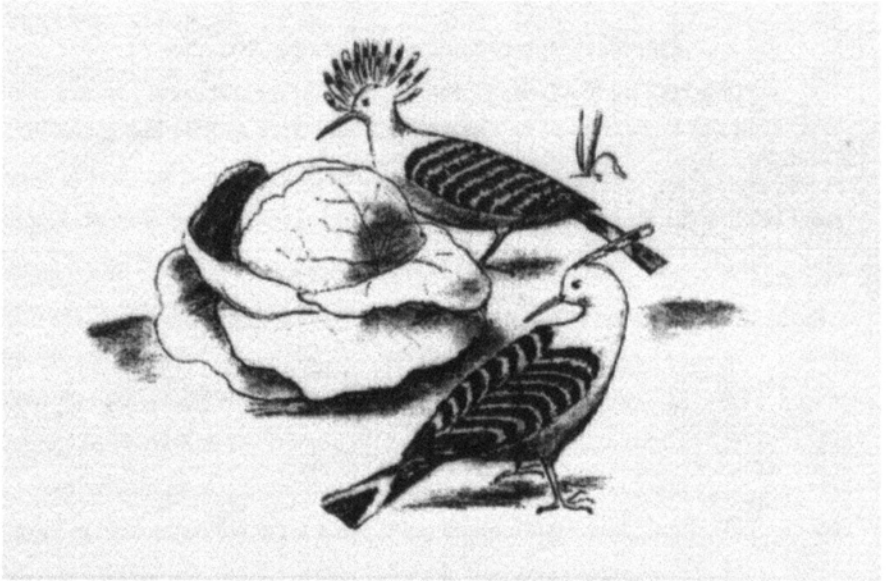


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# LETTERS FROM EGYPT AND IRAQ

## 1954



MARGARET BELL CAMERON  
1916-2000

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## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE.</b> <i>Gene Gragg</i> .....	5
<b>FOREWORD.</b> <i>Marion M. Lloyd</i> .....	7
<b>MEMOIR.</b> <i>Erica Reiner</i> .....	9
<b>LETTERS FROM EGYPT</b> .....	13
<b>LETTERS FROM IRAQ</b> .....	47
<b>ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE SKETCHBOOK OF MARGARET BELL</b>	
Detail of Hoopoe Birds in the Garden at Chicago House, Luxor .....	Cover
Hoopoe Birds in the Garden at Chicago House, Luxor .....	Title Page
Lateen-rigged Boats Tied Up below the Embankment at Luxor .....	16
Hoopoe Birds in the Garden at Chicago House, Luxor .....	21
Promenade at Luxor .....	24
Some Houses behind the Moslem Cemetery at Karnak Village .....	29
The Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Medinet Habu .....	34
A Street in Damascus .....	41
A Row of Houses on the West Bank of the Tigris at Baghdad .....	49
The Auto Bridge and Irrigation Canal at Afak, Iraq, Headquarters of the Oriental Institute Nippur Expedition .....	53
Uncovering 5,000-year-old Floor in the North Temple, Nippur .....	57
The Field Architect Leveling at the Inanna Temple at the Foot of the Nippur Ziggurat .....	60
Shergat Pickmen at Nippur .....	65
Part of the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem .....	71



## **PREFACE**

**Gene Gragg**

Travel to the Middle East has been a part of the lives of Oriental Institute faculty and friends since before the Institute's creation in 1919. Our founder, James Henry Breasted, made several trips to the region and has been followed by generations of scholars and students.

The Institute's friends and supporters have been venturing to Egypt and Western Asia almost as long as our faculty. From Florence Miller and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. through the tourists traveling under the auspices of our travel program today, our most devoted friends have made travel an integral part of their intellectual engagement with the Institute.

Margaret Bell Cameron made her journey almost fifty years ago and shared her experiences and her sketches with family and friends, including the Institute. We publish them now to honor her memory and to share her impressions of a world that has passed from view.

We would like to thank Oriental Institute Visiting Committee Member Margaret H. Grant for transcribing the letters for publication. John Larson, Tim Cashion, and Thomas G. Urban of the Institute staff readied the work for publication. We are indebted to Marion Lloyd and Erica Reiner for sharing their memories in this volume, and Marjorie Webster and the Margaret Bell Cameron's family for making this publication possible.



## **FOREWORD**

**Marion M. Lloyd**

Having read Margaret Bell Cameron's letters, I can readily understand why the Oriental Institute wishes to publish them. They are an observant, insightful record, concise, and humorous.

Although Margaret and I overlapped for a number of years on the Board of the University of Chicago, I knew her father before that, as he was a business associate of my father's.

Margaret's comments on the Board were as wise and thoughtful as her writing, and she was so comfortable with herself that she could bring her handiwork to Board meetings.

She was a splendid individual.





## MEMOIR

Erica Reiner

The letters in this collection were written by Margaret Fairbank Bell during a trip to the Near East during the winter of 1953/54. In her capacity as Executive Secretary of the Oriental Institute, she visited the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in Luxor, Egypt, and the Oriental Institute excavations at Nippur in Iraq.

She wrote almost daily letters home and asked that they be copied and sent to Dr. Carl Kraeling, the Director of the Oriental Institute, for possible publication in the *Archaeological Newsletter*, sent to members of the Oriental Institute. The letters give a vivid account of the day-to-day fieldwork done at Chicago House and Nippur.

After her graduation from Bryn Mawr College, Margie, as she was called, studied at the Art Institute of Chicago where she learned the craft that produced the sketches that illustrate this booklet. She filled the position of Executive Secretary of the Oriental Institute capably and responsibly, as one would expect from the daughter of Laird Bell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago, a distinguished lawyer and a leader in many civic enterprises.

Margie had invited me to share her house, and while she was away in Egypt and Iraq I took care of the house as well as of her poodle Jerry, named after the Biblical figure Jairus. Sharing Margie's house was for me, only recently arrived from Europe and a lowly research assistant at the Oriental Institute, an educational experience. Here was a young, single woman, tall, chic, charming, who was a regular at the Thursday night concerts of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and who knew the art world and its cultural leaders.

Margie took upon herself to improve my English, and soon she found herself also improving the English of the project on which I served, the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary. She volunteered to read the

manuscript in order to correct the English of all of us whose native language English was not. I remember when, exasperated, she muttered, "Why does he say again and again 'during the time when ... during the time when ... during the time when?' There is a perfectly good English word for this." So she crossed out all the "during the time whens" and wrote in "while."

There is one word that I will always cherish as her contribution to Assyriology: the translation "sagger" for the Akkadian word *haragu* which is "a box of fire clay used to hold small objects to be placed in the kiln," a term she knew from her classes at the Art Institute. She even designed the logo that appears on the title page of the Assyrian Dictionary — an invocation written in cuneiform to the goddess of literature — and she was so delighted when the first volume comprising the letter H was ready to go to press, that she organized a parade, marching in front, twirling her parasol and carrying the boxed manuscript to be mailed to the printer.

