

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

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SEASONS GREETINGS



We extend to the members, staff and friends of the Oriental Institute and to their families our warmest wishes for the Holiday Season.

The Institute has had a productive and rewarding year, although there were some very sad losses. We can look forward to many exciting activities and programs in 1977, particularly the *Treasures of Tutankhamun*. We hope you will be able to share in what promises to be a very eventful year for the membership program.

BRISBARD L. LINDEN
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

TELL MARDIKH

NEWS FROM NIPPUR

Nov. 30, 1976

A NEW CENTER OF CIVILIZATION IN SYRIA

During the past year, the sensational archeological finds at Tell Mardikh near Aleppo in Syria have made headlines across the country. The identification of the site as the ancient city of Ebla and the discovery there of over 15,000 clay tablets inscribed in cuneiform have opened new vistas and even added a new field to Ancient Near Eastern studies.

In November, the Oriental Institute was host to two members of the University of Rome's expedition to Tell Mardikh who gave a series of lectures on their recent discoveries. Dr. Paolo Matthiae, the Director of the excavations, opened the series with a discussion of the archeology of the site illustrated with slides of the excavations and many of the artifacts found. On the succeeding two days, Dr. Giovanni Pettinato, the expedition's epigrapher, delivered lectures on the tablets from Ebla and their significance.

In addition to the lectures held in Breasted Hall, Oriental Institute scholars had an invaluable opportunity to examine and discuss photographs of the texts from Ebla with Dr. Pettinato in several informal seminars. The texts discussed included letters and treaties as well as lexical, literary, and administrative texts. The city of Ebla flourished during the second half of the third millennium B.C. and was the center of a powerful and thriving kingdom. The 15,000 tablets discovered there constitute the royal archives and cover a period of about 100 years. These discoveries will completely change our concept of the history of the Ancient Near East in the third millennium and add new dimensions to studies of the neighboring civilizations.

The tablets of Ebla, moreover, reveal a new language previously unknown, which belongs to the West Semitic group but which was written at least a thousand years earlier than any other West Semitic language. Interpretation of this new language will greatly expand our knowledge of the development of Semitic languages, and the fact that it is the earliest West Semitic language written in cuneiform will add a new chapter to the history of cuneiform writing. (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic are later members of the important West Semitic language family.)

While the vast bulk of materials will make scholarly publication a long process, these preliminary indications show that the long-range effects of the texts from Ebla on Ancient Near Eastern studies may be greater than any other single archeological discovery of this century.

REMINDER

Members' Course: *Religion of Ancient Egypt*

Someone has decided that Nippur should be a tourist attraction, so hundreds of trees are being planted all around the site. This means concentrations of salt in the mound itself, and a limit to how deep we can dig. The trees are also paradise for mosquitoes and other bugs. Along with the trees, there will eventually be a paved road, and there is even talk of a casino and rest house. We have had dozens of visitors this season, compared to about ten last year and two the year before. With a road directly to the site, we can expect working conditions similar to the Agora in Athens. I prefer the desert and bad roads.

Our work this year has been concentrated on the low, southern end of the site, where last season we established the existence of a city wall, some Kassite houses, and nothing later than about 700 B.C. I've been personally directing the work on the city wall, but several versions, or at least additions to the basic Ur III (c. 2100 B.C.) wall. We've found hundreds of animal bones, hearths, bread ovens, grinding stones, and other food preparation items inside rooms within the wall and at first I thought they were for the provisioning of soldiers. I now think that all the cooking was done in connection with the building of the wall which must have taken some years. We've also found several burials above the earliest phase of the wall but under a later phase. These burials include infants. Maybe I've seen too many Cecil B. De Mille movies about pyramid construction ("In the fourteenth year they sang no more."), but I think we're seeing evidence of hundreds of men, probably some with families, working on a government project to erect the ramparts of Nippur.

Dick Zettler has almost completely uncovered one grand house of the Kassite period. It has walls preserved more than two meters high and must date from before the 13th century B.C. This is earlier Kassite material than we have had from any place at Nippur besides the ziggurat.

We have also exposed some houses of the early first millennium B.C., contemporary with the Neo-Assyrian Period. Here, we have recovered several glazed jars, but the salt in this low part of the mound is so concentrated that the jars are badly affected and the glaze begins flaking off almost immediately.

We've begun a new era in Mesopotamian archeology this year. For the first time, we were allowed to rent a large earth-moving machine to dig a two hundred-meter-long trench four meters deep across the end of the Shatt an-Nil. The Shatt is a depression that separates the eastern half of the site from the western and it has for years been assumed to be the bed of the ancient Euphrates. Our work in the southern end of the mound

has tended to show that at least in the Kassite Period the Euphrates ran around the west end of the mound, not through it. We cut this trench with the machine in order to see if we could find an ancient river channel, or a channel that could definitely be said to be a canal rather than a river, or a series of channels. Stephen Lintner, geomorphologist from Johns Hopkins University, is at present recording the strata in the trench. So far, we know for certain that there is at four meters a heavy stratum of debris filled with Kassite goblets. We could not go deeper because of the high water level, but we should have the Kassite channel identified with this cut. With the help of surface collections of pottery, Lintner also may have located the main Kassite bed north of the city and a place where it splits to send one channel down through the city and another past the western side. We are all awaiting the results of his work in the mud.

We have made some tremendous gains in knowledge with relatively little labor during the past two seasons on the low, southern end of the mound. We have been attempting, since 1972, to give a fuller picture of Nippur as a city. With Lintner's work, we're trying to put the city in perspective. Besides his work on the water courses, Lintner has been engaged in investigations on dunes, tamerisk-mound formation, variations in shells in ancient and modern contexts, and changes in landscape over the past hundred years. His work and the work of other natural scientists such as botanists, zoologists, and soil analysts who have been helping us since 1972, when added to the information gained from archeology and written material, may help us substantiate a theoretical cycle of development and decline that seems to have been in operation in Mesopotamia for thousands of years.

