

The Oriental Institute

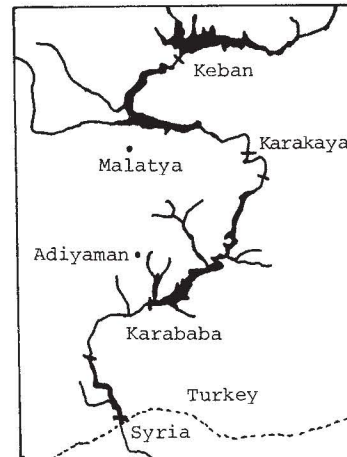
News & Notes

*Issued confidentially to members and friends**Not for publication*

No. 39: January, 1978

A LETTER FROM TURKEY

Robert J. Braidwood of the Joint Istanbul-Chicago Prehistoric Project returned a short while ago from Turkey. He brought back with him the tale of a new plight for Near Eastern archeology.



Euphrates River valley in southern Turkey

Greetings:

Archeologists normally decide where and what they shall excavate in terms of some specific culture historical problem. Naturally, matters such as political stability, budget, and the logistic possibilities for maintaining a field staff play a role, but normally a site is chosen for excavation because the field director and his institution are fascinated with the site's potential yield in information about the past. Unhappily, however, we increasingly find ourselves faced with another reason for excavation.

With the onset of the Industrial Revolution and especially with our own century, engineers and builders have increasingly come to manipulate the surface of the earth to meet the needs of the world's technologically oriented societies. Broad roads have been bulldozed, great building projects undertaken and the courses of rivers dammed or changed. Until quite recently, concern for the recovery of evidence of the human past has been ignored when such projects were carried out. Since World War II, however, and most spectacularly in the case of the Aswan High Dam in Egypt, what we know as salvage archeology has come to be recognized as a moral duty to posterity. Salvage archeology is that other reason for excavation—not a particularly happy one because we can't really select the "problem" of our choice and because the bulldozers are always breathing harder and harder behind us. We've been taught since our undergraduate days that our watchword is BE CAREFUL—DO NOT HURRY. In the case of salvage archeology, however, that won't work.

On November 21, I left Chicago for a three week trip to Turkey. The primary purpose of the affair was salvage archeology. A pair of dams will be built along the course of the Euphrates River in southern Turkey, and the flood-pools above these two dams will inundate well over 200 archeological sites. In anticipation of this flooding, the Turkish government's archeological service and the senior Turkish universities called for a conference in Ankara and an inspection trip to the threatened area. Having been involved in the planning of a previous salvage effort on a more modest northerly stretch of the Euphrates, I was named as the single foreign member of the planning committee.

The present committee has been active for well over a year and has already undertaken surveys of the regions to be flooded. The detailed report of the major survey effort was ready in book form when the conference opened on November 28. Titled *Lower Euphrates Basin, 1977 Survey*, its author (who also headed the survey) was Mehmet Özdoğan, an assistant in the Prehistory Department in Istanbul University. We first knew Mehmet as a graduate student field hand on our beginning crew for the Joint Istanbul-Chicago Universities' Prehistoric Project. He has been attached to our Project ever since; he is a young scholar and field man of great promise and his survey and its descriptive volume do us very proud indeed.

Mehmet and his assistants visited all the mounds and monuments they could locate in the basins where the two flood-pools will form. They located and made sketch maps of the sites and collected quantities of the surface scatter of potsherds, flints, and other artifacts which such sites normally yield.

At the opening morning's session of the conference, attended by about forty foreign and at least twice as many Turkish scholars, the whole affair was explained in detail. We had available for inspection samples of the surface collections from each of the mounds while the collections from the more important mounds were conveniently laid out in open museum cases. In this way, the colleagues interested in participating in the salvage effort could at least alert themselves to sites of their own particular chronological interest.

It was a full day's bus ride down to the city of Malatya, adjacent to the flood-pool basin of the more northerly dam, the Karakaya. We spent the next day and a half visiting the more important sites. Then we went south over a pass in the Taurus Mountains to Adiyaman, the town adjacent to the southern flood-pool which the Karababa Dam will form. We had two full—but unfortunately rainy—days to inspect the sites in this basin. The next day, we returned to Ankara and had the following day for further checking of the surface collections and for a general wind-up session.

