



News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

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No. 54: June, 1979

Letter From the Field: RESULTS OF THE IRAQI EXPEDITION

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For the past two days, I've been in traffic court. The Nippur jeep broke down in Baghdad and we left it on the street overnight. In the morning it wasn't there, and after some worried minutes I was told that the police had hauled it away. I went to the station and began the process of reclaiming it. After a number of trips to court and back to the station, the car was released. There wasn't a fine for illegal parking. All we lost was time.

Our joint effort with the University of Copenhagen has worked out well and we plan to continue together. The Danes, trained mostly in European prehistory, proved challenging and stimulating to the Americans, who were trained specifically in Mesopotamian archeology. No training, however, could have prepared us for the extraordinary preservation of mudbrick buildings at Üç Tepe and their special problems.

There is something unusual in the clay of the Hamrin Basin and in the processes by which abandoned buildings became filled in. At several sites, there are walls standing three and four meters high, even some with doors and windows. At Üç Tepe, we have preservation on that order. In fact we go even farther: we have parts of the roof intact on one of our buildings.

Üç Tepe (Turkish for "Three Mounds") consists of three mounds, each about 250 meters in diameter, strung out in a north-south line at the base of a gravel terrace. Around the main mounds are a number of smaller ones. This season, we put in only a minor sounding at Tell Ahmed al-Mughir, the northernmost of the three mounds. Here, we found substantial walls of at least two buildings of the Isin-Larsa Period (ca. 1900 B.C.), under very shallow remains of Kassite date (ca. 1300 B.C.).

At the southern mound, Tell Atikeh, we exposed levels of the Akkadian Period (ca. 2300

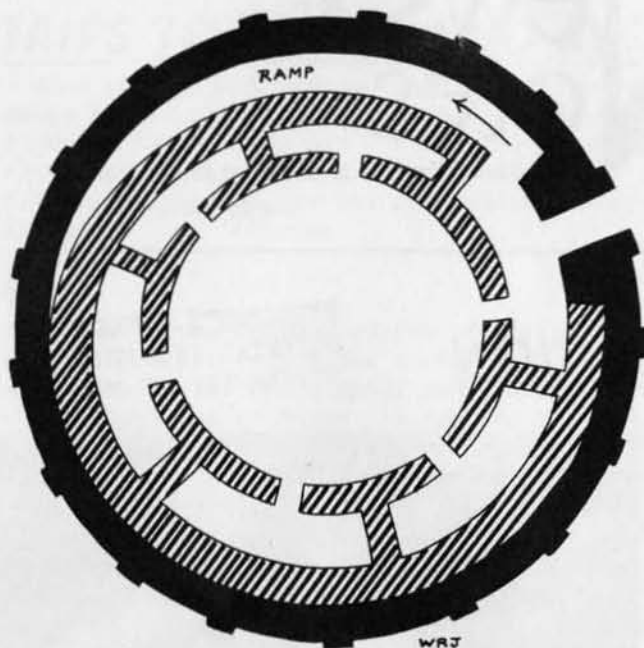


These walls are the remains of the Round Building at Tell Razuk, dating from about 3000 B.C. The outer wall is carried over as a vaulted roof (top left of photo) and connected to the inner wall.

B.C.). The main level consists of one or more large, rectangular buildings with walls standing almost three meters high. So far, we have excavated either the domestic wing of a large administrative building that occupied the entire mound area, or one large farm house in a hamlet. The rooms of the building seem to have served mainly for the preparation and storage of food. On the floors are many fireplaces, ovens, large storage jars, bins, hundreds of grindstones, flint sickle blades, and other stone items. There are many animal bones. The pottery from this building includes an unusual number of vessels that were hung from strings.

Outside the main door of the building, we encountered walls which may belong to the more formal, residential, and business end of the supposed administrative building.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This is McGuire Gibson's second letter from the Hamrin Basin Archaeological Salvage Project (see News & Notes No. 51: March, 1979).*



A tentative reconstruction of the plan of the Round Building pictured on the front page.