She was a charming hostess and liked to entertain in her Hyde Park house that was decorated in the then fashionable stark style. Not only did she have dinner parties for friends and visitors for whom she cooked excellent meals, but she also opened her house for my friends, including the hordes of linguists who invaded the University of Chicago campus in 1954. Most linguists invited for the parties were soon oblivious of their surroundings and gathered in a corner to discuss the latest theories. Others were more congenial and joined Margie in playing four hands on her small upright piano. I well remember them singing Gilbert and Sullivan songs with great gusto. She also sang in the chorus and even danced the French cancan in the annual Quadrangle Club Revels, a show that was written and performed by the faculty and staff of the University.

While working at the Oriental Institute, Margie met and married University of Michigan Professor George G. Cameron, who preceded her in death in 1979. Even after George Cameron swept her away to Ann Arbor, she kept up her interest and contact with the University of Chicago. She was appointed a trustee of the University of Chicago, and for many years she served as Chairman of the Visiting Committee of the Oriental Institute.

Margie also continued to care for the Assyrian Dictionary Project, and I was a frequent guest of the Camerons in Ann Arbor. I will miss her. We publish these letters to honor her memory and her life long devotion to the Oriental Institute.

*Erica Reiner*

*John A. Wilson Distinguished Service Professor Emerita*



## LETTERS FROM EGYPT

Metropolitan Hotel  
Cairo, Egypt

Sunday, January 17, 1954

Dear Ma and Pa,

I think for the time being anyhow, knowing my frailties as a letter writer, I shall attempt to write you every day a kind of running impression. Then please you send them on to Dr. Kraeling so he can abstract a newsletter if possible. Maybe Miss Dunklau can make copies for sisters as well. I am certainly not going to be inspired, but we might as well get the most out of this adventure as possible.

A relatively comfortable transatlantic flight was spoiled at the landing by “turbulence” both within and without. So that all day I had a seasickness hangover, if there is any such thing. It was glorious to get out to the calm and safety of Cambridge, and the warm and welcoming arms of Patrick. The breathing spell was over all too soon, and I was on my way back to the airport rather dreading the next leg of the journey.

My seatmate in the bus was a little plain grandmother who spoke in the loud voice usually associated with grand dames. She turned out to be very top drawer, the Viscountess Lowther, mother of Lord Lonsdale. She was also my seatmate on the plane, and I must say that I was glad to have her because she was responsive and amusing but not the least demanding. On the transatlantic plane I had had no seatmate, and no one moved about at all to chat — in fact you can’t see anyone on these planes. I find it cheerier to have a pal during these long dull flights.

This flight had a two-hour stopover in Rome — at 10:00 P.M. of all hours, so we sat in the restaurant and made two cups of coffee and two glasses of brandy stretch as long as possible. Lady Lowther discovered an acquaintance there — a Lt. Col. somebody, who was a Queen’s Mes-

senger and was on his way to Singapore with lots of diplomatic pouches. We who were exhausted with flying by the time we had gotten to Rome were horrified by his schedule which got him to Singapore more than thirty-six hours after he started, and most of that time in the air! The plane was full and half the passengers were going through to Australia — Thursday afternoon to Saturday afternoon — with only two hour layovers. Cairo is plenty far for me. I still have an air hangover (there is no other expression) due to lack of sleep and perhaps Dramamine.

Arrival at Cairo at the crack of dawn — this time quite literally as the sky was reddening in a thoroughly vulgar fashion as we landed — seemed as unreal as any other arrival until we passed a marvelous black-robed female riding on a tiny donkey, and a camel flock nearby, silhouetted against the hangars and aircraft. The modern part of Cairo looks just like Havana, I was surprised to see. It's colder here than Cuba, and not so lush at this time of year. Fellow passengers claimed that the new regime of Naguib has really cleaned things up — certainly the streets look fairly tidy, and beggars are few.

I've done no sight-seeing yet, as I spent all day yesterday recovering my lost sleep and whatever else it is that is lost — time? one's soul left behind? equilibrium? Something — I found the sleep by now, but not yet the other thing.

No Gertrude Bell I!

Now to beat off the *dragoman* so I can walk peaceably to the Semiramis and find your letter.

Good-bye — Margie



Metropolitan Hotel  
Cairo, Egypt

Sunday, January 17, 1954

Dear Parents,

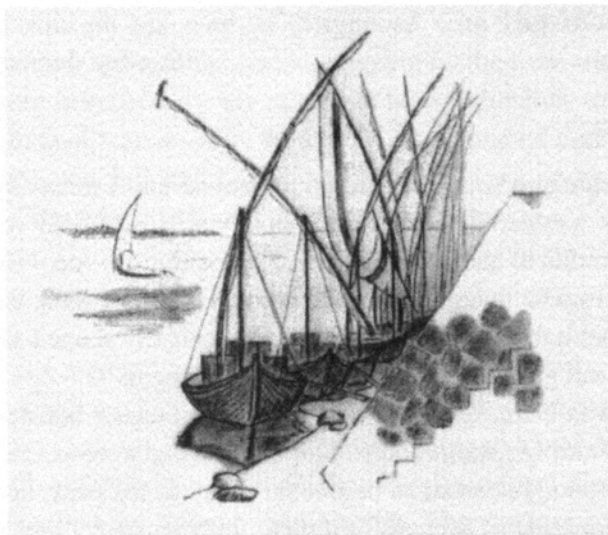
My morale and health are much improved and I must say that I enjoyed today. Yesterday I felt a little woozy still, so I only roamed over to the Semiramis to see if any mail had come there — no — and I made a sketch or two to inaugurate my new sketch book on the banks of the Nile. The inevitable *dahabiyeh*, with its beautifully shaped sail that collapses so it can go under a bridge, was one of them.

Today was Giza. Over my *dragoman's* protests I insisted on walking around, and the temperature and everything were perfect. Being a Sunday everybody seemed to be out for a day at the park, and the place was full of ordinary Cairoans complete with small fry and dogs. I enjoyed it very much. That Sphinx!!

After lunch I had a remarkable hour at the museum — I'm getting pretty good at batting off eager *dragoman* — and once I was inside the place no one bothered me. I felt I should see the King Tut stuff before going to Luxor — and I'm pleased that I could. But oh how very sadly it is displayed — all spread out and dark, so that the glories of the stuff are completely lost. It's odd how the gold has tarnished. Some odd alloy? In some pieces of jewelry it's quite rosy red in *patine*, as if it had been dropped in a bottle of red ink. Woolworth could do it better.

In roaming back through the dank and dark halls, idly just to get an idea of what was there, I got a feeling that our little Oriental Institute collection is not so bad! We seem to have something of everything, and just as beautiful as the ones here — and far better displayed. I'm looking forward to a return visit or two once I have had a proper indoctrination at Luxor.

The great *Platz* out in front of the museum is a mess of mud and dust. Apparently once upon a time the Hilton Hotels thought they would buy the old Kasr-el-Nil Barracks and make a fine hotel there. The barracks are empty now, and sloppy, surrounded by a high boarding advertising Coca-Cola, Hollywood, and Packards, and the space in front of it is being made into a garden. It sure is unattractive now.



