

Archaeometric Investigation of basaltic fragments of Aramaic Sculptures from Tell Halaf, Syria

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Tell Halaf is the modern name of the Aramaic city of Guzāna in north-eastern Syria, near the border to Turkey. It was built approximately 1000 B.C. after the decline of the Hittite empire. Max von Oppenheim (1860-1946) explored the site in the years 1911-1913 and 1929 after a reconnaissance excavation in 1899. Parts of the monuments of the so-called Western Palace, famous for its entrance façade with columns shaped as monumental deities standing on their sacred animals, are now exhibited in the National Museum of Aleppo/Syria. Other parts were brought to Berlin in 1928, where they were presented in a provisional Tell Halaf Museum in Charlottenburg which opened in 1930. During World War II the museum was completely destroyed by bombing during an air raid in 1943, but fragments of the statues and artefacts were recovered and stored in the Pergamon Museum, more or less forgotten until 1993. It is planned to incorporate the restored entrance of the Western Palace of Tell Halaf in the Pergamon Museum as the new entry to the Museum of the Ancient Near East in 2019.

The Tell Halaf-Project is supported by the DFG, the Bankhaus Sal. Oppenheim jr. & Cie., the Sal. Oppenheim-Stiftung and the Alfred von Oppenheim-Stiftung. In 2001 the project started with the sorting and restoration of the art works. In 2005, however, many fragments were still without correct assignment. Assignment of the missing pieces based on petrographic criteria was one of the major archaeometric tasks. The statues were made from rocks of basaltic flows, with minor heterogeneity, comprising massive as well as amygdaloidal types. Most statues were made from monolithic blocks, however, which was the prerequisite for a correct assignment. Another archaeometric question was the exact place of the original quarries in the area, where the Aramaic people extracted the raw material. In addition, some of the statues were severely damaged during the fire and show black carbon staining from burnt tar; almost all limestone artwork was completely destroyed. One of our projects focused on the reconstruction of the events during WW II.

Further information:

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- Drüppel K.** (2010): Herkunft Stein und Analyse der Brandreste. In: Cholidis, N., Martin, L. (Ed.): Tell Halaf Band 5: Tell Halaf – Im Krieg zerstörte Denkmäler und ihre Restaurierung. De Gruyter, Berlin, 381-417.
- Drüppel K., Kratzig A., Brätz H., Martin L., Franz G., Geismeyer S.** (2010): Aramaic basalt statues from Tell Halaf, Syria: locating the ancient quarries.- *Archaeometry* 53, 441–468.
- Drüppel K., Lehmann C.** (2009): Firebombing of the Tell Halaf Museum in Berlin during World War II – new insights based on mineralogical observations.- *European Journal of Mineralogy* 21: 443-456.