However, these walls may be merely part of other farm houses. Given the size of the walls, I tend to think we have one large building. Only further digging can tell us. We have not yet discovered tablets here, but do have some Akkadian seals and some clay sealings with impressions of late Early Dynastic III (ca. 2400 B.C.) date.

Tell Atikeh was badly disturbed by wells, ragged holes and circular storage pits cut by the inhabitants of a village that stood on the mound for some years prior to 1918. This village, the predecessor of the one we lived in about half a kilometer to the west, consisted (we were told by old men) of only a few mudbrick houses and many tents. In the past, the people of Uç Tepe were predominantly nomadic, using the mound as home for only a few months a year. From the surface and from the pits, we recovered many fragments of tobacco pipes, iron hoes, nails, a horseshoe, a few coins, some badly-fired pottery, some China tea cups, and bullet casings. After the people moved to the present-day village, they used this mound and the others as burial grounds.

Tell Razuk, the middle mound that occupied most of our attention, was also badly disturbed, both by recent graves and by ancient pits. Here, our initial efforts to excavate were hampered by the lack of expert pickmen. Because there is so much archeological work going on in Iraq, and the Sherqatis (skilled pickmen) are growing old and are not being replaced by their sons and grandsons (who become engineers instead), each expedition must

make do with fourth-rate Sherqatis or with inexperienced local men. Razuk proved to be very difficult to understand and excavate. Even with expert pickmen, it would have been a problem. With the pickmen we had, the mass of mudbrick cut by pits presented endless puzzles. Curving walls were not understood to be correct and not just mistakes in digging. We soon learned that the students and I had to do all the detailed pickwork. We have always done some of it, especially in the checking of critical corners, but we had never been faced with the amount of pure physical labor entailed at Tell Razuk. We moved a lot of dirt and learned a great deal. We were also able to train the local men and I think we have the makings of a new corps of pickmen to replace the Sherqatis. I would also guess that if we had not been forced to do the picking ourselves, if we had relied on the usual skilled pickmen, we would probably have cut through our most important find, the roof of the Round Building. Trained pickmen would probably have thought the mass of mudbrick was fallen wall and would have removed it, as we did in one place.

At Razuk, which is about 200 meters by 250 meters in size, we have a town of the Early Dynastic I (ca. 3000 B.C.) period. Other sites with similar material have fortifications and perhaps a few houses, but we have a real town. We probably have a four meter thick town wall and houses that radiate out from the Round Building that I see as a citadel.

The Round Building is 27 meters in diameter with buttresses on the outer wall at five meter intervals. There is one main doorway into the building which leads to a room that gives access to a central, round courtyard and also to an interior stairway that runs up onto the roof. The roof is badly cut both by ancient pits and recent graves, but is intact over all or parts of at least five rooms. The basic plan of the building is a ring of rooms around the central court. We have touched the original floors of only two rooms, and have just begun to excavate in the central court, where we have uncovered the remains of two large ovens. There is a great deal of ash both in the court and in the rooms. On the floors of the rooms, we have discovered various stone implements, including flint sickle blades, well-made copper tools and weapons, and a number of pots. Among the potsherds, we have hundreds of fragments of a type of pottery that has been called Scarlet Ware. This pottery, known from Early Dynastic I context in the Diyala region, from other sites in Mesopotamia, and from Iran, has a variety of decorative motifs. Our version of the ware has animals, birds,

fish, vegetation, and human beings. We are expecting to discover very fine examples of this ware in the houses outside the round building. The few rooms of houses that we have thus far exposed have yielded a great number of finds, many more than the round building itself.

The roof of the Round Building is of mud-brick. It was formed by bringing the walls of the building up in barrel vaults. The height from the lowest floor to the ceiling in the rooms will be about four meters. The highest floor, lying on a series of built-up floors, is about a meter and a half from the ceiling. At the end of its use, the building would have been rather cave-like in atmosphere. There is some evidence that during the life of the building, the roof began to fall in places. In one room, a large block of mudbricks was put in under the roof to hold it up. This seems to have worked for only a short time, because the room on either side of the block showed signs of the caved-in roof, lying on the floor. It is clear in all rooms touched so far that the upper meter or so of the spaces under the roof were used as dumping grounds for trash. In one place, it is evident that a hole was cut in the roof and trash was poured in over time.

