

Ancient Mesopotamian Wheat in Okayama

by H. Hara

History was recreated by the Okayama Orient Museum in Okayama city in the winter when the staff of the museum baked bread which they had successfully raised in the rooftop garden of the museum building. The wheat they used was a strain from ancient Mesopotamia and the cooking was all part of research program at the museum aimed at learning more about ancient life.



The Mesopotamian wheat strain grown on the roof of Okayama Orient Museum. (Photo courtesy of Sanyo Shimbun)

According to some history books, Ancient Mesopotamia succeeded in cultivating wheat for the first time in the world, about 10,000 years ago. The wheat made them wealthy, and helped to create a highly sophisticated culture in Mesopotamia. After the middle ages, this strain of wheat was only raised in a small region of Europe.

The museum got seeds from a beer company, which itself was trying to reproduce an ancient type of beer. The museum planted the wheat in the rooftop garden in autumn of 2005 and reaped

it all in the summer of 2006. Volunteer guides at the museum participated a lot. They watered the crop, removed weeds, made fertilizer from compost and regularly checked on the crops progress. Surrounded by modern buildings, the ancient strain of wheat grew well, and it was generous harvest.

As the curator says, "It is very important to get information not only from reading books, but also by actually doing something".

They also attempted to make pasta from the wheat too. Makes me wonder what it tasted like. The museum plans to grow other crops on the roof in future. If you would like to assist the production (and eating?!), please enquire about their volunteer staff programs.



The rooftop garden, with Okayama Symphony Hall in the background... (Photo courtesy of Sanyo Shimbun)