

THE PREHISTORIC PROJECT

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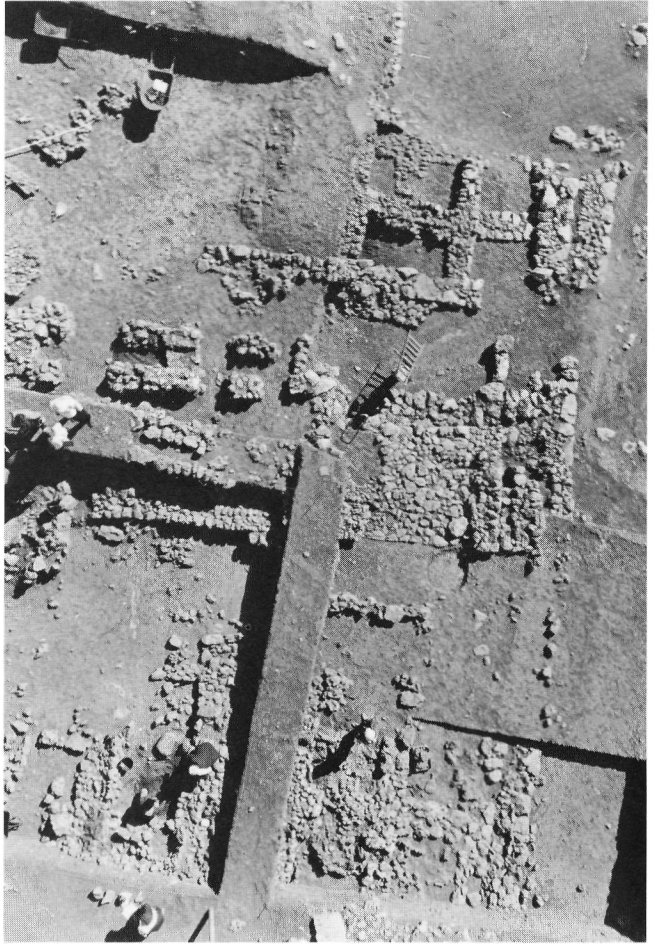
As of this autumn, the Oriental Institute's Prehistoric Project has a 40th birthday. In November, 1947, we (Bob, Linda, our two children, and a graduate student) left Chicago for Iraq. Post-war travel was just renewing itself. The Italian Line's *Vulcania* was still only a partially converted troop carrier and her captain put an extra watch in the bow, for mines, as we approached the Straits of Gibraltar.

It is surely easy, after 40 years, to exaggerate how clearly we had already visualized our goal. At the very least we had an idea for a new field research focus that germinated over the war years, and 1947 seemed to be the time to try it out in the field.

In our pre-War II years in Syria, we had excavated some rather early villages. But we wondered, *what would we learn* were we to concentrate on that *threshold* of cultural change that must have attended the very earliest domestication of plants and animals? We reasoned that the beginnings of village-farming community life, which domestication made effectively possible, must really have been a great change. Human beings had already been around for at least a million years, but their subsistence had depended entirely on hunting, collecting, even simply scavenging. The change to agriculture and an assured food supply, and the growth of year-round settled communities must—we reasoned—have been change on a grand scale. The late British prehistorian Gordon Childe visualized such change as analogous to that which attended the Industrial Revolution. What fascinated us about all this was that excavated traces of the beginnings of this early "agricultural revolution" had not yet been recovered. Thus our field research goal, in 1947, was to try to find the traces of such a threshold.

Well, we were indeed lucky with our first site, Jarmo, in Iraq, and we've also been very lucky (both in Iran and in Turkey) ever since. Too lucky, indeed, to account for it all

● Kite photo—workman clearing building foundations on Çayönü.



in detail here. One big volume (695 pages) reporting on what we found in Iraq and concluded from it is already out. Reports on the work in Iran and Turkey are also in progress. There are, however, other important—and lucky—dimensions concerning the Prehistoric Projects's success.

