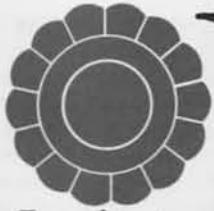


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The Oriental Institute



# News & Notes

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## REPORT FROM THE FIELD: The Joint Prehistoric Project

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The Prehistoric Project's excavation site at Çayönü. Various building foundations are exposed, including the grill plan on the left, the broad room plan (of flat floor stones) to the right, and two ovoid plan types just visible in the center. Preserved in the walls of the excavated areas are layers of material from different periods.

Ilk Öğretmen Okulu  
Ergani, Diyarbakir, Turkey  
November 26, 1978

Greetings:

When I last wrote, a month or so ago, excavation on the early village site of Çayönü was just about to begin. Now we are closing down with only three or four workmen kept on and the younger staff involved in making the final field drawings. The German architectural historians returned to Karlsruhe University last weekend. It has been an exceptionally informative and rewarding field season, although—as usual—we seem to have raised more new problems than we have been able to solve old ones. In 1952, with only our small exposure on the site of Jarmo representing the earliest village materials so far excavated in the Near East, I could make a wonderfully easy and simple picture of how it must all have worked. But just as soon as more sites and larger areas became exposed, the situation became more complicated.

And so it is at Çayönü. If only the people of the Çayönü village, some 9000 or more years ago, had arranged their succession of building renovations and rebuildings with horizontal regularity—

like layers in a cake—our job might have been easy. Any beginning archeology student learns that sites should have an orderly succession of strata—earliest layer on the bottom, latest on the top—but at Çayönü it doesn't work in such a neat and orderly fashion at all. Hence I hope that you'll bear with me for a bit while I try to explain, as simply as I can, what it's like to try, even in a preliminary way, to put together the evidence we now have. Perhaps by spring, when we've had some radioactive carbon age determinations and when the German architects and Barbara Lawrence and Bob Stewart are back to check further on the buildings and on the animal and plant remains and aid in the general thinking, the picture may change, but this is the way it looks to me right now.

By and large, the yield from the early village sites does not include spectacular antiquities. As I've remarked in letters from the field in earlier seasons, the people of Çayönü appear to have concentrated their aesthetic attention particularly on architecture. It had already become clear, in our earlier field work at Çayönü, that there were substantial stone foundations for a variety of architectural plan types. Some of these are—for so early a site—surprisingly sophisticated in both

their individual formality of plan conception and in the regularity and orientation of building groups. Certainly not all these building remains need imply simple domestic structures; indeed many suggest the necessity of concentrated community activity in their construction. We cannot always tell which different plan types may have coexisted or which must necessarily have preceded or have followed another. One plan type may appear nearest the surface in one part of the seven acre site of Çayönü; in another part a different plan type may be nearest the surface. (Of course, we've far less than the total seven acres of the site exposed: we have opened only about 6% so far). At the end of last season's work, we thought we had the evidence to suggest at least a rough succession for five or even possibly six plan types. Now we know that this suggested succession of types won't work and also that there are foundation remains for still more plan types.

In a much broader overview, we know that for the available sites of this time range in southwestern Asia, as food-production became effective with the positive domestication of plants and animals, rectangular several-roomed houses became the rule. Earlier than the recognizable appearance of food-production—which happened at about 7500 B.C.—the very few excavated sites we yet know, however, show that the standard(?) house form was a small round one. At Çayönü this season, we've uncovered the foundation remains for at least two small ovoid buildings, one of which was apparently built of clay plastered over a framework of narrow poles, and probably of twigs or reeds, bedded on stone. Both these near-round building remains, overbedded by later "grill type" rectangular foundations, came well down in the mound's depth but were not yet at virgin soil. The artifacts so far recovered from these small ovoid building remains appear to conform with the rest of the Çayönü inventory, however, and there is no stratigraphic indication of a long gap in time between that of the ovoid plans and that of the succeeding rectangular remains. Our last season's work already showed that domesticated animals were scarce if present at all in the earlier horizons, although there was some domesticated wheat and certain pulses. We now feel increasingly bound to wonder whether Çayönü may indeed have straddled the threshold of that critical moment in human history when the actual transition from a hunting-collecting to a food-producing way of life was taking place. (I do not, of course, mean that Çayönü was the only place where such a transition was made: if indeed it does straddle that moment, it must be only one of many such transitional settlements which still await discovery.)

Whatever Çayönü's broader implications may be, we are left to face the question—was there indeed little time difference between the end of a phase of simple ovoid building types and the appearance of sophisticated rectangular plan types, both the product of a single developing cultural tradition? Further, and even more important if the time interval was short—how shall we understand such an apparently rapid development in the conception and

execution of the several formal rectilinear and truly architectural plan types, some with symmetrically placed buttresses and limestone slab columns(?) and with floors of well fitted flagstones or terrazzo, by a culture which was just leaving the small ovoid mud-plaster house stage?

