

**A “Turning Point” for Turkish Archaeology:
The Keban Dam Rescue Project in Eastern Turkey (1966-1975)**

Built in the 1960s and early 70s on the Upper Euphrates River, the Keban Dam and its associated reservoir presented an immense threat to the cultural heritage of Eastern Turkey. As early as 1966, archaeologists and other scientists came to the region to record and study the past of a landscape soon to be inundated. In a relatively limited amount of time, a community of researchers was successful in documenting and examining archaeological sites and ancient monuments now underwater. But, considered a “turning point” by archaeologists working in Turkey today in the history of their discipline, the Keban Dam Rescue Project did not raise much enthusiasm at first.

It would take the foresight and determination of a few individuals (Halet Çambel, Kemal Kurdaş, Cevat Erder, Robert Whallon Jr., David French, Harald Hauptmann, and Ufuk Esin, among others), to launch the initial surveys of the region in 1966, followed by its first excavations two years later. Almost forty years after its completion, I explain how these salvage excavations and other parallel research projects carried out on the Upper Euphrates are considered such a success. Towards the end of the article, I also explain how the Keban Dam and its multidisciplinary and international project undertaken to rescue the past of a submerged region also represents a broader “turning point” in the history of Eastern Turkey itself, as well as the start of a major change in the definition of cultural heritage in the country.

Initial Skepticism

Before the Keban Dam, archaeology in Eastern Turkey had been carried out sporadically and limited to a few places. European and Ottoman diplomats, merchants, and missionaries, as early as the 17th century, had travelled to and explored the region, of course, but no serious archaeological research had been undertaken until perhaps Osman Hamdi Bey's expedition to the Nemrut Dağı in 1883.¹ In the 1940s and 50s, Kılıç Kökten and Charles Burney did include the Upper Euphrates region in their separate surveys of Eastern Turkey's Paleolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age.² Their meticulous research, however, did not generate any groundbreaking "intellectual waves" in the larger discipline of Near Eastern Archaeology and, by the 1960s, the irregular academic concern with Eastern Anatolia had not altered its status as an archaeological periphery.

Traditionally focusing on the Greco-Roman heritage of Western Asia Minor and the Bronze Age and Neolithic Cultures of Anatolia's inner plateaus, the scientific community of the 1960s did not place much hope in excavations further east. Sites such as Troy, Ephesos, Pergamon near the Aegean coast, or Hattusha, Alaca Hoyuk, Catal Hoyuk in Central Anatolia had thus far attracted the most popular and scholarly attention. Before Keban, the common belief was that surveys and excavations in the Upper Euphrates would not reveal any important Bronze or Iron Age sites, at best only a few

¹ Osman Hamdi Bey and Osgan Effendi (1883) *Le Tumulus de Nemroud-Dagh: Voyage, Description, Inscriptions, avec Plans et Photographies*. Constantinople: Imprimerie F. Loeffler. The Keban region seldom constitutes a final destination for these explorers. For the most informative accounts, see John George Taylor (1868) "Journal of a Tour in Armenia, Kurdistan, and Upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deyrsim Dagh, in 1866," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 38: 281-361; and L. Molyneux-Seel (1914) "A Journey in Dersim," *The Geographical Journal* 44(1): 49-68, which are both relatively late. For a more complete list of travellers to the region, see Robert G. Bedrosian's excellent "Travellers' Accounts: Journeys to the Armenian Highlands and Neighboring Lands in the 17th through early 20th centuries," <http://rbedrosian.com/Trav/trav.html> last consulted on July 20th, 2014. Among the expanding literature on European travellers to the Middle East in the early modern period, see Rudi Matthee (2009) "The Safavids under Western Eyes: Seventeenth-Century European Travelers to Iran," *Journal of Early Modern History* 13: 137-171; Amanda Wunder, "Western Travelers, Eastern Antiquities, and the Image of the Turk in Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Early Modern History* 7:1-2 (2003), 89-119; Christina Maranci (2000) "Early European Travelers and their Contributions to the Study of Armenian Architecture," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* 10: 7-28.

