Turkish Salvage Project

Leon Marfoe

The Turkish Salvage Project now nears the end of its second year and the completion of its first phase. The highlights of our first two seasons have already appeared in the "News and Notes" and need not be repeated here. Instead, I will merely summarize our results, assess our current line of thought, and speculate on where this might lead us.

The project was, of course, never meant to be solely the excavation of a site, but the study of a historical "situation." Viewed within the perspective of contemporary and later historical documents, much of southeastern Turkey seemed to have served as a major thoroughfare or imperial border for a number of neighboring civilizations— Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Syria among them. To what extent could archaeology shed light on this theme?

If our surmises are correct, this portion of the upper Euphrates valley first became a significant link in the network of Near Eastern interconnections shortly after 3500 B.C., although there is plenty of evidence of earlier

interaction. However, prior to this date, Kurban Hoyuk was a small village. The activities of Mesopotamian colonists all along a long stretch of the middle and upper Euphrates River seem to have changed that. In the Late Uruk period, the effects of their wide-ranging efforts, perhaps in search of silver, copper and timber in the eastern Taurus mountains, had a major impact on the site. Shortly afterward, the settlement expanded into a town, possibly as a result of the cross-river traffic. The effects left by this occupation had other results, too. Among them may have been a change in agricultural techniques and herding, which by the turn of the millennium, had transformed the lush vegetation of the riverbanks into the narrow rows of fields seen today on the river terraces.

As the evidence for this intrusion faded in succeeding centuries, so too did the town at Kurban Hoyuk diminish in size and significance. In southeastern Turkey and northern Syria as a whole, a number of regional cultures emerged. A major reorientation did not occur again until

about 2500 B.C. The reasons for this are obscure, but it coincides with the transformation of northern Syria and southeastern Turkey into a heavily populated region of large urban centers—an achievement that was not to be reached again until the Roman annexation. Some of these cities have been excavated, and their remains show strong affinities with Early Dynastic and Akkadian Mesopotamia. Vessels of Anatolian origin are also to be found, while there appear lapis from Afghanistan and copper, silver and gold from possibly diverse sources. It is evident from these remains and from both Mesopotamian and Syrian texts that a far-reaching web of communications now interwove the entire ancient Near East.

This web included the upper Euphrates drainage, an area directly and indirectly referred to in texts of a later date. At Kurban Hoyuk, a small town was built, the plan of which is still only partially excavated. A number of domestic dwellings, a series of narrow, cobble-paved streets, clusters of courtyards with work areas, and some well con-

structed mud brick buildings with at least one well-built fortification wall appear, along with quantities of seeds in storage pits, ceramic "wasters" and evidence of sheep herding. Numerous neighboring sites of varying sizes were occupied in this period, and a number of cemeteries, with tombs containing the characteristic pottery and copper implements of the period have been found by other expeditions. At least some of the pottery was locally made—kilns, with vast quantities of "wasters," for instance, have been excavated at the nearby German project on Lidar Hoyuk.

What were the reasons for this apparent florescence? At present, we think that the Karababa basin was the beneficiary of the major trade routes that traversed the northern steppe from Assyria to the bay of Iskenderun. A number of feeders undoubtedly led into and through the mountains, where timber, copper, silver, resins and wine were to be found. This traffic was probably aided by the domestication of the ass some centuries earlier, and pack caravans—so well documented in the Old Assyrian trade around 1900 B.C.—may have been the principal form of transportation. On coming to the river, however, it would have been necessary to obtain facilities and permission to cross, find temporary accommodations, whether for individuals or groups. These conditions, perhaps magnified by local traffic between pastoralists on the plains and settlers in the mountains, may have provided the setting in which local towns grew. Our current work—ably conducted by Tony Wilkinson—suggests that although there was necessarily a local agricultural base for each town, small villages that might have served as rural suppliers are few and far between. Compared to towns of the same proportions in Bronze Age times, the availability of land was somewhat limited. If we make a brief calculation of the sort of local income that might be gained from traffic like the Old Assyrian caravans, even a small percentage of the enroute expenses of these caravans would have made up a significant part of the local economy.

But neither income nor

size are what makes a town a town. A town, after all, is also an organization in which various institutions, facilities, groups—whether administrative, manufacturing or whatever—serve to handle specific functions. How could this have happened? Let us enter into some more speculation. In order to get to a river crossing, and even at the river itself, any caravan would have had a number of choices as to which towns it would pass through. There seem to be few advantages favoring a particular town or route or crossing, so that a degree of chance, momentary friendships or advantages would have been the deciding factor. For the towns, however, the matter of passage was not a minor concern. To be bypassed consistently may have resulted in a serious situation, especially if the rather unreliable harvest was poor that year. How then to cope with the situation? Quite possibly, by trying to make arrangements in advance with neighbors to oversee the safety and passage of a specific route, and by trying to block other neighbors out of this route. These alliances, of course, failed from time to time—they may even have depended on blood ties or contracts—and new neighbors became allied and new routes were arranged. This continual insecurity—the making of temporary alliances with neighbors, the crises from a change in traffic, a shortfall in harvest—all required various degrees of organization and facilities that may have started quite informally. But since a fluctuating economy attempts to maintain stability by being cautious and providing safeguards for times of crisis, a continuation of these insecure conditions may have led to more formal institutions, offices, facilities and personnel that would fulfill these tasks on a permanent basis.

So much for sheer imagination. Is there any way of substantiating this, apart from accidental archaeological discoveries? First of all, detailed study of the excavation results—town layout, for example—can give us an idea of whether Kurban Hoyuk was indeed this sort of town. Is there evidence for strangers, for example? We know that the kings of Akkad claimed to have conquered

regions this far north, and we have recovered an inscribed stone weight that bears the name of an official under their last king, Šu-turul. How did such an inscription get into our area when it is thought that the empire was crumbling by this time? We know that the enigmatic Hurrians were also in this area at this time. Can their presence be detected, and how might they have contributed to a situation like that described above? Second, study of the remains and the surrounding area could tell us what the local economy could or could not produce, and how far the hinterland extended. Was it self-sufficient, was there much local traffic? Finally, survey can trace the settlements in the area, the organization of their territories, and the routes connecting them. There are a number of techniques that we would like to try out in this approach.

One is the use of satellite imagery that might help us in the survey. If we can get enough information from survey, then a second analytic technique is simulation. Simulation by computer is frequently used to predict how an operation—a queue at a teller window in a bank for example—would work under different conditions (time of day, number of people in line, etc.). As such, it may be useful to see how settlements might expand or contract in response to elements of chance—a change in traffic or a shortfall in harvest or a combination of both— over a period of time. We don't know where all this might lead us, but if our work proceeds as planned, we'll have a chance to find out, and at the same time, help to rescue the cultural history of a site and an important area and time in history.