The Ministry of Communications and Works, Department of Antiquities, announces the completion of the 2011 field season at the Late Bronze Age harbour city of Hala Sultan Tekke, near Larnaka International Airport. The excavations, which took place during April and May and lasted five weeks, were conducted under the direction of Prof. Peter M. Fischer of the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

This year’s investigations uncovered a large building dating to approx. 1200 BC. The discovery of the building was made possible through the use of ground penetrating radar in 2010. Ground penetrating radar can best be described as “X-ray pictures” of the subsurface ground. It has been demonstrated at Hala Sultan Tekke that the radar waves can penetrate into the soil down to 2 m depth beneath the surface. The radar images were amazingly detailed: not only where the outlines of a large building made clear but also details such as single rooms with their entrances. The building, which is approximately 30 m by 20 m in size, contains living and working spaces. Spindle whorls and loom weights were found in the workshops pointing to a local production of textiles. Sea shells were also found which were used to dye the textiles purple. Frequent finds of melted lead and copper slag demonstrate that metal objects were produced on site. Amongst the discovered metal objects were beads, weights and tools of bronze and lead.

The living rooms produced an astonishing variety of high-quality pottery much of which was imported mainly from the Mycenaean world (Greece and the Greek archipelago). The pottery assemblage includes jugs, bowls, craters and jars. Locally produced pottery includes Base-ring Ware which is thought to have been produced in order to imitate metal and is very hard-fired. Juglets and jugs of this ware have proved to contain remains of opium but were also used to carry other liquids. The assemblage also includes the locally produced White Slip Ware which was very popular throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. White Slip bowls and jugs have a very bright appearance and are decorated with complicated patterns in red, brown and black colours. These vessels were exported to the Levant, Egypt, Greece and Anatolia and a few have also been found in Italy.
Two of this season’s most important finds are a haematite cylinder seal engraved with six scenes of religious significance. Cylinder seals were used as stamps by important persons. The origin of this cylinder seal is most likely Syria. Another find is a rather unique figurine of a black and white marbled stone depicting a female goddess. The figurine may have been imported from as far as Mesopotamia which roughly corresponds to today’s Iraq.

The excavations demonstrate that the ancient city’s life is characterised by (at least) three phases of habitation, stretching from approximately 1450 BC to around 1200 BC. It seems, however, that the foundations of this city go even further back in time judging from the pottery found.