IT IS OBVIOUS, THOUGH, THAT WE MUST DIG RAZUK. WE HAVE A UNIQUE BUILDING. WE HAVE THE WORLD'S EARLIEST INTACT VAULTS. OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM WILL BE TRYING TO DIG THEM WITHOUT HAVING THEM FALL.

We still have more than half of the Round Building to excavate and we have only begun to look at the town. We expect to return to Üç Tepe in September and to concentrate on Tell Razuk. The waters of the dam will begin to rise this June, but we still have time to do the work. Depending on the rainfall, it may be four or five years before the entire Hamrin Basin is filled. We expect to be back at Nippur before that, however, and may also have opened a site in the Haditha Dam area on the Euphrates. It is obvious, though, that we must dig Razuk. We have a unique building. We have the world's earliest intact vaults. Our biggest problem will be trying to dig them without having them fall. It should be interesting. You'll be reading about it in a few months.

Sincerely,
McGuire Gibson

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE COURTYARD (cont. from p. 5)

courtyard will be a lovely place for many to meet or for one to meditate. It is still growing into workable shape (it takes at least 5 years for a garden to develop), but it is more interesting now to watch the different varieties change day by day, and the whole develop from year to year.

As members, you are welcome to visit in the courtyard, but it does not function well as a gathering place for large groups, since the walks really are narrow. Some day perhaps we will be able to afford the enlarging of the south walk to "convening" size, but until then we are squeezing by. The only convenient access to the garden is by the stairs coming up from the basement just below the Palestinian gallery. Some of the museum windows look out on sections of the courtyard, if you'd like to look. Should you wish to visit, let us know; we ask only that you follow the conservationist's and photographer's code, "Take only pictures and leave only footprints" (but stay on the walk).

—Jean Grant

SRI LANKA (cont. from p. 6)

really like to do in the next few years is to dig a variety of sites in Ceylon and also in South India and add to the corpus of material and knowledge about these three cultures in conjunction with one another. If one could really build up a dating sequence successfully, one could work out from dated pieces in the center, Ceylon, to the two ends, and say that 'this type of Islamic pottery and that type of Chinese porcelain are also of that date.'

The Sri Lankans would certainly welcome further work. They unexpectedly provided the expedition with digging tools, lorries, jeeps, drivers, even a cook and six workmen, free of charge. Relations were extremely cordial, and in future expeditions Carswell intends to continue to train students to assist in the process, as he had done in 1977 (see *News and Notes*, January 1979, for a photo of two Tamil students at work). It happened that "When we got there, we discovered that all the students were busy sitting for their final exams," and couldn't take part.

Expedition members included Diane Kirk-Helbaek, formerly Director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, as Archaeologist, and Mrs. Carswell, as Camp Supervisor. Money for the expedition was provided by the British Academy and the National Geographic Society.

—Ronald Brown

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE COURTYARD AND OTHER BLOOMING THINGS

For about four years I've been working in the Institute's courtyard, spending lunch hours and many pleasant, though tiring, hours after 5 o'clock, planting and transplanting, weeding and watering, scratching and shoveling. During the important spring gardening time many weekends were spent here, too, while other chores suffered neglect. The results, as I hope to convey to you now, are a special delight.

The courtyard plan is similar to that of many gardens of the Middle East. It is divided into four even sections, with an eight-sided raised area in the center. Around each section is a walk of irregularly-shaped blocks, unlevelled by years of Chicago weather and the action of plants growing in and around them. There is also a space of 28 inches alongside the walls of the building. Virginia creeper and wild grape vines grow on the east, south, and west walls of the building itself. In the fall, when the vine leaves turn an exciting red, birds come to eat the grapes and the fruit of the four cherry trees near the center of the garden.

