

# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

*Issued confidentially to members and friends**Not for publication*

No. 51: March, 1979

## Letter from the field:

# THE IRAQI SALVAGE PROJECT

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 ORIENTAL INSTITUTE  
 UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

APR 10 1979

 Üç Tepe, Hamrin Basin, Iraq  
 January 14, 1979

 CHICAGO - COPENHAGEN  
 EXPEDITION:  
 HAMRIN BASIN  
 ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
 SALVAGE PROJECT

Dear Friends,

The boom that just resounded through this rainy night wasn't thunder. It was a mudbrick wall collapsing in one of the village houses. The people of the village, knowing that they will be moving in a few months when the new reservoir starts to fill, have not kept their houses in repair and a big rain that we had in mid-December weakened some walls. Tonight's downpour is toppling them all around us. We're okay. Our house was repaired in September when we moved in and I had more done after the big rain. I also had gravel laid down so that we can walk around with dry feet although there are inches of water in the courtyard. The street outside the house is a rushing stream, but we know from the last storm that the water will run off to the west. The unfortunate thing is that most of the water will end up around the mounds that we are excavating. Tomorrow, or the next day, when it is dry enough to work, we will be able to drive to one of the mounds, but will be obliged to wade out to the other two. Only after a week or so will all of the water be gone.

You have perhaps read or heard that we are taking part in a new archeological project in the Hamrin Basin northeast of Baghdad (Map 1), but you probably don't know where that is or what the project is about. In this letter, I will sketch out the area and the general excavation results of Iraqi and foreign expeditions. In a subsequent letter, I will give details of our own excavations.

More than a year ago, the State Organization of Antiquities began to make plans for archeological salvage in a number of places where dams and other development programs were certain to flood or otherwise affect ancient sites. The most critical need was for work in an area behind a dam that is to block the Diyala River (Map 2) as it cuts through the Jebel Hamrin (Hamrin Ridge), the



first ripple of the Zagros Mountains that rise to more than three thousand meters a few kilometers east of us. On clear mornings, we can see three or four ranks of snow-covered mountains lying just across the border in Iran.

When the dam is completed, a reservoir more than 40 kilometers long and 25 meters deep will form over the basin. Today the area is a rather picturesque agricultural backwater with about 25 villages and 5,000 people. The northern end of the basin has villages and fields bordering a sizable marsh. The middle area, along the Diyala River, has rich farms and orchards. The southern part is mostly desert, but it is here that the main highway from Baghdad to Kermanshah, Iran, runs. Other important roads skirt the Hamrin Basin on the east and west. It is fair to say that the

most important things in the Hamrin Basin are the roads that lead out of it. The Baghdad-Kermanshah highway is the latest version of the road that linked Mesopotamia to Iran and the great Caravan Routes of Central Asia. It was along this road that most invading armies passed from Mesopotamia into Iran, and vice versa. This was the route of major trade and the passing of information. But the Hamrin Basin, being relatively small and cut by rivers as well as partially occupied by marshes, was apparently never able to benefit enough by the routes to allow the creation of major cities. There are no cities on the order of Ur, Nippur, Babylon, or Nineveh, although there are major sites just outside the basin to the north and south. This is not to say that the basin is without archaeological and historical interest, however. There are more than 70 sites in the reservoir, dating from at least 5000 B.C. through the last century, and some have already yielded unique buildings, surprising finds, and information on relations with Iran, with Assyria, and with Babylonia. Never has one small area in Iraq been the subject of such sustained, concentrated investigation as the Hamrin. There have been about 20 Iraqi excavations and numerous expeditions by various foreign teams.