*Lateen-rigged Boats Tied Up below the Embankment at Luxor*

The hotel is old-fashioned, clean, and not very comfortable anywhere, but the food is good, reasonable in price and the service pleasant. There's no place to sit and read except one's room, and that's too cold unless you go to bed. The other sitting spots, like the Writing Room, are stiff and cold, or dark and cozy. Cups of tea or drinks are required from time to time.

I have a modest pal — a young Cockney in the office furniture business, a bit of a pansy, but still someone to chat with. The other single people seem all to be men, and entirely too well behaved. However, there's enough *va et vient* to keep one amused with watching, and I have lots of serious reading in addition to a couple of thrillers.

I'm reading a Penguin *The Pyramids of Egypt* a day late of course, but I find the *dragoman* wasn't too wrong in his information. (He's an earnest young man, and not too hard to choke off — but he charges me more than he should, I think — or rather I pay him more than I need to.)

I'm nodding over this letter.

Good-bye for now and love — Margie





Metropolitan Hotel  
Cairo, Egypt

Monday, January 18, 1954

Dear People,

Today my *dragoman* took me to Memphis and Saqqara. Memphis is nothing — a couple of fallen statues of Ramesses II in a grove of date palms. Presumably someone has excavated here and there, but the place is highly confusing and inhabited by farmers now and I suppose that excavation is impossible. Saqqara is on the desert ridge, a safe dry place to bury kings. It has the famous Step Pyramid and another pyramid to attract one's attention. The Egyptian Department of Antiquities has been excavating there since the mid-1920s, and an attractive site and unhackneyed antiquities are the result.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, the Step Pyramid was the precursor to the bigger Giza ones, built by the architect Imhotep for his King Zoser. It is one of the earliest monuments in stone — certainly the earliest large monument in stone. The tomb of the king had been originally planned for a pit dug into rock, with a *mastaba*, a lowish architectural mound, over it. Apparently as the building was underway, the architect changed his mind and it got bigger and bigger, and finally the first pyramid was born. Everyone was very impressed, and tourists came to see it 1,500 years later and wrote recommendations about it. The whole place was a pleasure to me because it was quiet (only one other tourist) and blessedly free from the horde of Arabs with postcards and camels and donkeys.

I knew the Oriental Institute had an expedition called the Saqqarah Expedition, but I couldn't remember what it had been doing there until we went into the Mastaba of Mereruka. There was the original of a watercolor that used to hang in my office! Brings it home to you, it does. Old Mereruka himself in the proper colors and all.

I fancy that the publication of those paintings and sculpture was wiser even than it appeared at the time because the natives and *dragomen* have a slightly cavalier attitude about the preservation of antiquities which are not covered. I betcha these sculptures have received some embellishments from busy little twentieth century fingers. I have to admit that the American initial and name carving would be a thousand times worse.

The drive out there was highly interesting — through incredible farms and slum — filthy, colorful, noisy, decorative, and busy. The chief harvest at the moment is in cauliflowers. What appears to be spinach is also visible, and sugar cane. The other crops, if they are crops, I can't recognize. All very sketchable if one could do it in comfort and unobserved.

I'm off for Luxor in a few minutes. Hope to find a letter there from someone.

Love to all — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

Tuesday, January 19, 1954

Dear People,

Oh I am happy to be here. It is a perfectly wonderful place, where I at once felt at home. Tuesday is market day, so all morning there was a stream of folk on the boulevard along the river, making such noise, shouting, and presumably joking (Arabic like Italian can sound simultaneously cheerful and angry). It was difficult to make out just what they were taking to market — an occasional cow with tiny satellite calf would pass — and a few goats. But no large wagons full of easily identifiable cauliflower such as I saw so much of around Cairo.

Later when the market was over I sat on the riverbank and watched them go home. Silent now, and tired. The only noises are the delicate

pat pat of the donkeys' unshod hooves or an occasional wooden wheel. At the foot of the embankment, not a hundred yards from our landing stage, is where the *dahabiyehs* now must tie up and unload (it's just outside the city limits it seems). The mayor decreed that it was bad for tourism if all the produce boats tied up at the docks in the center of town (and therefore right in front of the hotels). So now the nest of incredible masts is very handily placed for those who want to sketch on the riverfront, and our gateman keeps watch over ladies like me to drive away beggars and *bakshish* hunters and the like. The *dahabiyehs* at the end of market day look empty and sad, though one of them, I noticed, was being loaded with large metal drums — gasoline?

The sun was so warm on the riverside yesterday that I sat and watched the passersby for an hour until it got too cold. There was no wind, and the boats were having a rough time getting upstream. Today there is a big wind from the north so they should be scurrying. The sun's warmth is going fast, and the natives are hurrying home to shelter. Their long robes look nice and warm, but they don't keep out the wind. Last night it was 44° F and the night before 41. Full moon. The sun is the great furnace here, and I am enjoying it to the full.

George Hughes took me first thing to call on Labib *Bey* Habachi, the local Inspector of Antiquities of the Luxor district. He is a gay and busy person who is the Hughes' best local friend — a bachelor and a Christian. Egyptian civil service is not planned for delegation of authority, so that Labib *Bey* has to supervise, sign, and arrange everything himself. His life is one of constant interruption by a host of secretaries or assistants, and his only relief is to walk down the street to Chicago House to use the library and stay for a peaceful cup of tea.

He and George took me on a special sight-seeing excursion to the Luxor Temple, which is just about a half a mile from Chicago House and a good temple to begin on because it is a simple one. George and Labib *Bey* had a big time reading inscriptions, as if they had never been there before, and I roamed about highly impressed with the great columns and pylons.

Love — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters

Luxor, Egypt

Wednesday, January 20, 1954

Dear People,

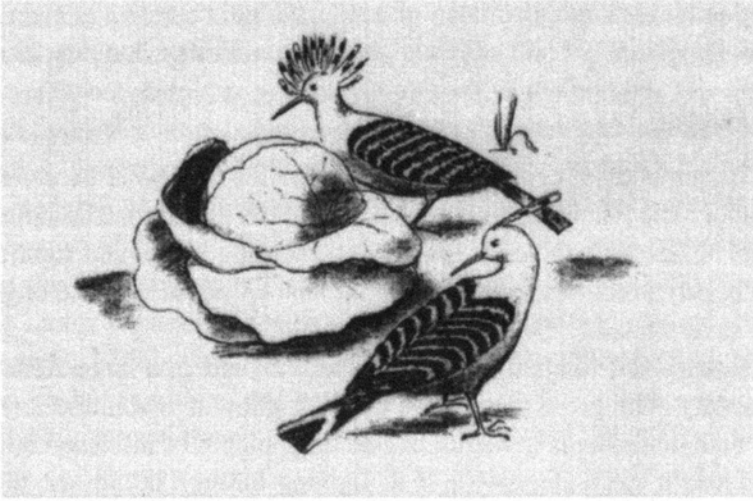
Luxor Temple somehow gives an impression of greater majesty and soaring columns than Karnak — but perhaps only because it stands so free and open — uncluttered by the complicated courts and courts and sub-temples and super temples of Karnak. Luxor has its processional road lined with sphinxes, its pylon with the four great statues of the king sitting in front, and then inside a great basilical hall with courts on either end. One can't make a triumphal entry through the pylon because built up against its inner face — and some fifteen feet above the pavement level of the temple — is a little mosque complete with minaret.