In May, my favorite month, the cherry trees burst forth with lovely white blossoms (I regret I didn't get a photo of the male cardinal who perched one day in the midst of that white bloom), and the wildflowers are at their peak. A quick count finds more than thirty kinds of wildflowers, and there are several varieties of some of these. Bloodroot, hepatica, dutchman's breeches, Virginia bluebells, and six varieties of violets other than the "common blue" are just a few of these thirty kinds. Later on a few summer-blooming wildflowers, like the bottle gentian, appear, but I especially enjoy the spring wildflowers that let you know that winter is definitely over.

June is a good perennial month. Some plants will have been in for three years and will have grown to eye-catching size. July and August can be very hot in the courtyard, causing some plants to droop in a single day;



The courtyard path features Egyptian bricks from Cairo—that is, "Cay-ro," Illinois!



These are red and white "Twinkle" phlox, annuals now blooming in the courtyard.

still, the annuals we have put in will be producing, followed by the mums and marigolds, which look their best in the fall.

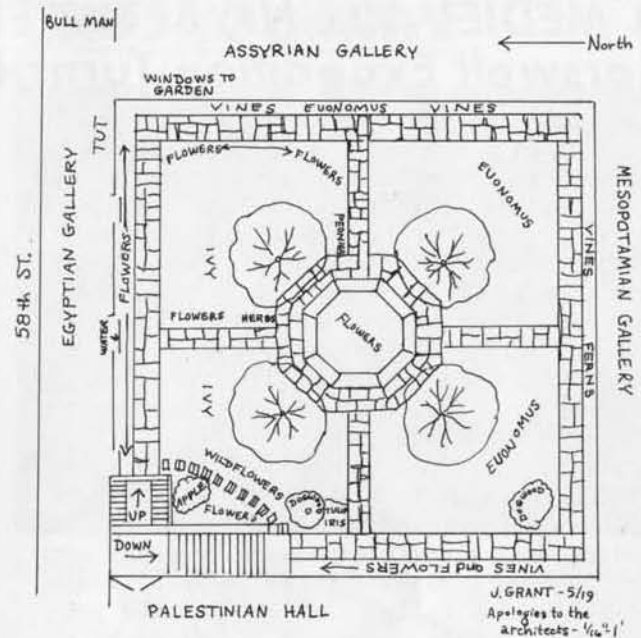
In addition to our native wildflowers we have plants which are probably of more than passing interest to people associated with the Oriental Institute. The tulip, which the Turks cultivated from the countryside of Asia Minor, and other bulbous plants originally grew wild in the Middle East: crocus, (including the fall variety which produces saffron), daffodil, narcissus, and hyacinth. We have (or will soon see) such Middle Eastern varieties as Oriental poppy, scabiosa, lily, veronica, and alyssum. Flowers from the Mediterranean area and southern Europe represented in the courtyard include lavender, sage, anemone, snapdragon, carnation, campanula, and arabis (rock cross). And then there are the larkspur and the bachelor's button (centaurea) found on King Tutankhamun's floral necklace.

Many plants have been donated to our garden. There are two small dogwood trees from Linda



The northwest corner of the garden. The steps lead up to the Palestinian Gallery.

and Bob Braidwood's place in Indiana. Dogwoods can't stand our winters, but in our protected courtyard these trees have leafed out nicely this spring for the fourth straight year. We have yet to know if they'll bloom. For the third year, Bob Bigg's narcissi (brought from his parents' home in eastern Washington) will be blooming. Erica Reiner gave us a bunch of Hosta lilies in 1978. Myrna Simon gave us mums, obedient plant (physostegia, if you're getting the cultivated kind), sundrops, and a small clematis seedling, which bloomed last year. My camera-club friend, Lia Munson, let me "weed" her fern bed, and Barbara Hall has bought a few plants each year (lily-of-the-valley, mint, dill, ginger, and ornamental thistle), some spring bulbs, and plant food. Twice I've stood around on the Quads like a hungry pup and grabbed bagloads of the tulip bulbs discarded every third year from the spring display. Gardeners Penny Kaiserlian and Mrs. Helen Coolidge have given us sedum (three kinds), forget-me-nots, brown-eyed susans, and one plant I accepted for its name: Egyptian walking onion (it looks like any other large onion to me; and yes, it has moved!). Wildflowers were received from



former docent Jean Hoffman. I'm sure I've forgotten other plant donors, but thank you all—your gifts have been appreciated.