² İsmail Kılıç Kökten (1944) "Orta, Doğu ve Kuzey Anadolu'da Yapılan Tarih Öncesi. *Bellekten* 8: 659-80. Charles Burney (1958) "Eastern Anatolia in the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age" *Anatolian Studies* 8: 157-209. See also the earlier Albert Gabriel (1940) *Voyages Archéologiques dans la Turquie Orientale*. Institut Français d'Archéologie d'Istanbul. (E. de Boccard, Paris).

Urartian remains. Money and energy available for fieldwork, it was thought, should be spent in places that had already proven fruitful.

A periphery in Anatolian Archaeology, the Keban Region was also considered a fringe of Near Eastern Archaeology. Predominantly practiced in Southern Mesopotamia, Western Iran, and Palestine, expeditions had only occasionally ventured outside of this established core to systematically investigate sites in its margins; Syria, Jordan, or Eastern Turkey.³ As news of the Keban Dam emerged in the early 1960s, established professors in Turkey and abroad were skeptical about working in a region that was still difficult to access and not accustomed to seeing foreign visitors at the time. For instance, the airport in Elazığ, the region's largest city located 40km from the town of Keban, which had been built by the military in 1938, had begun to allow civilian flights only a few years before the start of the rescue project. If this facilitated travels to the region, the logistics of organizing excavations still remained challenging. In the early 1960s, the Upper Euphrates remained a big unknown both to the scientific community and to the broader public as well.

Moreover, the Turkish landscape at the time had not yet been fully impacted by the threat of “development” and “modernization.” With its more than 200m high wall of concrete, the Keban Dam easily dwarfed any previous construction, launching Turkey into the era of mega-dams. Its future mega-reservoir, which slowly began to fill up in 1974, began to worry a few archaeologists in the early 1960s. If rescue excavations before the Aswan Dam in Egypt could perhaps provide a vague model, a rescue project of

³ For a history of Near Eastern Archaeology, see Larsen, Mogens Trolle Larsen (1996) *The Conquest of Assyria: Excavations in an Antique Land*. Routledge, London. Magnus T. Bernhardsson (2005) *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq*. Austin: University of Texas Press. offers For a more concise disciplinary history of Near Eastern Archaeology, see also Roger Matthews (2003) *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: Theories and Approaches*. (London; New York: Routledge): 1-19.

this magnitude had yet to be undertaken yet alone imagined in Turkey at the time.⁴ No institution in Ankara was in place to “salvage” archaeology and infrastructural development was not yet perceived as a danger. Before the Keban Dam, no one in Turkey anticipated the construction of these mega-infrastructures in terms of cultural heritage protection and a reaction from academics and from politicians was slow to come.

In the early 1960s, the question thus remained: If a rescue project had been done at Aswan, could it also be done at Keban? And, if yes, who would organize such excavations? Within the scientific community, no clear idea of what “salvaging” actually entailed existed and no one at the time seemed to have conceived of archaeology as rescue archaeology... no one except perhaps Istanbul University’s Halet Çambel, who immediately recognized in the construction of the dam an opportunity for both Anatolian and Near Eastern Archaeology to venture outside of their established boundaries.

Born in Berlin in 1916, Halet Çambel began studying archaeology in Paris during the 1930s and later finished her PhD at Istanbul University in 1940. Shortly after World War 2, Çambel began working with the German archaeologist Helmuth Bossert at the Neo-Hittite site of Karatepe, north of Adana in the Taurus Mountains of Southern Turkey. Her enthusiasm in promoting the country’s archaeology quickly made her a respected and indisputable figure in the discipline. In 1963, another collaboration --the Joint Istanbul-Chicago Prehistoric Project in the province of Diyarbakır with Robert and Linda Braidwood-- would take her even further east. When rumors of the Keban Dam surfaced in the early 60s, its location on the Upper Euphrates did not seem to her like

⁴ The Aswan Dam received much more attention than the previous Dukan Dam, built between 1954 and 1959 on the Lower Zab River in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate in Northeastern Iraq. A survey in the Ranya Plain in Iraq did document more than 40 archaeological sites and excavations were undertaken at five sites (Tell Bazmusian, ed-Dem, Kamarian, Qarashina, Tell Shemsara) before its construction. See Behnam Abu Al-Soof (1970) “Mounds in the Rania Plain and Excavations at Tell Bazmusian (1956)” *Sumer* 26: 65–104; and Peder Mortensen (1970) *Tell Shimshara, the Hassuna Period*. Historisk-Filosofiske Skrifter 5(2). Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab. Approximately 1000 families from 50 different villages had to be evacuated due to this dam’s reservoir.

such a remote place. An already well-established professor at the head of Istanbul University's Prehistory Department, Halet Çambel's experience with German and American scholars also allowed her to more easily conceive of an international and multidisciplinary project in the region.

