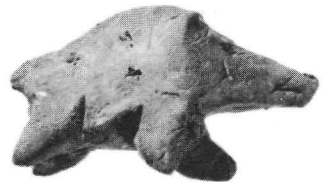


THE PREHISTORIC PROJECT

In charge: ROBERT J. BRAIDWOOD, Professor of Old World Prehistory (on joint appointment with the Department of Anthropology), Field Director.

The Prehistoric Project addresses itself to the problem: How was the stage set upon which the drama of ancient Western civilization was to unfold? The question is phrased so as to grant that in other parts of the world—in Mesoamerica and the Andes, somewhere in south-eastern Asia and probably in sub-Saharan Africa—other stages were also being set for the development of other ancient civilizations. In each instance, the setting of these stages involved the development of a complex of domesticated plants or of plants and animals.

As the evidence now stands, it seems clear that the earliest experiment in effective food-production was achieved in southwestern Asia some ten thousand years ago. Near Eastern food-production depended upon the domestication of such items as wheat, barley, certain legumes, sheep, goats, pigs, and cattle. Further, to be truly effective, the experiment must have involved sweeping renovations in the ways of life of the men and women who brought it about. The consequences



of effective food-production are already hinted to us in the earliest traces we find of small but permanent village-farming community settlements. The traces of these first villagers stand in marked contrast to the much simpler inventories of their food-collecting ancestors, who had already inhabited the region for countless thousands of years, living sometimes in caves and sometimes in impermanent open-air settlements.

Southwestern Asia is a vast and diverse region. The question of how food-production was achieved in this region only became a primary scholarly concern following the last war. Therefore, research upon the problem has so far yielded little beyond the bare outline of events in restricted parts of the whole area. The Institute's own field efforts have previously focused on several intermontane valleys of the Zagros range in Iraq and Iran, and currently are moving to the unexplored slopes of the Taurus mountains between the upper Euphrates and Tigris Rivers in Turkey.

It is clear that while man, as a developing cultural being, was the agent of domestication, nature also played a key role in the "food-producing revolution," since the ancient environment must have contained the potential domesticates in their wild forms. Thus the solution of the problem demands competences not only in cultural but also in natural history. Here we have been most fortunate in securing—through research grants from the National Science Foundation—a field staff of distinguished natural scientists in agronomy, botany, ecology, geography, geology, palynology, and zoölogy. In essence, the field strategy is one of a co-ordinated attempt at the reclamation of evidence for both the ancient environments and the human cultures which were adapted to these environments in progressively changing ways.

The basic patterns for much of the way in which we live today were germinated by the earliest farmers of southwestern Asia. In effect, the Prehistoric Project seeks understanding of how this process of germination took place.