

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

No. 23: January, 1976

Not for publication

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS THEY WILL HAVE RETURNED FROM NIPPUR,
BUT THIS LETTER ARRIVED ON DECEMBER 5.

November 15, 1975

Dear Friends,

For a while last week we thought we had found the world's earliest hat box. We were digging in a Kassite level when we came upon a pottery container with a brick on top. At first we thought it was a drain and pretty much ignored it for a few hours. Then I looked into it through a small hole near the top. I could see cloth, and immediately thought it was a burial. However, it was clear that the container was no more than a foot or so in diameter, not long like a coffin. Taking a little more of the cracked container away, we could see that the cloth had the appearance of a turban, with a rolled edge and a dome-like center. After careful consolidation of the cloth, we got ready to remove it. Just below one edge we could see the green corrosion of copper. The turban obviously had things under it. When the cloth was taken out, bones appeared. We had merely another baby burial covered with cloth. So much for the hat box. The cloth, however, is in good condition and the technique of manufacture and the material will be easily identifiable.

In the following week, things began to happen in all the areas of digging. In the Old Babylonian building of WA, the temple area, we found a drain. In cleaning up the drain for photographs, I hit something with the pick. Looking down, I saw a well-carved inscription in stone and a moment later I realized that it was on a superb cylinder seal of the Akkadian Period (2350-2200 B.C.). There are depicted the god Enki, holding a flowing vase, the god Ushmu who has two faces (like Janus), a human figure and a nude "hero." The details of the figures are the finest I have ever seen. Each finger joint and ridges in the palms of the hands are shown. The rib cage and musculature of the "hero" are beautifully rendered. With no other evidence than the carving one could say this is a very special seal, but the inscription gives additional confirmation. The seal belongs to a scribe in the service of "Sharkalisharri, son of the king." I know of no other seal in which Sharkalisharri, who later became King of Akkad, is designated "son of the king," referring apparently to Naram-Sin.

Alongside this seal was another more modest seal of Isin-Larsa date. So far, in various contexts we have found ten seals. We've also finally gotten tablets from our Old Babylonian temple level. These may tell us whose temple we're dealing with. In the three weeks left to work, we will expose at least three more rooms of the Old Babylonian level and should learn a great deal more.

While all this has been happening in WA, the work in WB has been going on at a good pace. We've finally removed the Seleucid walls on top and have excavated five more rooms of the Kassite palace. So far about twenty-five whole and fragmentary tablets have come from the building this season. We are now preparing to go down into the Old Babylonian level where we found large houses and much evidence of bread-making last season.

In WC, on the southwestern end of the site, down on the lowest part, we have finished our cut over the city wall. It is 17 meters wide, with more than four meters of baked brick foundation lying under about three preserved meters of mudbrick. We hit water and despite vigorous pumping, we were forced to stop without reaching the bottom of the wall. The pottery associated with it is Old Babylonian, as are the mudbricks. Above the wall there are Kassite remains of perhaps a less ambitious wall, and just inside the wall there are several rooms of a formally laid out building, obviously not just a house. We've opened an area twenty by ten meters and are nowhere near reaching the outer limits of the building. The pottery looks a bit later than the Kassite material from the palace of the 13th Century B.C. in WB. A more precise dating may be given by some well-preserved tablets found on a floor.

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2 Outside the city wall, Stephen Lintner is still digging holes and looking at the dirt. There are water-laid deposits in all the pits west of the city wall, where the Kassite map has the river Euphrates. He is also sectioning a Kassite canal in the same area, to find out what canal deposits look like in the hope of making certain that the deposits in his pits are river-borne rather than canal-borne.

Before you get completely bored rather than borne, let me switch over to another aspect of the operation. We are often asked what it's like to be on a dig. After the initial excitement and the welter of red tape in Baghdad, and after the first few days of sorting out bedding, setting up tables, getting the water stored on the roof, and in general settling in, the work takes on a routine. We're up by 5:30, have breakfast, and are on the mound by 6:30. We call the roll and begin working. We each have specific areas and specific pickmen to supervise, and take notes on what is being done. This year, because of a shortage of trained pickmen, we are doing a lot more of the actual digging ourselves. As a result we are getting much better information and are better able to show new local pickmen what to do. At 9:45 the men take a fifteen minute break and eat a light meal. Then they work till twelve when we break for lunch. We go back to the house to find the table spread with whatever has caught the fancy of our Kurdish cook, Abdullah, that particular day. He's good, but not so good as Abbas, whom we lost to a permanent job in Baghdad.

