



# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

*Issued confidentially to members and friends*

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## VALEDICTORY

This is the last *News & Notes* for which I am editor. Over the last three years I have had the privilege of getting to know quite a few of the Oriental Institute personnel through pestering them for articles, and for that and many other reasons I am grateful to Professor Brinkman for asking me to take on the job of transforming our occasional archeological newsletters into a regular publication about all the Institute's work. I want to thank several other people as well, especially Bernie Lalor, the Membership Secretary, to whom I was immediately responsible, and with whom I frequently disagreed, for his always wise and usually heeded suggestions. Chuck Van Sicen and Ruth Marcanti were generous and helpful in providing books from the Research Archives and photographs from the Museum Archives, respectively. For most of this time Sharon Hanna, and now Ann Thorne, have set type (and accepted last-minute alterations) with great skill and great results. The printers at the University's Industrial Relations Center always do a great job. Finally, I thank all the contributors for taking time out from their research and teaching to share their discoveries and insights with the public. This is a small, but important aspect of their work: for of what use is the best of scholarship—and the more I see of scholarship the more I am convinced that what's done here *is* the best—if it is not made available to all who are interested?

As for me, you might still hear from me; I'm moving upstairs to the Assyrian Dictionary to assist the editors while I work on my Ph.D. dissertation and, hopefully, become a scholar myself.

—Peter T. Daniels

## A NEW ERA IN SYRIAN ARCHEOLOGY

by Leon Marfoe

*It was already late in the afternoon, and a cool brisk wind whipped small "dustdevils" across the top of the mound as my companion and I trudged slowly and wearily back through the village cemetery towards our dig house. It had been a particularly hot, dusty day, and having missed my habitual afternoon dip in the slowmoving Orontes stream flowing past the tell, I was my usual irritable self. My friend, ustaaz Majid el-Musuli, the Syrian Director of Antiquities for Homs province, turned towards me with a smug grin. I replied with a scowl. "Lee, what is the English word for "Tontafeln?" he innocently inquired. He had been educated in East Germany. "Clay tablets," I snarled in return. "I have found some clay tablets," he announced. I forgot about the Orontes.*

That was in October 1975, and the site was Tell Nebi Men—ancient Qadesh—where Ramses II had sent his chariots rushing in—into a Hittite trap—and had lived to boast of it. "Qadesh the deceitful" and visions of the King of Qadesh thrust head first into the Orontes by the outraged Egyptian troops are conjured up. The site of this famous battle was the scene of a new excavation under the directions of my professor, Peter Parr, from the University of London. But all across central Syria, similar conversations must have been occurring at different excavations, in different languages, over the last few years. After decades of dormancy, archeology in Syria had reopened with a speed and energy that left archeologists gasping for breath (but the gasping is sometimes caused by the local drink, *araq*). A hundred miles north of us, at Tell Mardikh, our nearest neighbors, the Italians from the University of Rome, were probably toasting themselves with *vino*, unlike their more reserved English colleagues at Nebi Mend, who were consoling ourselves with Syrian brandy. They had reason to cheer; they had just uncovered an archive left untouched since 2300 B.C., an archive of 15,000 tablets with historical implications so far-reaching that it may well be one of the most important discoveries of the century. And all over Syria, more than a dozen expeditions, speaking Dutch, French, German, Danish, English, Italian, Arabic, and yes, even Japanese, were making similarly rewarding, if not startling, discoveries.

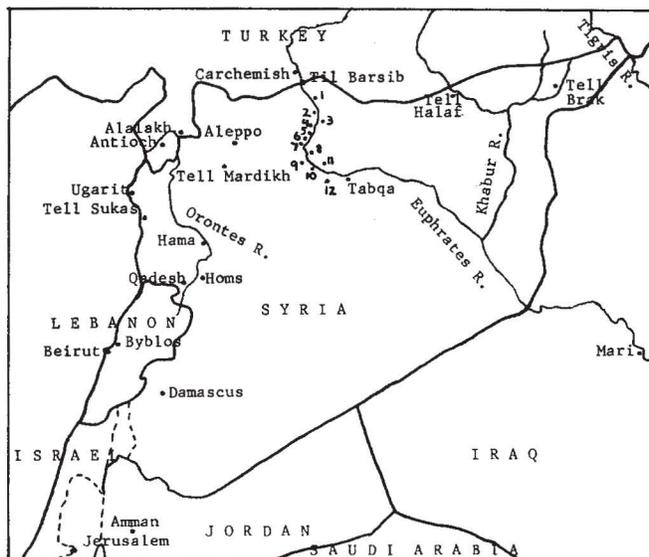
How did all this begin? After a fitful start at the turn of the century with the British excavations at Carchemish and the Germans at Tell Halaf, Syrian archeology had its heyday during the period of the French Mandate (officially 1922-1941). The Oriental Institute's own Syro-Hittite expedition worked in