Without question, the sites in the two basins indicate occupation from at least the Middle Paleolithic time range (100,000 years ago plus) to the present. In my own opinion, the southern or Karababa basin calls for more intensive salvage work than the Karakaya. There are excavations both to the east and west of the Karakaya basin which already provide chronological and cultural yardsticks as to what may have occurred there. The southern basin, however, lies just north of Turkish frontier with Syria and a recent salvage effort along the Euphrates in Syria has added a whole new chapter to our understanding of Near Eastern history. There are still certain gaps in this Syrian story. No physical or environmental barrier separates the Syrian basin from that of the Karababa reach of the Euphrates. Furthermore, the surface collections indicate that there are sites in the Karababa basin which would fill these gaps.

Before ending, I should remark on one particular site in the Karababa basin which impressed me as the biggest single mound I've ever seen, and I've seen a good many. The mound is called Samsat. It measures approximately 500 m by 350 m, is very steep and is 40 m high. Multiply a football stadium by five, fill it full of earth, and turn it upside down and you have the picture. The great single mound of Kuyunjik at Nineveh has more area, approximately 700 m by 400 m, but is only about 32 m high. Of course, the complexly mounded but lower sites of southern Mesopotamia cover more area still, and indeed both Samsat as well as Kuyunjik have traces of broad lower towns. The surface yield of potsherds suggests that Samsat was probably occupied more or less continuously from at least 5000 B.C. through Byzantine times and into the Middle Ages.

It is indeed a great shame that within seven or eight years Samsat, along with all the other mounds in the two basins, will disappear beneath the waters of the flood-pools. The Turkish government has, especially in a time of grave economic crisis, pledged money for the support of the work of its own archeologists, but what they do will be hardly a drop in the bucket. Happily, there is some active foreign interest and support, and several American colleagues in other universities intend to involve themselves. At this writing, the Oriental Institute is considering how it may become involved in the effort, either alone or jointly with other universities, but the details are yet to be worked out.

It was a wonderfully well arranged affair; the countryside along the Euphrates with its backdrop of snow-covered mountains was most handsome. If only we could have shaken off the realization that soon the waters would rise over all the sites and fill the basins. Damn the dam builders, anyway.

Best of cheer,

Bob Braidwood

COLOPHON CONTEST ANNOUNCED!

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE announces a contest to find a new colophon, or emblem, for its publications. Since 1976 the Institute has been publishing its own books and therefore needs its own colophon to replace the University of Chicago device (the phoenix).

Ideally, the new design should represent the Institute as a whole—not just one field of study such as Egyptian or Assyrian. Your design, or your idea for one (either is acceptable), need not be complicated. Perhaps there is a suitable item in our museum that can be copied or adapted. Perhaps you can think of an original design. Draw your idea or describe it, or do both. Your drawing need not be of professional quality.

The contest is open to any interested person. Submit as many entries as you wish to the Publications Office at the Institute, Room 233, no later than March 31, 1978. Judging will be done by a panel of experts. If your design or idea is the winner you may select any two of the books that the Institute

has published or will publish in the near future.

Help us find an attractive mark of identity. See your idea printed in gold on the spine of a book and in black on the title page! Enter now!

VOLUNTEER TRAINING PROGRAM

A NEW TRAINING COURSE for Oriental Institute volunteers will be offered on six Tuesdays starting April 4, 1978, from 9:30 A.M. until 1:30 P.M. Those taking the course will be expected to serve one-half day per week as museum guides or gift shop personnel for at least a year following the class. The course will consist of work in the museum galleries and lectures by staff members and graduate students. Suq volunteers may start immediately.

Volunteers are expected to be members of the Oriental Institute (\$15 per year) and pay a fee of \$20 for materials. Parking is provided. For further information call Jill Maher at 753-2573 or 753-2471.

ESCAPE FROM THE DESERT

by Jill Maher

During the fall the Institute's Nippur expedition staff excavated at a large site called Umm al-Hafriyat in south-central Iraq. Jill Maher, Chairman of the Volunteer Guide Program, went along as a volunteer assistant. She has recalled here for us some of the more memorable portions of that experience.

I HAVE JUST RETURNED from a month on the Iraqi desert and am suffering from terminal jet lag and a morbid desire to live in a hot shower. The latter is due to the fact that there was no running water of any temperature or any electricity in our tents at the site. It was a wonderful experience in every way, but the high spot was an unexpected trip to lush southern Iraq.

When I arrived at Umm al-Hafriyat in November, a major Moslem holiday was beginning. With work at the dig closed down for several days, Mac Gibson, our director, sent six of us—Bob Biggs, John and Patti Deres-Mooney, Stephen Lintner, our government representative, Daniel Ishak, and me off to Basra in our faithful white Jeep. Before we left, I had a good look at my new home, a green nylon tent standing in the middle of the desert. The area was so totally bare and featureless that I needed a compass to find my way around. I heard that the oldest Shirgati (a skilled pickman from the North) had hauled himself out of the car on the first day, looked around, and asked, "Where is the tell?"