At 1 P.M. we're back on the mound and we work till 3:30. We come in with bags of pottery and whatever objects have been found that day, wash up, and have tea at 4. Then there's a run on the shower until supper. After supper, we usually end up in the workrooms drawing pottery, mending tablets, registering objects, cleaning coins, and writing up the notes for the day. Occasionally someone will break out a beer, but this is really a pretty dry dig. We don't even smoke. Not one of us. I begin to think we're not living right. Most of us are in bed by 9, but John Sanders, the architect, is usually drawing till late and he gets to switch off the generator. He also gets to sleep a little later in the morning.

This is a good crew, and everyone is working well. No one hates anyone, and we are in fact enjoying ourselves. We talk a lot about movies (would you believe *Beau Geste*?) and restaurants, and far too much about the university and other universities. We're compiling a list of catch phrases for the season. Famous lines of the past have been "I am just a dust," "Not on your life," and "I am the responsible of this." This year's line seems to be "Nippur is hopeless to me." There's a long story behind each of these quotes and I rather think that twenty years from now we'll look at each other and say very seriously "Nippur is hopeless to me" and fall out laughing, or at least smile a bit.

It's late and this is already over-long. I'm committing this to the mercies of the Afak post office. I have no idea if it will ever reach Chicago. Sometimes things do.

Sincerely yours,
McGuire Gibson

P.S. By the way, I didn't hurt the seal when I hit it with the pick. Luckily, I was pecking gently, and I hit it on the end. It didn't even chip.

THE DEMOTIC EGYPTIAN ARCHIVE FROM HAWARA (2)

by George R. Hughes

In the last issue, Dr. Hughes described the acquisition in 1932 of nine large papyrus rolls forming part of an archive, now housed in London, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Cairo, and Chicago, that originated at Hawara in the Fayum, Lower Egypt. He told of the intermittent attention the documents have received until the last two were unrolled this summer, and summarized the contents of some of the papyri. (The figures in parentheses refer to the chronological order in which the documents were written.)

After the one dated to Alexander the Great, the Institute papyri then skip the eight-year reign of his successor, the half-witted Philip Arrhidaeus, and the next one (3) is dated in the seventh year of Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great, in the month of Dec. 9, 310 to January 7, 309 B.C. It is one of just nine demotic documents in the world surviving from the thirteen-year reign of Alexander IV. It too is a marriage settlement; there are four of them among the Institute's eleven contracts and there are two among the six contracts in Copenhagen. They were valuable legal documents to be safely kept, for they provided for the inheritance rights of the woman's children and through them for those of future generations.

The remaining Institute Hawara documents, not described above, are of this nature: In the next one (4), dated in year 13 of Ptolemy I Soter, i.e., in March of 292 B.C., the man who made the marriage settlement (3) in 310 B.C. gave part of his property to a son eighteen years later, but this son was not the son of the woman on whom his father had made that marriage settlement. Then this son made a mar-

riage settlement (5) thirty-three years later in year 26 of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (August-September, 259 B.C.). Curiously enough, the document (4) of 292 B.C. was rolled inside and, it would seem, may have been attached end to end to another (10), which is dated by the Greek registry docket at its bottom (since the date of the demotic text was broken off and lost) to year 8 of Ptolemy III Euergetes I, that is, March 9, 239 B.C.—53 years later than the one around which it was rolled. This is a contract for the sale of one-third of a house by a man to a woman, but neither of them is known from any of the other Institute or Copenhagen documents. What the connection is between these two contracts I do not see at present. However, the later of the pair is dated in the very same year and month and was made by the same man for the same woman as is a marriage settlement which is the earliest of the Hawara documents in Copenhagen, and this Copenhagen document mysteriously mentions “every document that I have made for you.” Furthermore, the companion document to the Oriental Institute contract of sale for a third of a house, that is, the document which completed the sale by the man’s ceding all rights, is in Copenhagen also, but it is dated six years later, in the month July 17-August 15, 233 B.C., and it describes the third of the house as “which I sold to you in year 8, month Tybi” of Ptolemy III Euergetes I, that is, on precisely the date of the Oriental Institute contract of sale. The third of a house was thus put up as security for some obligation that the man owed the woman, his wife, perhaps for the marriage settlement itself, and that obligation was met by his ceding all rights to the third of a house to her six years later by means of the Copenhagen document. The third of a house had been, as it were, in escrow for the six years.

