

Russian Archaeological Mission in the Republic of Yemen: Preliminary results of its campaign in 2008

This year the Russian Archaeological Mission undertook the excavations on the island of Socotra from November 13 to 27, 2008. The main object of the archaeological explorations was the site of Hajrya situated to the south-east of Ḥadîbô. Here the field works were undertaken at three trenches.

The RAMRY explored a segment of the fence which surrounded this settlement. For the most part, it represents an ashlar with the width of 0.65 m.

One more object of the excavations was a part (5 x 5 m) of a large construction identified as the main building of the settlement. Its walls are made of stone. The RAMRY archaeologists found a place of its door (0.85 m wide) through which it had been possible to penetrate into the building.

An interesting construction situated to the south-east of the main building was excavated completely. It has a rectangular form (7 x 3 m) with a slightly curved angles. The construction is divided into three parts by two low parallel walls. Three stelae made of big undressed stones are dug in its floor. Probably this building had been used as a sanctuary.

There are some reasons to suppose that the site of Hajrya would date from the pre-Islamic period.

The member of the RAMRY Mr. Valery Zhukov discovered Stone Age sites for the first time on the island of Socotra. He gathered a large collection of tools which can be approximately identified as Early Palaeolithic.

As to the epigraphist of the RAMRY, Dr. Serge Frantsouzoff, his main task consisted in filling in the most considerable lacunae in the epigraphic documentation of the Soviet-Yemenite Multidisciplinary Expedition, namely in taking photographs of the inscriptions discovered at Raybûn XIV (temple Mayfa'ân of the god Siyân) in 1987, 1989 and party in 1988 and in measuring and describing the most important items among them. In the course of his

work (from November 10 to 16) in the Museum of Say'ûn, where all these objects are conserved, he took 855 digital photographs of 598 inscriptions, among which 315 had been found in 1987, 42 – in 1988 and 241 – in 1989, and carried out the detailed descriptions of 47 items (for the most part, of large fragmentary stelae).

It should be noted that some of the texts found first in 1987 were practically rediscovered this year, since no information on them had been kept in the archives of the Soviet-Yemenite Expedition. They proved to contain very interesting data on the Hadramitic language as well as on pre-Islamic religious rites of the inhabitants of ancient Raybûn, for instance, on previously unknown votive objects, such as *nfd-m* “fruits fallen from trees” (Rb XIV/87 n° 61 a-c/5-6; Rb XIV/87 n° 88 a-b/5) and *'kwt|s^lr'-m* “black lambs with white rear parts” (Rb XIV/87 n° 88 a-b/6-7).

Hadîbô

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