

*THE IRANIAN PREHISTORIC PROJECT*

Many indications point toward the hill flanks of the Fertile Crescent in southwestern Asia as the scene of the earliest development of effective food-production and a village-farming community way of life, some ten thousand or fewer years ago. In its 1959/60 field season the Iranian Prehistoric Project reclaimed further evidence of this important transitional step in human history.

The field season was begun with a surface survey for both caves and open-air sites of the intermontane valleys of the Zagros Mountains near Kermanshah in Iran. Over two hundred and fifty prehistoric sites were located. Sites yielding surface materials suggesting the time range from *ca.* 15,000 to *ca.* 8,000 years ago—the span during which time the swing to effective food-production and village-farming communities must have appeared—were well represented and several of these were selected for excavation.

For Near Eastern prehistory at least, the exceptional find at a small low mound called “Asiab” was great quantities of what we interpreted as coprolites or fossilized fecal matter. Should these indeed prove to be coprolites and to be human, they will be an invaluable clue to the diet of a group of people who had already achieved a somewhat settled way of life on the basis of intensified regionalized food-collecting and who also should have been on the road to “incipient agriculture.” These objects we are calling “coprolites” are definitely human in size and shape, and they occur in great concentration within the living area at Asiab, which circumstance also would

*River side of Asiab*





*Sarab figurines*

indicate a human origin. Coprolites of wild animals would not be expected to occur there, and we have no evidence for domestic animals at Asiab.

At another low small mound, called "Sarab," an assemblage of prehistoric materials was excavated which, in part, strongly recalls artifactual elements of the village-farming community assemblage at Jarmo in Iraqi Kurdistan. In fact, the pottery, the clay figurines, the finer work in ground stone, and the flint and obsidian industries might be said to be typological advances over their Jarmo counterparts within the same general technological traditions. We do not have yet firm indications of the presence of wheat or barley, an important element of the Jarmo assemblage, although it is possible that traces of these cereals may yet appear as molds in lumps of earth.

Since the laboratory processing of the materials is only now under way, it is too early to speak of absolute results. Our immediate post-field impression does include the feeling that the Kermanshah valleys *may* lie slightly too high to have been in the optimum part of the environmental zone for the utilization, by incipient agriculturalists, of the potential plant and animal domesticates. A new survey is now being planned which will link the higher Kermanshah valleys with the alluvium of the Khuzestan Plain, by traverses along various of the tributaries of the Karkheh River.

ROBERT J. BRAIDWOOD  
*Field Director*  
*Iran Jarmo Expedition*



*Siabid pot*