

The Oriental Institute

News &
NotesCHICAGO'S ORIENTAL
INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO*Issued confidentially to members and friends**Not for publication*

No. 55: October, 1979

"An institution is the lengthened shadow of a man"

BREASTED: FOUNDER OF THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

Six decades of research in the history of early mankind. "Since 1919, the Institute has been engaged in a variety of activities. More than 20 archeological expeditions have excavated or conducted areal surveys in countries of Northern Africa and Western Asia: Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and North Yemen. Philologists and lexicographers have worked with many languages, including Akkadian, Arabic, Aramaic, Coptic, Egyptian, Elamite, Ethiopic, Greek, Hebrew, Hittite, Old Persian, Pahlavi, Sumerian, and Syriac. Historians—both social scientists and humanists—have studied the ancient civilizations of the same areas. These labors of research and interpretation have produced more than 250 published volumes of excavation reports and text editions, archeological syntheses and dictionaries, cultural essays and histories representing the Institute's most tangible contribution to on-going scholarship in the field.

"Less tangible but perhaps of even greater significance are the Institute's uncatalogued assets: Its faculty and staff, past and present; its pioneering in archeological, historical, and linguistic techniques; its training of generations of students. From these assets issue its hopes for the future." John A. Brinkman, Director of The Oriental Institute, in his Introduction to the 1979 Annual Report.

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To catch the spirit and vigor of The Oriental Institute, now 60 years old, we must immerse ourselves in the life of James Henry Breasted—the two cannot be separated. Dr. Breasted, who was invited in 1894 to be the first occupant of the first chair of Egyptology in America, never wavered in his goal to establish and to build for the brand new University of Chicago "a research laboratory for the investigation of the early human career."

Breasted's life is a remarkable story of one man's vision, talents and charisma. John A. Wilson, Breasted's immediate successor as director of the Institute, has said that Breasted became both a legend and a myth:

"With his fellow Egyptologists he was legend for producing sound and useful translations and the most lucid history of ancient Egypt. For a larger segment of the public he was the historian of ancient times, because of a high school text of great acceptance. Within academic circles he became a myth as a promoter who could raise financial support for studies seeming remote in time and space. Both the myth and the legend has a large content of truth, but truth which needs to be seen in context." (1)

The Prairie Boy Seeks Direction

How did a prairie boy become an internationally accepted figure, member of seven different foreign academies, recipient of an honorary degree from Oxford University, and a man whose books were translated into eight languages? His preparation for his field did not start early or easily and progress in his pursuit and in his achievements sometimes seemed disastrously more down-hill than up.

Breasted was born in Rockford, Illinois, on August 27, 1865. He grew up in Downers Grove, a suburb of Chicago, because in 1871 his father had started in Chicago's Loop, the largest hardware firm in the country, only to see it go up in

flames the same year during Chicago's Great Fire. Defeated, his father became a travelling salesman for a stove company, and the family's fortunes changed for the worse. Nonetheless, "Jimmy" started North Central College in nearby Naperville after attending public schools. However, chemistry and botany beckoned him, so he went to Rochelle, Illinois, as an apprentice in a pharmacy belonging to his brother-in-law. He came back home the following year to clerk in the village drug store and to resume his studies in Latin at North Central College. In 1882 he entered the Chicago College of Pharmacy, worked in a bank and became a paying teller during summers, and in 1886 graduated as a registered pharmacist. After a year's stint as pharmacist in Omaha, Nebraska, he came home to start a pharmacy of his own in downtown Chicago, but became desperately ill. While convalescing at "The Pines," the home of his "Aunt" Theodocia in Rockford, she convinced him to train for the ministry.

At the Congregational Institute (now the Chicago Theological Seminary), he was an outstanding scholar in Hebrew studies, but as he studied the language and literature of the Bible, he began to realize that contemporary understanding of ancient civilizations was "lamentably inadequate." After two years, Prof. Samuel Ives Curtiss forced him to face something he had already begun to realize for himself: "He was intended for a life not of religion but of scholarship." Dr. Curtiss suggested that Breasted go to Yale University and study with America's foremost Semitist, William Rainey Harper. Dr. Curtiss also mentioned the new and neglected field of Egyptology.

