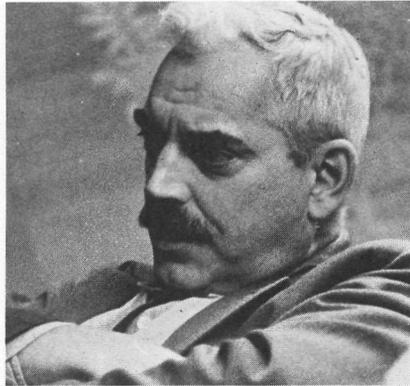

Robert J. Braidwood



No doubt there are many different paths that men and women have followed into archeology, and through a career of it. But few can have been as distinctive as Bob Braidwood's, as consistently productive of new knowledge, as unswervingly devoted to a broad, demandingly interdisciplinary attack on a single, richly rewarding intellectual problem. His seventieth birthday, on July 29, 1977, finds him and his wife Linda preparing yet once more to take to the

field. They carry forward beyond the mere formality of retirement an old Oriental Institute tradition that the foremost "cutting edge" of archeology is the spade.

Bob's introduction to Near Eastern archeology was perhaps the only accidental step along the way. As he tells it, prodigious drafting performance in what was prevailingly regarded as a "gut" course on Roman Band Instruments, entered initially only to improve an indifferent record as a student architect at the University of Michigan, led to an invitation to accompany the professor for a season at the great Hellenistic site of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. From there it was a natural shift out of architecture altogether and into the ranks of the Oriental Institute's Amouq Project in what was then northwestern Syria, where he participated for a number of years in large scale excavations of mounds on the plain of Antioch. Already in those pre-World War II years his attention was increasingly drawn to the earliest occupations that underlay the historic later ruins, tantalizingly exposed only in narrow trenches that had to reach down through the huge overburden of later levels. The artifactual inventory of those earliest levels suggested that they represented small but fully sedentary villages, not far over the threshold of the crucial turning point in the human career that was brought about by the introduction of agriculture. Almost all of Bob's subsequent work has been devoted to deepening our understanding of that threshold, comparable in some respects with the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries of our own era, and he is today our foremost student of it.

Along the way archeology itself has changed profoundly, and in no small measure in response to his leadership. From a primarily art-historical activity directed toward ancient cultural expressions in their monumental repositories, it has necessarily diversified into the sciences. Geomorphologists, paleobotanists, paleozoologists were added to his research teams already during the time of his work at Jarmo in Iraqi Kurdistan, begun as soon as the chaos of the war years began to subside. Only through their collaboration could the crucial ecological and dietary aspects of the agricultural transition be winnowed out of the fragmentary archeological record. Waste debris, quantitatively observed, became in some cases an even more precious clue to ancient human behavior than the rare, better preserved, more highly stylized specimens that had previously been sought after for museum display. What increasingly loomed as the primary objective of study was not the particular ancient site or the artifacts it yielded but the prehistoric processes of change that both elucidated.

After the mid-'fifties a tide of new discoveries began to extend the geographical field in which Bob and others sought to identify these processes. It became clear that there was not one transition to agriculture but many—individual, localized sequences that saw the introduction of different mixes of domesticates into widely variegated environmental settings during the eighth, ninth, and tenth millennia B.C. immediately succeeding the last Ice Age. His own field research took him next into western Iran, and then for the last fifteen years or so to the exciting site of Çayönü in southern Turkey. An increasing number of other colleagues, many of them his former students, have meanwhile carried their investigations of the same theme into Syria, Jordan, Israel, and Egypt, and even northward entirely beyond what had always seemed the Near Eastern hearthland, into southeastern Europe and the Aegean.

It is a pleasure to salute both Bob and Linda on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. As on so many, many previous occasions we extend to them the traditional archeological sendoff: "Good Digging!"