

The Oriental Institute Euphrates Valley Expedition

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Through the generous support of the National Science Foundation the Euphrates Valley Expedition is carrying out its second campaign of excavation in that part of Syria which is to be flooded upon completion of the projected dam in the Euphrates. The first campaign uncovered what seems to be a pre-agricultural village culture of the eighth millennium B.C.

This time the Expedition's aim is to throw light on events in the late third and early second millennium B.C. Throughout the Near East this was a time of upheavals apparently caused by, or at least coinciding with, a shift in the balance between nomad and settled world. At some city sites the evidence points to an interruption of urban life. On the other hand, settlements of this period are found reaching far into the steppe, normally the preserve of the nomads.

In order to gather information from both sides, excavation of a large mound just inside the settled zone is to be followed by exploration of possible camp sites near springs in the adjoining steppe.

Under the large mound, Tell Selenkaḥiye, fifty miles east of Aleppo, we expect to find a city which flourished throughout this turbulent period, despite several destructions and rebuildings. Its fortification walls are visible as low ridges above ground. Large buildings in two or three superimposed levels were cut through recently when an irrigation canal was straightened.

Digging started on March 4 at four points simultaneously: the city wall, the burial grounds along the river terrace south of the mound, and the two banks of the canal cut through the mound. One bank, already encumbered except for a narrow strip, was chosen for a vertical sampling of the materials we may expect from the successive phases in the occupation of the mound. The other bank was chosen for the horizontal exposure of a representative building.

The mud-brick city wall proves to have been founded on stone blocks up to 5 feet long and to have been rebuilt at least once after burning.



Burial with bronze pins over the ribs and silver frontlet on the skull, excavated south of Tell Selenkahiye.

The burial grounds have yielded eleven graves to date, in each of which twenty-five or more pottery vessels had been placed. Bronze pins and daggers usually lay on or near the skeleton. One skull wore a silver leaf on the forehead. Stone groups, possibly grave markers, were associated with two graves.

The vertical sounding is supplying a large sample of domestic pottery, as well as plant remains turned to charcoal in the violent—presumably warlike—destruction of successive building levels.

The horizontal exposure has so far yielded the portico, service rooms, and possible staircase of a heavy-walled, white-plastered building, in which at least one victim was trapped when it collapsed. A bronze adze and a bronze pin were lying near his prone skeleton. A large cylinder seal of local style had fallen into the portico entrance. A child victim and a smaller seal of the same type were found in part of the same complex, encountered in the vertical sounding.

The expedition staff included, besides the writer, three archeologists who studied at the Oriental Institute (Rudolph H. Dornemann, Alfred J. Hoerth, and Stanislao Loffreda), as well as specialists in early animal and plant remains. Operations continued until the end of May; in that month part of the team explored the supposed habitat of third-millennium B.C. nomads in the steppe south of the Euphrates.

It is hoped that samples of carbon and other organic materials, as well as of the artifacts found, can be brought back for study with the permission of the Syrian Antiquities Department, which is anxious that the remains of early cultures now threatened with submersion be utilized for a better understanding of Syria's past.

White plastered room excavated on Tell Selenkahiye, skeleton of man killed by fallen debris.