Additional help would come from the Middle East Technical University, newly founded in 1956, and its president Kemal Kurdaş. Born in Bursa in 1920 and trained as an economist, Kemal Kurdaş became soon after the military coup of May 1960 Turkey's Minister of Finance. After the election of a new coalition government, however, he resigned from the post and was appointed president of METU in November 1961. During eight years at its head, he would help transform the small technical institute into one of Turkey's leading universities. Kurdaş was no stranger to Archaeology himself. While inspecting construction work on the new campus in 1962, he located the remains of an ancient site under the ruins of Yalıncağ Köyü and quickly organized a team to excavate them. With the objects found at the site, Kurdaş launched the university's new archaeological museum, where the finds are still displayed today. For the rescue project at Keban, Kurdaş served as its passionate spokesman, instigating media events and coordinating public exhibits to advertise and raise funds for it. When needed, he also sought the necessary political and legal backing for the salvage excavations, and, not least importantly, negotiated the cooperation, at times problematic, with those in charge of construction.

Ankara's Committee

Halet Çambel's educational background, her previous work in Eastern Turkey, her connections in and out of the country, and her concern to preserve its Archaeology

would be key in the overall success of the Keban Dam Rescue Project. Another decisive factor was Kemal Kurdaş' experience in the world of economics, finance, academia, and the government. Through their active participation, as well as the support of a few other enthusiastic individuals, the salvage of cultural property in the Keban Dam area would begin to materialize during the year 1966. Halet Çambel and Kemal Kurdaş first met early that year, quickly joined by a handful of other researchers and government officials in order to initiate the first meetings of the "Committee for the Salvage of Cultural Property in the Keban Dam Area." In a matter of weeks, this small core was able to plan the rescue project, establish the broad guidelines for future fieldwork, and solve many pressing issues.

In October of the same year, the committee sent Cevat Erder and a team of Middle East Technical University graduate students to Keban for a survey of its ancient monuments and archaeological sites. A recently appointed professor in the newly created Department for the Restoration and Preservation of Historic Monuments at METU, Erder's team was able to measure and photograph more than a dozen sixteenth century Ottoman monuments and document many other threatened historic and prehistoric sites. Their results were published in a small booklet titled *Doomed by the Dam*, which was widely disseminated and accompanied by exhibits in the hope of capturing the attention of a wider audience.⁵ If the mosques, churches, as well as the other abandoned edifices and lone historical ruins were "doomed by the dam," they at least would become the material advocates for the launching of more salvage work. Working swiftly and intensively but never regarding the survey as comprehensive, the team discovered more

⁵ Cevat Erder, *Doomed by the Dam*. (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Restoration, Publication No. 9, 1967).

edifices than had time to catalog in two weeks. More importantly, their work did attract public interest, raising awareness about the dangers of the dam and revealing the remaining task at hand.

A few months later, another survey would catch this time the attention of the scientific community. Financed by the National Science Foundation, Robert Whallon Jr. from the University of Michigan and Sönmez Kantman from Istanbul University came to Keban in 1967 with a testing hypothesis on urban development from the Lower to the Upper Euphrates during the Bronze Age.⁶ For their scientific survey of the region, the two archaeologists defined their research questions precisely, stated their methodology explicitly, and constituted rigorous samples in order to collect potsherds from the surface of mounds. Broader in scope, more rigorous in methodology, and more ambitious in its goals than the first survey, their work outlined much of the future scientific research agenda of the rescue project and, at the same time, established early on what would be the rescue project's high scientific standards.

After the two surveys finished, there was still no money available for any additional investigations. In February 1968, the committee instigated in the newspaper *Milliyet* the "Campaign to Save the Country's 6000 Year Old Monuments".⁷ Throughout the spring, short advertisements announced the dam's construction and publicized its threat to the "country's 6000 year old monuments." Two accounts were opened at İş Bankası and Ziraat Bankası in order to facilitate the collection of funds. The fundraiser quickly attracted large donations from Istanbul's Chamber of Commerce, Turkish banks,

⁶ Robert Whallon Jr. and Sönmez Kantman, "The Survey of the Keban Dam Reservoir, 1967," *1968 Summer Work* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University Keban Project Publications, Series I, No. 1). Robert Whallon Jr. and Sönmez Kantman, "Early Bronze Age Development in the Keban Reservoir, East-Central Turkey," *Current Anthropology* 10:1 (1969).

