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News & Notes

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*Issued confidentially to members and friends**Not for publication*

EXPEDITION MOVES RAILROAD:

DATES 700 B.C. HOUSES

Baghdad
January 27, 1982

Dear Friends,

It is three in the morning and I am in Baghdad Airport waiting for my flight to be called. The plane should arrive in London at about 8 a.m., leaving enough time to get a little sleep, visit the British Museum, check a couple of bookstores, see a play, and eat a curry. The next day I'll make the jump to Chicago.

We stopped digging at Nippur on January 19th. This did not mean the end of the work. Most of the staff spent the next three days drawing sherds, finishing descriptions of excavated areas, completing the catalogue, photographing and drawing objects. John Sanders was mapping the site until the last minute. When I was not cleaning samples of bones, gluing pots and other objects, writing up notes and doing accounts, I was supervising the transfer of the railroad from its old quarters near the ziggurat to its new location at the expedition house.

For several years, I have been planning to move the railroad because its house was a half a kilometer or more from the expedition house and thus was outside the usual range of the guards. Last year, Naji, one of the guards, retired and when I was informed by letter, I immediately decided that this year would be the time to shift the railroad, since his house would be empty. I was more than a little disturbed to find, when I got to Nippur in October, that Naji's house was open to the sky. When he left, he had taken with him the wooden beams and the reed mats that formed the roof, as well as the wooden doors. It is standard procedure in Iraq to take the roof and doors, as it was the usual practice in ancient Mesopotamia. I know we owed Naji something substantial for his services over the years, and I guess he thought we did too. But a roof is more substantial than many other things.

Prior to moving the railroad, I had to take the roofs off the old buildings near the ziggurat and have those materials brought to re-roof Naji's house. Besides the railroad shed, there were two houses that had been built more than twenty-five years ago for the Sherqatis, the trained pickmen from the north of Iraq, whose services we can no longer obtain. It was a pity to abandon the Sherqati houses. They had been built in an unusually strong way and would have lasted a hundred years if maintained. The roof beams were portions of telephone posts and were much more substantial than normal. Each pole is worth about five hundred dollars on the current market. We got them down and over to Naji's house and lifted them into place



View from north-east over buildings of 7th century B.C. Paved court with well in foreground and small shrine room to right.

without hurting anyone. The railroad was moved with a rented tractor and trailer and stored in its new quarters after being oiled. Nur, our remaining guard, is much more content with this arrangement as he enters his 34th year at Nippur.

Our digging season was relatively short, just about two months, but it was extraordinarily successful. We expanded area WC, where we had exposed a group of houses in 1976. These houses, which we thought were datable to some time around 700 B.C., had yielded a fine group of glazed pottery at that time, along with many plain pots, some seals, and figurines. We hoped that by expanding the area, we would find tablets and other objects to give not only a more precise date, but also a full assemblage of artifacts for the inadequately known first millennium B.C.

Since 1972, we have systematically investigated a number of areas with different types of buildings, progressively filling in the assemblages of periods from the Akkadian to the Kassite (c. 2350–1100 B.C.). We had a fairly good idea of the range of material for the Archaemenid and Seleucid eras (c.500–150 B.C.), but the earlier half of the millennium was blank or represented by isolated groups of material that we could not place within a given century.

We intended to attack our problem in two ways. Our main operation would take the horizontal exposure of the houses in WC. Meanwhile, we would make a cut along one face of Trench TA, a large pit sunk into Tablet Hill, near the ziggurat, in



Ancient baked clay mold for making plaque of a king.

1948-52. The TA cut would allow us to gather more pottery and reassess the stratigraphy of the entire first millennium and thus allow us to place our WC buildings in the sequence.

As it turned out, we were unable to carry out the TA operation due to shortage of labor and problems of supplying the operation. We decided to put all our efforts into the main excavation at WC, hoping for enough material to date the houses. It was a gamble that paid off.

In the largest house we found, along with the omnipresent pots, a few seals, figurines, plaques, and tablet fragments. One of the tablets has a date in the reign of Shamash-shum-ukin, the brother of Assurbanipal, who had been put on the throne of Babylonia. We can thus, assign our buildings to the middle of the 7th century B.C.

Besides the dating of the buildings, we discovered some interesting details on the construction practices of the time. In several thresholds, we found deposits of objects. In one, for instance, there were thirty-five pieces of amethyst, a very rare stone in ancient contexts. We also found some cylinder seals and beads included in the plaster of a wall. These objects may have been dedications, or more likely a hoard of valuable

stone objects hidden very ingeniously—an early form of wall safe.