Breasted studied hard at Yale, yet found time to make much needed extra money by singing, playing the flute, and by lecturing at chautauquas. After two years, he told Harper that poverty notwithstanding, he hoped to get to Berlin to study Egyptology under Prof. Adolph Erman. Breasted later wrote: "He seized me by both lapels of my student jacket, and



Dr. Breasted in study in Haskell Museum, University of Chicago.

said, 'Breasted, if you will go to Germany and get the best possible scientific equipment, no matter if it takes you five years, I will give you the professorship of Egyptology in the new University of Chicago!' " In fact, Breasted appears in the University's very first Quarterly Chronicle, published in June of 1892, as a non-resident fellow.

So, with continued help from his family, Breasted went to Berlin in the fall of 1891 to study hieroglyphs and Coptic under Prof. Erman and Hebrew and Arabic under other professors. During the following three years, he worked himself into a state of mental and physical exhaustion, but won his Ph.D. in Egyptology *cum laude* in July 1894, having written his dissertation in Latin which dealt with the "monotheistic" hymns directed by the Pharaoh Akhenaton to the sungod. Kindly Prof. Erman, who had noticed how nervously exhausted his student had become, suggested that a trip to Egypt before returning to America would help his scholarly future and his health. He also suggested that while there, Breasted could do some copying of inscriptions for the Commission of the Royal Prussian Academy, which had been appointed by the Kaiser himself, to compile the first comprehensive dictionary of ancient Egyptian ever undertaken. Breasted was honored and delighted.

Meanwhile, Harper sent a communication saying that Breasted's salary for filling the first chair in Egyptology in America would be \$800 per year, and that immediately he had at his disposal \$500 for the creation of an Egyptian Museum (Haskell Oriental Museum which was opened in 1896) at the University of Chicago. He was instructed to begin at once to gather the Egyptian collection, but cautioned to rely chiefly on the generosity of excavators in Egypt, drawing on the appropriation only as a last resort! The salary was disappointingly low; but Breasted's fiancée, Miss Frances Hart, an American from San Francisco studying piano in Berlin, was willing to marry him, and his family agreed to continue their

help. So with the attitude that God would provide, he married Miss Hart in October 1894 and immediately set off on his honeymoon to Egypt with a notebook in his hand.

Honeymoon in a Leaky Little Dahabiyeh on the Nile

Breasted's inscription copying for the Kaiser was copious and laborious. He copied, copied, copied, even by moonlight. He was copying not for himself, but for scholarship—he had the vision of preservation rather than exploitation, and proposed to publish translations of all these inscriptions. His collecting for the new Oriental Museum in Chicago was painstaking and ingenious: first, he methodically listed the types of objects from each age of ancient Egypt which an ideal museum collection ought to possess; then he hunted for examples. He was able to stretch the \$500 to include a range and quantity of items which rising prices of the next ten years would not have permitted; in addition, he persuaded Petrie and a few others then excavating in Egypt, that whenever they found two or more similar objects to donate one to the University of Chicago.

A scholar who knew what he wanted to see in Egypt had to control his itinerary so Breasted bought a floating home on the Nile; a dahabiyeh which leaked and had to be pumped out the first night out! The boat was a worrisome expense, but he wrote his family:

"Our boat, with bedding, linen, kitchen equipment, a crew of four sailors, captain and second captain, dragoman, cook and boy, and including all table and household expenses and hire of donkeys at all stops, will cost us \$4.84 each per day. Some unavoidable purchases of equipment will bring the daily expense up to \$5.00 per person."

