IndiVIdual ReseaRch

trip out to the desert with pals Steve Garfinkle, Alhena Gadotti, Alexandra Kleinerman, and Lance Allred: an effervescent cocktail of mesas, chaparral, Indian fry bread, and Ur III shop talk.

In May, Seth flew to Seattle and drove up to Vancouver, B.C., with Garfinkle to deliver a paper at the annual meeting of the Association of Ancient Historians. The paper there was "Ex Oriente flux: Problems and Preconditions in Transmission," a discussion of theoretical and methodological problems in positing the diffusion of "Oriental wisdom" to Greece in the mid-first millennium B.C. These points were reinforced on the Greek side by a very sympathetic lecture from Kurt Raaflaub — a very enjoyable conference. Back in Chicago, Seth also delivered two public lectures in October. The first was on the image of the Tower of Babylon in historical imagination, as part of a Chicago Humanities Festival panel (fig. 1). The other addressed the role of divine idols in Mesopotamian society called "Idols without Anxiety" in conjunction with the exhibition entitled Idol Anxiety at the Smart Museum of Art. His most demanding audience all year, though, without doubt, was his son Benjamin’s first-grade class, which came for a tour of the Oriental Institute Museum galleries in June.

Seth looks forward to a year in which he will conclude his work on Old Babylonian state collapse and liver divination, as well as articles on ancient state competition and the role of geography; on rebellion in the ancient Near East; on a "new" military history of Mesopotamia; and a number of smaller projects.

Robert K. Ritner

Robert K. Ritner was the annual Invited Professor in “Sciences Religieuses,” for the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. In the month of May, he delivered eight hours of lectures at the Sorbonne and (due to university strikes) at the private Institut Khéops. His topics included “Heka: The Origin and Nature of Magic,” “Curses and Love Charms,” “ Implements of Magic,” “New Approaches to Magical Literature,” and a final discussion of “Medicine and Demons.” The first lecture treated issues of varying creation myths, the significance of the term “god” in ancient Egypt, trinities and the issues of polytheism, monotheism, and pantheism, the appearance of Heka, god of Magic, as well as the role of magic in theology, iconography, architecture, and script. The significance of domination magic served as the basis of the talk on curses, execration magic, and “love” and separation rites. Implements of magic included serpent wands and snake charming, magical knives used to draw defensive perimeters, Bes images and Horus stelae against animal and reptile bites, and the Egyptian origin of the “Hermes” caduceus symbol in modern American medicine. New magical literature surveyed Ritner’s forthcoming publications.
on the topic, including an unrecognized serpent ritual in the Pyramid Texts (with critical passages in Semitic, to be published by Richard Steiner), Pyramid Text influence on the Demotic “Romance of Setna and the Mummies,” overlooked theological insights from the mummy case of Meresamun in the Oriental Institute, Demotic graffiti at the Theban tomb of Nespakashuty and at Medinet Habu, funerary texts of Third Intermediate Period chantresses and the conscious omission of male relatives (husbands and fathers), and a forthcoming, complete edition of the papyri once acquired (and partially “translated”) by Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The final lecture surveyed the practice and theory of Egyptian medicine, a contrast with Greek practices, associated magical spells and iconography, gynecology, his new edition of the Bentresh tale preserved in blocks at Luxor, and the nature of demonic possession as described in Egyptian texts.


When otherwise unclaimed, he served on multiple committees and taught courses on “An Introduction to Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphs” I–II, “Animal Cults in a Wider Context: Social, Political and Economic Ramifications,” and “The Religion of Graeco-Roman Egypt.”

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Yorke Rowan

During this academic year, several new publications appeared by newly appointed Research Associate Yorke Rowan. “The Chalcolithic Period of the Southern Levant: A Synthetic Review” (with J. Golden) appeared as an entire issue of the Journal of World Prehistory (issue 22: 1–92), providing the first comprehensive synthesis of the period in over twenty years. In addition, he edited (with J. Ebeling) New Approaches to Old Stones: Recent Studies of Ground Stone 

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