



Chicago-Copenhagen Expedition to the Hamrin: Üç Tepe and Tell Rihan

McGuire
Gibson

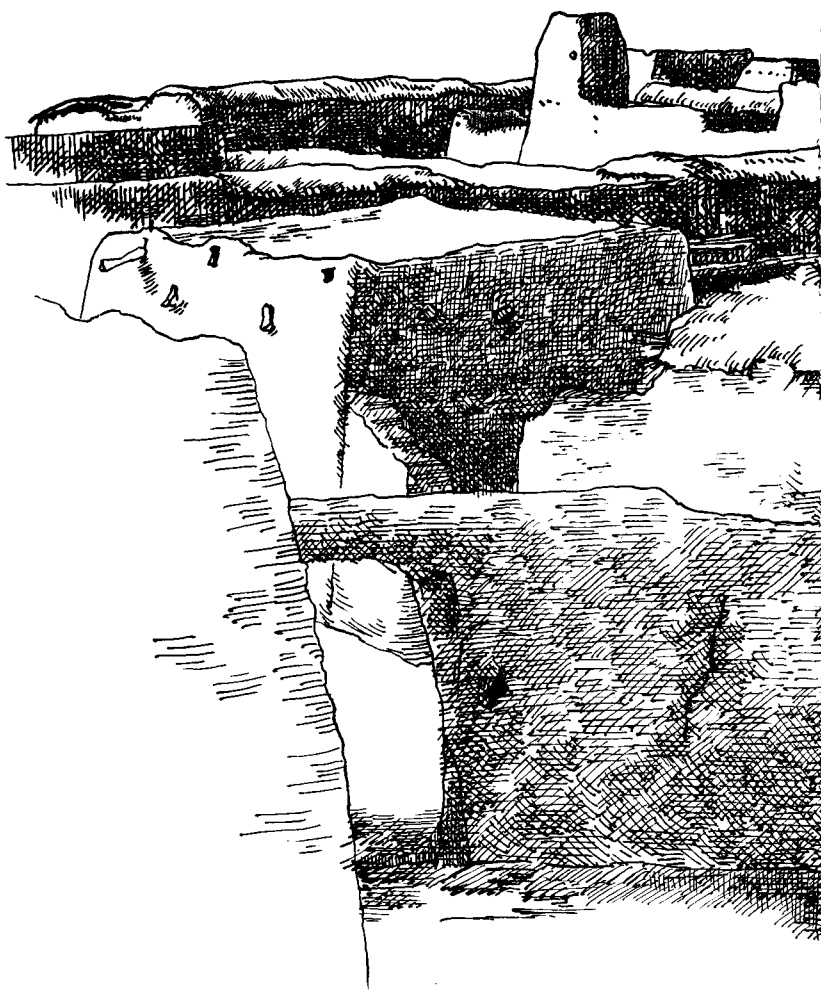
During the past year the Oriental Institute Nippur Expedition was transformed into a joint expedition with the University of Copenhagen in order to carry out a special salvage project in an area that is about to be flooded.

The Hamrin Basin is a relatively small, lozenge-shaped alluvial plain between the Jebel Hamrin and the Jebel Jesper, two long ridges that are the westernmost ripples of the Zagros mountains. The Diyala River, beginning in the mountains across the border in Iran, meanders through the basin, is joined by the Narin, and cuts through the Jebel Hamrin. At this place, a dam is being constructed that will be completed in two years, but the water of the reservoir is to begin rising as early as the summer of 1979.

When the Iraqi Organization of Antiquities announced a special salvage project for the Hamrin basin, most archeologists working in Iraq were only slightly aware of the area. Very important work had been done during the 1930's by an expedition from the Oriental Institute in the Diyala Region just south of the new dam, but work had never been carried out in the basin itself. Its position astride the road from Baghdad to Kermanshah, the most important route for trade, warfare, and transit between Mesopotamia and the East, led us to expect that the basin would yield important information and finds from a number of periods. Besides the connections between Iraq and Iran, the relationship of Assyria and Babylonia should be made clearer by work in this area, which was on the frontier between those two ancient culture areas. For the Oriental Institute, in particular, the Hamrin basin had a special attraction since the material found there would be comparable and complementary to that from its old excavations in the Diyala.

Living quarters occupied by members of the expedition. Photographs and drawings by Peggy Bruce are available through the Friends of Nippur, proceeds to benefit the Nippur Expedition.

