

T H E H A M R I N

 McGuire Gibson

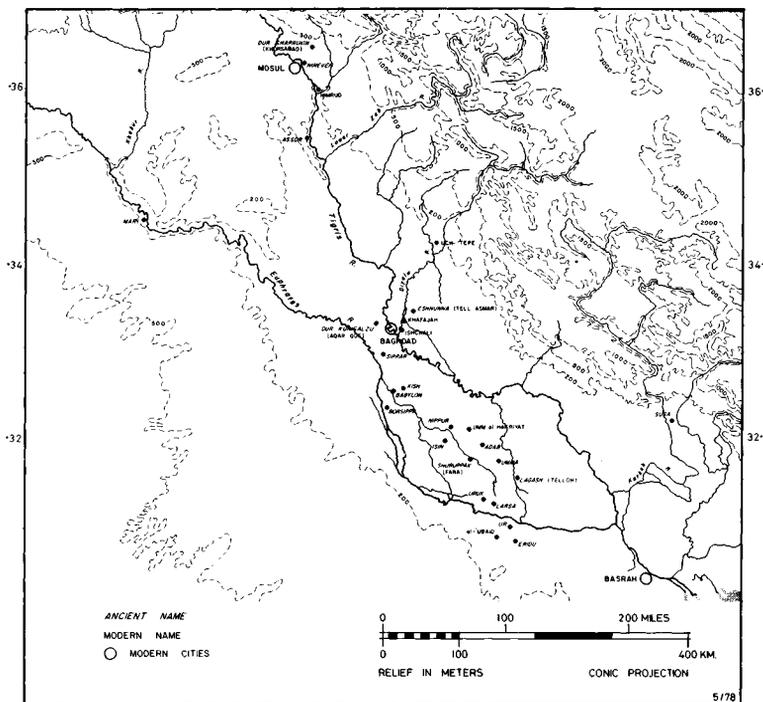
**The Hamrin Expedition
Chicago-Copenhagen Expedition
to the Hamrin, Iraq,
Second Season, 1979**

In last year's annual report, I described the Oriental Institute's involvement in a salvage operation with the University of Copenhagen in east central Iraq. Here, the new Hamrin Dam is scheduled to create a lake that will cover an area never excavated before 1978. The Hamrin Basin was archeologically unknown and cuneiform records were relatively silent about it, despite the fact that through the basin runs the major route from Babylonia to Iran.

During our first season, we found that although the Hamrin might be a backwater, it was yielding information at Tell Razuk that would drastically alter architectural history and call into question some assumptions about the political and economic history of Mesopotamia. Our most important discovery was a large, round building, 27 meters in diameter, 4 meters high, with buttressed outer walls, an internal stairway to the roof, and parts of the roof itself. The building, of unbaked mudbricks, was badly damaged by later peoples' pits and graves; but there was enough intact to show that the roof, rather than being of the more usual flat, wood-reed-and-mud type, was created by carrying the walls up to form corbelled vaults. This use of mudbrick is very unexpected, since the mudbricks we usually encounter at Nippur and elsewhere are too weak to withstand the stress in corbels spanning more than a meter. Because this construction was so unusual and because we had less than a third of the rooms in the building, and little or nothing of the town, we decided we must return for one more season. The fact that the building was of the Early Dynastic I period (c. 2900 B.C.), when southern Mesopotamia was beginning to develop the first real cities and to form elaborate social and economic systems, including states, made continued exposure of Tell Razuk more important.

During the second season, September to December 1979, we were committed not only to digging Tell Razuk, but also to making a sounding in the northernmost of the mounds in our area, Tell Ajamat. Here, surface sherds indicated an occupation of the Kassite (ca. 1300 B.C.) and perhaps of the Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 800 B.C.), time ranges that are not well represented in the Hamrin. James Armstrong

ARCHAEOLOGY



Map of Iraq, showing Üç Tepe, the "three tells" of our section of the salvage excavations in the Hamrin (drawing by John Sanders)

opened an area and found the bottom two courses of a house that we eventually concluded was relatively recent, probably about the turn of the century. The local people said that about that time a group of Iranians (Ajamat) lived on the tell. Below the recent house, Armstrong sank a pit 5 × 5 meters in size, making it smaller as he descended to about 4 meters depth. The entire operation showed one or two small walls, but little else except potsherds, all of which we could date to the late Kassite period. At this point, we decided that Armstrong's expertise as supervisor and pickman was more urgently needed on Razuk, so we closed the operation.