The whole temple had been covered with fifteen feet of the debris of 2,000 years of living, but the Department of Antiquities has been able to buy up and remove all the houses except five, and the mosque. There is a handsome new mosque to replace it nearby, but they still haven't moved the old one. Things like that move slowly in these countries, I expect.

It is believed by the excavator Chevrier that the Avenue of Sphinxes originally ran all the way from Luxor Temple to Karnak — the beginning and end of the avenue are evident, but the center mile or so is under fifteen or twenty feet of town — so no one will know for sure. The sphinxes are thought to be Ptolemaic — much, much later than the main building periods of Thebes.

Near the Luxor Temple just behind the sphinx avenue is a tiny Roman shrine with a rather nice headless statue in it. Labib *Bey* hopes to reconstruct this little place — it's only about eight feet square so that other sculpture that came from there can be safely returned to place. There is no museum here, so that treasures have to be removed out of sight altogether — or left *in situ* to disintegrate.

It is evident that one can explore these temples without being pestered by *dragomen* — but on the other hand they can mean little unless there's an Egyptologist handy to explain the details. Karnak is a temple one can visit purely for the aesthetic pleasure of lights and shadows, the processions of columns, the unexpected bits of color. Its very enormous-



*Hoopoe Birds in the Garden at Chicago House, Luxor*

ness, both in square footage of sculpture, and in acreage, is a challenge to American eyes. The architectural rhythm is interesting — pylons are full stops, courts are full breathing spaces with noise and air, and the great columned halls are hushed and devious. They succeed each other in full solemnity, on all sorts of axes, one even leading off nearly a half-mile to the side — toward a temple of Mut.

Since this temple is a god's temple, the holy of holies is a small chamber which held the ceremonial ark, or barque, on which the cult image of Amon would appear in public. On special occasions the priests took the ark on excursions through the temple, sometimes even to other temples in the neighborhood. If you're going to have a parade you have to have something to parade in, and the temple was it. No wonder it had to be so grand and so complicated.

More than one king is commemorated at Karnak — I can't remember who — and they all added their two cents worth to the complex of the temple.

Love — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

Friday, January 22, 1954

Dear People,

Charles Nims escorted me through Karnak, via what he called the backdoor. The Khonsu Temple which is part of the Karnak complex had a relief he needed to refer to, so, with the aid of a ladder and fighting off some highly predatory bats called fruit bats — about the size of hawks — he investigated.

Meanwhile I roamed about and found myself in a large stone-yard — literally. The great open space (I don't know if it's called anything other than that) seems to be full of odd large pieces of inscribed building stone. And it has a Decauville R.R. running through it. On one side are stacks of white small stones, about twice the size of a loaf of bread. Prickly camel thorn underfoot, and all bordered by either temple or a great fat mud-brick wall. Here and there were little groups of men squatting over their tea I suppose — elevenses we call it in England.

And against the famous Bubastite Portal, which the Oriental Institute will publish any minute now, was a wooden ramp leading off and up into the shadows and scaffolding of a pylon. The chugging of a little gasoline motor could be heard. I couldn't have been more mystified. It seems that the Department of Antiquities has gotten concerned about the safety of Karnak's Second Pylon and is attempting to pull it down and rebuild it.

Pylons are mighty thick structures at the base, maybe forty to fifty feet thick, and tapering off to maybe fifteen feet at the top. The outside casing is all carved and inscribed, but the inside is just miscellaneous stone, properly fitted, and solid except for the stairways and occasional guardrooms and galleries.

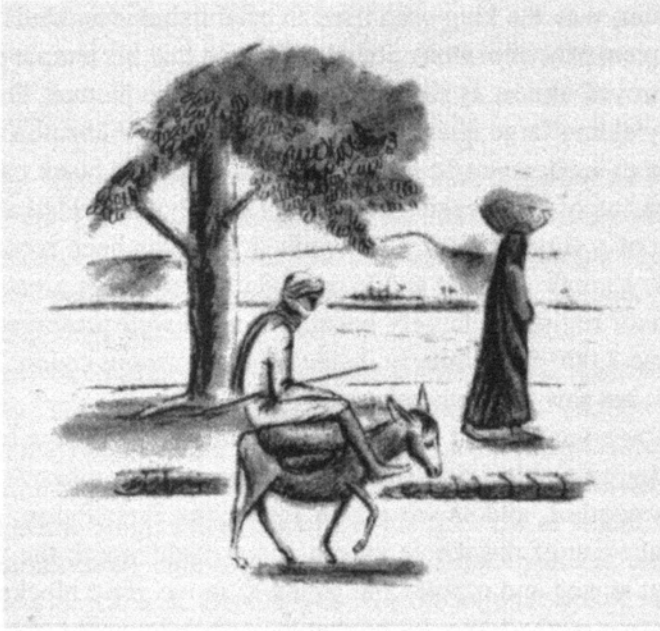
In tearing down this pylon and another, M. Chevrier, the archeologist belonging to the Department of Antiquities, found that the fill of these pylons was cannibalized from earlier temples or shrines built by rulers who were despised by subsequent kings — mostly Akhnaton and Hatshepsut. In the Third Pylon Chevrier found almost all the pieces belonging to a handsome shrine of Hatshepsut, who, if you remember, was a lady king so disliked by her brother Thutmose III that when he succeeded to the throne he chiseled her name off every monument that bore

it. Akhnaton was the king who tried to establish a monotheism, which failed to please the enormous priestly class, so that his temple structures were destroyed almost as soon as he was out of the picture. The Second Pylon is yielding large quantities of stones from an Akhnaton structure, as well as miscellaneous beautifully carved pieces of black basalt from another shrine of Hatshepsut, while the Third Pylon yielded almost every piece of a shrine built by Sesostriis, which has been reconstructed within the Karnak precinct and is considered one of the great treasures of the Luxor region — largely because it is so well preserved, having spent some 3,000 years snugly inside of an enormous pylon. I haven't seen it yet but saw some photographs.

The stone-yard has all the courses carefully laid out, row by row, so that the design won't get mixed up. The Second Pylon hasn't been entirely dismantled, and as we sat on top of the First Pylon, getting a wonderful view of the whole precinct, we could watch the workmen prying out stones and rubble, and trying to move great blocks of stone with the same methods, no doubt, that their ancestors used. About ten of them pried and hauled on a large block, to move it onto some log rollers. They sang a song like the "Volga Boatmen" while they hoisted and pushed.

