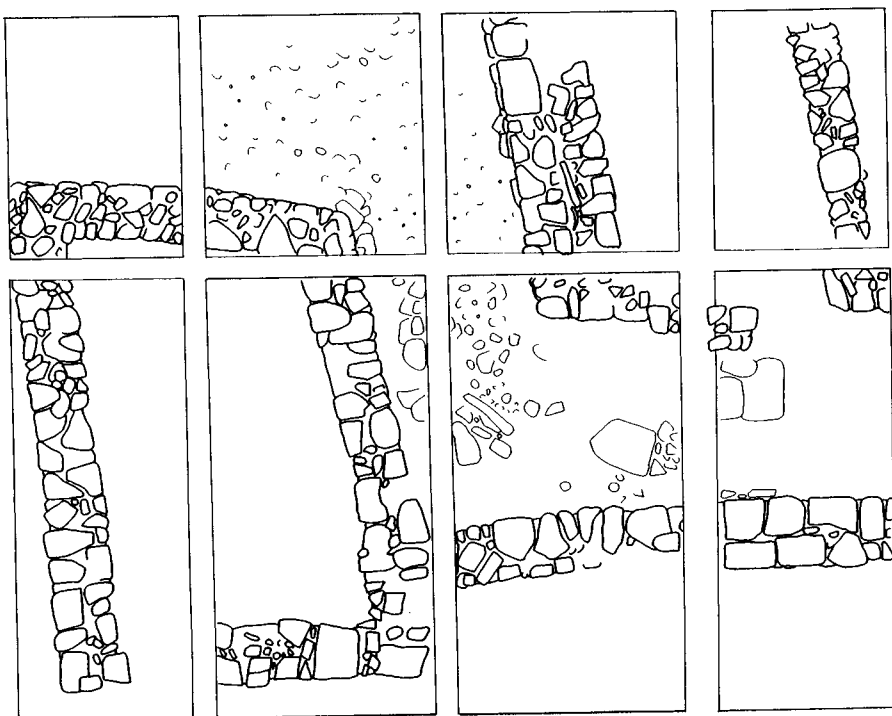


Chicago Turkish Euphrates Salvage Project

Kurban Höyük Excavations

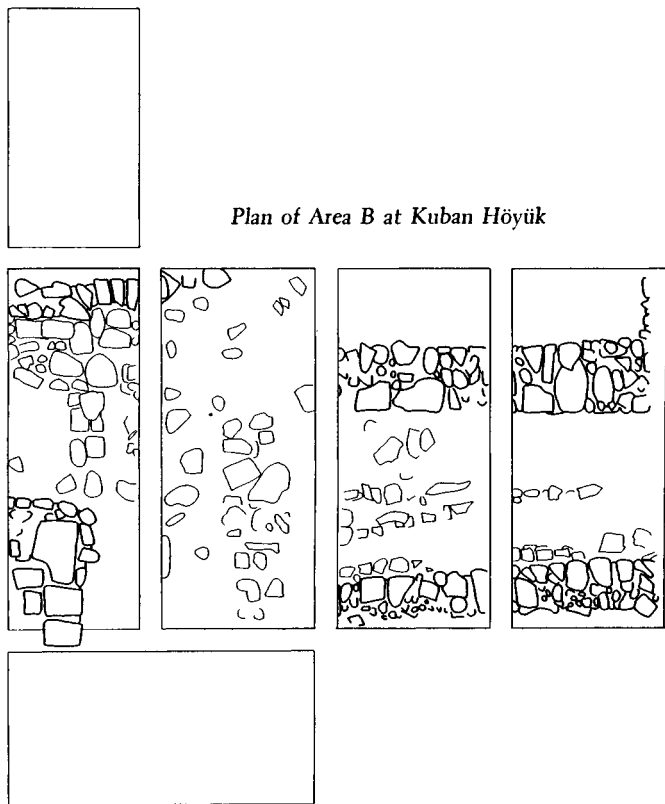
Leon Marfoe

Over the past decade or so, a number of dam salvage projects have enabled archeologists to concentrate their investigative efforts upon recovering a maximum amount of information from a tightly defined region. For all its myopic and redundant quality, this information has provided a firm foundation for future efforts by more



