

NEMRIK 9

PRE-POTTERY NEOLITHIC SITE IN IRAQ

Vol. 2: House No 1/ 1A/ 1B

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VIII. A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON THE CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

In May 1987, while operating a flotation machine for the Qermez Dere excavations at Tel Afar, I also processed 20 five-litre samples from the spring-1987 excavations at Nemrik. Owing to shortage of water, some of the samples were amalgamated for flotation: 1 mm and 0.2 mm meshes were used, although few seeds were found in the smaller mesh.

Seven samples were from House 1, and their contents are summarized below:

Fill of the house 1:

NK/1982 – 1 unidentifiable fragment of vetch/vetchling (*Vicia/Lathyrus*).

Destroyed roof of the house 1A:

NK/1984 – Same as NK/1982.

Floor of the house 1A:

NK/1986, NK/1987, NK/1988 (floated together) – 3 lentils (*Lens* sp.), 2 vetch/vetchling seeds,

NK/2024, NK/2025 (floated together) – 6 lentils, 7 vetch/vetchling fragments.

These samples were much less rich than those from other areas of the site, where concentrations of bitter vetch, lentils and other unidentified pulses (possibly *Vicia sativa*) were quite common. The other samples produced a few fragments of wild grass grain, and two larger grain fragments which might be of domestic grain, but are so poorly preserved that no definite opinion is possible. Wild pistachio nutshell was also present in several samples.

It is clear that bitter vetch, lentils and other pulses were being used as food, but it is not yet possible to say whether they were grown as crops, or harvested from the wild. This is similar to the situation at Qermez Dere, a site of the same period, just west of Mosul, where pulse seeds and wild grass seeds are the most common, but it is not yet clear whether domesticated plants were being used.

Larger samples have been collected from the autumn season at Nemrik, and once these have been floated and examined, it may be possible to make some more definite statements. Numerous small charcoal fragments were found in the flotation samples, and these are in the course of identification by Dr Rowena Gale.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second volume, published by the Warsaw University Press, devoted to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic site Nemrik 9 lying in the Dohuk governorate in northern Iraq (36°43' N, 42°51' E). The site is being explored since the spring of 1985 by a mission of the Mediterranean Archaeology Centre of Warsaw University headed by Stefan K. Kozłowski. The previous volume, edited by S.K. Kozłowski and published in 1990 brings a preliminary presentation of the site. The present publication is a monograph of house 1/1A/1B excavated by prof. Andrzej Kempisty in the years 1986-1987.

House 1/1A/1B lies in the site's northern part (are 96), and is an original oval structure (Figs.1,2), exceptionally well preserved, inviting separate treatment. Its architecture is presented by Andrzej Kempisty, the flint material connected with it is described by Stefan Karol Kozłowski and Karol Szymczak; ground stone artifacts are described by Ryszard Mazurowski, graves – by Wojciech Borkowski; bone and clay artifacts – by Stefan Karol Kozłowski. All the authors are employees of the Institute of Archaeology of Warsaw University, except for W. Borkowski who works for the State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw. The radiocarbon dates are due to prof. Mieczysław F. Pazdur from the Gliwice Technical University; fauna is described by Dr. Alicja Lasota-Moskalewska from the Monuments Conservation Company (PKZ) in Warsaw; flora is presented by Mr. Mark Nesbitt of the British Institute of Archaeology in Ankara; building materials were analyzed by M. Jabłońska-Szysko, B. Rudnicka and M. Smarzyńska from the Monuments Conservation Company. Many thanks to all for their valuable cooperation.

Nemrik 9 is a large (ca two-hectares) multi-layer Pre-Pottery Neolithic site situated on a peninsula formed by two wadis, on the third terrace of the Tigris river. Its elevation is ca 340-345 meters above sea level, and ca 65-70 meters above the present-day Tigris valley floor. It lies about 1500 meters from the river valley and about 4300 meters from the Kurdish Mountains foot.

The site appears to be three-phase, with each successive settlement phase being connected with a distinct phase of the house described here: going from the bottom upwards, we have the oldest settlement phase (house 1B), the middle phase (house 1A), and the youngest phase (house 1). The entire site is apparently homogeneous culturally, dating to the PPNA and the first phase of the PPNB period. Its flint industry resembles industries from the Anatolian-Levantine cultural province.

CONCLUSION

1. This publication was intended as a maximally comprehensive presentation of an exceptionally interesting feature, house 1/1A/1B, which is in fact a sequence of three superimposed houses, faithfully repeating the same ground plan. We decided to proceed with this publication although one quarter of house 1B is yet to be explored, and although there is no data on animal remains in house 1B, and no radiocarbon dates from this structure. We believe a speedy presentation of this unique feature was called for.

2. The individual houses differ architecturally, but all had circular ground plans and were sunk beneath the ground levels of their times. House 1B is reminiscent of structures known from the Natufien, but the overlying houses 1A and 1 are built of cigar-shaped bricks, smaller in house 1, and plaster-covered in house 1A. The roof of house 1A and 1 were most probably flat, made of clay, and supported by wooden posts (1A) or massive pillars (1). House 1A featured a clay floor with pits and an elaborate system of benches. Structurally, houses 1A and 1 fit into the PPNA standard.

3. The successive houses are of course connected with three separate principal phases of the Nemrik site. House 1B belongs, stratigraphically, to the oldest phase, and there corresponds to it the cultural layer K 0/1 which, like the house itself, rests on virgin soil. Radiocarbon dates place house 1B, together with the stratigraphically contemporaneous house 6, at the end of the 11th millennium BP (?).

House 1A represents the site's middle phase, and ought to be dated to the 10th millennium BP minus its end. The house itself was ultimately destroyed by a fire which appears to have been more than just a local disaster. Numerous inhumations were discovered between the floor of this exceptionally well preserved feature, with no such inhumations known from the other two phases. The inhumations are of course indicative of a sufficiently long period of occupation of house 1A, but not of the several-hundred year period suggested by the puzzling C₁₄ dates connected with this house.

The youngest house 1 with the very interesting massive pillars supporting the roof (a novelty in the Middle East) is of course connected with the younger phase of the site, commencing towards the end of the 10th millennium BP and lasting into the 9th millennium. The first rectangular houses make their appearance after this phase. House 1 is urbanistically connected with the KM pavement forming a vast "square" extending over almost the entire