



The Harran Project

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Today in southeastern Turkey, a small village of “beehive”-style houses occupies the corner of a 300-acre ruin that once was medieval and ancient Harran (classical Carrhae). In antiquity Harran sat high on the arc of the Fertile Crescent that linked Mesopotamia with the Levant. Already by the 3rd millennium B.C. Harran’s merchants were trading in textiles with Ebla. Three thousand years later, according to the biblical prophet Ezekiel, its merchants were trading with Tyre in “choice garments, clothes of blue and embroidered work,” and “carpets of colored stuff” (Eze. 27: 23-24). Throughout most of its history as a major caravan city, Harran was also a “holy city,” sacred to the devotees of the moon-god Sin. Even with the rise and fall of one great ancient Near Eastern civilization after another, Harran’s position at the commercial crossroads of the Near East and at the center of the moon cult assured this city an enduring primacy.

Yet, despite the numerous references to Harran in ancient, classical, and medieval sources, this city and its plain remain virtually unknown to the archaeologist. But therein lies an unparalleled opportunity to study the archaeological remains of this underexplored territory and to compare those findings with evidence from the texts.

During September-October of 1983, an archaeological survey team, staffed mainly by students and faculty from the Oriental Institute, will begin a survey of the Plain of Harran, an area of ca. 300 square miles dotted with dozens of mounds, between Harran and Urfa. During this first season we will be hitting only the “high spots” (i.e. tells) in the Plain. More intensive surveys for farmsteads and the like that might lie between the major settlements must await future seasons. Two teams of five surveyors each, one led by me and the other by the Associate Director, Doug Esse, will collect surface artifacts from the mounds, sketch outstanding architectural features, and record modern placenames of the mounds (which sometimes can be identified with those from ancient texts). Following up these teams, will be John Sanders, the architect-surveyor for the project, and his crew. They will map all of the ancient sites, many for the first time. To expedite the mapping of such a large region, he will be using an infrared theodolite with a built-in computer that can store all of the coordinates and altitudes for the various sites surveyed. A program has been developed

that allows these data to be transferred to a microcomputer, which will then generate maps almost instantaneously for the region. At the same time, John Wilkinson, the staff geographer and geomorphologist, will be investigating the hydrology and land formations of the Plain.

In 1984 and subsequent seasons the Oriental Institute team will be joined by a team of Turkish archaeologists to begin large-scale excavations at Harran itself. After several seasons of excavation there and at one-period sites in the vicinity coupled with various surveys and textual studies, we may be able to produce, for selected periods, a much more complete and variegated picture of the various components of the kingdom of Harran and aspects of its daily life, from kings to commoners.



The tell of Harran (background, center) and the minaret (right) looking northwest from the "castle."

Postscript

New rules, adopted by the Turkish Department of Antiquities over the summer of 1983 and communicated to us too late to be acted upon, required the postponement of the fall season of the joint Turkish-American Project at Harran. Although a research permit for the archaeological survey had been issued, it could not be used until a Protocol, establishing the longterm commitment of research and finances, had been drawn up and signed by both parties of the joint archaeological expedition.

The Protocol should be established soon. In the fall of 1984, we envisage a three-pronged program of research, consisting of excavations on the tell of Harran, restoration of standing monuments at the foot of the tell, and a survey of sites in the Plain of Harran.