The honeymoon ended in March 1895, following some

work in the British Museum in London and the Louvre in Paris, and he brought his bride home to Chicago, where he spent the following five years in teaching and lecturing. Dr. George R. Hughes, who became director of the Institute in 1968, has said:

"The experience and the copying he had done in Egypt on his honeymoon had done three things for Breasted: (1) He had become something of a fanatic about the making of accurate copies of hieroglyphic texts and he became a great copyist himself. (2) He had occasion to compare older copies with the originals and had come to realize how unreliable the copies were. (3) He determined that if he was to write the history of ancient Egypt—and he had decided to do it—he must have reliable copies of all available historical records, and there seemed no way to get them in most instances except to make them himself from the originals where possible or from photographs."

The Royal Academy of Germany invited Breasted to copy more Egyptian inscriptions in 1899. He accepted the invitation of the Royal Academy and this time, first took photographs and made pen-and-ink copies of every ancient Egyptian relic in Europe. Then he scoured the Mediterranean and Aegean world, travelling southeastward to Egypt and to north Sudan, where he copied every historical inscription along the Nile Valley between Aswan and Khartoum. A strange Odyssey in quest of every extant fragment of Egyptian history had begun. By the summer of 1900, he wrote his mother:

"Behind all this preliminary work looms my history of Egypt. But before I write a history based on the original monuments, I intend to find out, to the last jot and tittle, what the monuments say. This is what the other fellows have not yet done. It is taking me years, but before I am forty, I propose to make myself the leading authority on Egyptian history. Had I been willing to compile a

history out of the books of Germans, I could have finished it in six months. But I ask no odds of anyone, taking nothing second-hand from any middle man. I hope you will not think I am boasting: I have just been revaccinated, and perhaps this outburst is due to the virus!"

It was not until 1906, however, that the Ancient Records of Egypt was published (in five volumes) by the University of Chicago, Press. It had taken ten years, and there were 10,000 pages of manuscript. His History of Egypt, published in 1905, was based on this monumental work, and was so clean and appealing that it was translated into German, French, and Arabic, and set into Braille.

1800 Miles Up the Nile

There followed seasons in 1905-6 and 1906-7 along the Nile copying inscriptions. The first season, Breasted picked upon the stretch between the First and Second Cataracts in Lower Nubia as a territory which might promise the freshest results for the epigrapher. At the end of the three-months' season the expedition had copied ten temples, five chapels, a tomb, and several stelas. The objective of the second expedition the next year—after which available University funds were to run out—was the Egyptian evidence from the Sixth Cataract north to the Second.

When Breasted started in the pyramid fields of Meröe in November, 1906, it was so hot that a standing camera scorched the hands and in the camera's spirit level, the liquid expanded until the bubble finally disappeared. Yet the expedition managed to do splendid copying there, with photographs and copies still of unique use. The great adventure of the expedition was shooting the rapids of the Third Cataract. After that danger was passed, the boat moved downstream to the Kagbar Rapids, where the channel was so narrow and



Dr. Breasted opening the gates to the Egyptian gallery of The Oriental Institute museum. With him are (left to right) Dr. Raymond B. Fosdick, Dr. John H. Finley, editor of the New York Times, and President Hutchins of the University of Chicago.

tortuous that sailing was impossible. Fifty local workers manned ropes, whereby the boat could be slowly let down and then released in calmer water. Then came shipwreck. After a dismal night, the next day brought unexpected relief in the form of "one of those miracles of the desert." There appeared two young Englishmen, a surveying party, probably the only such party within hundreds of miles. With their help, the boat was careened and patched, inside and outside, with the hold between the patches filled with waterproof cement. And thus, three months' work was saved. On March 5, 1907, the expedition reached its northern goal at Wadi Halfa. In a little over four months nearly a thousand miles had been covered, nineteen temples recorded as well as eleven stelae, one palace, and four groups of pyramids. Also 500 miles south of Thebes, a temple of Akhenaton had been discovered.



Egypt—the working party for the tomb of Tutankhamon, lunching in a neighboring tomb. Left to right: Dr. Breasted, Burton, Lucas, Callender, Mace, Carter and Gardiner.

