

IRAN Eleven Thousand Years of Cultural History

In October of this year, world attention will be directed toward the achievements of Iran's ancient civilization through the celebration of the symbolic 2500th anniversary of Cyrus the Great. Cyrus, who ruled over the extensive Achaemenian Empire from 559 to 530 B.C., was renowned for his interest in, and tolerance of, the many non-Iranian cultures over which he ruled. Thus, while the celebration will highlight the events of his reign in particular, by implication a wider background of interest is indicated. In view of this wider range of interest it seems appropriate to devote this special double issue of *Expedition* to a review of the current state of our archaeological knowledge of Iran's heritage.

The professional study of Iranian archaeology is a relatively recent development, having begun only in the later nineteenth century. In the tradition of Cyrus' interests, however, this study has been international in scope involving, in addition to Iranian scholars, men and women from Europe, North America, and the Far East. Fieldwork began with early studies by British and French visitors to Iran and proceeded in earnest with the establishment of the French Archaeological Mission at Susa in 1897. In 1930, with the opening of research opportunities to other nationalities, the University Museum of Philadelphia and the Oriental Institute of Chicago established programs of field research which still continue today some forty years later. Numerous other North American institutions and a growing body of scholars have recently joined this field of activity since the Second World War.

Recently, research on the civilization of Iran has been greatly facilitated by the organization of the American Institute of Iranian Studies. The Institute was incorporated as a tax exempt organization under the laws of Delaware by twenty charter member educational institutions and art museums in 1967 and was subsequently officially registered in Iran with permission to operate a Tehran Center. The Center (Edward W. Davis, Director, P.O. Box 11-1885, Tehran, Iran) contains offices, a basic research library, a residence for the Director, and temporary accommodations for a limited number of visiting scholars. The Center depends entirely upon private contributions and annual memberships (Student \$10 and Annual \$25) for its operations. It supplies a newsletter which contains information on Iranian studies and on Iranian regulations for visiting scholars. The operation of the Center



Detail of repoussé plaque of gold from the Ziwiye Treasure, showing stags and ibexes with strikingly Scythian features. University Museum Collection.

has greatly facilitated the research activities of North Americans working in Iran and represents a significant step forward in coordination and cooperation between research teams of both countries.

Archaeological research has been one of the fields of study which has benefited from the new organization. The initial pioneer work carried out prior to World War II indicated the fascinating complexity of Iran's archaeological past waiting discovery. Roman Ghirshman's work in prehistory, especially at Tepe Sialk and Giyan, and Erich Schmidt's work at Tepe Hissar, in Luristan, and at Persepolis, defined a wide range of problems within an historical frame of reference. Immediately following the war research was resumed with historical questions such as the origin, date, and routes of the Indo-Aryan migrations dominating the field. A major drawback at the time to the critical evaluation of the various hypotheses proposed lay in the scarcity of stratified sites with adequate chronological control of material. Thus the quarter of a century which followed and which is now ending saw the major thrust toward stratigraphic excavation at important mounds in various parts of Iran (Susa, Ali Kosh, Choga Mish in the southwest; Bampur, Yahya, and Iblis in the southeast; Yarim and Tureng Tepes and Belt and Hotu Caves in the northeast; Shahr-i Sokhta in the east; Hasanlu, Yanik, Geoy, and Haftavan in the northwest, and Godin and Baba Jan in the west). Connected to these efforts was the beginning in each area of extensive survey activity both by foreign teams and by the Archaeological Service of Iran. At the same time a beginning was made on the problem of more extensive lateral excavation for better data for cultural reconstruction and for better control over data obtained by sampling techniques. Hasanlu IV, Marlik, Zendan-i Sulaiman, L. Vanden Berghe's Luristan sites are among examples of this development. Perhaps most significantly, major sites such as Bishapur, Kangavar, and Persepolis are being extensively excavated by the Iranians themselves.

More recently, and most important for the future development of Iranian archaeology, a new generation of North American scholars, trained largely in anthropology, has been opening up new areas of inquiry, introducing new methods, and starting to change the direction of research. Site surveys combined with locational analysis of settlement patterns (Robert McC. Adams in Khuzistan and William Sumner in Fars), analysis of palaeobotany in relation to climatic change (Herbert Wright), and the use of statistical methods and the concept of ecosystems (Frank Hole, Kent Flannery and Henry T. Wright) have led to a redefinition of questions relating to environmental reconstruction, ecological adjustment, economic organization and cultural change. These new concerns will inevitably lead, at least for the time being, away from the traditional historical orientation with its mechanism of diffusion to more specific questions of social and cultural organization with attendant interpretive models. We thus stand on the threshold of new and exciting adventures of the mind in the context of ancient Iran.

At such a moment, therefore, we have asked a few members of the group which has been working during the recent past to write short essays aimed at conveying some of their ideas on where we have been and where, in general, we are headed or should be headed in the near future. In line with the new direction we have concluded with a short essay by Brian Spooner on the newly developing field of anthropology in Iran, since traditional culture cannot be divorced from the study of archaeology if we are to have a mature grasp of the meaning of antiquity for the present day.

We hope that the articles assembled will thus provide a brief survey of past achievement, will suggest some sense of future direction, and will indicate the vast opportunity to learn about Iran as seen from the vantage point of North America.

Robert H. Dyson, Jr.
Curator, Near East Section.

