ARCHAEOLOGY

Temple Changes View

➤ AN ANCIENT Assyrian temple in northern Iraq, dating from 1800 B.C., has been uncovered to reveal columns decorated like palm trees, some 40 texts containing commercial transactions of the time, and a cache of wild animal bones hidden away inside a ziggurat.

Details of the temple help to confirm the theory that the site of Tell al-Rimah was a religious center in the second mellenium B.C.

It also indicates that the Assyrians were considerably more sophisticated than historians have believed, according to Mr. David Crownover, a member of the excavation team from the University of Pennsylvania's Museum.

Assyrians have been viewed more or less as "country cousins" of the Babylonians, 800 miles to the south, Mr. Crownover said. But now with evidence of rich detail on the columns at Tell al-Rimah, it is clear that this conception did not do justice to the Assyrians.

Mr. Crownover noted that the molded, painted columns are the earliest instance of baroque detail found in the Middle East.

Among the more exotic patterns is a simulation of the scales of a palm tree trunk on half columns. One massive stone door jamb bears a figure flanked by palms and sheathed in a skirt with bands of nearly illegible cuneiform inscription.

The animal bones, including remains of deer, gazelle, hare, fox and wild boar, were discovered in a small vaulted room located in the center of a ziggurat adjacent to the temple. Their significance is unclear, but they should give evidence of the kind of animal life that existed on the Sinjar Plain in early Assyrian times.

Also, the economic texts indicate that Tell al-Rimah must have been an important trade route between the Hittite and Egyptian worlds, Mr. Crownover said.

The temple, first discovered in 1964, dominates the site which also includes a palace and residential areas surrounded by a city wall.

Its prominence testifies to Tell al-Rimah's importance as a center for religious worship.

Excavation findings from this year's joint British-American project were reported by Dr. Theresa Howard Carter of the Museum and David Oates of the British School of Archaeology.

University of Pennsylvania Museum

FIGURE WITH PALM TREES—The inscribed stone block, excavated at Tell al-Rimah during the past year, shows a draped figure flanked by two palm trees. The temple dates from the 18th Century B.C. and is situated in northern Iraq. The inscription on the skirt is much worn and has not yet been deciphered.

ANTHROPOLOGY

Primitive Diets Caused Bad Teeth, Strong Jaws

➤ THE EATING habits of earlier civilizations may have produced bad teeth but strong jaws.

The teeth and jaw structures of 62 skulls of young adult Maoris who lived in New Zealand before European settlers arrived were studied by Dr. Michael McCann of the University of California at Los Angeles School of Dentistry.

He found that the teeth of these early Polynesians were often worn down below the original level of the pulp chamber.

He attributes this to their coarse diet.

One of the major culprits in the diet was probably fern root, which has a very gritty quality.

Modern young adult Maoris, who eat a refined European diet, have healthy teeth, Dr. McCann said, but their jaw structures are significantly smaller.

They will probably have problems with crowded teeth, he added.

Some authorities have maintained that the form and size of jawbones are determined by inherent genetic factors, and that environmental factors are not a significant influence. Dr. McCann's study implies that functional stimulus is also important, and without it jawbones may not develop to their fullest extent.

The study was supported in part by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.