While the terrain is featureless, the sky is not. We left for our southern adventure before dawn under stars that were incredibly bright and beautiful. After reserving rooms in Shatra (a very necessary step with a big holiday in progress), we proceeded in a motorized canal boat to al-Hiba, the site of ancient Lagash. On this trip we had our first look at marsh country where all the buildings, many with columns and elaborate windows, are constructed entirely of reeds. All the residents raced out to see our boat pass, and I was delighted to hear the women, all of them cloaked in the black abayah, return my Arabic greeting. No man in our party would dare offend them by speaking. At Lagash we found the New York group, directed by Vaughn Crawford and Donald Hansen, about to begin their season. They never flinched when six of us arrived at lunchtime. With no way to phone ahead, archaeologists get used to drop-ins.

Basra, which we reached after a jolting ride over rugged terrain, turned out to be a beautiful, cosmopolitan city on the Shatt al-Arab, about 60 miles from the Persian Gulf. There is major shipping here, and we went out by motorboat to inspect the huge freighters from Greece, Canada, and Russia. There is also a great mixture of races and nationalities; visiting Kuwaitis on holiday in their white robes stood out among the Iraqis, enjoying the sunshine and 85° weather.

From Basra we turned north to Qurna, where the Tigris and Euphrates meet and flow into the Shatt. Local legend says this was the true Garden of Eden. We strolled by the river banks and spoke to local ladies in black who had come down to the water to wash pots and clothing. Stephen's reddish, curly beard caused a sensation, as it did wherever we went.

Thanksgiving Day was the most memorable any of us will ever spend. We took a motor boat deep into the marshes where little canals branched out from the main



"Why is this woman smiling?" Actually I'm gathering the potsherds for my survey.

channel like streets and alleys. All travel here is by boat or *balam*. The *balam* is a canoe coated with bitumen, steered by pole or paddle. It is a long way from the marsh villages to town for major shopping, and we passed groups of *balams* all hitched to a motorboat for the big trip! A score of *balams* came out to meet us to transfer us to the island we were to visit. Balancing in one is a tricky business, because they are narrow and ride extremely low in the water. It was a wonderful sensation to glide along, looking up at reeds twelve feet tall, reed houses, and giant black water buffalo. Kingfishers hovered over the water like hummingbirds, while big white pelicans floated on the surface, and a strange brilliant blue bird perched on top of the reeds. Once on the island we felt like explorers in a *National Geographic* feature. The people surrounded us and followed our every move; mobs of children left us only for a few minutes to gather shells for Stephen, our geomorphologist.

We left the beautiful marshes and palm groves of the South finally and headed for home. I acquired an Iraqi nickname, Umm Aysh, "Mother of the Nest," referring to my place in the back of the Jeep, nestled among suitcases, blankets, and edibles. As we stopped at the *suq* in each major town, my nest grew like a tell on a mounting pile of purchases.

Back at camp, work resumed quickly. I was instructed in the technique of pottery surveying and watched the progress of the excavations with great interest. I also learned that I could sleep in a tent when the temperature was freezing. I could even sleep in a tent in the same clothes I wore all day. And finally, when the rains came, dripping into our food and down our backs, and making the tent floor a sea of mud, I could remember the beautiful sunshine in the marshes and be cheered.

We are all home now, and Dr. Gibson will speak to the members on the results of our work on February 20, 1978.

The Oriental Institute cordially invites you to attend a lecture:

"New Excavations in Iraq"

by McGuire Gibson
the Oriental Institute

Monday, February 20

8:00 P.M.

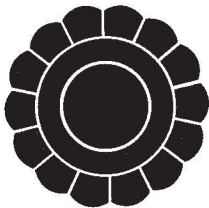
Breasted Hall
1155 E. 58th Street

(The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Mrs. Schlender, 493-8601. Please remember that the privilege of the use of the dining room at the Quadrangle Club is a courtesy extended to members of the Oriental Institute only on nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.)

The Museum Halls and The Suq will be open one hour before the lecture.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP LECTURES

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| Mar. 29 | "Hattushili I: Portrait of a Hittite Ruler in the Old Kingdom"
Harry A. Hoffner, the Oriental Institute |
| Apr. 11 | "The Shrine That Never Was: An Egyptological Mystery"
T. G. H. James, the British Museum |
| May 22 | "Mummies and Magic: An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Funerary Beliefs and Practices"
Lanny D. Bell, Director, Chicago House |



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