The ruins of Metsamor, a Bronze Age fortified city and cemetery, sit on and around a volcanic hill within sight of Mount Ararat. The site also has to have been an ancient astronomical observatory. For over 40 years, until 2007, the ruins were excavated by an Armenian team directed by Emma Harutunyan and Yurik Aghababyan. Archaeologists explored the ruins of a fortress from the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, uncovering evidence of earlier occupation in the form of round houses from the 3rd millennium BC. The team also discovered a meteorological center comprising workshops and storehouses that occupied the site by the end of the 2nd millennium and two temples that were purely religious. In the early 1st millennium BC, investigations of the cemetery yielded over a hundred richly equipped graves from the Bronze and Iron Ages. Metsamor today is an archaeological reserve with its own museum opened in 1970, housing the finds from the site.

Armenian-Polish project

In 2013 the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology and the Institute of Archaeology of the University of Warsaw embarked on a joint archaeological project with the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of Sciences of Armenia and the Ministry of Culture of Armenia. It is the first Polish archaeological project in Armenia.

The team focused on a large settlement from the transition from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age located on a northern hill terrace. Four different buildings were uncovered, the most interesting being an oval structure with large storage vessels still in place alongside a hearth. Buried here under a thick layer of ash — remains of the roof were unearthed — were a few small objects, including a stone casting mould. The configuration may illustrate a historical event: the invasion of King Arzni of Urartu, whose army swept through the Ararat Valley in the beginning of the 8th century BC.

The excavations also revealed evidence for another violent conquest, this time of the Urartian settlement from the early 8th century BC. Two headless skeletons of men killed in the fighting were unearthed, as well as many iron knives and slingthrow pellets. The town never fully recovered from the disaster. A number of graves from the 1st century AD that were dug into the ruins show that in time the abandoned area came to serve as a burial ground for the local inhabitants.

Three seasons of work by the Polish Armenian team have yielded large quantities of pottery representing a fine millennia of occupation (from the 3rd millennium BC to the 1st century AD). Finds have also included ossuary arrow points, bone pins and awls, sandstone and faience beads, bronze rings and decorated stone elements of horse harnesses.

Polish Armenian archaeological cooperation also undertakes a public and student-oriented program of information about the discoveries, from media coverage to honorary annual two scientific conferencess on the archaeology of Armenia were held at the University of Warsaw (in 2013 and 2015), and a conference on current research was organized at the Metsamor museum as was an exhibition showing an overview of University of Warsaw fieldwork abroad. Future work will concentrate on the extent and layout of the early iron Age Lower City in Metsamor and on confirming the data of its foundation. Another objective is the investigation of the nearby cemetery in search of graves from the late Bronze Age I, early Iron Age, which could shed some light on the history of the city of the 15th century BC.

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1999 (since 2000 under the present name). The project has to expand its scope of interest to include the Aegean Peninsula and the Cyclades. Currently there are about 30 projects in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus, Crete, Lebanon, Iran, Kurdistan, Jordan, Israel, Africa, Armenia and Georgia. It is also connected to Research Center in Cologne.

For more information on the PICA (UK) go to: www.pcmcs.uj.edu.pl/; www.facebook.com/pcmcs.uk

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw is the largest archaeological institute in Central Europe. Established in 1917, it now employs almost 130 scholars in different associations, securing valuable work in the fields of archaeology, ethnography, physical anthropology, archaeozoology, as well as remote sensing and field documentation techniques.

For more information on this site (UK) go to: www.archae.uj.edu.pl