For the salvage project, the operational ground rules were different from those in normal excavations in Iraq. This time, the Iraqi government was supplying housing, labor, some transportation costs, and equipment. The central antiquities office in the area was administering a complex program that included as many as a dozen Iraqi expeditions at one time, plus a number of foreign expeditions. Besides our American-Danish group, there were British-Canadian, German, Italian, Japanese, Belgian, Austrian, French, and American (NYU-Metropolitan Museum) expeditions. With all these expeditions working alongside one another, we had the unusual advantage of studying in depth one small area. Opportunities for intensive work of this kind are rare,

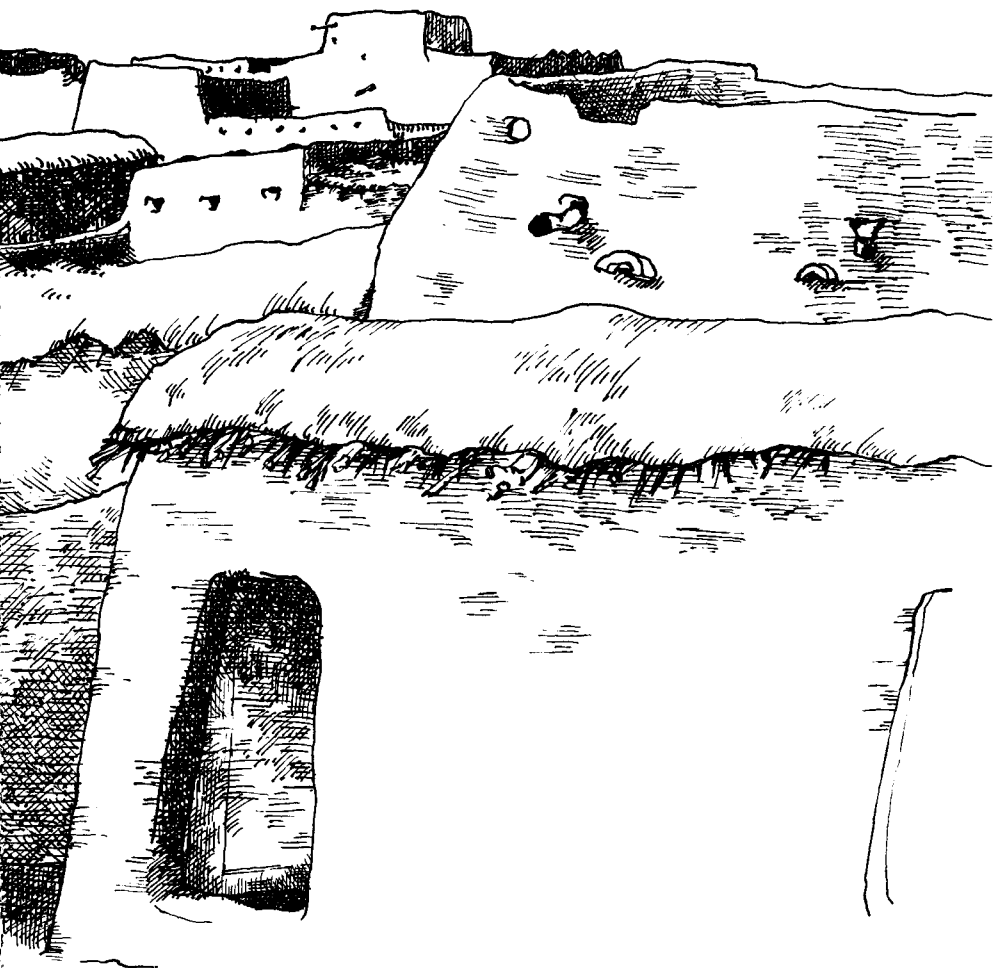


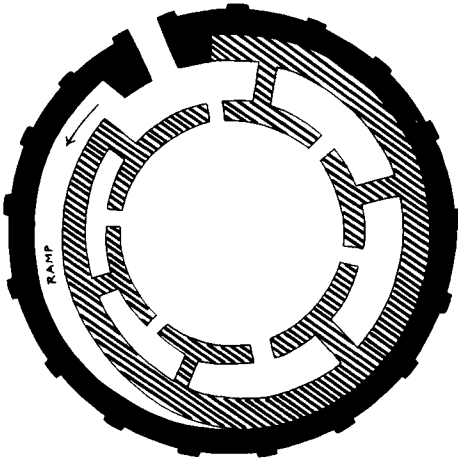
and we made efforts to open communications with other expeditions on official and unofficial levels.