Outside the main house, we found a street with a baked-brick drain running along it. On the other side of the street was a building of which we could expose only a few rooms just as the season was ending. In the debris above the rooms, we found some remarkable baked clay plaques and molds, similar to Assyrian ones, but different enough to indicate a local style. The rooms themselves were rich in finds. For the last two days of the dig, objects seemed to be pouring out of the ground from this building. One room, with a niche on the back wall, had been we think, a shrine. At one time in the history of the building, this room was filled with three courses of mudbricks. Between the bricks, in the mud mortar, were found dozens of stone and faience beads, along with several cylinder seals. Most of the seals were of earlier periods, but some of them seemed to be contemporary with the building. These small, sometimes crude, but lively seals may be important for defining Babylonian style in the early first millennium B.C.



Ancient baked clay plaque of winged bull.

Most of the building with the shrine lies under our dump. It is a cliché in archaeology that you put your dump over something important, regardless of where you put it. Looking at it optimistically, it can be said that the dump is protecting the building until our return. I have left another remarkable building under a big dump at Umm al-Hafriyat, out in the desert east of Nippur. And there's another one under a dump at Area WA, and there's another one ...

Sincerely yours,
McGuire Gibson

P.S. I must confess that the letter you've been reading wasn't entirely written at 3 a.m. in the Baghdad Airport. I did finish it and thought it was not bad just before I went on the plane at 4:15. On reading it through back in Chicago, I found the description of the digging was a little groggy. I have redone that part.

Vivid Recollection of Visit to King Tut

A delightful Christmas letter, received by someone at the Oriental Institute, came from Mrs. Bernhard Hormann, daughter of the late James Henry Breasted, sent from her home in Honolulu. It is a pleasure to have Mrs. Hormann's permission to share with the readers of News and Notes, the following description of a "child's-eye view" of King Tut's tomb:

After a summer and early fall in England, France, Germany and Italy, [in year 1922-23,] the family went to Egypt and boarded a dahabiya, a river vessel, for a two-month journey up the river to Abu-Simbel. Up-river at Luxor, "they missed" a runner dispatched to our vessel by Lord Carnarvon (sponsor of Howard Carter). Only later, on our way down river, we picked up mail at Aswan in which was a letter from Carnarvon for my father telling of Carter's discovery in the Valley of the Kings. He wanted not only to have my father share in this unparalleled experience, but also solicited his help in substantiating and confirming the evidence from the seal impressions on the walled-up doorways that this was in fact the long-searched-for tomb of Tutankhamon. So "The Cheops" remained tied up at Luxor for some time while my father made daily trips over to the Valley of the Kings. One day my father returned from the Valley of the Kings to say that he had had the temerity to ask Carter whether he might bring other members of his family into the tomb. He wanted me and (14-year-old) brother James to share this momentous occasion. Carter was willing.

It is difficult to retrieve my first child's-eye view of the tomb. But my father had prepared us well. Carter and my father now prepared to take us down into the tomb. At the foot of the rough-hewn steps was a sloping passageway stretched down ahead of us. At its end a white sheet was suspended like a curtain. Our eyes were adjusting from the Egyptian sunshine outside to the shadows in the passageway when Carter switched on the 2,000 candle-power light he had installed in the antechamber behind the sheet. Instantly silhouetted against the sheet, like prison bars, appeared the heavy iron grill Carter had made haste to install. Then he pulled back the sheet and unlocked the grill. That is the moment I try to hold on to. We stood surrounded only by the personal belongings of an Egyptian Pharaoh (who had ruled over 3,000 years ago). Nothing had as yet been moved or touched. I stood in the center of the room, flanked by my elders. In front of me were all those food boxes of various shapes stacked underneath one of the Pharaoh's great couches. Later I was allowed to move over to the left to look at the King's chariots where they lay, stacked, all dismantled, their metal tires showing, as my father pointed out, the unmistakable signs of wear. These were the King's chariots, which he no doubt had driven. My father pointed out the lovely informal scene of the young King with his girlish Queen depicted on the King's chair.

It was the rare quality in my father of being able to recreate for others in his conversation and in his writings the fabric of ancient life which so utterly charmed all of us. As I grew older I became aware of a sort of inescapable mark which the experience had left. I was forever cast in the role of the child who had been in King Tut's tomb. I used to long for the anonymity of my other schoolmates. As far as I know, only three children ever glimpsed the tomb before anything was removed.

Eventually "The Cheops" went back down to Cairo where, until April, my parents took an apartment. (Then) my father booked passage for my mother, brother James and me, on a freighter from Port Said to Boston. He and (big brother) Charles would remain a little longer in Egypt.

