

the German Orient-Comité and the Berlin Museum.

The German expedition determined the city walls and gates of Iron Age (about 3,000 years ago) Sam'al and exposed several palaces and other large structures on the eight-hectare upper mound. This mound is the remains of the original Bronze Age (about 3,200-5,000 years ago) settlement. It lies in the middle of the 40-hectare site and rises 15 metres above the surrounding plain. Dozens of sculpted stone pieces were recovered and are now in museums in Istanbul and Berlin, including statues of lions and sphinxes.

The focus of the modern dig is to learn more about the society through detailed analysis of the finds, including foundations, pottery, stone objects, lithics (stone spear-points, blades etc), iron, brass, bones and seeds. The current stage of the dig is the Iron Age, with the goal to reach down to the Bronze Age palace that lies below.

In 2008, this dig produced one of the top 10 finds in the world. An eighth century B.C. funerary marker, a stele, was found. Its inscription clearly described how the soul played an important role in these peoples' afterlife, providing new insights into their lives.

My official title was assistant square supervisor (forget the acronym, please). My square supervisor, as most of the 15 or so supervisors were, was a 20-something student of archaeology.

Let me talk a bit about this remarkable crew. They all read and/or write dead languages. They are off the brightness scale at whichever university they study, tend to be a bit eccentric, and are delightful. These folks are focused, driven and fun to be around. Over twice their age and easily the oldest person working the dig, I never once felt ageism— I was one of the crew, and accepted as such. In addition, there was an array of very well-chosen support staffers who were fantastic in working behind the scenes to keep a really complicated operation running smoothly.

Part 3: A day in the life of the dig

Back home in Canada, there are many mosques near where I live and work. The daily calls to prayer occur at home just as they occur in Turkey, with a major exception. Given that Turkey is 99 per cent Muslim, the calls to prayer can be heard everywhere—including the first one at 4 a.m. Welcome to the day! Even though the call was sung in Turkish, we could have sworn that at the very end, the imam sang, "Archaeologists get up!"

First breakfast was tea or coffee, tomato and cucumber, fresh bread and jam. Loud rock music pounded on the overtaxed speakers as the bus took us the three kilometres to the dig. We would arrive as the sun rose over the beautiful mountains in the east, meeting the local workers who were already there.

Within 10 minutes, we were at work. Under the guidance of the area supervisor, square supervisors would have prepared what they wanted to focus on, and away we went.

Local labourers tended to use the larger picks, and I would work on finer details, except one day when we were trying to get the guys to really dig hard at the walls to make them vertical. It would have taken them weeks to do the job at their pace.

Enter Don.

By this time, they respectfully called me "grandfather" as I was two to three times their age. I picked up the large pick and thrashed away at the wall— really hard and deep— ripping out hunks of earth the size of footballs. They watched me for about 30 seconds until the embarrassment factor kicked in. This old guy was showing them up at what they could clearly do better. So they took the pick from my hands, and we never had another problem getting them to do the hard slugging. My hot tub back home was calling my name that night!



A stone blank for one of the Zincirli lions, at the quarry at Yesemek. One wonders how these 10-ton behemoths were transported 35 kilometres to Zincirli 3,000 years ago.

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