First—indeed back of it all—was the Oriental Institute. There are very few organizations that from the start would have countenanced and encouraged what we planned to do. Ours was a Near Eastern field program with *no* promise of a *spectacular* yield of objects for museum exhibits. We could absolutely guarantee *no* gold, *no* royal tombs! But with the Oriental Institute as our home

base, we had no reason to worry. From the start we were assured that our research goal and its yield in knowledge was the important thing.

Next came the make-up of a field staff to cope seriously with the broad spectrum of research problems we faced. We both had had our training in culture history. Our colleague Bruce Howe, then of the Peabody Museum at Harvard, was also focused on culture history. But in his case it concerned what went on during the approach to the "threshold" in the very latest Pleistocene ice-age times. However, much of the potential yield of materials we expected to recover would reflect the ancient environmental situation. This would require competent analysis and interpretation by colleagues in the natural sciences.

Here, too, we were extremely lucky, both in the natural sciences colleagues who joined us and in the fine results they got and also in the means we obtained for getting the colleagues themselves into the field. A new program was being developed in the National Science Foundation (N.S.F.) in Washington. In 1954 we received the larger of the first two grants made by the new anthropology section of the N.S.F. This gave us the field support we needed for the natural sciences colleagues.

The evidence recovered by our botanical, geological, and zoological field companions has stimulated other field directors to seek similar help. Thus much has continued to be learned of the ancient environmental background of the time when a food-producing and village-farming community way of life began.

There is, also, a fascinating aside regarding the matter of chronology. When we first went out to Jarmo in 1947, the late Willard Libby, then at Chicago, was developing his radioactive carbon age determination technique and he urged us to bring him samples. Before Libby's radiocarbon age assays, the dating of excavated materials from before the time of written history (say before 3000 B.C.), was mainly guesswork. Now, for our Turkish site, Çayönü, we have—from trustworthy findspots—some sixteen radiocarbon age assays, all clustered within the time range from 7450 B.C. to 6750 B.C.

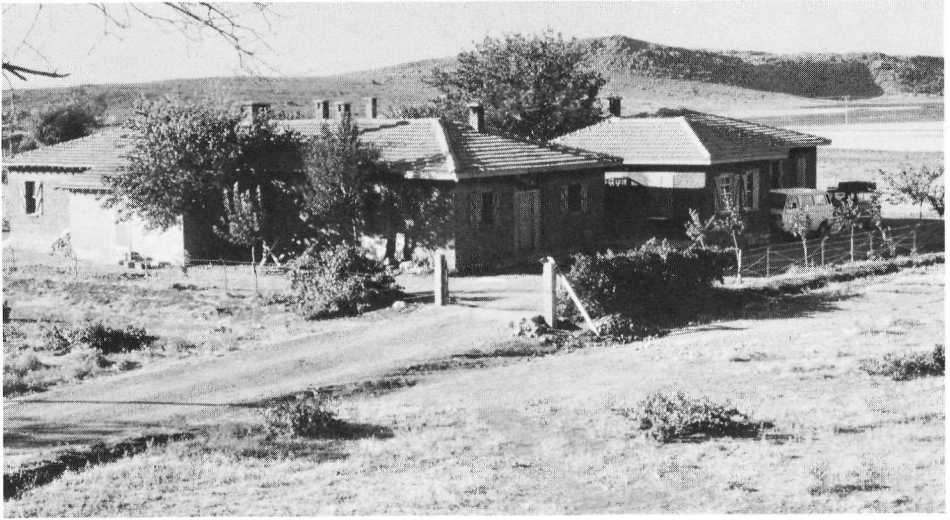
In 1962 the Project became the Joint Prehistoric Project of Istanbul and Chicago Universities. We had long hoped to work full-time with a national of the country where we planned to excavate. Furthermore, for southeastern Turkey an exclusively American expedition could not have had permission to work in the environmentally critical but

militarily sensitive region of the Tigris river headwaters. Happily, our old friend and colleague, Prof. Dr. Halet Çambel, of Istanbul University's prehistory section agreed to become "joint" with us. She devised the conditions that would allow us, jointly, to do an extensive surface survey for sites within the military zone beyond the Euphrates, and then—once a site was chosen—to undertake its excavation. In the spring of 1964 we began the excavation of the early village site called Çayönü. The Joint Project's excavations have resulted in a very substantial yield of evidence for understandings of the culture history of the beginnings of the new food-producing way of life.