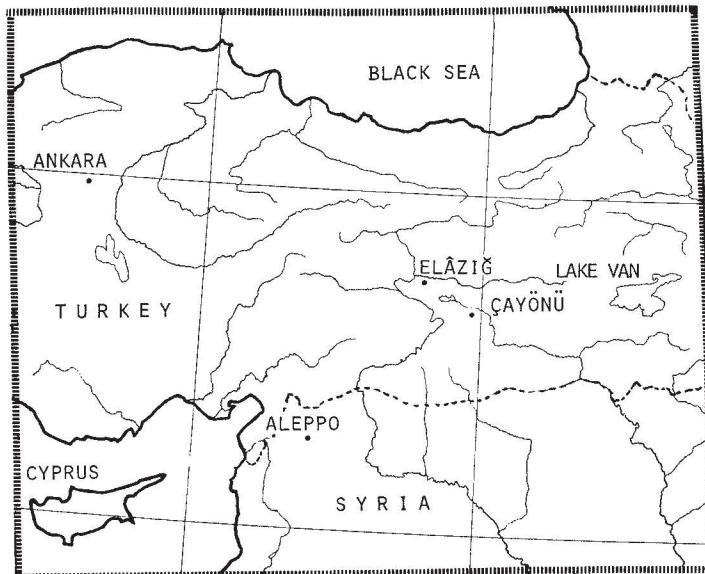
It has become fashionable to play down the implications of rapid cultural change that the late great British prehistorian V. Gordon Childe appeared to suggest in his phrase "the food-producing revolution." Recently, I've found myself wondering whether old friend Gordon might have had something in that idea! But, of course, not all of the evidence even now available is processed and interpreted, and the level exposed where the ovoid plans appear is pitifully small in area. *Nous allons voir!*

Hence, all I'm doing here is setting down—I hope for your amusement—the sort of typical archaeologist's end-of-season and not yet fully digested train of thinking (when he isn't thinking of all the things he should have done differently and better).

All in all it has been a particularly fine season with one of the very best field crews we've ever had (both Turkish and foreign). The co-director, Prof. Dr. Halet Çambel of Istanbul University, has surpassed even her usual standard of efficiency, energy and know-how in handling the local situation and in prodding productive thinking. Several days ago, Lee Marfoe and Dave Webster arrived and have been dispatched in a rented jeep to investigate promising sites, in the region of the Euphrates salvage project, which they might undertake to excavate respectively for the Oriental Institute and the Pennsylvania State University. We look forward ourselves to resuming work in the spring, especially since Prof. Wulf Schirmer and his two Karlsruhe assistants have promised to return. In the meantime, Linda and I shall be home around mid-December.

Best of Cheer,

Bob Braidwood



## MUSEUM CURATOR CARSWELL TO RESUME SRI LANKA RESEARCH

Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) offers unique opportunities, largely unexplored, for investigating archeological evidence of the interaction of three cultures. Chinese and Arab traders of the Middle Ages were drawn to the island by its spices, and left along its shores legible tracks. In 1977 John Carswell, looking at ports and inland sites, found a cache of more than 500 pieces of Chinese pottery dating from about A.D. 1100 in a sand dune near Jaffna in northeastern Sri Lanka. He has recently received grants from the National Geographic Society and from the British Academy to mount a joint excavation with the Sri Lankan Archeological Commission of one of the most promising sites, on the northwestern coast near Vankalai. Since preliminary digs uncovered a promising quantity of Chinese pottery and local earthenware near the surface, the project could yield important new evidence of patterns of medieval trade between Africa and the Far East.

Diana Kirkbride-Helbaek, Wainwright Fellow of the University of Oxford and formerly Director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, will be chief archeologist of the excavation, which is expected to take place in February and March. Barbara Hall will serve as Acting Curator of the Museum in Mr. Carswell's absence.



*Two young Tamil architectural students from Jaffna, who assisted in the excavation and in marking the Chinese pottery.*

## ILLUSTRATED TALKS ON EGYPT AND MESOPOTAMIA AVAILABLE AT MUSEUM

Now you can combine a walk through the galleries of the museum with a richly illustrated introduction to either Egypt or Mesopotamia. Two half hour slide shows, ideal for school groups, are given by appointment:



**MESOPOTAMIA:** The presentation on Mesopotamia includes 74 slides and is broader in scope, showing aspects of Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, and Assyrian cultures which flourished between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Emphasizing the work of modern archeologists, the presentation includes many shots of reliefs, statues, buildings, and artifacts from more than 3,000 years of the area's history.

The shows can be given at 9:30 A.M. or at 1:00 P.M. There is a fee of 50¢ per person, with a minimum charge of \$15.00. For reservations and further information call 753-2475.

**EGYPT:** The Egyptian presentation includes fifty slides depicting the Nile and surrounding landscapes, the temples of Karnak and Abu Simbel, the pyramids, the tomb of King Tutankhamun, and dozens of artifacts. It is a panoramic view of the legacy of Egypt.



THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO ATTEND THESE LECTURES:

February 15, Thursday

RECENT ARCHEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES ILLUMINATING THE BIBLE

William Dever, University of Arizona

March 15, Thursday

QASR IBRIM: WATCHDOG OF THE NILE

Robert Anderson, London

April 4, Wednesday

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT ÇAYÖNÜ

Robert J. and Linda S. Braidwood, The Oriental Institute

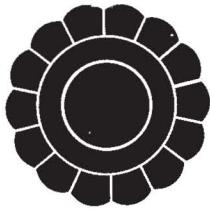
May 15, Tuesday

AI, A PALESTINIAN TOWN IN THE EARLY BRONZE AGE

Joseph A. Callaway, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

All lectures will be at 3:00 P.M. in the lecture hall of the Oriental Institute, 1155 East 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 Sog will be open one hour before the lecture.*



The Oriental Institute

The University of Chicago

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