

# Book Reviews

## Early Settlements and Their Environs

**The Uruk Countryside.** The Natural Setting of Urban Societies. ROBERT MCC. ADAMS and HANS J. NISSEN. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1972. xii, 242 pp., illus. \$17.50.

So long as archeologists conceived their main aim to be the recovery of remains, they concentrated on the sites which would yield the most elaborate remains. In the case of Mesopotamia, this meant tells, which are the sites of protohistoric and historic cities, and, within the tells, temple compounds, where the most advanced examples of art, architecture, and writing are to be found.

Now that attention has shifted from the remains to the peoples who produced them, Mesopotamian archeologists have come to realize that studies of the city dwellers and their temple communities are not sufficient. We also need to know about the country dwellers, who supplied the cities with food and the other materials necessary for their survival.

Robert McC. Adams first began to fill this gap in our knowledge with his *Land behind Baghdad: A History of Settlement on the Diyala Plains* (University of Chicago Press, 1965), in which he studied a sustaining area within central Mesopotamia. Now he extends the same approach to Uruk in lower Mesopotamia, an older and larger urban center which is more representative of the beginning of urbanism. He is responsible for the first half of the present volume; the second half, by Nissen, is a report on the surface collections obtained during the course of the research.

Adams originally planned a long-range program, of which the survey reported in the present volume was to be the first step. He intended to follow up the survey with more detailed, problem-oriented studies of restricted areas, emphasizing the hydrology and ecology of the ancient irrigation systems. Political developments in the Middle East prevented the completion of the project, and Adams stresses the tentative nature of his conclusions.

According to the so-called hydraulic

theory, the first cities were able to develop only with the support of large-scale irrigation systems, and the first states arose to meet the need of organizing and maintaining these systems. Adams finds on the contrary that the first Mesopotamian city-states were not accompanied by an extensive system of irrigation canals; such a system did not develop in the Uruk area until the Parthian and Sassanian dynasties, after the time of Christ. The earlier farmers relied instead upon the natural watercourses, though they did modify them, for example, by straightening them and building dikes. They only constructed short offtake canals into the adjacent fields. As a result, the protohistoric and early historic farming settlements were situated along streams rather than on canals, as the hydraulic theory assumes.

Adams further concludes that swamps were much more widespread in lower Mesopotamia during protohistoric and early historic time than they are today. At that time, the Uruk countryside consisted of a complex mosaic of three kinds of microenvironments: agricultural land; steppes, which were suitable only for grazing; and swamps, from which the inhabitants obtained fish and fowl for food, reeds for making baskets and buildings, and fodder for their livestock. The parts of this mosaic shifted frequently in the absence of an extensive irrigation system. Sand dunes, which are now a prominent feature of the landscape, are believed by Adams to be largely a consequence of draining of the swamps by construction of the recent irrigation systems.

The Uruk area seems to have been originally settled between the middle of the fifth and fourth millennia B.C. by farmers and herdsmen who lived in widely scattered villages and small towns. The numbers of these settlements increased markedly during the latter part of the fourth millennium B.C. and they began to be clustered in areas of favorable water supply. At the same time, Uruk itself began to achieve urban status, apparently

because the people in its vicinity were attracted by its importance as a religious and commercial center. Other cities subsequently came into existence in a similar way, with consequent depopulation of the surrounding countryside. By the end of the third millennium B.C., as a result, the entire population of the Uruk area was concentrated in a relatively small number of cities. Even the farmers seem to have lived there and to have cultivated only the fields within walking distance of the cities. They lacked an irrigation system which would have enabled them to extend their farms beyond the local microenvironments.

It was not until the second half of the third millennium B.C. that the population expanded any distance from the cities into the surrounding countryside and an artificial system of canals began to be constructed. These developments were soon aborted, however. Primacy shifted from the Sumerians in southern Mesopotamia to the Babylonians in the central part of the valley, and there was a marked decline of population in the south, which was not reversed until Parthian time.

Although these conclusions are tentative, there can be little doubt that previous archeologists have been mistaken in projecting modern ecological conditions, the present irrigation system, and the contemporary settlement pattern back to Sumerian time. Contemporary conditions cannot be used to explain the rise of the world's first civilization, as the hydraulic theorists have assumed.

IRVING ROUSE

*Department of Anthropology,  
Yale University,  
New Haven, Connecticut*

## Space Politics

**The Russian Space Bluff.** The Inside Story of the Soviet Drive to the Moon. LEONID VLADIMIROV. Translated from the Russian by David Floyd. Dial, New York, 1973. ii, 190 pp. \$5.95.

This description of the Soviet space program, by a former Soviet science writer and magazine editor, is packed with interesting stories concerning the activities and personalities of engineers, cosmonauts, and political figures. It is at times of only historical interest because the author left the Soviet Union