

The Prehistoric Project

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The Prehistoric Project addresses itself to the problem: How was the stage set upon which the drama of ancient Western civilization was to unfold? The question is phrased so as to grant that in other parts of the world—in Meso-

america and the Andes, somewhere in southeastern Asia and probably in sub-Saharan Africa—other stages were also being set for the development of other ancient civilizations. In each instance, the setting of these stages involved the development of a complex of domesticated plants or of plants and animals.

As the evidence now stands, it seems clear that the earliest experiment in effective food-production was achieved in southwestern Asia some ten thousand years ago. Near Eastern food-production depended upon the domestication of such items as wheat, barley, certain legumes, sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle. Further, to be truly effective, the experiment must have involved sweeping renovations in the ways of life of the men and women who brought it about. The consequences of effective food-production are already hinted to us in the earliest traces we find of small but permanent village-

farming community settlements. The traces of these first villagers stand in marked contrast to the much simpler inventories of their food-collecting ancestors, who had already inhabited the region for countless thousands of years, living sometimes in caves and sometimes in impermanent open-air settlements.

The Prehistoric Project undertook excavations in northeastern Iraq in 1948/49, 1950/51, and 1954/55; in Iran in 1959/60, and began its work in southeastern Turkey in 1963/64. The Expedition (now the Joint Istanbul-Chicago Prehistoric Project) resumes its Turkish investigations in a series of autumn campaigns, beginning in 1968. Professor Halet Çambel and Professor Robert J. Braidwood serve as co-directors, with Dr. Bruce Howe as associate director.

The Project's problem focus has, from its beginnings, been concerned with reclaiming understandings of the beginnings of food-production and of a village-farming community way of life. Its efforts have been aided by grants from the National Science Foundation, the American Schools of Oriental Research, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the American Philological Society, as well as by friends of the Oriental Institute. Given the importance of understanding the man-nature relationship which obtained before and during the initial

phase of plant and animal domestication, the Project has made wide use of collaboration by colleagues in various branches of the natural sciences. It is probably fair to claim that the Project's activities initiated a new phase in the patterns of research in the Near East, and that it has had a hand in the training of a new generation of research scholars.

As well as with earlier so-called Upper Paleolithic sites, Dr. Howe's part in the effort has been concentrated on such sites as Karim Shahir in Iraq and Asiab in Iran, with inventories which suggest the incipient beginnings of food-production at best. Dr. and Mrs. Braidwood have been more directly concerned with the site of Jarmo in Iraq, of Sarab in Iran (with the collaboration of Dr. Ezat Negahban of Tehran University), and now—with Dr. Çambel—of Çayönü in Turkey. Part of the new plans for Turkey include a second site, near Çayönü, with materials of a somewhat more developed aspect of early village life, the so-called Halafian phase. This new site, Geri Keyhacian, will be excavated—with our Turkish colleagues—by Dr. Patty Jo Watson, veteran of two previous Prehistoric Project seasons.

In May of 1968, an exhibit in two alcoves in the Oriental Institute Museum was opened, illustrating the research concerns of the Prehistoric Project.



View of Çayönü in Turkey