A further fortunate aspect of the joint arrangement has been the field training it provides for both Halet's and our own students. Here, too, the Joint Project's yield in competent young field staff has been most gratifying.

There are other parts of the story. At about the time our last N.S.F. grant ran out (when Bob reached emeritus-hood), Halet began to lobby in Ankara. The Çayönü excavations now receive basic Turkish grants for workmen's wages and "materials deemed essential" for running the camp. Friends of this Institute's Project have been gratifyingly generous in allowing Linda and me to hold up the now modest American end of the "Joint." Further, colleagues in the natural sciences have maintained and supported their own special interests. Prof. Dr. Willem van Zeist, of Groningen University in Holland, has continued his long interest in the Çayönü botanical materials. We have also had much cooperation and interest, in the yield of simple copper tools at Çayönü, from the MASCA group in the University Museum in Philadelphia, and MASCA's Dr. Tamara Stech was at Çayönü during the 1986 season. The Hacettepe University-Ankara physical anthropologist, Asst. Prof. Dr. Metin Özbek, has tackled the restoration and interpretation of the large number of human skulls, recovered from one particular Çayönü building. The Prehistoric Project's volunteer, Andrée Wood, is deeply involved in the study of blood residues she has been recovering over the last three field seasons at Çayönü. "What animal did they butcher with that flint knife, Andrée?"

Another major staff impact began in 1978, when Prof. Dr. Wulf Schirmer, director of Karlsruhe University's Institut für Baugeschichte (history of building) joined us at Çayönü. Wulf always brings at least four or five students as well as his excellent senior assistant, Werner Schnuchel. Wulf also has German financial support to cover the cost



● *The Çayönü expedition house.*

of their travel and living expenses in the field. In addition, work on the architectural reports proceeds in the Karlsruhe Institute. Given the number of field seasons we have had (twelve, since 1964) and the broad areas we have excavated by excavation, we are extraordinarily lucky to have the interest of the Karlsruhe architectural staff in Çayönü. This is especially so because the site has yielded at least some building remains that cannot be understood as those of simple domestic structures. Increasingly we feel bound to wonder whether the Çayönü villagers were a bit higher on that “threshold” of change than we’d first thought.

We face another particular problem, as well, in not yet being able to define exactly how the end of the Çayönü settlement came about, and why. We have no trouble in digging down, in space and in time, to virgin soil, observing and recovering as we go. The site has, however, had a certain amount of near surface disturbance and erosion, since it was last lived on, some nine thousand years ago. This means that our control over the latest/uppermost layers of the site has—so far—not been ideal. We believe, however, that we now have better ideas as to where we may recover untouched uppermost layers of the site; with real promise for understandings of how and why the settlement at Çayönü ended.

Our veteran American field research assistant, Mike Davis (ten field seasons since 1970), is particularly concerned

- Staff at lunch on the site.



with this latest prehistoric subphase at Çayönü. Although domestic wheat and several pulses were already present with the earliest Çayönü settlers, sheep and goats—the earliest animal domesticates save for the dog—only began to appear after the settlement was already well established. Mike speculates that herd animal production was, in effect, a beginning form of stock venturing. He thinks it provided expendable *interest* (milk, wool, hair), consumable *dividends* (males and infertile females for meat), and of course *growth* capital (fertile females and stud males). Mike even hopes to inspire the interest (and the support) of today's investment community in his idea. There will, however, surely be other interesting things to learn if we can discover how Çayönü came to its own particular end.

All in all, forty years of the Oriental Institute's Prehistoric Project have provided much new information about a significant moment in the human career. Also, of course, for those of us involved in the Project, these years have been ones of great fascination and satisfaction.