Wind, sand, rain, and human agency have damaged the monuments in the areas visited, but the excellent photographs and careful copies provided by Breasted's mission remain of inestimable value. Even though he did not carry out his dream of personally copying all the historical inscriptions in Egypt, this beginning was a triumph. But the Sudan had taxed his strength far more than he had realized. His wife and son Charles had been with him for a good portion of the expedition, so when, as he took care of the heavy burden of paper work in a small hotel in Lucerne, he came down with bronchial pneumonia and serious complications, he was not alone. After several months when he could not seem to regain his old vigor, he took a year's leave of absence from the University and spent the time in Italy. He and his family returned to the University in the spring of 1908, to begin what turned out to be twelve years' exile from Europe and above all from Egypt.

Breasted's neighbor in Chicago, who was in the publishing business, urged him to write a high school textbook on ancient history. Breasted did not want to write for "popularization" and did not think he could write for young people, but the royalties were alluring since the income was very much needed. *Ancient Times* took four years to write and to re-write, but was finally published in 1916 and was a sensational success. Theodore Roosevelt reviewed it warmly in *The Outlook*; and if the Rockefeller boys had not read it in their classroom, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. might not have been willing three years' later to make funds available with which to establish the Oriental Institute.

Ten Months and 8,000 Miles in the Cradle Lands

As soon as Rockefeller promised \$10,000 per year for a period of five years, Breasted set about organizing a reconnaissance expedition. Its purpose was to determine what archeological sites in the Near East could profitably be investigated or excavated, and to buy museum pieces from

antique dealers both in Europe and the Near East. Breasted started on this preliminary reconnaissance of the Near East in August 1919. When he reached England, he found that because of constant fighting in the Transjordan, one could not reach Mesopotamia by traversing 850 miles directly overland from Cairo to Baghdad. He would have to follow the two long sides of a triangle with its apex at Bombay, a distance of over 5,000 miles. The survey expedition took Breasted and his party, ten months of considerable hardship and courage, but "in the matter of museum pieces acquired and the practical foundation necessary to establish work in the newly organized Near East emerging from the World War" Breasted was quite satisfied.

Breasted waited three months in England before he was finally able to set foot in Egypt on November 1, 1919, where he waited until February 18, 1920 for High Commissioner Lord Allenby to get him and his party of four, passage from Port Said to Bombay. While waiting in Cairo, he discovered and bought for 500 pounds, the 35-foot "beautifully intact papyrus, exquisitely executed, hieroglyphic copy of the Book of the Dead with wonderfully wrought vignettes, one of the finest copies to have come out of Egypt for many years, found in the day of Menkure, great Pharaoh who built the third pyramid at Gizeh nearly 2,000 years before." He also went to Luxor for purchases, and had to wire President Judson for \$5,000. Reply by cable was: "Today sending you \$25,000 more."



Deir ez-Zor: the reconnaissance expedition meets Sheikh Suwan of the Sabkha Arabs.

Eventually the steamer trip to Bombay materialized. To get from Bombay to Baghdad was a problem because of the recurrence of serious trouble in Mesopotamia which had compelled the British to reinforce their garrisons on the Tigris and Euphrates. This meant that it was impossible to secure berths on any boat going along the southern coast of Persia. Breasted finally got transportation which took the expedition along the projecting coast of Arabia and on to Basra. The party continued from Basra to Baghdad on the railway just opened and used for the first time by an archeological expedition. First important stop for inscriptions was in ancient Ur of the Chaldees, traditional home of Abraham. Ancient Eridu was next, which once was on the Persian Gulf but now some 150 miles from the nearest shoreline.

Baghdad offered enormously extensive ruins, and visiting the ancient sites in the area had to be done by zigzagging alternately by railroad, Ford vans, river launches, and horseback. Breasted came upon very important antiquities among the native dealers in Baghdad, especially a large six-sided baked clay prism, eighteen inches high, bearing the Royal Annals of Sennacherib, which he was finally able to buy for 19,000 rupees, nearly \$9,500.