The temple of Medinet Habu, in which the Oriental Institute has for many years been making facsimile copies of the reliefs and inscriptions, is on the opposite side of the Nile from Luxor town, and about a mile back from the river. It is the best preserved of the pharaonic temples in Egypt, having served first as a mortuary temple for Ramesses III (around 1175 BC). Later it was used as administrative headquarters for the whole Theban Necropolis, down to Ptolemaic times, *circa* 300 BC, so that it was kept in good repair, presumably. There was a Christian church built in one of the courtyards, which meant that some sculpture was defaced, and a whole row of thirty foot seated statues of Ramesses was destroyed, but other reliefs along the retaining walls were merely plastered over, which preserved them better than ever.

The thousand and some odd years between the coming of Islam and the present saw some ten feet of rubbish accumulate all over the temple, which had to be dug out by the Oriental Institute in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Probably during that time the place was inhabited by peasants, as most of the other temples were, but the ceilings have not been

*Promenade at Luxor*

blackened by smoke, as at Karnak, and the painted reliefs that decorate the ceilings and architraves look almost as bright and clear as they did 3,000 years ago. The paint has, of course, fallen away from the lower parts of the walls where the rubbish had been, and the damp of the piled-up earth has in many places caused the stone to disintegrate, but it is remarkable how much of the original splendor of color can still be seen up high — beautiful colors, made even more brilliant by the white plaster background that covered so much of the area. The back (or innermost) part of the temple has suffered most, the stones removed to no one knows where. There is a horrible rumor that they were used to build the Luxor sugar factory, but no one has had the courage to go and make sure!

Love from Margie





Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

Monday, January 25, 1954

Dear People,

I'm getting a little bit behind, but since one or two days were completely quiet ones here, I'll just not report on them.

I've been pestering George and Charles to give me a job to do at Medinet Habu, figuring that my artist training should be good enough to at least try to copy an inscription. That's not as difficult as one might think because I would work directly from a photograph made to scale. One draws the outline of the figures right on the photo and the only thing that can baffle you is the shadows. Almost all the sculpture at Medinet Habu is the opposite of bas-relief, except that it is not relief in the reverse like intaglio is. The plane surfaces which are background are actually the closest to the eye — and the figures and hieroglyphs are cut back from it. So in making a copy one must learn to render the line where the sculpture leaves the front plane and not be swept away by the depth of the cut. These copies are not meant to record the delicacies of the sculptor's art, but to preserve the written rituals and historical inscriptions so that historians and philologists may more perfectly understand ancient Egypt. Each drawing is checked twice to make sure that no carving is ignored, or that no accidental break is included. The scene I was given to do had no hieroglyphs in it, so it was fairly easy going all the way along, and I am now basking in the pleasure of one small job accomplished. I shall soon meet my fall, however, because after penciling in the lines I must ink them, and my hand must be steady — which it practically never is.

We have an early breakfast and are ready to hop into the little launch at 7:30. The river is so beautiful in the morning, still with much haze, and the sun picks out here and there the white of a *dahabiyeh* sail. The opposite bank is low so it stilts up unevenly, yesterday's landing place becoming today's mudbank. We generally have to land at the regular ferry dock, if you can dignify it by that name. It is a sawhorse stuck out in the river about fifteen feet from the shore with a sort of sand causeway carpeted by sugarcane leaves leading out to the few boards that are the actual dock. This is where the king or the commoner would

land. No permanent dock is feasible because of the shifting mudbanks. The landing place of last year is now an island.

We have to walk from the landing beach — which contains the most glorious collection of automobiles, jalopy to station wagon, that you ever saw. The small Chevrolet touring car, *circa* 1930, is the favorite, and some of them are gaily painted, and all of them washed daily in the waters of the Nile. About a quarter of a mile back inshore and up on a higher level is the little garage where the Oriental Institute car is kept. Then we jounce and honk our way about two miles on, westward to the rim of the desert, under the great rosy cliffs of the *gebel*, where the Theban Necropolis was made. Medinet Habu is not exactly on the beaten track for tourists, so it is very quiet and peaceful there.

The ladder men bring out ladders of varying heights for every one (when you copy you have to make sure that your eye is right opposite the place you are copying, so that that mysterious force called parallax will not deceive you) and then you are ready for work. Standing on a ladder for four hours is something that I haven't gotten used to yet, but fortunately my piece of wall is not high, and I can stand on firm ground for half of it. It is also sunny, which is very important at eight o'clock in the morning. Night temperatures since I've been here have ranged from 38° to 45° F — and there is no heating except the sun.

Helene Kantor, one of our Oriental Institute faculty who is exploring the Near East this year, is at Chicago House this month, the most indefatigable traveler I have ever seen. We have been having all sorts of excursions organized to show her the important sites and monuments of all periods in the neighborhood. Sunday we went to Dendera, some fifty kilometers down the river on the west side. The drive was a fairly exciting experience, not because we went fast, but because it was very bumpy, the hazards of animals and people were constant, and the station wagon has never had a comfortable rear seat. Although buses travel this road regularly, the camels don't seem to have gotten used to automobiles, and they were constantly making it hard for their drivers by bucking and leaping about (which means, for a camel, motions made only slightly more rapidly than normal) and standing right across the road so we couldn't pass.

Really the rural landscape here is incredibly interesting. Each clod of earth is so treasured, each blade of fodder so needed, that all activities

seem to be devoted to extremely small scale hand labor. You don't set your donkey or cow out in a pasture free. You tether a hind leg to a peg so he can reach just so much fodder (I don't know what it is — it's something like alfalfa) and let him eat the place clean. None of this treasured green stuff is wasted by being trodden. The women, all draped in black, and the children tend the livestock and harvest certain crops, and the men work the irrigation.

The fields are subdivided into little paddies, like the terraced rice fields of Indonesia, which are terraced infinitesimally one below the other so that the irrigation water floods one section which is maybe ten feet square, before it can spill over into the next. This is to prevent too rapid runoff, I suppose. The water is fed into the ditches from *shadoofs*, the well-sweep, dip type of apparatus which lifts the water in leather buckets from a well up three stages or so into a little ditch. The sweep arm is counterbalanced by a mud ball so it isn't quite so heavy to hoist the water, but it takes one man for each sweep with the bucket, but I guess they have to work at it constantly to keep the flow even because often the well can be as far as a half-mile from the area being irrigated.

Other wells are operated by oxen going round and round a wheel thing, and a waterwheel with ceramic jars spills water into a trench. Small children ride the horizontal wheel and goad the ox or camel to keep him moving. It's just like the pictures in the geography books.

The villages are beautiful from a distance — Pueblo-like piles of cubes and rectangles, all mud colored except for the occasional white-washed cottage which indicates that the owner has been to Mecca. Usually the villages are in groves of palm trees. They are exceedingly dirty and smelly, and no wonder, because all the animals and people live together in the same house (I suppose camels don't — they're too big), and walls, floors, and ceilings are all made of mud-brick.