⁷ "Milliyet'in 6 Bin Yıllık Eserleri Kurtarma Kampanyası" (*Milliyet* February 1968). The campaign began in the middle of February and ended 5 months later in the middle of July when funds were delivered. Information concerning the campaign can be found in the pages of *Milliyet* between the months of February and April, 1968.

and foreign corporations such as Mobil, British Petroleum, Shell, and Nestlé. When news of it reached the ears of Nejat Eczacıbaşı on the first day of the campaign, the Turkish entrepreneur and philanthropist donated 10,000 Turkish Liras. Not all contributions were made by such large fortunes however, coming instead from smaller businessmen, government officials, or enthusiastic elementary school children across the country. In two months, *Milliyet* had raised the equivalent of \$60,000. Thanks to the fundraiser's success, Turkey's Central Treasury was more easily convinced of supporting the rescue project and, within a few months, the sum of \$250,000 was made available for rescue work at Keban.

Despite the initial skepticism and lack of funds, the project did appeal to a few more interested volunteers. The committee in Ankara had to then assign sites based on each one's interests and competence. Norşuntepe, for example, the region's largest mound, seemed to have been reserved for Tahsin Özgüç, an influential figure in Turkish Archaeology and long-time director of Kultepe-Kanesh. The multi-layered site had also caught the attention of American and German scholars however. Harald Hauptmann, a relative newcomer to Anatolian Archaeology, who had just received in 1966 a fellowship to study in Istanbul, hears about the Keban Dam at this time from his British colleague David French and quickly discusses the possibility of representing Germany with Rudolf Naumann, then director of the German Archaeology Institute in Istanbul. Rudolf Naumann agrees that if the institute were to be awarded a site, Hauptmann would be responsible for leading its excavations. Surprisingly, Tahsin Özgüç did not attend the early meetings of the executive committee and would not claim what everyone thought was his possession. The site was then in the balance between the German Archaeology

Institute and Harald Hauptmann, and a joint University of Chicago-University of Amsterdam team. For the committee, attributing sites sometimes turned out to be a challenging exercise in diplomacy. For the archaeologists, the process frequently involved being in the right spot at the right time. In the end, enthusiastic in his request, benefitting from the good reputation of German Archaeology in general and of the Institute in Istanbul in particular, and with the support of a reputable scholar in Rudolf Naumann, Harald Hauptmann was eventually awarded the prestigious site. The Chicago-Amsterdam team then had to settle without too much remorse for the smaller nearby site of Korucutepe.

In a few months, the committee in Ankara had been able to initiate the project's first surveys, raised funds for further research, and assigned sites to all interested volunteers. Its duty was now to organize field facilities near the threatened sites themselves. The city of Elazığ at the time did not possess an archaeological museum that could have served as the project's base. The *Fırat Üniversitesi*, which had yet to fully open its doors, had nonetheless inaugurated its Academy of Architecture and Department of Engineering in 1967. These new buildings would serve as the project's headquarters and transit point for many researchers who would spend the night there before reaching the sites the following day. Equipment for excavations and finds unearthed during the summer were also stored inside the walls of the new Academy; never an ideal solution, as many archaeologists remember, since flooding and theft occasionally occurred. Located today on its campus, Elazığ's Archaeology and Ethnography Museum only opened its doors in 1982, seven years after the project's end. It has recently been refurbished and reopened last year, displaying today the many finds of the Keban Dam excavations. Last

but not least important, the committee established a temporary publishing office in Ankara to facilitate the forthcoming publications of preliminary and final results. By the summer of 1968, all of the pieces of the Keban puzzle had slowly come together. Everyone at this point in time could now look forward to the project's next step.⁸

International and Multidisciplinary

Again, in spite of the limited amount of time, the relatively small number of volunteers, the overall skepticism of the archaeological community, the lack of money available, and, let us not forget, the fact that salvage excavations of this scale had never been undertaken in Turkey before, the committee in Ankara managed to finance, organize, and oversee the completion of a rescue project before the construction of the Keban Dam. The twelve teams that began in 1968 were quickly joined by more expeditions bringing to 28 the total number of sites excavated before 1975.