clearly defining the historical problems and research emphases of later projects in hitherto poorly known areas. The Keban project in east-central Turkey, for example, has provided a wealth of still emerging information on the early history of the eastern Taurus mountains, while the Tabqa project in northern Syria has shed a similar degree of light on the civilization of "upper Mesopotamia" near the big bend of the Euphrates. The initiation of two new dam salvage projects on the Euphrates river in southeastern Turkey provides, therefore, an unusual opportunity to explore intensively a region between these two earlier projects. As reported in newsletters during the past year, the first barrage scheduled is the Karakaya basin between Malatya and Adiyaman in east-central Turkey. The Karababa basin is farther south, located between the provinces of Adiyaman and Urfa, where the Taurus mountains merge with the undulating north Syrian plain. In this narrow river valley, very

Plan of Area B at Kuban Höyük



near the early historic centers of Carchemish and Harran, at least two Turkish, two German, two American (Bryn Mawr and Chicago), one British, and one Dutch expedition are currently engaged in an archeological program spanning the prehistoric to Islamic time range.

The Chicago expedition to the Karababa basin selected its site in 1978 and, in 1980, carried out a brief three-week pilot season at the site of Kurban Höyük. On the less intensively explored left (south) bank of the river not far from the proposed dam, Kurban Höyük forms a low, extensive double mound roughly 340 meters in length and 220 meters in width. Including the low saddle between the two mounds, the ancient settlement seems to have been divided into at least five or six separate sectors, each of which may have formed separate "quarters" with differing functions. During the fourteen days of excavation, four of the sectors were tested by exposures extending over roughly 350 square meters of surface area. So far, only the top two levels of occupation have been uncovered, with both dating to a time range between 2500 and 2000 B.C.

At this time, it would appear that the entire site, including the low saddle, was settled. On the larger and higher southern mound, excavations revealed part of a domestic residential area on the east slope, where a winding street was flanked by blocks of rooms. On the highly regular, rectangular top of the main mound, two levels of buildings have been found, the earlier of which may have been part of a public building. Excavations on the lower and smaller northern mound have so far indicated that this may have been a specialized quarter of as yet indeterminate character. The topmost level lies only a few centimeters beneath the soil, but because of this shallow depth, only the foundations of structures have been preserved. About a meter beneath this level, a well preserved building was found. From these tests, it would seem that the final occupation of the site was markedly different from the preceding one, but any time gap between the two would, at least on ceramic grounds, be limited. At some point in time not too distant from the dates of the excavated levels, both mounds were connected by settlement on the saddle. However, some two meters of eroded wash layers have covered this link. Despite the brevity of the 1980 season, the excavations were sufficient to indicate that Kurban Höyük was a small town dating to roughly the same time as the Ebla archives.

Indeed, the material culture of Kurban Höyük is similar to that found at a variety of north Syrian sites, but because its location is



The data from which the previous plan was drawn

near the northern fringes of this lowland “civilization,” it may yet provide us with information on the relationships between the earliest highland urban culture of the mountains, now well defined by the Keban project, and the earliest urban culture of plains. Early archeological and historical records suggest a brisk interchange at this time; and although the earliest periods of occupation at Kurban Höyük are still unknown, the formation of this border river town may provide clues to the role of this traffic in the tremendous expansion of towns and cities across eastern Turkey and northern Syria at this time.

In this initial season, the small staff consisted of two Chicago students, Guillermo Algaze and Mary Evins, Michael Ingraham (University of Toronto), Tom McClellan (now University of Melbourne), and our geographer, Tony Wilkinson. Funding was provided by a matching grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The 1981 season, just two weeks off at the time of this writing, will comprise a much larger crew over a longer season.