Barbara Hall has been given the title of "undergardener," but "apprentice" is more correct. I tease her about being a "sidewalk" gardener (that's anyplace you can reach from the sidewalk; you get your hands dirty, but not your knees or your shoes). Others have helped out: Jean Luther, Pam Bruton, and Shirley Fisher (all in the Publications office) spent a hot summer lunchtime weeding for us. We've also enlisted the aid of ladybugs (donated by Joyce Bartels) and praying mantises to battle the bugs, but with little success.

Hopefully, some day (if my energy, interest, and cash hold out) the Oriental Institute

(cont. on p. 3)



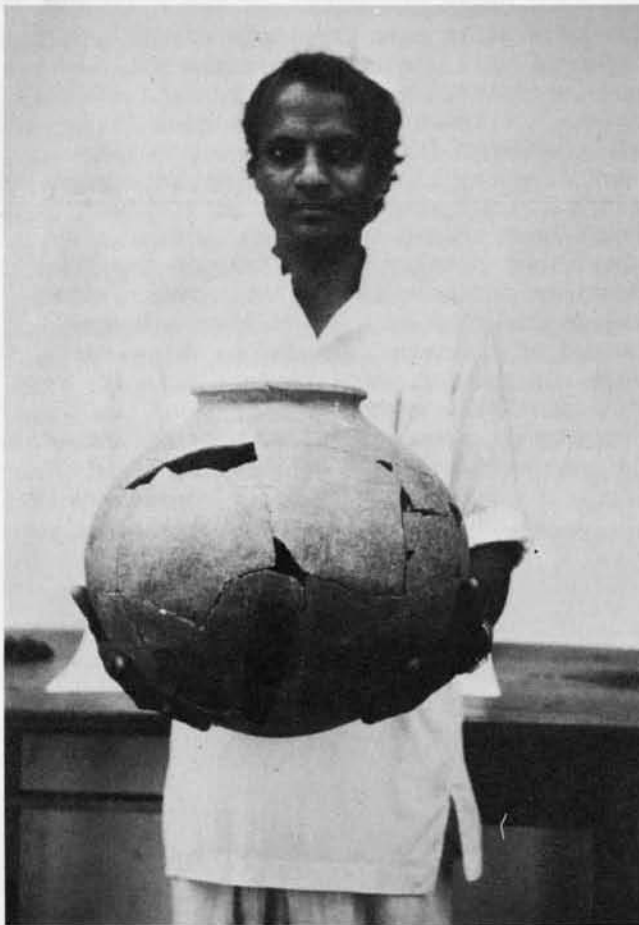
In the octagonal, raised center of the garden grow veronica, phlox, coreopsis, mums, lilies, petunias, and gladiolas. There are herbs on the lower left, ivy and daisies on the right.

A MEDIEVAL LINK BETWEEN SRI LANKA AND CHINA

Carswell Expedition Turns Up New Evidence

At Vankalai on the western coast of Sri Lanka there was a small village settlement that apparently existed for only some 50-60 years and abruptly came to an end sometime in the 12th century. Its inhabitants may have migrated south from India. We don't know what sort of houses they had, none of their architecture remains. We do know, as Museum Curator John Carswell has proven in a recent excavation, that they had extensive contacts with another medieval civilization, that of the Chinese.

Carswell has made similar investigations twice previously in Sri Lanka. His latest excavation provided important new finds, including much local earthenware (cooking pots with rounded bodies, spouted vessels, lamps, and bowls with rolled rims and incised patterns on the inner surface), hundreds of mysterious black glass bangles of uncertain ori-



Large storage vessel of local earthenware, first half of 12th century A.D., restored by the preparator in the Archaeological Commission laboratories in Colombo, Sri Lanka.



