associated connotations of danger and difference.

For those of us who have had direct involvement in research in this area over the years and who know the richness and diversity and the social and cultural nature of Western Asian society the above viewpoint causes concern. In other words without understanding the pre-Islamic civilization of Western Asia it is difficult to understand both modern Arab and non-Arab Islamic society. In depth study of West Asian civilization shows that the development of wheat farming; urban societies and even Christianity, foundations of modern western society have their origins in Western Asia. In addition, the study of West Asian civilizations is crucial for understanding contemporary Islamic society and to use as a base to deepen mutual understanding in the modern world.

The planning initiative for this research center is to facilitate communication and information dissemination between university researchers already working in West Asia and involve early career researchers (including graduate students) in field projects and research.

ORGANIZATION

The Research Center for West Asian Civilizations is based in the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba and is administered by a group of core researchers and teachers with the

following roles:

Center Director: Prof. Akira Tsuneki

Field Project Support: Dr. Yutaka Miyake

Rescue & Assistance for Sites and Historical Resources: Dr. Yoko Taniguchi

Organization of symposiums and workshops on West Asian Civilizations: Prof. Shigeo Yamada

Education Program: Prof. Jun Ikeda

BACKGROUND

There are a number of research organizations specializing in Islamic Studies in Japan however there is no center which focuses specifically on the environment, culture and society of pre-Islamic West Asia and the development of professional researchers in this area. In contrast, the west has a long tradition of research on the ancient history and archaeology of West Asia prior to the Islamic Period including the training and development of many distinguished scholars. This includes public education initiatives and the dissemination of significant research results to the public in various ways.

There are a number of researchers and graduate students at the university currently involved in research on the archaeology, history, culture and linguistics of West Asian Civilizations. The university also has researchers from the disciplines of plant ecology, environmental science and geology experienced in West Asian research. In establishing the Research Center for West Asian Civilizations and facilitating cooperation amongst researchers we hope to integrate the results from various projects and develop a new integrated research approach combining natural sciences and the humanities.



Planned Activities

2010-2011 ACADEMIC YEAR

Support for Field Projects

The Research Center for West Asian Civilizations supports field projects underway by center researchers. These include: the study of the dispersal of modern humans in southern Iran; focus on research and analysis of the changes in Neolithic social systems in Turkey; clarification of the process involved in urban development and city formation in Syria; deciphering of cuneiform clay tablets of the second millennium BC.

Rescue & Assistance for Sites and Historical Resources

Through co-operation and consultation with government officials in local and national governments the Center plans to provide cultural heritage support for sites and heritage objects under threat. This includes the conservation of clay cuneiform tablets from Tell Taban in Syria as part of a larger project on the conservation of unfired clay artifacts from Western Asia. Planning is also underway to conserve and protect the monuments and murals of the rock hewn churches of Cappadocia, Turkey. The scientific and chemical analysis of archaeological material recovered from sites in West Asia is also ongoing.



Conferences and workshops on West Asian Civilizations

The Research Center for West Asian Civilizations hosted an international colloquium on Assyrian philology on the 9 – 10 October at the Tsukuba International Conference Centre. In addition, an international symposium on Neolithic research in West Asia was held at the University of Tsukuba on 12 December with a follow up public lecture in Tokyo on hosted by the Ancient Orient Museum. The research seminar series of the Center began in November 2010 with subsequent seminars being held in a regular basis. The aim of this series is to disseminate research undertaken by center researchers in the fields of archaeology, history and the natural and physical sciences and facilitate cooperation amongst researchers as well as to integrate the results from various projects and develop a new integrated research approach combining science and the humanities.

Education Programs

Each field work project including the archaeological surveys in Syria and Turkey provides graduate students with field experience and technical and research 'know-how' to conduct their own research in the future. The educational program includes lectures aimed at graduate students as well giving students the opportunity to hone their own research and presentation skills.

2011-2012 ACADEMIC YEAR

Support for Field Projects

The Center will continue its support for field projects scheduled for Iran, Syria and Turkey during the summer (July - August).

Rescue & Assistance for Sites and Historical Resources

On the basis of research undertaken the previous year new projects are being considered for assistance. Candidate sites currently include those in Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and Lebanon.

Conferences on West Asian Civilizations

The regular seminar series re-commences with the 4th seminar to be held in October followed by the 5th and 6th seminar to be held by March 2012. These will be held in collaboration with experts from the fields of environmental science and analytical chemistry including invitations for overseas researchers to attend.

Education Programs

Implementation of field education and center programs.

2012-2013 ACADEMIC YEAR

By the end of the year the Center hopes to collate the results of three years research and co-operation amongst staff and submit the final proposal to establish the Research Center for West Asian Civilizations.

Support for Field Projects

As in the previous year summer field projects will be undertaken in Iran, Syria and Turkey.

Rescue & Assistance for Sites and Historical Resources

An important initiative of the Research Center for West Asian Civilization is the selection and implementation of assistance for sites and cultural heritage objects at risk. This program which was expanded in 2011 will continue in 2012.

Conferences on West Asian Civilizations

The regular seminar series re-commences with the 7th seminar to be held in October and the 8th scheduled for January 2013. The seminar in October will focus on presentations from the field projects and larger studies on the theme of civilization in West Asia and will include invited speakers from overseas. Presenters at the January seminar will be limited to university researchers reporting on the overall results of the Pre Strategic-Initiative during the previous three years.



Education Programs

The field education program and other education programs will be conducted as usual.

As it will be three years since the establishment of the Pre Strategic-Initiative of the Research Center for West Asian Civilization the Center hopes to publish a report detailing its activities and results. This will not only include research results and activities but also the organization and direction for the establishment of the Research Center for West Asian Civilizations as a Center for Excellence at the University of Tsukuba.