The party was eager to go north from Baghdad, but although the new Mesopotamian railway was supposed to extend to Mosul—the site of ancient Nineveh on the upper Tigris, the expedition got as far as Shergat where the roadbed ended! The remainder of the trip to Mosul, some eighty miles, had to be made by automobile and wagon train over a dreadful road. Nineveh and Assur were visited. Beyond Mosul,



Tell Asmar: Dr. Breasted and Dr. Frankfort before a lateral connecting a water closet of the 26th century B.C. with the main sewer of Eshnunna.



Tell Asmar: Drs. Jacobsen, Frankfort, Breasted, and Captain Oiley of the Royal Air Force.

everything was unsafe because the Arabs were not as well under control as in Babylonia, but the trip to Khorsabad was made. The return to Baghdad was under despairing conditions with torrential rains and with ugly news from the south that bridges were washed out, that the Arabs had undermined the railway at several points and were shooting into the rest camp below Shergat. The wearied convoy of 20 cars finally crawled through the deep mire and reached Shergat, where a train had got through from the south on which the party could board for Baghdad.

Breasted was very anxious to go westward from Baghdad, but Syria was supposed to be absolutely cut off from Baghdad by hundreds of miles of hostile country. When the party first reached Iraq, via India, no one dreamed that it would be possible to return to the Mediterranean overland. But while in Baghdad, Breasted learned that the British army had been digging machine-gun emplacements at a place called Salihyah on the Euphrates, some 250 miles northwest of Baghdad, or about half way to Aleppo, and there they had uncovered some ancient wall paintings. Since the British line was now to be pulled back from that region, it was important that some scholar go and record the paintings. Breasted was the right man at the right moment in the right place! He said he would go to Salihyah provided the British would sanction an attempt by the American party to continue through the no man's land of upper Euphrates to Aleppo in northern Syria.

Permission was given and Breasted proceeded to Abu Kamal, where the commanding officer arranged overnight accommodations for the Americans at military headquarters. Next morning, the General and Breasted drove twenty-seven miles upriver to Salihyah to see the paintings. They drove into the ruins of Salihyah—ancient Doura—a tremendous stronghold of the late Roman Empire on the Euphrates—in the midst of which were now pitched the tents of British East Indian troops. A body of these troops under a sergeant was placed at Breasted's disposal and everything made ready so that the entire following day—the last day before the British withdrawal—could be devoted to clearing and recording a group of all paintings which were of the utmost importance in the history of Byzantine art. As it turned out, the original paintings were destroyed by the Arabs, so the only known record is the work done in one day by Breasted and his team surrounded by soldiers and war paraphernalia. This work was published by the University of Chicago Press, in 1923 as *Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Paintings*, and was the first volume of publications of The Oriental Institute.

The journey to Aleppo was of course perilous but made safely. And safe too were the trunks filled with a thousand old Babylonian and Assyrian documents, cylinder seals, sculptures, a bronze statuette from the archaic Babylonian Age of which only a few exist, and the highly valued prism

bearing in fine cuneiform the royal annals of Sennacherib. From Aleppo, the expedition proceeded to Kadesh, then to Jerusalem, on to Cairo, and finally after a delay in London, on to Chicago—having chalked up ten months and 8,000 miles of hardship and incredible adventure in the Cradle Lands.