There are no pigs, of course, and few sheep, but lots of goats and cows and donkeys and camels. The baby goats are the cutest things you ever saw, and you see a lot of them because they graze along the side of the road. The cows are a reddish variety which would never make the grade in Wisconsin. Occasionally one sees a water buffalo, and then the whole landscape takes on a very Chinese look because he is such a characteristically Chinese beast. The donkeys are my very favorite animals.

They have such sweet patient chubby little faces, and they look so busy as they trot along. Most of them look decently fed.

One unpleasant trick of the *fellahin* is to tether a sick old donkey in the middle of the road so that he might be killed by a passing car and then they could collect damages from the driver. We saw one such dying donkey who was pathetic. We did not kill him, but he was clearly being starved to death, and it might have been kinder of us if we had.

The temple at Dendera was built by the Ptolemies — which means the rulers of Egypt before the Romans — the royal house that ended with the famous Cleopatra. It is fairly well preserved, and remarkable because the main temple is still entirely roofed. The dimness and mystery that must have been one of the features of Karnak and Medinet Habu which were built nearly 1,200 years before Dendera. All the columns have the head of Hathor, the cow goddess, as capitals. The sculpture is gross compared with earlier periods, and the composition of the reliefs monotonous — all systematically squared up in nice even rows. The hieroglyphs are readable but apparently untranslatable because they are full of puns, magic, and cryptic in the extreme. The Romans tried to revive the ancient style at a time when it had been nearly forgotten, and the resulting hodgepodge has really got the archeologists baffled.

The Department of Antiquities is getting disturbed about one phenomenon of nature which has beset Dendera Temple. Enormous numbers of bees or wasps (not the honey kind) have built their mud egg cases, or chrysalis cases, against the outer wall of the temple, nearly obliterating the sculpture, and in some places nearly a foot thick. These mud cases are made of something that hardens even harder than the stone they are built against and therefore are almost impossible to remove without damage to the sculpture. The roar of those millions of wings has to be heard to be believed.

This took two-and-one-half hours to write. I'm tired!

Good-bye now — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

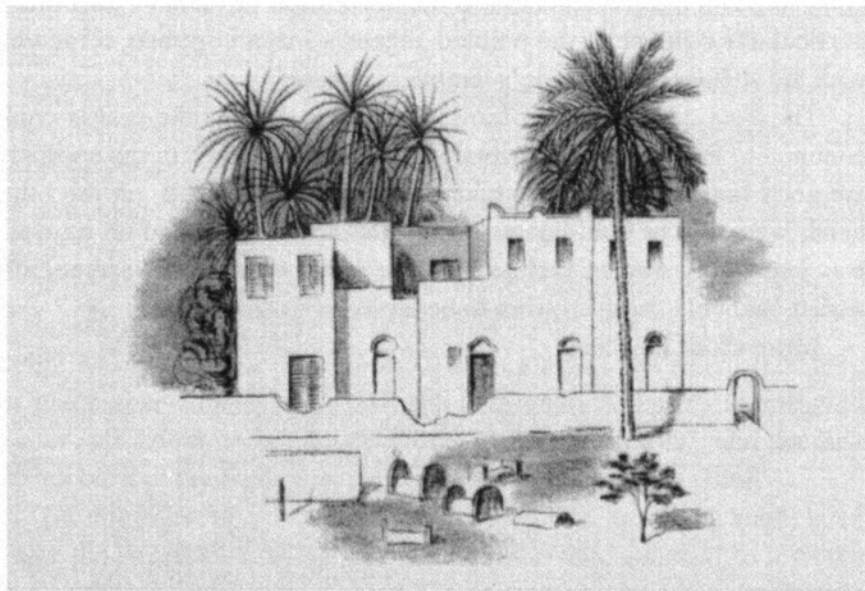
Wednesday, January 27, 1954

Dear People,

The chronicle must continue but I fear it is going to lose some of its head of steam. Each excursion will seem less novel and each sight seen will seem more artificially described. The routine of life here is fairly simple. If we go to the temple — and this is not necessary every day — we draw in pencil in the morning — or George and Charles collate which means comparing the drawing to the sculpture and making corrections and noting omissions — and in the afternoon we work at home, drawing with ink instead.

The library is the work place and it is used occasionally by outsiders. As I write two unknown-to-me people are reading and taking notes there. One morning Douglas Champion and I went to the temple for a couple of hours and then spent the last hour looking at four or five tombs nearby, where there are delectable wall paintings, many of which the Oriental Institute published in *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*.

I find that I can't absorb very much sight-seeing in one day, and these tombs, though beautiful, are thoroughly mixed up in my mind



*Some Houses behind the Moslem Cemetery at Karnak Village*

now. They're the kind of thing that one has to return to often because there is so much subject matter to be aware of.

What appeals to me most in all of Egyptian wall decoration is the "offering table" — or still life one might call it. I think its pleasure derives from the fact that it is the one element where shapes and/or colors are massed — considerably in contrast to the processional lines of human figures and animals. They are fairly formal piles of foodstuffs, painted in gay colors, presumably to demonstrate that the deceased was not niggardly in his offerings to the gods.

The tombs we went into, and almost all the others in the neighborhood are tombs of nobles, not kings or queens. The elaborate rituals and spells for the proper entry into the Other World are not necessary for the nobles — I think this is tied up with the concept that the king is really a god personified, and therefore at death his return to the World of Gods is highly essential, and one can't take any chances by omitting spells or not providing the proper equipment for sustaining spiritual life in the style to which the king had become accustomed. Nobles, on the other hand, are simple mortals, and their tombs seem only to say that they lived well, had many fields and cows, and treated the gods with proper respect. Some of the nobles have grander tombs than others, but in general there is a lightheartedness in the decoration of them — and this is particularly evident in the painted scenes — that contrasts somewhat with the stiffness of the king's temple sculpture.

The king generally built himself a temple, so that the priests could continue to look after his spiritual welfare and do honor to the appropriate gods long after the king had died. The king's tomb, on the other hand, was only to hold his body, and the magic inscribed on its walls was especially potent and secret. The tomb was to be permanently sealed, and only the gods were to be aware of its messages.

More about this later.

Love and blackbird — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

Thursday, January 28, 1954

Dear People,

My little dissertation on tombs of the nobles is probably full of mistakes, although I did check a bit. It seems that up to the Nineteenth Dynasty they were simple tombs, memorials that surmounted a deep dug burial place. Later they got fancier and fancier, involving temples, and all the magic formulae inscribed on the walls which previously had been the prerogatives of kings. Sculptured tombs versus painted tombs apparently means nothing other than personal preference or the availability of sufficiently gifted sculptors.

One noble's tomb, that of Ramose, is remarkable in two ways. One because it is large enough to contain, underground, a temple of sorts, which stands at the mouth of the deeply sunk chamber where the sarcophagus once was. The other way it is remarkable in that it shows a very clear transition between two artistic styles. It was started early in the reign of Akhnaton (approximately 1375 BC), before he moved the court to Tell el-Amarna, and before Akhnaton really got his monotheistic sun-worshipping new religion properly established. As the new style, so-called naturalistic, which resulted from the king's revolutionary ideas, became popular, or if not popular at least *de rigueur*, Ramose caused his sculptors to change their tune and incorporate the new style with the old. So one side of a doorway shows the old style and the old god Amon, and the other side was started to show Aton the sun god, and the new style. The tomb decorations were not finished because the court was moved to Amarna.