The excavation of Razuk proceeded very slowly until the Iraqi Organization of Antiquities sent us a truckload of workmen from the town of Jalawla, twenty-five kilometers away. These men, who made the arduous trip every day in hot weather and cold, were eager and industrious, but had little experience of excavations. Almost none could be made into pickmen. Therefore, the greatest part of the

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Air photo of Razuk taken from a kite about 100 meters up (photo by McGuire Gibson)

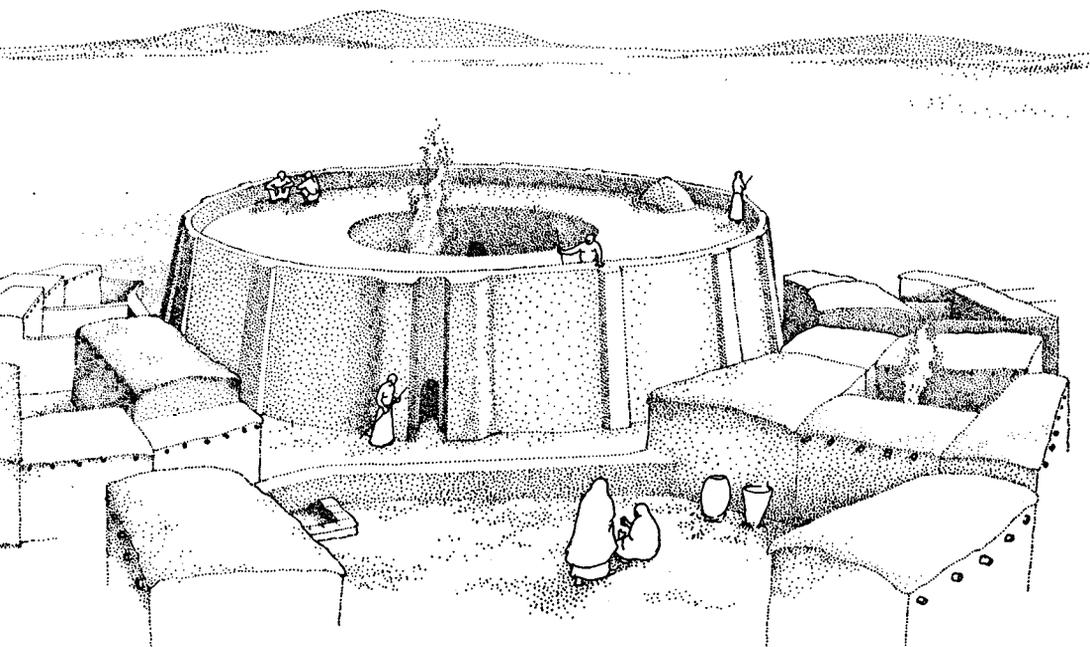
actual excavating fell to the American, Danish, and Iraqi staff members: Ingolf Thuesen, James Armstrong, Dennis Collins, Bodil Mortensen, Marianne Hirsch, Abdul Razzak (our Iraqi colleague), Elisabeth Petersen, Jill Maher, and me. John Sanders, as usual, showed his great value as a field architect, keeping up with the entire operation and asking the types of questions that are critical in figuring out relationships between rooms. Racing against time and under extraordinary stress, he maintained his normal, easy demeanor. He was assisted in the field by Brian Von den Driesch, who also created ingenious devices to lift dirt from deep in the excavation and kept the cars running. Peggy May Bruce did the photography and drew objects, as well as assisting the architects. Mogens Trolle Larsen, the main Danish collaborator, was able to be with us only a week or two. Evelyn Oldenbourg, another member of the Copenhagen faculty, visited for two weeks during the season and joined in the digging. Of great importance for the season's work was the help given us by

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Sayyid Abdul Razzak, who solved many administrative problems. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Sayyid Hussayn Ali Hamza, who stepped in to iron out our difficulties even though he was not officially connected with us.