Current Research

FIELDWORK UNDERTAKEN BY UNIVERSITY OF TSUKUBA RESEARCHERS

El-Rouj Basin Project (Syrian Arab Republic)

A University of Tsukuba archaeological team has been conducting fieldwork in the El-Rouj basin, north western Syria since the 1990s. Since 1997, Akira Tsuneki (Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences) has undertaken investigation of the site of Tell el-Kerkh. Occupation of the site from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic to the Pottery Neolithic (about 11,000 to 8,000 years ago) reflects the initial process of the change in early societies from village to city life. Hundreds of human bones ranging in body size were recovered from the village graveyard. (Further Information at: <http://www.sakura.cc.tsukuba.ac.jp/~elrouj/index.html>)



Salat Cami Yani (Republic of Turkey)

Salat Cami Yani is a Pottery Neolithic site (about 9000 – 8000 years ago) located upstream in the Tigris basin of eastern Turkey. Yutaka Miyake (Associate Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences) at the



University of Tsukuba has been head of the excavation team at the site from 2004 to 2010. Excavation has uncovered settlements inhabited for hundreds of years, including pise buildings, cooking facilities as well as infant burials located in the dwellings. The discovery of pottery at the site similar to the oldest pottery type in West Asia provides an important opportunity to extend research on the use of pottery in West Asia. (Further Information at: <http://www.histanth.tsukuba.ac.jp/~tap/scy>)

RESCUE PROJECTS FOR ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Tablet decryption at Tell Taban (Syrian Arab Republic)

Assyriologists at the University of Tsukuba, Prof. Shigeo Yamada and Dr. Daisuke Shibata have been involved in the deciphering of cuneiform tablets from Tell Taban. The director of the project at Tell Taban is Hirotohi Numoto (Professor of Kokushikan University) and excavations at Tell Taban (ancient name Tabetu) have unearthed hundreds of administrative documents, written in Akkadian, from the Old Babylonian and Middle Assyrian periods. The deciphering of these documents has revealed political, economic and social aspects of this society from varied perspectives. Decoding of the tablets is ongoing and the

results are expected to extend understanding of this period of history.

Tang-e Bolaghi (Islamic Republic of Iran)

The construction of a river dam in the Fars region, Iran led to the commencement of the Sivand Dam rescue project in the Bolaghi valley in 2005. A joint team from University of Tsukuba (headed by Prof. Akira Tsuneki) and the Cultural Affairs Bureau of Iran's Archaeological Heritage and Tourism Authority (ICAR) surveyed and excavated late Palaeolithic to early Neolithic sites in the Bolaghi valley with a view to clarifying transhumance and dispersal patterns for each period of occupation.



CONFERENCES ORGANIZED BY THE RESEARCH CENTER FOR WEST ASIAN CIVILIZATION

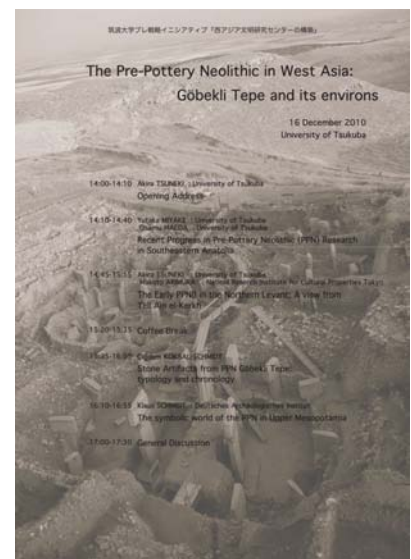
The Third Sakura Meeting

The Research Center for West Asian Civilization hosted the Third Sakura Meeting on “Geography and Culture on the Habur and the Euphrates” on October 9-10, 2010 at the Tsukuba International Conference Center. The debate and discussion of cuneiform tablets from ancient West Asia included top class researchers from around the world including invitees from France and Japan.

International Symposium

“The Pre-Pottery Neolithic in West Asia: Göbekli Tepe and its environs”

On December 16, 2010, an international symposium sponsored by the Research Center for West Asia Civilization was held at the University of Tsukuba. Prof. Klaus Schmidt from the German Archaeological Institute and a director of the excavation team at Göbekli Tepe in south-eastern Turkey was an invited speaker. The symposium included presentations by researchers from the Research Center for West Asian Civilization as well as a presentation on the latest research and publications on work being undertaken at Göbekli Tepe, the world's oldest ceremonial centre. On December 18 a public lecture was held in Tokyo in collaboration with the Ancient Orient Museum.



Research Seminars

The regular seminar series of the Research Center for West Asian Civilizations commenced in November 2010 with subsequent seminars at a regular basis. The presentations by staff members of the center included information on current research and focused on a different theme: archaeology, geology and philology and conservation science.

EDUCATION PROGRAM

Lecture by Dr. Josef Kanjou



On November 8, 2010 the Research Center for West Asian Civilization invited Dr. Joseph Kanjou from the Aleppo National Museum of the Syrian Arab Republic to give a presentation to students and graduate students as part of the center's ongoing education program. The lecture focused on human remains and burials from Levantine Neolithic sites.

West Asia represents a dramatic historical landscape which repeatedly marked important turning points in human history. This long historical development of human society is so important that it has formed the social and cultural foundation of every society in the modern world. It is expected that the Research Center for West Asian Civilization at the University of Tsukuba will be at the forefront of world-wide research and research communities in this area.

Updated information is available at our website:
http://rcwasia.hass.tsukuba.ac.jp/rcwac_en/index.html

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