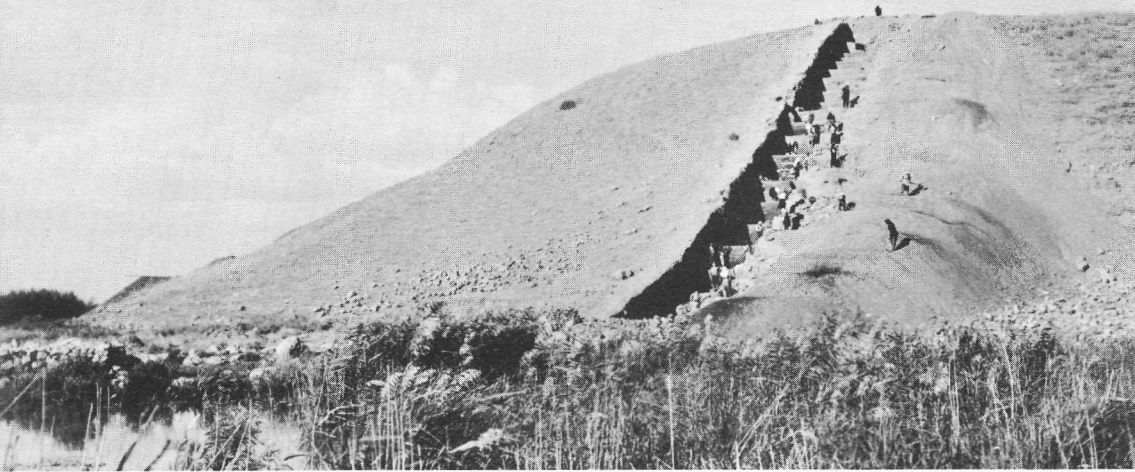


THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

Research institutes are means for the concentration of effort in fields of special importance, particularly on the frontiers of knowledge. In the field of history and of the humane letters they are anything but numerous. The existence of an Oriental Institute at an American university expresses the conviction that the ancient civilizations of the Near East are worthy of intensive study and that to discover, explore, record, and interpret them requires the services of many different specialists working together in close co-operation.

The work of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago is important for two reasons. The first is the need of our own country—and of the Western world generally—to understand the foundations of our civilization, built as it is ultimately upon the high cultures of the ancient Near East. The second is the need of the contemporary Orient to understand that we of the West are interested not only in the markets and the raw materials it provides but also in the cultural heritage common to its peoples and to us.

In the thirty-five years of its history the Oriental Institute has, in spite of war and depression, become one of the outstanding research agencies in the field of Near Eastern studies, largely because of the eminent scholars that constitute its moving force. Their competence ranges from remote prehistory to modern Islam, covers all the many languages, literatures, and cultures that existed in the Near East over a period of several thousand years, and includes also the technical skills necessary for field work in the geographic and ethnic areas in question.



The mound Tell Judaidah

On horseback and camel-back, in car, jeep, and airplane, Institute staff members have explored the Near East, locating sources of strategic information or monuments most immediately in need of salvage. In teams of field workers, with hundreds of laborers locally recruited, they have excavated in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, bringing home full accounts of their findings and some share of the precious objects and written records brought to light by their efforts. Meanwhile, other staff members, working continuously at the home base, have made available and interpreted the materials collected and provided the tools for the understanding of the written records. All the work proceeds in closest co-operation with scholars of other institutions and other lands for the enrichment of the learning of all.

What has been accomplished is truly remarkable. Many phases in the history of man's rise from savagery to civilization in the Nile Valley and in the Tigris-Euphrates Basin have been illuminated. Important historical and cultural monuments—palaces, temples, military installations, literary and historical records—have been brought to light, studied, drawn, photographed, and

made accessible in published form. Over 150 large volumes already attest the painstaking work of a generation of scholars, and more are continually being prepared. Indeed, so fast was the tempo of the Institute's work, particularly during the first twenty years of its history, that the printer is still catching up with the spade.

Although the Institute's purpose, as originally set forth by its founder, James Henry Breasted, has been well served, the work is still only in its earlier stages, and the full range of the program as originally conceived has not yet been developed. Most of the ancient cultures of the Near East are still only imperfectly known; others are little more than names; and yet others quite unknown today will certainly come to light. In the field of written records it has proved so great a task to read and publish the texts that their relevance for the study of social, economic, religious, political, and literary history has still to be given full attention. Problems of the intermingling of cultures in the Orient have scarcely been broached, and the whole question of the transmission of Near Eastern civilization to the West has scarcely been explored.

In the meantime new perspectives have opened up upon the distant past, and new methods have been developed for the appraisal of its relevance to the present. In the effort to keep pace with such changes, the Institute has been re-examining its procedures and clarifying its long- and short-range objectives. Fundamentally, its purpose—to help describe the rise of human civilization in the Orient—remains constant. But a conscious effort will be made during the next decade to re-create the rise and the life of the urban community as the means and the measure of man's cultural growth and experience. With this effort the research in the field and at home will be ever more closely coordinated under the supervision of an Institute Research Council



of five. The opportunities remain limitless, and what will be accomplished depends upon the firmness and promptness with which the Institute can grasp the opportunities that continually present themselves.

In the pages that follow, the Oriental Institute is described as a research instrument, in terms of its official enterprises, its staff and their scholarly work, its Museum, its publications, and its outreach to the general public.