The results of the 1979 season were gratifying, even though we were unable to carry out all that we wished to do. We had to concentrate our effort on the Round Building and thus were unable to work on the houses around it. Our attempt to discover whether we did, in fact, have a wall around the town had to be abandoned without results. In many ways, the relationship of the town to the Round Building and of the parts of the town to one another might be of greater interest than the citadel itself; but, given the fact that a structure exactly like the Round Building had never before been unearthed, priority had to be given to it.

We were able to show that, whereas we had suggested last year a total of six rooms around the courtyard, there were in fact only five, with five doorways leading to the court. The building had been constructed on gravel that may have been a natural ridge. As the building was used, the rooms and the court began to fill up, due in great



Reconstruction of the Round Building (drawing by Peggy Bruce)

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The Round Building from the northwest: on the walls is the wooden crane used to lift dirt out of deep rooms; two or three portions of intact roof are visible to those who know where to look—directly under the car is the roof over the narrow stair, directly left is roof over a room; the door at lower center is the main door to the building (photo by Peggy Bruce)

part to the ashes from cooking fires in the court and hearths in the rooms. The dirt floors were strewn with animal bones, potsherds, and other debris, but few objects. There must have been a terrible problem in the rain, because the courtyard had no drainage; and, even if the water had originally run out through the entry room, debris accumulated so fast that such a drainage solution became impossible. Near the walls of the courtyard, we found pavements of mudbricks that must have emphasized the water retention. Not only were these mudbricks slick when wet, as we discovered in December, but they made the courtyard even more of a bowl. In winter, the center of the Round Building must have been an unhealthy, slippery mire.

The filling up of the rooms with debris forced changes in the use of the building. The earliest change was in the access to the stairway, which is within the outer wall. From the entry room (No. 449), one went to the stairs through a tunnel-like doorway, which we found intact. As the debris in the entry room piled up, it tended to rise highest in the corners; and the doorway into the stairs became lower and lower. The uppermost floor that we can follow through the stairway door leaves about two feet clearance. Even the relatively small people of Early Dynastic Tell Razuk would have been obliged to crawl

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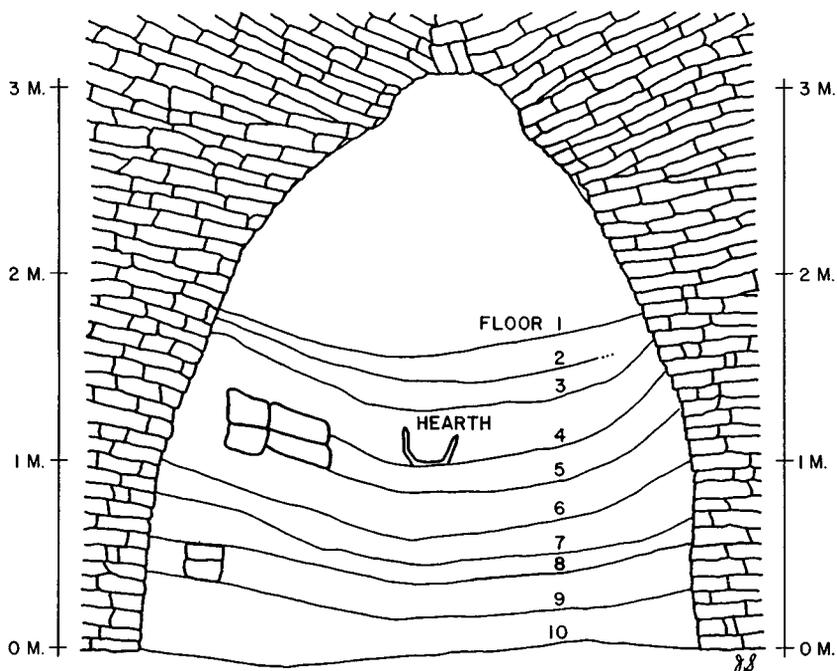
Roof over the stairway from the entry to the roof; James Armstrong as scale (photo by McGuire Gibson)

through. At this point, the doorway was blocked and a new entry into the stairs was cut through the western wall of Room 47. Now, one passed through the entry and the courtyard, then to Room 47, up a short flight of steps into the stairway. In previous reports, the stairway was called a ramp, because individual steps could not be defined in the upper part, but this last season showed well-defined steps toward the bottom. Constant use wore down the upper steps.