Given the fact that the area would be under water in two years or so, it seemed important to work beyond our usual three-month season. Therefore we started work in early September and continued to dig until March 15.

Üç Tepe (Turkish for “three mounds”) is located in the northern end of the Hamrin basin. The three mounds lie in a north-south line at the junction of a rolling, gravel plateau on the east with a marsh that stretches to the Narin River. The largest of the three mounds, Tell Atiqeh, is no more than two hundred meters in diameter and five meters high. Some three hundred meters north is Tell Razuk, and about the same

The village of Üç Tepe, ink drawing by Peggy Bruce.





Plan of the Round Building at Tell Razuk

distance beyond is Tell Ahmed al-Mughir. All three of the mounds show evidence of fairly recent occupation. The village of Üç Tepe, where we lived, now lies about half a kilometer to the west, but until 1918 it was located on Tell Atiqeh. We found much evidence of this old village, not in architecture, but in pits, wells, and storage bins that had been cut down into the ancient levels. On Tell Razuk and Ahmed al-Mughir, the villagers used to bury their dead. All the tells were, therefore, badly disturbed and difficult to excavate. With these conditions, it was doubly unfortunate that for most of the season we did not have the services of the trained pickmen we were accustomed to in former years. All the work going on in the Hamrin, along with major projects at Babylon, Assur, and other sites, meant that there were not enough pickmen to go around. This season, the European and American staff did most of the detailed pickwork while training local men.

The three main mounds of the site are accompanied by at least six smaller, lower mounds. We did not excavate any of these mounds, but did make soundings in a small site west of the Narin River. Here, at Tell Rihan, having observed sherds of the Samarra period (ca. 5000 B.C.), we put in some test pits and found pottery, but no structures. Until we identified the pottery as of Samarra date, no one had recognized this period as the earliest occupation in the basin.

The earliest material at Üç Tepe proper is at Tell



Intact vaulting (center, background) on the Round Building.

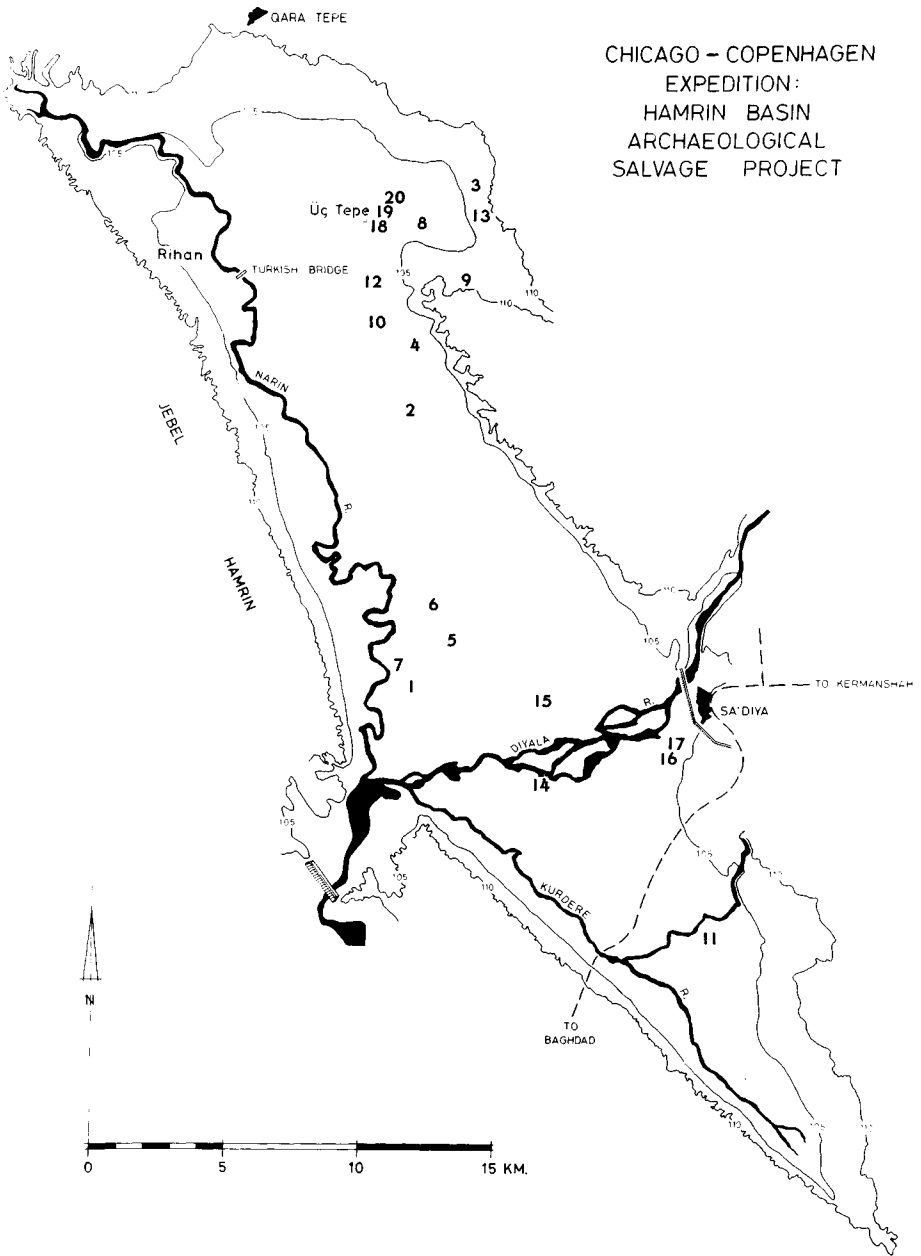
Razuk. Here, beneath medieval Islamic pits, we made the unique discovery of a mudbrick-vaulted roof on a Round Building. The Round Building, twenty-seven meters in diameter and four meters high, is only partially exposed as yet, but we have enough to understand the basic plan. There is one main doorway on the north leading into a room that gives access to a central open courtyard and to a mudbrick ramp that rises to the roof. There are at least five rooms positioned around the courtyard, where there are ovens and much ash. Inside the building we have thus far found weapons, tools, and pottery, including Scarlet Ware that is datable to the Early Dynastic I period (ca. 2900 B.C.).