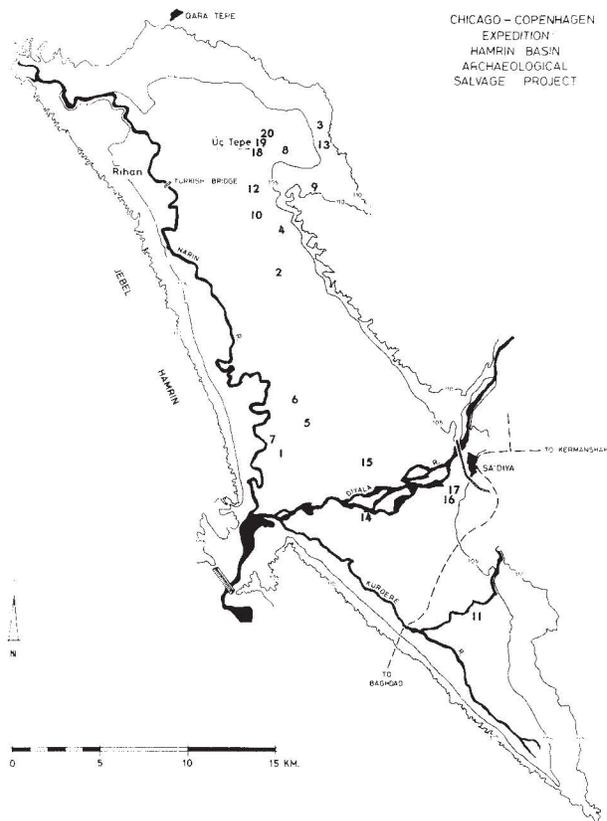
The foreign groups with the longest service in the project are the Japanese and Italian expeditions. They have been working continuously, even during the summer, for more than a year. The Japanese have excavated on nine mounds so far and have one of the most interesting sites at Tell al-Gubbeh (No. 1 on Map 2). This mound is relatively small, being only about a hundred meters in diameter and maybe 8 meters high. It consists of mudbrick walls laid out in concentric circles. The building stands about three meters high.

The Italians have also excavated on a number of sites, mainly on Tell Yelkni (2), one of the largest (about 250 meters diameter, 10 meters high) sites in the valley. Here, there are Isin-Larsa (c. 1900 B.C.) and Kassite (c. 1200 B.C.) administrative buildings where cuneiform tablets were found.

The British are excavating Tell Madhhur (3) with the cooperation of the Royal Ontario Museum. You may have heard Cuyler Young speak on these excavations, which exposed very interesting Ubaid (c. 4000 B.C.) buildings under a round building of Early Dynastic I date.

A French expedition has exposed a cemetery next to yet another massive building of Early Dynastic I (4) dug by the Iraqis.

Belgians (5), Austrians (6), and three different sets of Germans (7, 8, 9) have



- 1) al-Gubbeh, 2) Yelkhi, 3) Madhhur, 4) Kheit Qasim, 5) Sabbra, 6) Abbabra,
- 7) al-Imlehiyeh, 8) Khuzeifi, 9) al-Abga, 10) Kheit Genj, 11) Abbadeh,
- 12) Abu Shi'afeh, 13) Abu Gubab, 14) az-Zawiyeh, 15) Tuiul Baradan, 16) as-Suleimeh, 17) Aq Tepe, 18) Tepe al-Atiqeh, 19) Razuk, 20) Ahmed al-Mughir.

also carried out work this year. An expedition from New York University and the Metropolitan Museum found Isin-Larsa houses at Tell Genj (10).

Meanwhile, the Iraqis have exposed very important Ubaid material at Abbadeh (11) which has close links to Iran. They have also excavated Sasanian fortresses (12, 13), a Kassite palace or villa (14), a Parthian fortress with an Islamic fortress on top of it (15), and have made major finds of tablets dating to the Isin-Larsa Period at Tell as-Seeb (near No. 15). Chief among the Iraqi excavations is Suleimeh (16), located on the old line of the highway to Iran, where a series of palaces date from as early as the Akkadian Period through the Isin-Larsa. The uppermost palace has a shrine with a royal tomb beneath it.

Our own work, at Uç Tepe, is yielding good results. We have formed a joint expedition with the University of Copenhagen and the collaboration is working out well. Tell Atikeh (18), the southernmost of our mounds, consists of one large Akkadian palace (c. 2300 B.C.), with walls standing more than three meters high.

Tell Razuk (19) is a town of the Early Dynastic I Period (c. 3000 B.C.) with a town wall, houses, and a citadel of mudbrick somewhat like the round building the Japanese found at Tell al-Gubbeh. Our round building has at least three concentric walls and is 27 meters in diameter. The walls are about three meters high. We expect to find doorways and in one or two places there are indications of an intact mudbrick roof. We will know a lot more about this building when I write the next letter.

Tell Ahmed al-Mughir (20), the third tell we have investigated, has Kassite houses overlying buildings of the Isin-Larsa Period.

We have also carried out a short sounding at a small tell called Rihan on the western side of the Narin River. Here we found pottery of the prehistoric Samarra Period (c. 5000 B.C.), perhaps the earliest material in the basin.