As the courtyard continued to rise, due to the piling up of ashes from the constantly-used cooking ovens, the occupants were forced to cut short ramps down from the court into the rooms. This solution worked for some time, but finally it was necessary to raise the tops of the doorways, apparently by cutting away the mudbricks above them. This gave better access to the rooms, but must have caused structural damage. Soon, supporting walls and partitions had to be erected inside, resulting in Rooms 68, 75, and 42, which had originally been one long room. Subsequently, the building began to collapse in places; and drastic changes were made to keep the building useful beyond the scope of its design. In Rooms 47, 449, and 456, we found evidence that the vaulted roofs were cut away and upright walls were built on the studs of the old walls, to form regular rooms, probably with flat roofs. At the same time, Rooms 416 and 42 were completely sealed with mudbrick and were not used.

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Finally, the entire Round Building was given up and its rooms used as garbage dumps, and a large, rectilinear building was constructed over it. Even this later building had Early Dynastic I pottery in it, so no great break in occupation is indicated. After the phase of the rectilinear building, however, the site was unoccupied, being used as a source for dirt to make mudbricks, and as a burial place. One of the burials, a very large square cut with a side chamber at a lower level, had the skeletons of two equids, probably asses, a number of large pottery vessels which may have been used in beer making, some bronze weapons, and a few beads. The human skeleton found in the lower pit was too deteriorated to save. The pottery in this grave is of types that look similar to Early Dynastic III (ca. 2500 B.C.), but are significantly different. Likewise, although sharing some traits with pottery that we know marks the later part of the Akkadian Period (after about 2250 B.C.), it is not identical. We have concluded, from the evidence in the Hamrin, from the Oriental Institute's work in the Diyala during the 1930's, and from our work at



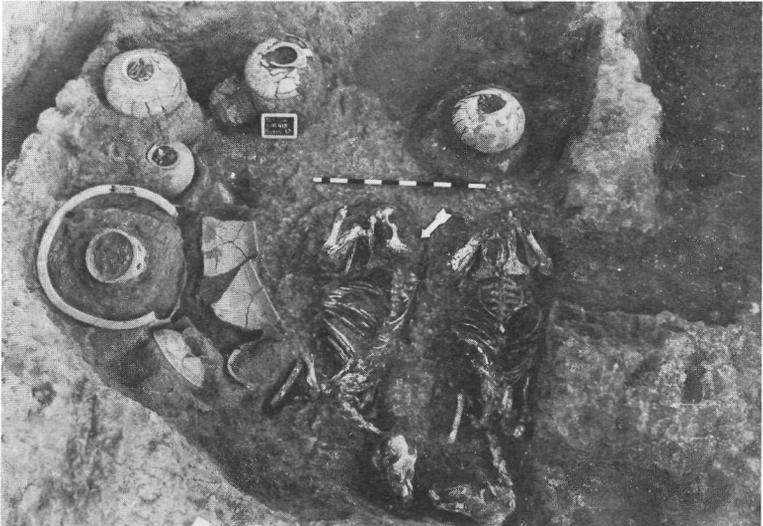
Section through walls and roof over a room in the Round Building; superimposed floors show how debris accumulates in a room over time (drawing by John Sanders)

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Nippur, that this pottery is to be dated to the early part of the Akkadian Period (ca. 2330–2250), that is, the time of Sargon and his sons Rimush and Manishtushu. We have, then, in the Hamrin, found evidence that has forced a reevaluation of older material and has allowed us to fill a gap in the pottery sequence that had been a great difficulty. I might add that the British-Canadian team at Tell Madhhur found equid burials with very similar pottery at their site.