It interested me particularly to study the unfinished reliefs because all the stages of composition were visible — the grid lines whereby the design was transferred from paper(?) and enlarged, the rough sketching for placement done in red paint, the firm and true corrections by the master artist done in black (guidelines for the sculptors), and the first cutting back of the background stone to form the shallow relief.

The tomb is cut in what is commonly called the living rock, but I prefer the expression of my Cairo *dragoman* who referred to it as the "national rock," the word "natural" being an impossibility for him to pronounce. This rock is a cream colored limestone, apparently without

flaws, which can be carved with the uttermost delicacy. Sometimes it has the gloss of ivory, when it is not painted — many reliefs are painted, including some in this tomb — but I think I like them best uncolored.

Ramose's tomb has a little bit of everything, including adequate light to see it by, since the temple part, or pillared hall needed a new roof when the tomb was excavated and so it now has a skylight. Often the single shaft of light that comes from the door of a tomb provides the best light for seeing the sculptures in corridors — even a long way back, because the edges of the shallow relief pick up the light, making the relief even more effective than it would be if there were lots of light.

Mother's letter to the Semiramis got here today. When I got to London I went to Thomas Cook's for my final orders, and he said the Semiramis was full up. I am pleased to hear that Jerry and the Hillman are well, and that Ma is over her cold and that she was mistaken for me in her red wig. It's lovely to get everybody's logs — makes the rest of the world seem a long way off from Egypt.

Love to all — Margie





Egyptian Headquarters  
Luxor, Egypt

Friday, January 29, 1954

Dear People,

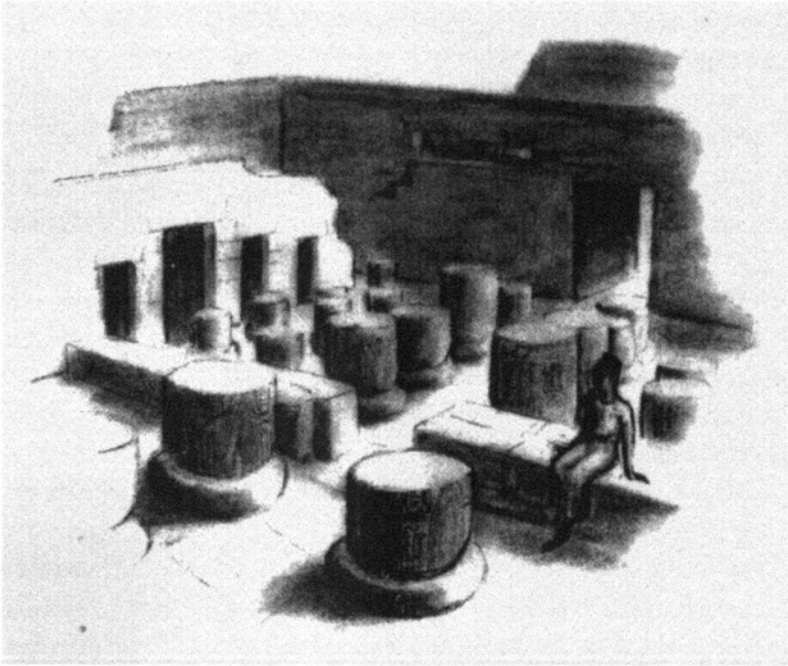
I have finally achieved some paper of my own, and the nice lines should make my writing easier for Miss Dunklau to read. I've worked all day on practicing how to draw nice neat lines for inking in my inscription, and my hand is very weary from holding onto that kind of pen. I don't have to press so hard with this one anyhow. In another day or two I shall be either adept or permanently paralyzed.

To continue with the tombs. The Valley of the Kings is an odd valley that swings around behind the main Nile valley wall, until its headwall is separated from the Nile valley by only the thinnest sort of rock escarpment — less than a quarter of a mile thick I gather.

This geological oddity has probably changed much of the character of the Theban Necropolis. All the kings who made Thebes their capital have been buried there, including Hatshepsut and of course Tutankhamon. Hatshepsut built her mortuary temple right against the Nile face of the cliff, and her tomb was dug back into the head wall of the Valley of the Kings so that the two nearly join (but not quite) deep underground.

The decorations of these tombs are, as I mentioned before, largely spells and magic to insure the king's safe passage to the other world. They are carved without the same loving care that the less imposing tombs of the nobles got, and the subject matter is not particularly appealing to the visitor because it is so obscure — even to Egyptologists, who can read the words but who have trouble interpreting them. Astrological ceilings appear in many of the tombs — rather dashing and stark, all black and white.

We put a quick appearance in King Tut's tomb, just so we could say we had been there, but it is small and simple, not deep, and is undecorated save for one wall. This poor king is the only one of thousands of ancient Egyptian kings whose mummy still rests in the place where it was originally placed. The outermost of the three gold coffins is in the tomb, and the great granite sarcophagus. The mummies of all the other kings were removed from their already looted tombs some thousands of years ago by the priests and placed together in a common secret tomb



*The Hypostyle Hall of the Temple of Medinet Habu*

which contained no treasure and therefore wouldn't be robbed. I believe they are now kept in the Cairo Museum.

On the Nile face of the escarpment which heads the Valley of the Kings is King (Queen) Hatshepsut's great temple, now called Deir el-Bahri. It was excavated and restored by the Metropolitan Museum for many years before the war and is a very pleasant place to tour. Of course the sculpture was defaced by Hatshepsut's successor, Thutmose, who hated her, so that every representation of her, and every cartouche that mentions her name has been chipped away. But there remains much handsome sculpture in some places brightly painted in red, yellow, blue, and green.

Generally the kings ornamented their temples with battle scenes and other commemorative designs. Apparently Hatshepsut was peaceable because she shows no battles, but she does record two delightful events. One is a picture of the ship which carried her great obelisk (now in the Karnak Temple) from the quarry to Thebes. The Queen (King) felt that

her greatest contribution to her country was the diplomatic and exploratory mission she sent to the country of Punt, which is Abyssinia, on the Red Sea. It was apparently a very fascinating country with many trees and animals unknown in Egypt. The visitors were most impressed by the frankincense trees, and the sculptured scenes show the spice trees being carried aboard the ships to be brought back to Egypt.

All this is guidebook stuff, really, probably much more faithfully related by Baedeker. Well, it's tea time now, and I've sort of run dry. Thank you all for your logs and letters. Keep'em coming!

Love — Margie



Egyptian Headquarters

Luxor, Egypt

Sunday, January 31, 1954

Dear People,

I've dropped another day (dear me) without writing. And as the life I've been leading most of this week has been fairly devoted to my two drawings I have no more adventures to report. But I'm trying to think up some odds and ends that otherwise I might fail to record.