The outer face of the Round Building has buttresses every five meters. The entire building is designed to lean in toward the top and the outer wall is carried over the ring of rooms in a barrel vault. We thus have the earliest known vaulting in the world.

Outside the Round Building there are houses that radiate out to a large mudbrick town wall.

There are several other fortress-like settlements of the Early Dynastic I period in the Hamrin, and in two of them the main structures are round. However, our building is larger and the roof is intact.

At Tell Atiqeh we exposed three levels of Akkadian period (ca. 2300 B.C.) buildings. Since there has been little work done on Akkadian sites (our excavations at Umm al-Hafriyat last year being one of the few exam-



1) al-Gubbeh, 2) Yelkhi, 3) Madhhur, 4) Kheit Quasim, 5) Sabbra, 6) Abbabra, 7) al-Imleihiyeh, 8) Khuzeifi, 9) al-Abga, 10) Kheit Genj, 11) Abbadeh, 12) Abu Shi'afeh, 13) Abu Gubab, 14) az-Zawiyeh, 15) Tulul Baradan, 16) as-Suleimeh, 17) Aq Tepe, 18) Tepe al-Atiqeh, 19) Razuk, 20) Ahmed al-Mughir.

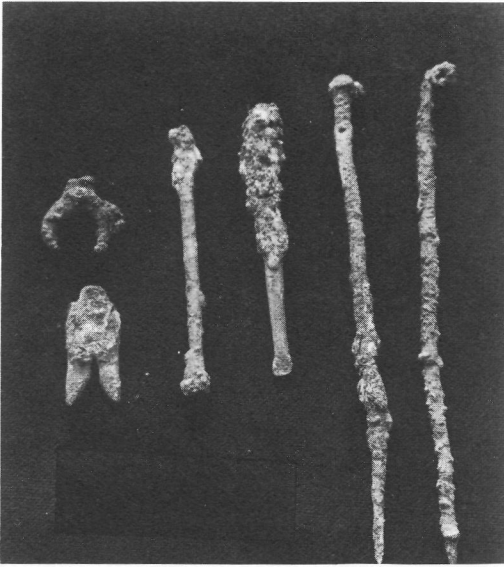
ples), this material has importance beyond the site itself. The lowest, best-preserved level has a large rectangular building with walls preserved up to three meters high. The finds in the building are domestic in character, with dozens of grindstones, flint sickle blades, storage jars and bins, ovens, and utilitarian pottery. Thus far, no tablets have been found, but the objects fix the level firmly in the Akkadian period. At the moment, the remains seem to be those of a large country manor. However, more digging might show that we have exposed only the domestic wing of a large administrative building.