McGuire Gibson

PEOPLE

Dr. Helene J. Kantor, field director for the Joint Iranian Expedition at Chogha Mish left this fall for another season in Iran. Dr. Kantor will be away from the Institute until next summer in order to conduct an extended excavation season at Chogha Mish.

Dr. Robert McCormick Adams is en route to Saudi Arabia where he will spend 6 to 8 weeks at work with the archeological survey of the Arabian peninsula. He will then be at Harvard University for the spring semester.

Mr. Charles C. Van Siclen III, in charge of the Research Archives at the Institute, has left for Luxor, Egypt. He will replace Dr. Kent R. Weeks as field director of the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House. Dr. Weeks will return to the United States to assume teaching duties at the University of California at Berkeley.

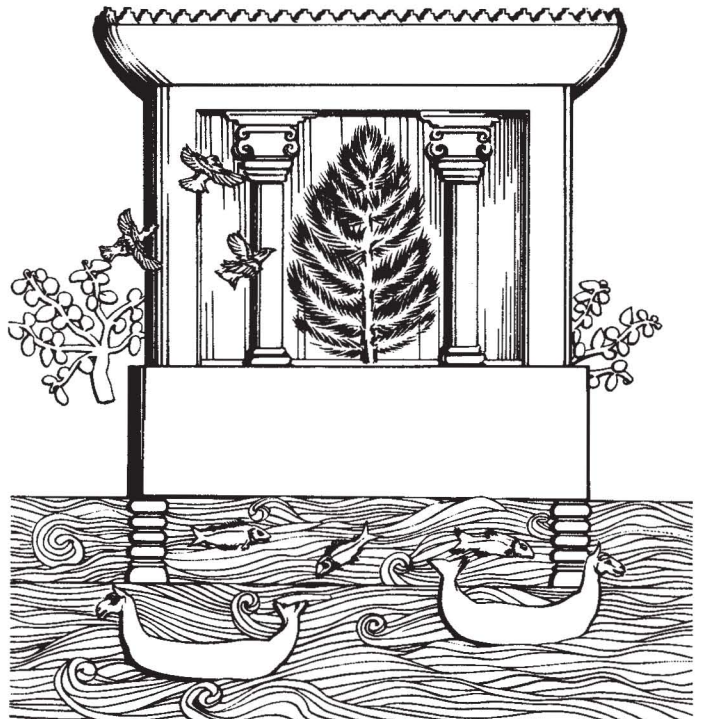
Mr. Richard Zettler, who is presently on the staff of the Nippur Expedition, will replace Mr. Van Siclen in the Research Archives. He will return to the Institute at the end of December with the rest of the Nippur staff.

BON VOYAGE

Twenty members of the Institute or Field Museum of Natural History leave wintry chills for Cairo where they will celebrate New Year's Eve. Led by Egyptologist Thomas Logan, they will visit the monuments and tombs of Ancient Egypt along the Nile from Cairo to Abu Simbel. They will be the first of eight groups to travel to Egypt this winter as all the tours were completely filled. All our wishes to these travellers for a pleasant and rewarding journey.

SPECIAL

A limited number of copies of *OIP LIV, The Excavation of Medinet Habu III (1941)*, have become available and are being offered for sale at \$30.00 (plus the cost of postage and handling, and in Illinois 5 percent sales tax). This volume is hardcover bound and complete. It has been out of print since 1971. Please address inquiries to the Publications Office at the Oriental Institute.



1977 EVENTS

TUTANKHAMUN LECTURE SERIES

- Jan. 11, *Mummies and Mummification in Ancient Egypt*, George R. Hughes, Oriental Institute
- Feb. 7, *Tutankhamun's Treasures*, Winifred Needler, Curator Emeritus, Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology
- Apr. 7, *History of the Later Eighteenth Dynasty*, Cyril Aldred, University of Edinburgh
- Apr. 18, *The Rediscovery of the Tomb of Horemhab*, Geoffrey Martin, University College, London.
- May 24, *Egyptian Relief Art of the New Kingdom*, Bernard Bothmer, Brooklyn Museum

ALL TUTANKHAMUN LECTURES
 8:30 P.M., MANDEL HALL
 UNIVERSITY AVENUE AT 57TH STREET

MEMBERSHIP LECTURE SERIES

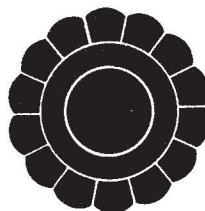
- Apr. 20, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, Robert Anderson, Egypt Exploration Society, London
 8:30 P.M., Breasted Hall, 1155 E. 58th St.

WESTERN SUBURBS AFFILIATES

The Western Suburbs Affiliate Group of the Oriental Institute members continues its lecture series on Friday, January 14, 7:00 P.M. at the Monticello Center, 600 West Ogden Avenue, Hinsdale. Donald Whitcomb of the Oriental Institute will speak on *The Archeology of Iran, Before and After the Advent of Islam*. For further information, call 354-4285.

REMINDER

The Tutankhamun engagement calendar for 1977 is still available from our gift shop, The Suq. This beautiful calendar, which is described in the October issue of *News and Notes*, was specially printed for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and features color photos of all the Tutankhamun treasures coming to Chicago in April. The calendar is a perfect gift for any occasion and is reasonably priced at \$3.75. Mail orders should be addressed to "The Suq" at the Oriental Institute. Please add 25¢ for postage. Illinois residents should also include 19¢ state sales tax.



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