The same vessel can be seen in situ, above the scale at the bottom of the main trench, with a group of similar pots, just before they were lifted.

gin, and many pieces of Chinese porcelain ware and pottery, including a large *ch'ing pai* base sherd with incised and combed floral decoration. Careful excavation of the site, in ground which Carswell describes as "cement-like," revealed that the Chinese and Ceylonese objects were clearly in conjunction with one another, and contemporary. This makes it possible to date the local earthenware with more precision than had been possible until now, since some of the Chinese ceramics can be proven to be of the early 12th century. As Carswell found some 100-120 different varieties of local earthenware, an extensive range of objects found elsewhere in Sri Lanka can be placed in their historical context with greater accuracy.

Mr. Carswell had hoped that Vankalai would prove to be a trading post at the crux of three civilizations. Islamic and Chinese travellers met at such a post at Mantai, about 5 miles from Vankalai. That site is rich with medieval Islamic and Chinese objects mixed with local earthenware, and underneath those medieval remains are 30-40 feet of Sasanian (Persian) material, with earlier Roman artifacts at the bottom of it all. Vankalai had given indications of being a western extension of Mantai, but Carswell's excavation proved that not to be the case. He hopes to return: "What I'd

(cont. on p. 3)

PRESIDENT GRAY ATTENDS DEMOTIC DINNER



President Hanna Holborn Gray, Mrs. George G. Cameron, chairman of the Visiting Committee, and Mr. and Mrs. John Livingood converse at the reception before dinner.

Dining amidst the ancient treasures of the Egyptian Gallery, listening to an address by University of Chicago President Hanna Holborn Gray, and delighting in a lively Middle Eastern "belly" dance by graduate student Rosalinde Vorne were some of the pleasures savored by the 250 members and friends of the Institute gathered on Wednesday, May 23, at a special Demotic Dinner. Sponsored by the Visiting Committee, the dinner was held to benefit the Demotic Dictionary Project (see *News & Notes* No. 52: April, 1979). Funds raised by the occasion will be matched dollar-for-dollar by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Before the dinner the guests enjoyed a reception at the opening of a new Demotic exhibit in the Palestinian Gallery. On view are mummy labels, ostraca, and stelae with demotic inscriptions, a display illustrating the work of the Dictionary Project (with large photos of the staff members along the walls), and dozens of Egyptian objects from the period. These include a full-color Fayum portrait of a bearded Greek, a gilded mortuary mask, statues, lamps, terra cotta beads, and dishes. The demotic marriage contract featured in the April *News & Notes* is hung prominently at the entrance to the gallery, with a full translation by Professor Charles F. Nims.

Recognizing the importance of the Dictionary Project, President Gray noted that this



Museum Curator John Carswell greets President Gray. Also shown are Mrs. George G. Cameron, Director John Brinkman, and Mr. and Mrs. Cameron Brown.

basic research tool will "allow us to ask the kinds of questions we should be asking" about the demotic texts. Many of the extant demotic texts are contemporary with Greek texts that have been preserved only in Egypt, because of the extreme dryness. The interactions among the Greeks and Egyptians during this period will become much more accessible to research once the Dictionary Project is completed.

After dinner President Gray presented an Etruscan pendant, mounted by Suq volunteer Barbara Watson, to Mrs. George G. Cameron for her work as chairman of the Visiting Committee. Mrs. Cameron has been a member of the Committee since 1957.



Dancer Rosalinde Vorne adds a lively flair to the evening with her performance of a Middle Eastern "belly" dance.

CREDITS: Photo on page 1 by McGuire Gibson; diagram, page 2, by Ray Johnson, after John Sanders (who also drew the maps in the March 1979 issue); photos, pages 4, 5, and 7, by Jean Grant (who also shot the photos of the Egyptian materials in the April issue); photo, page 6, by John Carswell; photo, page 8, provided by Bernard Lalor.

NEWS & NOTES STAFF: Ronald Brown, editor; Shirley Fisher, production.

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EGYPT

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Departs Chicago on March 6 and returns March 23, 1980.

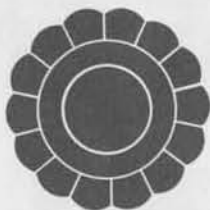
SYRIA

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