the Amuq plain near Antioch in the 1930's, and even managed a quick season at Tell Fakhariyah (1940) which, at the time, they hoped might be Wasshukani, the capital of the Mitanni empire. They worked side by side with a host of nationalities: Leonard Woolley at Tell Atchanah, Max Mallowan in the Jezireh (the semiarid "island" surrounded by the Euphrates and Khabur rivers), Harald Ingholt at Hama. The most indefatigable, however, were the French. André Parrot at Mari and Claude Schaeffer at Ugarit were the most famous because of the archives they found, but a myriad of excavations were carried out by a number of eminent scholars, not the least of whom were Maurice Dunand at the rich site of Byblos, François Thureau-Dangin at Til Barsib, and the prolific Comte Robert du Mesnil du Buisson, the excavator of Qatna and many other sites. Until about a decade ago, the results of their work (of which the Braidwoods' *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch* is a shining example) formed the sole body of archeological information from which armchair archeologists would derive ingenious answers for insoluble problems. The onset of World War II brought an end to all that.

Very slowly, after the war, a few archeological missions returned to continue their pre-war studies. Woolley resumed work at Alalakh. The French, of course, reopened their excavations at Ugarit and Mari. A few new expeditions cautiously began to initiate new projects. By 1960, a number of new excavations were under way. They were no longer on the same scale as before but nevertheless obtained important results. Anton Moortgat began to excavate at Tell Khuera in the Jezireh, a magnificent 3rd millennium site with distant connections to Early Dynastic southern Mesopotamia. The Danes began again, at Tell Sukas on the coast. Dunand continued his efforts at Byblos, but found time to search for ancient Simyra (Sumur) at Tell Kazel on the coast. The British decided to investigate Tell Rifaat in northern Syria, a large mound which they had hoped might turn out to be Arpad, an Aramean state in the 1st millennium B.C. In many ways, it almost seemed like the good old days, but uncertain financial conditions and the constant political turmoil made long term projects an anachronistic venture. Rising nationalism and fluctuating monetary values forced a new stage of less ambitious, more realistic goals upon western archeologists.

*Cra-ack! The shot echoed across the valley. "He's shooting at us!" Tony yelled at me. It was a wet and miserable day in the Biqaa valley where we had been slowly wending our way through the agricultural fields on foot. I was carrying out a survey of archeological sites for my dissertation. "It must be a mistake," was my hoarse reply, not very hopefully. The next moment dispelled any doubts. Cra-aa-ck! We hurled ourselves against the wet mud as the whistle of buckshot flew around us. "I've been hit!" mumbled Tony. "So am I," was my inaudible cry. "God, your face is a mess!" "Look, do you think we can rush him?" I frantically yelled back. "Not a chance; I'll carry the sherds and we'll run for it!" Cra-a-ck! I was totally convinced. "Let's go!" We stumbled into a shambling run through the mud . . . 3 miles to our base crosscountry. Cra-aa-ck! "¡†\$%&\* . . . I hate this sort of thing!" For us, the fighting in Lebanon had begun.*

And then came the Deluge. Literally. As part of a major program of economic and social development projects in the Syrian Arab Republic, it was decided to build a dam across the Euphrates at Tabqa, 100 miles east of Aleppo. The dam was to be almost 3 miles long and 200 feet high in order to create a lake 50 miles long and 5 miles wide. When the Egyptian Asswan dam was announced, there had been a flurry of archeological activity. The Syrian salvage project began with less publicity and more slowly. Professor Maurits van Loon, who came to the Oriental Institute in 1964, initiated a survey of the area to be inundated and examined a number of archeological sites. The Syrian government then issued an appeal to UNESCO and to the international body of archeologists, and over the last decade, about 20 foreign missions working on two dozen sites have responded. Some were lucky and others were not, but it was and



#### Key to the Euphrates sites:

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Tell es-Sweyhat | 7. Selenkahiye  |
| 2. Tell Hadidi     | 8. Mureybit     |
| 3. Mumbaqaat       | 9. Meskene      |
| 4. Tell Hajj       | 10. Dibsī Faraj |
| 5. Habuba Kabira   | 11. Tell Frei   |
| 6. Tell Qannas     | 12. Abu Hureira |

is the spirit governing the entire venture, a spirit of international cooperation and goodwill, that was really important. Their host, the Syrian government, itself developing a corps of archeologists, responded with a warm welcome. Two years ago, the Syrians invited the participating missions to display their "first fruits" in a new exhibition in the Aleppo Museum. The results officially revealed at that initial meeting on November 16-18, 1974, having slowly emerged over the years and diffused by word of mouth, showed that a new chapter in Syrian archeology was unfolding.