Another reevaluation is concerned with mudbricks in the Hamrin. In previous reports, I have stated that whereas in the Diyala and other Mesopotamian areas, the Early Dynastic is marked by plano-convex bricks (bricks that are flat on the bottom and somewhat rounded on the top), in the Hamrin there were no plano-convex bricks. This season, however, in taking down some walls, we were able to see that mudbricks that were laid as if they were perfectly flat had, in fact, a slightly convex top. We have, thus, reestablished a cultural and technological link with the Diyala Region, but at the same time find that certain practices in laying such bricks were not carried into the Hamrin. As stated in prior reports, the mudbricks of the Hamrin are extraordinary in their hardness, and can be used in ways that other mudbricks cannot.

As we left the Hamrin in December, we faced the realization that what had been started as a short-term, limited operation could very



Akkadian-period burial with two wild asses and a group of pots that may have been a complete beer-brewing outfit (photo by Peggy Bruce)

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easily be carried into one or more additional seasons. We still have much to learn from Razuk. We excavated only about half of Tepe al-Atiqeh, the Akkadian site to the south, and barely touched Ahmed al-Mughir, which is of Isin-Larsa date (ca. 2000 B.C.) and should produce tablets, since a number of contemporary sites in the area have done so. But, water from the dam has by now risen over the southern part of the valley. It is likely that our sites will be under water, or badly affected by it, within a few months. If it is feasible, we might want to return to check details or put in very limited soundings at some time, but essentially our work in the Hamrin is done.

The gain from the Hamrin operation, not just ours but the work of all the foreign and Iraqi teams, has been tremendous. The data from the excavations will take some years to publish, but we already know more about this one small area than we know about any other region in Iraq. The identification of the area and one or two sites is fairly well established by now, especially from the finds of one of the Iraqi expeditions at Tell Suleimeh. Here, Old Akkadian administrative tablets may indicate that the site, and the area, should be identified with Awal. This name, known from only a few texts, has been associated with Iran, but its placement on the main routes to Iran has only recently been suggested. The relationship of Awal to the great kingdoms of Akkad, Ur, and Babylon will become clearer as these tablets



Turkish bridge over the Narin River: built around 1800, destroyed by the Turks as they retreated before the British in 1918, restored by the British (note rails on left end), toppled by a flood fifteen years ago, and now under water (photo by McGuire Gibson)

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and later ones found at other Hamrin sites are read and published.

The findings in the Hamrin will be the subject of much theorizing. Especially important are the Early Dynastic I fortresses, such as that at Tell Razuk. Are they outposts of southern, i.e., Sumerian, civilization or local strongholds of petty kings? Are we dealing with border fortresses, such as the Roman forts on the outskirts of the empire, or with something like the medieval European castles of virtually independent lords?

It is with questions like these that the articles and reports on the Hamrin will deal. We are, in the beginning of the summer 1980, already working on our final report, a joint Chicago-Copenhagen volume to be published in Denmark. By the end of the summer, the manuscript should be finished just as we turn again to our main concern in Iraq, Nippur. It is the continuing program of excavation at Nippur that allows us to create a uniform, chronologically extensive synthesis of Mesopotamian civilization. We may be called upon to undertake other salvage operations as the need arises, but it is our work at Nippur that gives those efforts shape and meaning. In the coming autumn, we expect to continue excavation on the houses and city wall in our Area WC, hoping to gain a comprehensive picture of events at the site in the early first millennium B.C. We will also be doing some exploratory trenches, testing for productive locations for future work on the earliest periods at the site.

We wish to express our thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Ryan Crocker for their hospitality in Baghdad, and to the Momberg-Thorsen Company, especially Kay, Erle, and Flemming Thorkildsen, for equipment and housing. In our forthcoming season, as in our last, we will be aided by our faithful supporters, the Friends of Nippur, whose extra financial help each year allows us to do a good deal more. I would like especially to acknowledge the gratitude that I owe to Howard Hallgren, who opened his house for a party last summer, and to Jill Maher, Elda Maynard, and Richard L. Zettler for seeing that notices were sent out and newsletters reproduced and mailed. Limitations of space preclude my listing members here, but I would like to assure them that they are not taken for granted.