MEMBERS' COURSES FOR SPRING 1982

The History and Culture of the Ancient Near East

From the invention of writing by the Sumerians to the magic beliefs of the Ancient Egyptians, this series of eight lectures by professors in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations will survey the history and culture of ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. This introduction will give the student a glimpse of life as lived in the river valleys of the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates from 3500 BC to ca. 500 BC, as well as a brief glimpse of the art and culture of ancient Iran (Persia) and Canaan. Lecturers will include Professors McGuire Gibson, John Brinkman, Helene Kantor, Klaus Baer, Edward Wente, and Lawrence Stager. The class will meet in Breasted Hall at 10 AM Saturdays STARTING APRIL 3. An early bird special will be a series of eight archaeological films shown in Breasted Hall at 9:15 preceding each class session. This eight-week lecture course will also serve as the basis for two all-day workshops: One for Oriental Institute docents-in-training, and one for teachers in the Chicago area. For information on these workshops, call 753-2573. For specific film and lecture topics, call the Oriental Institute Membership Office at 753-2389.

History and Cultures of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan; Part II Culmination; The Second Empire of Kush

As in Part I, this course is designed to take advantage of much new information that has emerged in the last twenty years. The re-emergence of Kush will be traced, with the conquest of Egypt by the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, the struggle with Assyria, the retreat to Napata and the establishment of Meroe, far to the south. Meroitic culture will receive emphasis and the events surrounding the fall of the city and the coming of new peoples will be discussed, ending with the conversion of the Nubian kingdoms to Christianity. The course will be substantially illustrated from the Oriental Institute's own excavations in Nubia and will include lab sessions with actual pottery from the excavations. The course will meet in the Oriental Institute at 10 AM Saturdays STARTING MAY 1 (note late start) for eight weeks and will be taught by Bruce Williams, Research Associate (Assistant Professor), Oriental Institute.

All classes are eight sessions, 10 AM to noon Saturdays. Tuition is \$50 for Oriental Institute members and \$70 for non-members. (Includes membership in the Oriental Institute). Please register by April 1, 1982; for more information call 753-2389.

Please enroll me in the following Members' Course(s) in the spring quarter:

Course(s) _____

Name _____

Address _____

Daytime phone number _____

My check for \$50 for each course is enclosed (\$70 for the first course if I am not currently an Oriental Institute member) Total enclosed \$_____

Please return to Membership Secretary; 1155 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637

THE SUQ 

A new book by National Geographic Society:
SPLENDORS OF THE PAST: LOST CITIES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD. 250 color photographs including some from our own museum. John Carswell is a contributing author. Contributions appear also from our own Robert D. Biggs, Miguel Civil, McGuire Gibson and Hans Güterbock. \$18.95 + \$2.00 postage.

Our own Assyrian winged bull made into a gold-plated pendant or charm. \$7.50+\$1.00 postage.

Members—10% discount
IL residents add 7% sales tax

NON—MEMBERSHIP LECTURES OF INTEREST

Edmund Buchner, President of the German Archaeological Institute in West Berlin, will present an illustrated lecture, *"Solarium Augusti: Monumental Sundial of Augustus at the Ari Pacii in Rome.* The lecture is sponsored by the AIA, March 29, 8 PM, Breasted Hall.

Ezat O. Negahban will present an illustrated lecture, *"Haft Tepe: Excavation in Khuzistan (Iran)"*. The lecture is sponsored by the Friends of International House, April 2, 8 PM, International House.

UPDATED SPRING LECTURE SCHEDULE

*"Development of Mining and Metallurgy
In the Ancient Near East"*

Paul T. Craddock, British Museum, March 17, 8 PM, Breasted Hall.

"Marlik: Excavation of a Royal Cemetery"

Ezat O. Negahban, University Museum, Pennsylvania, March 31, 8 PM, Breasted Hall

*"Conservation and the Oriental Institute Collection:
Preserving Evidence of Ancient Technology"*

Barbara Hall, The Oriental Institute, April 21, 8 PM, Breasted Hall.

"Recent Archaeological Investigations in Afghanistan"

Henri-Paul Francfort, CNRS, Paris, May 3, 8 PM, Breasted Hall.

"Assyrians at Nippur"

McGuire Gibson, The Oriental Institute, May 19, 8 PM, Breasted Hall.

MARCH LECTURE:

Ezat O. Negahban, University Museum., The University of Pennsylvania, will present an illustrated lecture: *Marlik: Excavation of a Royal Cemetery*, Wednesday, March 31 at 8:00 PM in Breasted Hall.



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