

Robert K. Ritner

With an extensive series of public lectures, over a dozen media interviews, and a guided tour, **Robert K. Ritner** was often the visible face of the Oriental Institute during the past year. As detailed in the Oriental Institute's *News & Notes* (Fall 2001, No. 171), Ritner served as the Academic Consultant for the sole American venue of the exhibit *Cleopatra of Egypt: From History to Myth*, displayed at Chicago's Field Museum from 20 October 2001 until 3 March 2002. The first comprehensive exhibit dedicated to the life and legends of the queen, *Cleopatra of Egypt* drew more than 333,000 visitors, who encountered over 300 revised labels and charts, in addition to hieroglyphic banners and gift shop images, produced for the Chicago presentation. All of these were vetted by Ritner, who was also a commentator on the Acoustiguide recorded tour. At the Oriental Institute, two cases of objects from his personal collection (and that of John Larson) highlighted the Cleopatra of popular culture, complementing

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a self-guided gallery tour of Ptolemaic artifacts devised in conjunction with Karen Wilson and Carole Krucoff.

In association with the exhibit, Ritner delivered lectures on “Cleopatra and the Ptolemies” to The Field Museum exhibit docents (12 September), The Field Museum Women’s Board (2 October), the Exelon sponsor’s reception (23 October), the Egyptian Consulate (13 November), the University of Chicago Alumni Association (4 December), and the Breasted Society of the Oriental Institute (15 January). For a day-long Cleopatra seminar hosted by the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, he presented “Cleopatra’s Ancestors: The Ptolemaic Dynasty” (22 October). As part of a joint lecture series between the Oriental Institute and Field Museum, Ritner provided two lectures held in Breasted Hall: an historical analysis “Cleopatra in Context: A Princess Descended From So Many Royal Kings” (24 October), and a detailed survey of Cleopatra’s image in Western painting, music, sculpture, and popular culture “In Death Immortal: Cleopatra and her Legacy” (7 November). For the Classical Art Society of the Art Institute of Chicago, he spoke on “Cleopatra in History and Legend” (30 October). Each of these lectures drew capacity audiences, but all were surpassed by Ritner’s presentation “The Egypt of Cleopatra and the Ptolemaic Dynasty (332–330 BC)” for the Fermilab lecture series, which drew a “standing-room only” audience of over 850 listeners.

In addition to Cleopatra lectures, Ritner provided media interviews for television (ABC, CBS, WGN, CLTV), radio (NPR, WBBM), and print media (Associated Press, the Chicago Tribune, Sun-Times, Times of Indiana, Des Moines Register, Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism, Southwest Airlines Spirit Magazine, and various other free-lance journalists). One of his more unusual media duties was to provide expertise on Cleopatra questions to NBC studios for the television game show “The Weakest Link.” Media appearances were not limited to Cleopatra. On 3 April, the History Channel aired “Egypt: Land of the Gods. Part 4 — Magic,” an hour based on Ritner’s Oriental Institute publication, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, with an extended personal interview. He is pleased to be one of the few individuals who can claim that his dissertation has been filmed.

Invited lectures unrelated to the Cleopatra exhibit included six presentations on magic, religion, medicine, and hieroglyphs. He discussed “An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Magic” for the South Suburban Archaeological Society (18 October). For the Chicago Humanities Festival XII, he lectured at the Alliance Française on “The Living Image: Art and Text in Egyptian Hieroglyphs” (3 November). “Heka: The Magic of Ancient Egypt” was his topic at the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia (15 November). At the annual meeting of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons in Chicago, he delivered “An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of the Egyptian Surgeon” (10 April). The Brown University Friends of Egyptology requested an overview of “Ancient Egyptian Magic” (12 April). Finally, Ritner concluded a Chicago alumni panel on Late Period Egypt at the fifty-third convention of the American Research Center in Egypt in Baltimore with a survey of “Egyptian Religion in the Late Period” (28 April).

Following the closing of the Cleopatra exhibit, Ritner led the Oriental Institute tour to Egypt, where a decline in tourism allowed unhindered access to the sites. After the highly successful tour, he stayed on at Chicago House in Luxor to provide assistance with Ptolemaic inscriptions and to conduct personal research.

Ritner’s publications for the year comprise a re-evaluation of the Joseph Smith Papyrus underlying the Mormon “Book of Abraham,” entitled “The ‘Breathing Permit of Hôr’ Thirty-four Years Later” (*Dialogue* 33/4), and the *News & Notes* article mentioned above, “Cleopatra in Chicago.” He completed his editorial duties on the forthcoming final volume of *The*

Context of Scripture; thirteen translations in *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, to be published by Yale University Press, and, with the assistance of François Gaudard, the French version of his manuscript on “Evidence for Necromancy in Ancient Egypt,” to be published in the proceedings of the Louvre symposium, “La magie en Égypte: à la recherche d’une définition.”

Ritner opened discussion at the second Oriental Institute retreat on 12 November, having been requested to provide a provocative report on “The Future of the Oriental Institute.” Other University committee service, student oversight, and teaching (six courses with contribution to a seventh) completed his academic year. He is the formal scholarly consultant for the forthcoming Field Museum exhibit “Eternal Egypt” (26 April–10 August 2003) and so will again be liaison between activities at The Field Museum and the Oriental Institute Museum.