Our work on Tell Ahmed al-Mughir was limited to some surface clearance of a very shallow Kassite occupation (ca. 1300 B.C.) and a deep pit five meters by five. The pit exposed two levels of large Isin-Larsa (ca. 2000 B.C.) buildings. Once again, the size of the building walls seemed to indicate public buildings rather than private houses, but further digging needs to be done to clarify the situation.

The Hamrin basin is proving to be intriguing for a number of reasons, almost none of them related to our initial expectations about the area. There are interesting connections between Iraq and Iran in prehistoric Ubaid (ca. 4000 B.C.) sites dug by other expeditions; and there are features of the Akkadian pottery that link the Hamrin with Assyria; but marked Babylonian influences that we expected, especially in the Early Dynastic III (ca. 2400 B.C.) and Kassite periods, are not in evidence. For an area on the main east-west route, the Hamrin has a surprisingly poor assemblage of trade items. Settlement seems never to have been very heavy, and many sites seem to be only fortresses or small administrative centers. The routes leading out of the basin are far more important than the settlements in it.

Having reached the end of our season without resolving a number of important questions, and having touched the Round Building at Tell Razuk, we must return for at least another season during the fall of 1979. We will again cooperate with the University of Copenhagen and will spend most of our time on Tell Razuk.

The staff this year was larger than normal, consisting of myself as director; Mogens Trolle Larsen, my chief



Bronze tools and ornaments from the Round Building (ED I).

collaborator from Copenhagen, as epigrapher; Richard Zettler, Ingolf Thuesen, James Armstrong, Perry Gnivecki, Jesper Eidem, Bodil Mortensen, and Mette Mortensen as site supervisors. John Sanders, the architect who has been a member of the staff since 1972, kept pace with the digging at four mounds with his usual good humor and keenness of perception. He also prepared in the field and presented in December a long, detailed, excellent paper on Assyrian and Babylonian building function for the International Conference on Assur, Babylon, and the Hamrin in Baghdad. Peggy Bruce served as photographer and artist. Robert Eidt was with us for a short time collecting soil samples for analysis. Jill Maher worked as general assistant and conservator. For the second year in a row, we had the pleasure of working with Hussayn Ali Hamza, the official representative of the Organization of Antiquities.

Several persons visited for some days, volunteering their time and energy. Among these were Marco Nielsen, Ramzi Wahba, Marnie Akins, and Audrey Tajeddin.

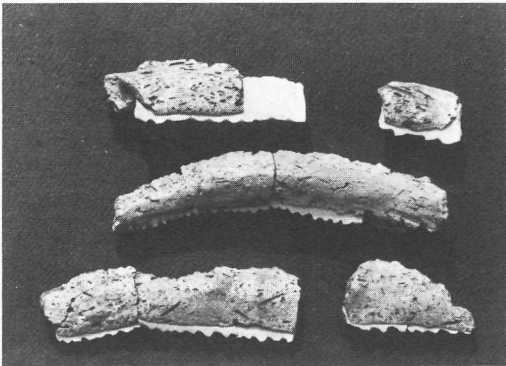
We owe a special debt of gratitude to Kay Erle, Flem-

ming Therkildsen, and other officials of the Monberg-Thorsen Construction Company. This Danish firm lent us surveying instruments, stoves, and a Toyota Land-cruiser. Moreover, we were allowed to use the company guest house in Baghdad, thus saving much in hotel bills.

The Kohler Company of Wisconsin must also be thanked for donating a generator which was custom-built for use in Iraq. We expect to go on appreciating this gift for a number of years. We thank the Everpure Corporation for their gift of a water filtration system.

We also received aid from British Airways in shipping samples from Baghdad, which saved us time, money, and bureaucratic tangles.

We also, of course, must acknowledge the continuing support of Friends of Nippur, who have maintained their interest despite our temporary shift to other sites. Under Chairman Howard Hallengren, membership has grown to the point that our mailings exceed one hundred twenty-five. Most memberships are held by couples or families, so probably hundreds of people now know about dogs that live on roofs, coats made of live ducks, and other important facts of life.



Sickle, flint with bitumen, originally set into a wood or bone handle, from the Akkadian Building at Atiqeh.