In less than a decade, participants were able to collect material evidence from all periods of Eastern Turkey's history and prehistory --from Kılıç Kökten's survey of Palaeolithic caves, rock shelters, and open-air workshops revealing traces of the region's earliest occupation, to excavations at the much later Seljuq-period fortress of Şimşat. At least for a few years, the salvage efforts undertaken in this supposed "archaeological backwater" of Eastern Turkey had forced the scientific gaze of researchers away from the Aegean Coast and Central Anatolia. The Upper Euphrates of Eastern Turkey could now figure prominently on the disciplinary map of Anatolian and Near Eastern Archaeology. In addition, a 5th century CE Greek inscription found on the façade of the Karamağara Bridge near Çemişgezek, as well as two endangered 16th century mosques in Pertek were

⁸ For more details on the rescue project, see Cevat Erder, "Lessons in Archaeological and Monument Salvage The Keban Experience," *Monumentum* 17: 22 (1978).

documented, dismantled stone-by-stone, and later transported to a safer location for their preservation.⁹

The rescue project also allowed a younger generation of scholars, many of them in their 30s, to receive their first field experience and to experiment with newly developed techniques recently made available in the 1960s. Surveyor levels and theodolites, Carbon-14 dating, radio-magnetic surveys, and water sieving machines were tested for the first time in Turkish Archaeology at Keban. The grid system, for instance, a technique all of us take for granted today, began to be used systematically, with more or less success, by almost all teams at Keban. Additionally, in an effort to refine Bob Whallon's pottery classification established during his 1967 survey, Henry Wright and Mehmet Özdoğan experimented with a pioneering invention and original tool at the time... a computer.

The quantity of information discovered in a relatively limited amount of time constitutes an achievement in itself. At Keban, however, the typical archaeological potsherd had been replaced by a multitude of other scientific artifacts and forms of material evidence. During the various surveys in the region, for example, the objects documented ranged from monumental stone buildings to minute lithic tools, from pottery fragments on the surface of mounds to "invisible" buried architectural features magnified by radio-magnetic techniques. Experimented with at Keban, water sieving machines also significantly broadened the scope of evidence by being able to sort out micro faunal and floral remains from the ground. The rescue project thus allowed the definition of what constitutes archaeological data itself to significantly expand to the point that Keban's

⁹ Ibid.

success, in the end, is perhaps to be found in the quality of data produced rather than in the quantity.

Archaeologists at Keban surveyed its landscapes more systematically, collected material evidence more meticulously, experimented with new archaeological techniques; in other words, transformed the practice of Archaeology itself into a more “scientific” endeavor. Science (with a capital S) -- as understood in the late 1960s by the proponents of this new kind of archaeology-- would play a preponderant role in the rescue project and change the somewhat haphazard study of sites and objects into a more rigorous investigation of entire landscapes as well as a more holistic understanding of the past. Confidently moving away from the simple documentation of ancient mounds associated with culture-history, researchers at Keban positioned Turkish Archaeology, for a few years at least, on the forefront of methodological discussions. Slowly but surely, from a marginal endeavor in a peripheral region, Keban was transforming itself into a major scientific undertaking unique in the history of Anatolian and Near Eastern Archaeology.

Keban also brought a multitude of non-archaeologists --botanists, zoologists, architects, ethnographers, sociologists, anthropologists, as well as professional restorers, draftsmen, photographers, geologists, statisticians, and even engineers-- to work side-by-side the archaeologists in the trenches themselves. This multitude of scientists, whose academic background and training had been anything but field archaeology, most often worked as integral parts of the teams and made excavations, like the ones carried out at Aşvan by David French of the British Institute and at Tepecik by Ufuk Esin of Istanbul University, truly multidisciplinary.