In this account, I have several times mentioned fortresses, palaces, and administrative buildings. I have not used the word town very much. This reflects the peculiar nature of settlement in ancient Hamrin. There seems to have been very sparse population but a lot of administration. One has the notion of strong-points along roads, or castles somewhat like those of medieval Europe. A glance at Map 2 shows concentrations, or rather alignments, of numbers that mark sites. A line drawn through the numbers in connect-the-dot fashion will duplicate fairly well the present-day road system. I think that although the landscape has undergone some changes over the millennia, the general lines of communication would have been much the same in all periods.

There are unexpected aspects to the occupation of the basin. There are a good number of prehistoric sites (probably 30 or more) datable to the Samarra, Halaf, and Ubaid periods, but almost no Uruk sites (c. 3500-3000 B.C.), when southern Mesopotamia was creating the earliest civilization. There are numerous Early Dynastic I sites (c. 3000 B.C.), but no Early Dynastic II or III. There are only a handful of sites from most succeeding periods except for the Isin-Larsa (c. 1900 B.C.). The fact that there are a good number of Isin-Larsa sites should not be surprising since Eshnunna, in the Diyala Region just south of the Jebel Hamrin (Map 1), was a major power at

that time and would have considered the Hamrin Basin as crucial to its security. What is surprising is the lack of sites of the second and first millennia. We thought that there would be several important towns from this period because the Hamrin area would have been a frontier between Assyria and Babylonia when they were rivals for supremacy in Mesopotamia. Ahmed Mughir is one of only five or six known Kassite settlements in the basin and a nearby mound may be one of the few first millennium sites. We expect to make a sounding in this fourth mound before we quit in March.

We are just beginning to understand the archeology and history of the Hamrin area. It is appropriate that the Oriental Institute should take part in this project, since its Diyala expeditions of the 1930's produced the closest parallels for the Hamrin material. We are now comparing our material with the Diyala finds and with the results of our last few seasons at Nippur. There are variations, due to regional preferences and time-lag, but our Nippur sequence is proving to be very valuable in dating our new pottery and objects.

The Hamrin Salvage Project is due to end in a year or two, with some work continuing on fringe sites even after the water rises. We may need to spend part of another season here. There are other projects that we are being asked to help with. The next one will be in a dam area above Haditha on the Euphrates. In two years or so, work will start in a large area north of ancient Nineveh, where the Eski Mosul dam will be built. There is also talk of an irrigation project near Nuzi. There are many opportunities in the offing and lots of room for expeditions from many universities. Our main concern is to try to find ways to take advantage of the opportunities as they arise. We are just beginning a new era of Mesopotamian exploration and the increase in knowledge should be explosive. We could learn more in the next ten years than we have in the past fifty.

Sincerely yours,

McGuire Gibson

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*PHOTO CREDITS: p. 4, David Nasgowitz, Assistant Curator, Museum Archives (probably taken by photographer Friedrich Koch); last month's photos, p. 3, taken by Jean Grant, Oriental Institute Photographer.*

*NEWS & NOTES STAFF: Ronald Brown, Editor; Shirley Fisher, Production and Artwork.*

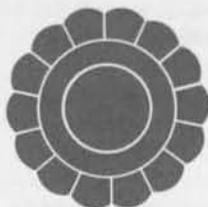
**MEMBERS' COURSES  
STARTING SOON**

**REGISTRATIONS DUE  
BY MARCH 31**

REGISTRATIONS ARE NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR THIS SPRING'S MEMBERS' COURSES: "A HISTORY OF EGYPTIAN ARCHEOLOGY" AND "A HISTORY OF MESOPOTAMIAN ARCHEOLOGY." THESE COURSES WILL MEET ON SATURDAYS, 10-12 NOON, APRIL 7-MAY 26 (8 wks.). COST: \$50.00 FOR MEMBERS. REMEMBER THAT THOSE ENROLLING FOR "MESOPOTAMIAN ARCHEOLOGY" ARE INVITED TO ATTEND THE SIX MESOPOTAMIAN GALLERY TOURS LED BY JUDITH A. FRANKE, SATURDAYS, 1-2:00 P.M., APRIL 7 - MAY 12. IF YOU DO NOT HAVE A REGISTRATION FORM, PLEASE CALL 793-2389.



*In 1905-1906, founder James Henry Breasted took his wife and son with him on a photographic reconnaissance trip to Nubia (Egypt and the Sudan). Here the family's caravan prepares to leave Amara, Egypt.*



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