Taken chronologically, the earliest finds were from excavations at Pre-ceramic Epipaleolithic and Neolithic settlements (c. 9000 to 6000 B.C.), Mureybit and Abu Hureira. The former, originally begun by van Loon as an Oriental Institute project, and the latter, co-sponsored during the first season by the Institute, yielded villages of populations initially practicing hunting and gathering, and subsequently domestication. Their information fills an important gap in our knowledge of the period which hitherto had come from other regions. After the Neolithic, the next important period represented in the Euphrates valley is the Halafian (c. 5000 B.C.), found also in great abundance across north Syria and Iraq. So far, the Ubaid (c.4000 B.C.), discovered throughout the Near East from southern Turkey to the Arabian peninsula, has only appeared in fragmentary finds.

One of the most important discoveries of the salvage project was of the Uruk period (c. 3500 B.C.). Until now, remains of the Uruk period, and particularly the ubiquitous bevelled-rim bowl, have been found from Iran to Turkey, but no "purely" Uruk settlement had yet been revealed in the west. Based on his own experience in the Amuq, Professor Braidwood had suspected that a slightly later period was one of "incipient internationalism." This anticipation bordered on clairvoyance. Excavating in the southern portion of their allotted area, a German mission at Habuba Kabira, directed by Dr. Eva Strommenger, discovered a wide mud-brick enclosure wall only slightly beneath the surface. On tracing this wall, they discovered that it extended well over 500 yards from north to south, parallel with the banks of the Euphrates, and 150 yards from west to east towards the river. This expansive settlement was definitely dated to the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr period, and in fact, all the finds may well have originated in southern Mesopotamia, hundreds of miles away, so that there was no question in giving it that name. Among the many objects, clay "tablets" that may have been inscribed for counting were found. Even more important, to their dismay the excavators found that the center of their settlement was in the Belgian concession, at the site of Tell Qannas. Sure enough, the Belgians discovered a temple of the same period complete with cone mosaics, so similar to the south Mesopotamian variety that an archeologist not knowing he was in Syria might well have thought he was in Iraq. More recently, excavating around the main tell, an Early Dynastic (c. 3000-2500 B.C.) settlement was located. Not to be outdone, the Dutch expedition from Leiden have found yet another temple of the Uruk period on the top of the nearest mountain, Jebel Aruda. It's almost a case of *déjà vu*.

Of the 23 excavations in the salvage project, 10 have now revealed remains of the late 3rd millennium (Akkadian period). Poorly understood in the past, it is now the best represented period in Syria, especially since the Tell Mardikh excavations have now yielded epigraphic evidence that complements, if not overshadows, the archeological evidence. The most interesting settlements of this period have been found at Selenkahiyeh, Tell Hadidi, and Tell es-Sweyhat, by Dutch, American, and British excavations. Numerous graves of this period have also been found at Mumbaqtat by a German mission.

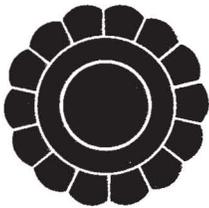
From the later Bronze Age periods, the most important excavation is that of Meskene, ancient Emar. About 1500 tablets in Akkadian and Hittite have been found by a French expedition, yielding tremendous information on the history of the 13th century B.C. during the time of the Hittite domination. An Italian mission has similarly excavated a town of the 13th century at the site of Tell Frei where, in addition to some tablet finds, they have found a bulla seal of Hattushili III and Pudukhepa of Hatti. The overall picture that is now emerging is one of a very important commercial and agricultural zone in this portion of the Euphrates valley during the entire Bronze Age.

This makes it all the more surprising, then, that very little in the way of Iron Age settlements has been found—indeed, quite curious considering what we know of the Aramean and Neo-Hittite states of the period. The entire region does not seem to have supported a substantial population again until the Roman and Islamic periods. Excavations at Dibsi Faraj and Tell Hajj have shown that this was an important sector of the Eastern Empire under the Roman and Byzantine emperors. Subsequently, the area seems to have flourished under the early Islamic Caliphate, particularly the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties, until the Mongol invasion in 1258 A.D.