In the Middle East, the practice of bringing a wide range of experts to the field is often traced back to the 1950s at the site of Jarmo in Northern Iraq, where Robert and Linda Braidwood assembled an expedition composed of botanists, zoologists, ethnographers, as well as architects, geologists, and radiocarbon specialists to examine a broader range of data including seeds, bones, wood remains, and to study, not just the history and culture of the ancient Near East, but its climate and nature as well.¹⁰ During their collaboration in the Joint Istanbul-Chicago Prehistoric Project in Southeastern Turkey, the Braidwoods shared many of their methodological insights on multidisciplinary teamwork with Halet Çambel, who, a few years later at Keban, would pass many of these on to her Istanbul University colleague Ufuk Esin working at Tepecik.

As archaeologists at Keban embraced their multidisciplinary side, many of them also shifted their research interests to “environmental archaeology” as well as the theoretical paradigm popular at the time, namely “Processual Archaeology.”¹¹ To fulfill its objectives, the salvage excavations required the meshing of multiple disciplines as well as the cooperation of different generations and archaeological traditions. Besides David French and his Processual-inspired “Total Archaeology” and the “Braidwood School” represented by Istanbul University’s Ufuk Esin, working in the same region side-by-side were Hamit Koşay’s particular type of Turkish “culture-history” and Harald Hauptmann’s “Great Tradition” from Germany.

To be successful, the rescue project also required the collaboration of various universities, both Turkish and foreign. At first spearheaded by Kemal Kurdaş and the

¹⁰ Patti Jo Watson, “Robert John Braidwood,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 149:2 (2005).

¹¹ Patrick V. Kirch, “Archaeology and Global Change: The Holocene Record,” *Annual Review of Environmental Resources* 30 (2005).

Department of Architecture at METU, Ankara and Istanbul University, despite their supposed rivalry, would later take the role of leadership as the project advanced. Finally, it is within this diversity of disciplines, generations, paradigms, universities, and nationalities --a unique moment in the history of our discipline-- that many Turkish archaeologists, through their contact and collaboration with German, British, and American scholars, first learned how to carry out archaeological fieldwork.

Last but not least, the rescue project went beyond the purely archaeological study of the region's ancient past. The dam did not only inundate ancient monuments and archaeological sites. Its reservoir also submerged numerous villages, dramatically altering the lives of local people. More precisely, 212 towns and villages were flooded and more than 30,000 people forced to relocate. Conscious that many local village traditions would vanish as a consequence, the committee in Ankara also felt the need to document aspects of the region's more contemporary history and initiated a number of projects to study its present-day culture. Between 1968 and 1975, studies in vernacular architecture, local folklore, local carpet production and weaving techniques, as well as ethnographic work recording the last days of the area's agricultural villages and a socio-economic study analyzing the dam's impact on forced migrations and problems related to resettlement, were carried out by non-archaeologists from Turkey and abroad as part of a rescue project that today is essentially remembered for its archaeology.

Imagination and Improvisation

If the Keban Dam Rescue Project is considered today by the Turkish archaeological community a "turning point," it is important to remember that at its start, archaeologists did not know exactly the number of years they would have to finish their

excavations. Work at Keban had to be done quickly, as if the current season had been their last. In fact, the rescue project questioned the amount of time needed to excavate a site properly. Not able to afford century-long projects on these endangered mounds, archaeologists had to re-imagine their field methods. For instance, decisions were made to only excavate a sample of the site, to only collect very indicative pottery, to only examine the very significant artifacts. Other archaeologists thought they would gain time by using radio-magnetic surveys to “see” architectural remains before they unearthed them. Promising at first, this innovative technique only achieved limited results, however, leaving many to wonder what precisely the machine was able to do. Another team simply decided to avoid this problem of time altogether by extending their normal summer seasons until the end of December.

In general, however, the situation of emergency forced archaeologists to become more creative and to imagine rapid solutions to many unexpected problems. Furthermore, at the time in Eastern Turkey, only a few roads were asphalted; villages had no access to electricity and running water, and a functioning sewage system constituted a luxury. Again, no governmental institution was in place to organize this rescue project. To compensate for their lack of experience, of institutional assistance, and proper infrastructures in the region, this young generation of archaeologists often resolved problems through much improvisation and imagination, and quickly solved unforeseen issues through collaboration and cooperation.

