

Origins of the Old Akkadians

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Hand in hand with the study of ancient Mesopotamian society and economy, the collection of materials now scattered in museums throughout the world has continued. Of the two volumes of Old Akkadian texts now being readied for publication, one containing materials from the Louvre in Paris, the other from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the latter has led to a new and important interest, namely, the question of the original home of the Akkadians. One of the strange features of Babylonian archeology is that, while the Sumerian southern Babylonia has been well explored, the Akkadian north has not. Thus in the south, such sites as Nippur, Ur, Uruk, Eridu, and Lagash have given us a relatively good picture of the Sumerian people, language, and civilization. By contrast, in the north, the oldest levels of Babylon have not yet been reached, Sippar has hardly been touched, and Kish, excavated years ago by a joint expedition of the Field Museum in Chicago and the Ashmolean in Oxford, remains unfinished and partly unpublished.

Of these latter sites, the Kish area offers by far the greatest promise. As a preliminary to the projected study of the Old Akkadians, centering on Kish, I visited Iraq in the summer of 1966 at the invitation of Dr. Faisal al-Wailly, a former student who is now Director-General of Antiquities in Iraq. The emerging project is a complex, long-term one, involving the cooperation of several institutions and individuals in Chicago, Oxford, and Baghdad, as well as the establishment of an order of priorities for its component parts. Of most immediate importance was the establishment of a Kish archive center in Chicago, and this is now almost completed.

As a second phase, the topographic survey of the Kish area is already in progress. Building on earlier studies of the area by Professor Adams and Dr. Vaughn Crawford ten years ago, Mr. McGuire Gibson carried out an intensive survey of the region around Kish in the fall of 1966. Sherd collections were made from more than one hundred mounds within a radius of ten miles or so of the site. At the conclusion of this reconnaissance, brief soundings



Sounding at Umm-el Jir. Earlier plano-convex brick wall used in Old Akkadian building.

were made at Umm el-Jir, apparently the site known as Umm el-Jerab from which a Field Museum–Oxford University expedition obtained important Akkadian tablets in 1932. Jointly sponsored by the Oriental Institute and the Directorate General of Antiquities, this sounding was co-directed by Mr. Gibson and Dr. Subhi Anwar, with Mr. Douglas Kennedy as general assistant.

Further ahead looms a program of publication of the Kish materials, archeological and philological. We also anticipate more thorough exploration of the Kish region, as well as possible trial excavations in a number of sites.