If the revival of interest in Syria was limited only to the Dam Project, it would only have been a short-lived affair. The dam is now completed and an inundation of the archeological sites has already begun. But the fever has caught, and numerous excavations outside the dam area are now in progress. The most important of these is the Tell Mardikh excavations which had already begun in 1963 before the salvage program. On this enormous site of 230 acres, an important city of the 3rd and 2nd millennia had been found with impressive fortifications, temples, sculpture, and the like. But only since 1974 has the work there attracted the attention it deserved. During that season, over 60 tablets were found in a deep trench on the high central mound of the site, in levels dating to the late 3rd millennium. These tablets furnished

the earliest such inscriptional evidence found in Syria, some of them written in a hitherto undiscovered language, a West Semitic language akin to Hebrew, but in a cuneiform script. The important finds of 1974 did not in any way prepare scholars for the discoveries of 1975. In that season, about 15,000 tablets were found, a number in this new language. The rumors hinted that these tablets had been neatly stacked on shelves and probably were not even the main royal archives! Although the results cannot be divulged until they are officially published, a few facts have been confirmed. Some of the contents are staggering. Tell Mardikh is the ancient site of Ebla, a city mentioned by the Akkadian kings Sargon and Naram-Sin (c. 2340-2220 B.C.) as a kingdom to the west which they claimed to have conquered. During the period of the archive, this kingdom had wide ranging influence and interests over large portions of Western Asia, including contacts with Egypt and southern Mesopotamia. Towns and states already known from contemporary texts in Mesopotamia and from diverse sources in later periods (some of which were not known to have existed at this early period) are mentioned and provide important synchronisms. Perhaps as significant, the new language and attested names found in these texts will yield information vital for the understanding of Biblical history, many of these personal names also occurring in the Old Testament. The language itself, tentatively dubbed Old Canaanite or Eblite, is the oldest attested West Semitic tongue; and it has many features in common with Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew, and Phoenician. As these texts are deciphered and gradually published, their impact on our understanding of the socio-economic, political, legal, religious, linguistic, and literary world of the 3rd millennium Near East should be enormous.

The enthusiasm has not ended there. New excavations and old ones are entering into the field. In just these two years, two new British missions have begun work at Tell Brak and Tell Nebi Mend. A new Syrian expedition will begin at the enormous (260) acre) site of Qatna. Mentioned in the Mari archives as a powerful kingdom, the Syrians regard this site as sufficiently important to justify a removal of the village presently atop the tell! Just last autumn, a new German survey of the Khabur Valley was under way. Some of the enthusiasm creeps into a letter from a colleague on that survey: "Yes, we did have a rather successful survey. We have visited 56 sites, out of which we have mapped 49 thoroughly. . . many practically unmentioned in the literature . . . and so we hope to return and finish the rest." The sentiment is shared by us at Qadesh, especially as the tantalizing tidbits uncovered half a century ago are finally merging into a coherent pattern. In the brief three-week season last year, only three small trenches on a site of 200 acres were opened. Yet the excavation of the Middle Bronze Age fortifications and the find-



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ing of a cache of tablets (dating from a few years before the battle of Qadesh) in Late Bronze levels that verify the identity of the site were more than we expected. Levels contemporary with Mardikh have probably been located. Perhaps the next season will be even better.

*"Wouldn't this make a beautiful publicity photo?" queried Peter as we steadily chipped away at fallen mud brick that had covered a group of storage jars. It was a quiet and beautiful Friday morning, and we had decided to do this piece of delicate work ourselves while the workmen were away. A small green sliver emerged from one of the jars. "What's that?" "Where's the pick? Hand me the pick!" "Look out! Don't hit the baulk! Watch out for the baulk!" "Ugh! Got it!" The little green viper had been smashed to a pulp against the plastered floor. "And that would have made such a nice photograph too," wailed my shaken professor.*

Mr. Marfoe is a Ph.D. candidate in Syro-Palestinian archeology.

Kaspar K. Riemschneider  
James Henry Breasted Research Associate

Word has been received of the death on June 5 of Kaspar K. Riemschneider and his daughter, Julia, in an automobile accident in Idaho. Mrs. Riemschneider is recovering. Mr. Riemschneider was for two years the James Henry Breasted Research Associate at the Assyrian Dictionary. A biographical memoir will be issued later.

In lieu of flowers, contributions to a special fund for Mrs. Riemschneider will be received by the Oriental Institute.