These absences and uncertainties, in the end, created the ground for archaeologists to unite. Members of the rescue project often visited one another and shared lunches on their days off. They observed each other’s progress, exchanged ideas

on archaeological methods, borrowed or adopted new tools, and most importantly learned from each other. The proximity of the sites themselves facilitated communication and favored the collaboration of these scientists. Participants at Keban fostered a “community of practice” by helping each other out as well as learning as a group. Of course, communities should never be idealized as hierarchy also defines their identity and conflicts can erupt in parallel to collegiality and friendship. Nonetheless, the rescue project at Keban represents a unique moment where, again, members from a broad range of disciplines, countries, universities, generations, and theoretical paradigms came together as a group sharing similar goals. In the end, despite all of the skepticism and difficulties encountered, it is this collegial, even friendly, atmosphere that members of the rescue project today remember above everything else... a collegiality, I must add here, that would not be found in the region’s subsequent salvage excavation projects.

Finished in 1975, the Keban Dam was followed by a series of other mega-infrastructures in Eastern Turkey, first on the Euphrates River: the Karakaya and Atatürk Dams in the 1980s, the Birecik and Karkamış Dams in the 1990s, and later on the Tigris River: the Ilisu Dam for instance. All of these dams were preceded by salvage excavations similar to the ones at Keban. The dam also announced the implementation in the 1980s of the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP), financed by the Turkish State to “develop” and “modernize” the impoverished, mainly Kurdish, provinces of Southeastern Turkey. The goals of the development project quickly moved beyond the provision of water and electricity from dams, however, to include today an ambitious remodeling of the region’s economic, political, cultural, and social life. An important component of GAP is also found in its management of the region’s history and archaeology. In its

attempts to redefine the socioeconomic identity of Southeastern Turkey, the GAP has also given much importance to the management of its cultural heritage. If not in its fullest form in the 1960s, the Keban Dam Rescue Project nevertheless announces a shift not only in the minds of archaeologists, but also in the policies of the state and in the consciousness of the public, on the meaning of cultural heritage, on how to best preserve it, and, in the case of the GAP region, how to transform it into a commodity with high potential economic value.¹²

In spite of the limited amount of time, the relatively small number of volunteers, the overall skepticism of the archaeological community, the lack of money available, and, let us not forget, the fact that salvage excavations of this scale had never been undertaken in Turkey before, the committee in Ankara managed to finance, organize, and oversee the completion of a rescue project before the construction of the Keban Dam. Four decades have passed since its completion and I have just outlined the reasons why today the scientific community in Turkey perceives it as a “turning point” in the history of their discipline. Again, participants of this international and multidisciplinary project were able to collect material evidence from all periods of Eastern Turkey’s history and prehistory, new techniques were experimented with broadening the quality of data recovered, ancient monuments were rescued and the contemporary cultures of villages now under water studied.

Despite the absence of institutions and infrastructures, as well as the lack of experience of its members, the rescue project allowed a young generation of

¹² If this is the main focus of my forthcoming book, a few examples here suffice to illustrate this last point about the remodeling of Eastern Turkey’s cultural heritage: For instance, the opening of the colossal “Mozaik Musesi” in Gaziantep with artifacts rescued at Zeugma by salvage excavations; a complete redefinition of the identity of Urfa full of “arkeoparks,” butik otels, and “otantik” restaurants, etc. in order to attract tourism money; and discussions surrounding the protection and eventual transfer of Hasankeyf threatened by the Ilisu Dam.

archaeologists with different educational backgrounds, national origins, and academic training to carry the project forward as a community thanks to much improvisation and imagination, as well as much collaboration and cooperation, to the point that, today, what is remembered of the project by its participants is its collegiality. Finally, in the article's last part, I broadened the idea of a "turning point" beyond the discipline of archaeology to the region of Eastern Turkey itself in order to explain how the Keban Dam represented a crucial event in the history of Eastern Turkey itself, announcing many of the social, economic, and political changes it has witnessed over the past 40 years. More specifically, I describe in my research the relationship, beginning in the 1960s, that appears between, on the one hand, the broader changes in the social, economic, and political structures of Eastern Turkey and the emergence of economic "development" as well as the new forms of liberal "modernization," and, on the other hand, the simultaneous changes not just in the practice of archaeology, but in this sudden concern to preserve cultural heritage and to "rescue the past." In other words, the question I answer in more details remains, why did the "past" suddenly become worth "rescuing" in Eastern Turkey at the same time that dams, such as the one built in 1974 at Keban, began to appear across the Anatolian landscape first on the Euphrates and later on Tigris Rivers.