

The Joint Istanbul-Chicago Prehistoric Project

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The Joint Prehistoric Project of the Prehistory Section of Istanbul University and of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago completed its third field campaign in late December, 1970. The excavations were concentrated on the mound of Çayönü in the Diyarbakir province in southeastern Turkey. Since their inception in 1947, the Oriental Institute's prehistoric projects have been deeply concerned with the reclamation of understandings of the ancient ecological and cultural conditions within which plants and animals were domesticated and the so-called "food-producing revolution" was achieved.

Test excavations on Çayönü in 1964 and in 1968 had already exposed the partial remains of a village of very early farmers, first settled

over nine thousand years ago. The inhabitants of its later and more developed levels already had domesticated wheat, peas and lentils, as well as domesticated sheep, pigs and dogs, and probably goats—basic elements of the normal food-production pattern of the western cultural tradition. The Çayönü inhabitants also made simple metal tools by hammering hunks of native copper, but they had not yet learned the potter's craft.

The 1970 excavations considerably expanded knowledge of the site. The stone foundations of the newly exposed series of Çayönü build-



A house foundation at Çayönü, with objects still in place on the floor. Photo by Charles L. Redman.

ings indicate a very considerable and truly architectural sophistication for so early a time. In one instance, the broad central room of a building was floored with polished orange-colored stone chips set in cement and this terrazzo pavement also had a pattern of two pairs of lines made up of white stone chips. Unfortunately, the center of this paved area had been broken away. We know of no earlier evidence of cement and of terrazzo pavement, just as we still have no earlier evidence of hammered native copper. In several instances of buildings destroyed by fire, remarkably large clusters of tools, weapons and objects of daily use were recovered in the exact positions in which their original users had left them. One exceptional find was the unbaked clay model of a house.

The research intent of the Joint Prehistoric Project, being generally concerned with the beginnings of agriculture and animal husbandry in the Near East, is most specifically focused on the cultural consequences of these beginnings. Recent excavations in other parts of southwestern Asia have already suggested that a simple type of at least semi-settled village life began well before a time when identifiable evidence of plant and animal domestication can be found. The point at issue here poses certain questions: For how long a time did men manipulate or control the ancestral forms of the plant and animal domesticates before strains or breeds appeared which we now can recognize as truly domesticated? How successful, at least from the point of view of fully settled community existence and of technological advance and change, were the earlier phases of this transition toward effective food-production?

Çayönü appears to contain an actual transitional sequence from the use of still "wild" plants and animals to the use of identifiable domesticates. Uniquely, this evidence is found within the above mentioned series of substantial and even architecturally specialized stone-founded buildings. Such circumstances surely point to a year-round settlement of socially and economically well adjusted inhabitants. Among other evidence pointing to technological innovations with important consequences for the future are the tentative working of copper and the preparation of a simple cement. It would now appear that earlier theories were in error in regarding fully effective and developed food-production as prerequisite to perennial and architecturally well expressed settlements, and to the onset of specialized technological change.

The excavations at Çayönü are under the co-directorship of Halet Çambel for Istanbul University and of Robert J. Braidwood for the

University of Chicago. Grants-in-aid to the expedition came from the National Science Foundation and, for graduate student training, from the Ford Foundation. Patty Jo Watson of Washington University continued the testing of a more developed village site, Gerikihaciyan, in the same area but dating only to about seven thousand years ago. The Gerikihaciyan excavations expanded knowledge of an archeological material known as the Halafian phase, with mound house plans and a handsome style of pottery painting.

The excavations at Çayönü are scheduled to resume in September, 1972.