

Robert K. Ritner

Following a keynote lecture in Greece in June of 2003, **Robert K. Ritner** began the academic year by returning to Europe to analyze ancient ethnic competition in a lecture “Libyan vs. Nubian as the Ideal Egyptian” during the symposium “Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity,” held at Schloss Elmau in Bavaria (July 14). In August, he relocated to Philadelphia to serve as visiting professor in Egyptology in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, the University of Pennsylvania, and as Egyptologist in Residence in the University of Pennsylvania Museum. Before taking up these duties, Ritner made a third European visit to deliver the keynote address for the inaugural Egyptology conference of the University of Swansea, held at Baskerville Hall in Wales. There he gave the first presentation of two bronze serpent wands recently acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Entitled “‘And each staff transformed into a snake’: The Serpent Wand in Ancient Egypt,” the lecture traced the Egyptian antecedents of the famous episode of Exodus 7:8–12 and was repeated for the Boston Museum’s Friends of the Ancient World on May 14.

While in Philadelphia, Ritner taught courses on Egyptian language and religion and lectured for the museum on “The Eldest Son of Creation: Magic in Ancient Egyptian Theology and Ritual” (November 19). Concurrently, he began the study of fifteen unpublished Demotic documents pertaining to the monthly activities of Egyptian “cult guilds” in the Ptolemaic Period (second century B.C.). A partner in this research is Jennifer Houser-Wegner, Research Scientist at the University of Pennsylvania Museum and Ritner’s former Yale doctoral student. In 1991, Ritner had to decline a Mellon grant to study these papyri because of his new appointment at Yale, so it is a particular pleasure to be able to return to them with a Demoticist trained during the Yale years. With itemized rosters of officers, novices and meeting expenditures, these papyri more than double the known documents of Egyptian religious associations, which — like ancient “Knights of Columbus” — provided ancillary service to the religious community and had defined ranks and regulations. As one papyrus alone (31.5 by 117 cm) contains 30 columns with information on more than one year, the Philadelphia archive will provide a unique witness to the basic activities of religious communities in the Egyptian Faiyum.

Ritner resumed duties in Chicago in the winter, teaching a full complement of courses and leading the first Oriental Institute tour of “The Oases of the Western Desert” (March 12–28). The highly successful tour included private visits to some forty sites in Alexandria and the oases in addition to major monuments in Luxor. Particular highlights included a day’s off-road trek across the desert from Siwa to Bahriya in four-wheeled drive vehicles and a spectacular, new cliff top hotel at Dakhla, where the group held a starlight cocktail party against the panoramic backdrop of the oasis. Following the tour Ritner stayed a week at Chicago House for personal research.

In October, Ritner’s translation of thirteen literary texts appeared in William K. Simpson, Robert K. Ritner, Vincent A. Tobin and Edward F. Wente, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, Third edition, published by Yale University Press. As the culmination of an active year, Ritner received word of his promotion to full professor, effective July 1, 2004.