Final Turn in the Road

Breasted came home to become the "commander of an empire" which the Institute was soon to be. Its staff at home and abroad was the best in the world. There was an awesome number of expeditions throughout the Near East. There were many other projects at home including the phenomenal Assyrian Dictionary. Publications were rolling off the presses at a fast pace. Breasted was at a turn in the road. His work had justified itself. At the height of his reputation, in the full maturity of his powers, he deliberately turned his back on the personal research, which to him was the breath of life, and devoted his last years to administration of the Institute. This did not prevent him from continuing his writing and doing much traveling, but more and more frequently, he would exclaim: "If I only were twenty years younger!" He completed his *The Edwin Smith Surgical Papyrus*, a landmark in the history of medicine on which he had labored for over ten years. He finished his *The Dawn of Conscience* and his *The History of Civilization*. He went back and forth to Europe, Egypt, and the Near East, but to enjoy, relax as much as he was able, and to reap honors. While in Luxor in 1935, he sent John D. Rockefeller, Jr. a proposal for the future of The Oriental Institute of an endowment which would set the work on a continuing basis, free from the annual applications for grants—\$17,000,000 at 4% would work out to something like the annual budget of the Institute at that time.

On the ship going home Breasted came down with a strep infection and died in New York on December 2, 1935. He never knew that Mr. Rockefeller turned down his proposal, and that the depression and current obligations of the Rockefeller boards would force a cancellation of their annual support of the Institute. Wilson has said: "Breasted died while in triumph. God gave him rest while he was still crowned with laurels". He rests beside his father and mother in Rockford, and his grave is marked by a block of rough-hewn granite from the ancient quarries of Assuan.

—Elda Maynard

(1) See *Near Eastern Archeology in the Twentieth Century* by James A. Sanders. For additional reading: *Pioneer to the Past* by Charles Breasted; *Signs and Wonders upon Pharaoh* by John A. Wilson; *Biographical Memoir of James Henry Breasted* by John A. Wilson in *National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. (Fifth Memoir)*.

Photos: Courtesy of Ronnie Burbank, photographic archives, The Oriental Institute Museum.

1980 ARCHEOLOGICAL TOUR PROGRAM

SYRIA, May 7-18, 1980

Led by John Carswell, Oriental Institute Museum Curator

EGYPT, March 6-23, 1980

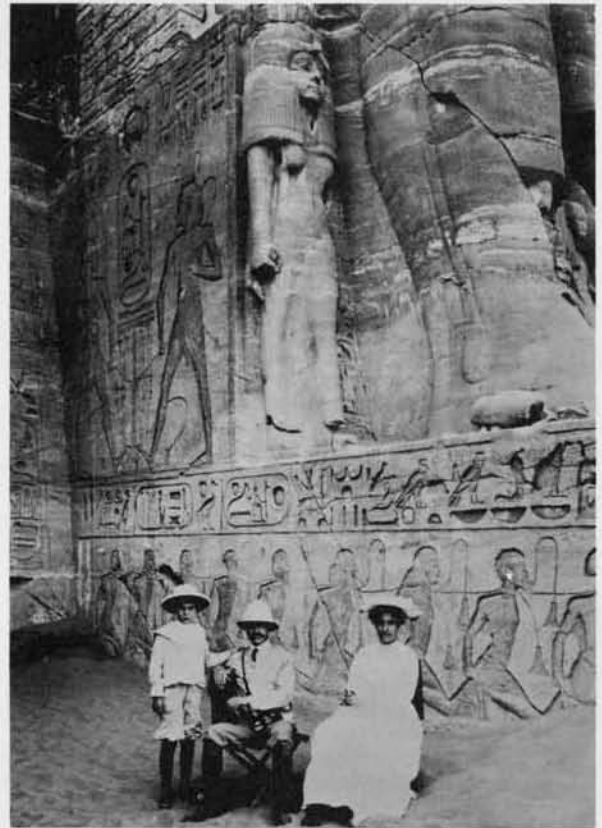
Led by James P. Allen, Assistant Director of the American Research Center in Egypt.

CHINA, October 2-25, 1980

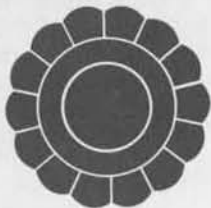
Features 20 nights in China with archeological itinerary.

For further information, please call or write Bernard Lalor, Membership Secretary, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637 (312) 753-2389.

Remember Members' Day
Sunday, November 4, 1979
1:00 to 5:00 P.M.



The Breasted family visiting Abu Simbel.



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