Another papyrus (6), bearing a contract for the sale of 1/18th part of a house by a man to a woman, is the only one of the Oriental Institute or Copenhagen papyri that cannot be dated to an exact year B.C. and month. The beginning of the document was broken off and lost. This is frequently the case because papyri were rolled up from the left end so that the beginning of the text would be immediately visible at the right end as the papyrus was unrolled, inasmuch as demotic writing runs from right to left. The outside end of the roll was thus vulnerable in handling, especially when the papyrus had become dry and brittle. This papyrus (6) can therefore be dated only to the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.), but no closer. That a person should own and sell something as small as 1/18th share in a house may seem strange, but when one considers that if a man owned a house and had six children and each inherited 1/6th of the house and each of them had only two children apiece, each of the man’s grandchildren would inherit 1/18th of his house. The seller in this document is the brother of the man who is the husband in document (3) and the father in document (4) above.

The remaining document (9) was written in year 4 of Ptolemy III Euergetes I in the month of July 20-August 18, 243 B.C. It too is a marriage settlement but neither the man nor the woman appears in any other Oriental Institute or Copenhagen Hawara document, so it cannot be tied into the series.

As Edgerton told Breasted over forty years ago, before anyone knew much about these papyri except that they were in large, long rolls, “several of them will make impressive museum pieces.” Most of them are indeed physically very impressive, for the pieces of papyrus are huge and the texts are in but a few long lines centered vertically, and the handwriting is correspondingly large and bold and of a consciously elegant calligraphy. This is especially true of the marriage settlements. Furthermore, the writing of some of them especially is unusually valuable palaeographically both because it is so carefully done and because the oldest of it comes from the early part of the Greek Period when surviving demotic texts are scarce. This scarcity also enhances the value of the documents for the history of the legal procedures and terminology and for the development of the legal clauses and phrases, among other things. There are still problems in the reading and understanding of the contracts, and much more information of many sorts remains to be extracted from them, but their publication will be impressive, for it will add much to demotic studies.

The ten-week course for training new Museum Docents and Suq Volunteers will begin Monday, April 12, 1976. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer guide in the Oriental Institute Museum, please call Mrs. Jill Maher, 753-2573 or 753-2471, to arrange an interview.

4 THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

*cordially invites you
to attend a lecture*

“THE PARTHIANS”

by

Edward Keall
Royal Ontario Museum

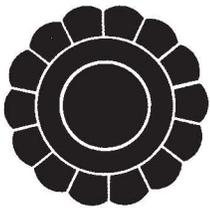
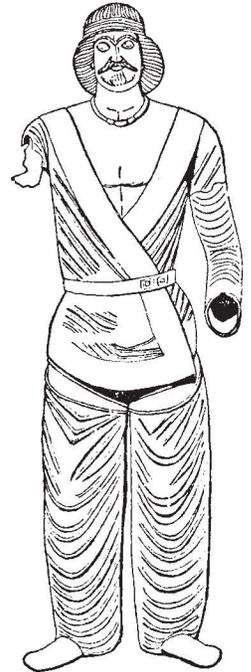
Tuesday, February 17, 1976

8:30 P.M.

The James Henry Breasted Lecture Hall
1155 East 58th Street

Admission is free. Museum Halls and The Suq will be open one hour before the lecture.

(The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Mrs. Schlender, 493-8601. Please remember that the privilege of the use of the dining room at the Quadrangle Club is a courtesy extended to members of the Oriental Institute only on nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.)



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