This is the Motion Picture Year in Luxor. Three movie companies have made films here. MGM nearly two years ago sent one of its directors, a very charming fellow named Robert Pirosh, to the Oriental Institute to see what background material and film strips were available in the States for a projected film on Egypt. Mr. Pirosh was wisely wary of a historical picture, but he thought a melodrama with an archeological subject filmed in the Valley of the Kings would be a successful starting place. He looked at all the unused shots taken for the Oriental Institute film called *The Human Adventure*, and he picked the brains of our beloved Dr. Harold Nelson, formerly Field Director at Luxor (whose recent death has saddened so many of his friends both here and at home), of all the lore and superstition and fantasy and fact that it was

possible to do. Well, lo and behold, Mr. Pirosh turned up here with a complete outlay of stars and cameramen and so on and made his picture this fall. I believe it's to be called *The Valley of the Kings*, and its star is that well-known archeologist Robert Taylor.

And Twentieth Century-Fox is here right now, filming *The Egyptian*, a novel by Waltari. This is a historical picture, placed I think in the Eighteenth Dynasty or Nineteenth, anyhow around the time of Akhnaton, the monotheist. I've heard lurid reports of a chariot race across the escarpment at the head of the Valley of the Kings, and we have seen the mock-up of the Barque of Amon tied up outside the Winter Palace Hotel, where the cast resides.

The Barque of Amon is a holy of holies, a ceremonial boat, used in funerary worship, in which the deceased would travel to the other world, and representing the journey of the sun around the sky by day and under the earth by night. For Oriental Institute newsletter purposes this description should be well vetted by John Wilson because I'm not sure I've got it right. Anyhow the boat the movie people made has no relationship whatsoever with the sculptures I've seen. George looked a little dumbfounded and considerably amused when he saw it, doubtless for the same reason. Too bad they didn't try to imitate the sculpture more because those barques are very handsome, with heads of beasts at either end.

The other day two "Fulbright" ladies, up from Cairo for the weekend, were intercepted on the dance floor of the Winter Palace and asked if they would like to be extras, dancing girls, in the scenes planned for the next day. I was told that the ladies were flattered but refused.

Otherwise the only evidence I've seen of this film project is a very classy and chromium trimmed station wagon which is kept on the west side of the river (there is no bridge across the Nile nearer than fifty miles) to ferry the cast and staff back and forth.

That's all there's time for now.

Love — Margie



Chicago House  
Luxor, Egypt

Monday, February 1, 1954

Dear Family,

Our personnel here is pleasantly varied. The George Hugheses and the Charles Nimses are the regular Egyptologists. Alexander Floroff and Douglas Champion are artists, and Tim Healey is the engineer or superintendent who keeps all the mechanics of the place in operation and that's saying a good deal.

Tim is one of those small neat north country Englishmen who can do anything with their hands and who can work with anybody anywhere in the world. He used to be in the regular army serving in Egypt and Palestine and other places (I think he even mentioned India) before he joined the Chicago House staff, way back in 1931. During World War II he was in the Navy, on destroyers on the Murmansk run. He is apparently the only capable mechanic in Luxor because in addition to the constant odds and ends of repairs he does for the house, he is asked to fix outboard motors, automobiles, flashlights, and I daresay zippers. He runs the launch that takes us across the river on days we go to the temple, and I think his happiest times are when he's cruising about the landing place, captain of his own vessel, in the pleasant sun and breeze of the river at noon. He's a source of all knowledge (he would make a perfect agricultural, nautical, and mechanical gigolo for mother) about how the lateen rig works, and what crops are being harvested now and what the local *gendarmerie* has been doing. He's a kind of one man miracle and I can't imagine how Chicago House would get along without him.

Alexander Floroff, artist-draftsman, was born in Russia. He served in the Russian army in World War I, in the Caucasus, and fought against the Bolsheviks during the Revolution. He was evacuated by the British from the Turkish border of Russia when they took out sick and wounded and was sent to Cairo where he has been every since. Through the years he worked for the British army in all sorts of civilian capacities, and for a number of years he was surveyor and draftsman for Professor Reisner of Harvard who excavated the cemetery of Giza. We were fortunate to be able to acquire an experienced archeological draftsman, and even luckier to find one who lives in Egypt because the poor old Oriental In-

stitute finds it awfully expensive to have to ship people back and forth across the Atlantic. He's an odd untalkative gent, who keeps himself to himself. But he was very cordial to me at the temple one day, brewing me a fine strong cup of Nescafé, and telling me the story of his life. I forgot to say that his mother, who was a nurse in the first war, managed to join him in Cairo about six months after they were both evacuated, and she looked after him here until she died last year. He has not heard from the rest of his family in Russia since the middle 1930s.

Douglas Champion is a young Englishman with aspirations to be a real artist, but with the not unusual requirements of making a living for his wife and child, who are here, too. He is a very pleasant guy whose aspirations may be greater than his talents, but meanwhile he is grinding out handsome drawings for the Oriental Institute publications, and becoming, as most people out here become, more and more respectful of the art and civilization and religion of the ancient Egyptians.

Miss Elizabeth Thomas, native of Mississippi, was a former graduate student of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute and an Egyptologist who is pursuing her studies of some form of the ancient religion. She is here on her own, with a car and a cocker spaniel named for a king who built a pyramid, Uni or Unas. I haven't seen very much of her because she went to Aswan the day after I arrived and only returned four days ago. She speaks thick Mississippi talk and is almost impossible for the Englishmen here to understand — to say nothing of Labib Habachi, the Inspector of Antiquities, who is around here so much. He says she even writes with a southern accent. She could probably be an epigrapher for us if we had another artist working to keep her busy.

The W. T. Co. and L. N. Co. meetings sound all very cheerful — and oh my, how far away. You can see what subject matter I'm reduced to now, but my drawing is getting better and better. Sketch book is not filling as rapidly as you hoped, I fear.

Love — Margie



Chicago House  
Luxor, Egypt

Tuesday, February 2, 1954

Dear People,

Two other guests are in residence here now. Jim Harvey is a young American, about twenty-three I should guess, who is a painter here on a Fulbright. He is interested in the ancient Egyptian art, especially composition over all, and he tramps around the tombs copying items that interest him and reads all sorts of books in the library. His sketches are very interesting. But when the sketch is turned into a painting, then composition reigns because Jim is an abstractionist and any resemblance between the inspiration and the finished painting is only apparently in the artist's mind. I think he does pretty good work, actually, though there are many that don't "come off." He works hard and swiftly, which is a real virtue, and ideas are popping at him from everywhere. He is especially interested in tangents, which it seems are a feature of Egyptian composition — circles or parts of circles that touch and run into others, a compositional taboo in the Western world. By segregating the tangents from the rest of the picture, he has a framework for an entirely new composition and away he goes with all sorts of lines and shapes. About the only thing Egyptian remaining are the colors — and I'm not too sure about them. I was requested to interpret his art to the assemblage, but fortunately that idea was forgotten because I would be unable to oblige. I get the point of his work, but I don't think I could put it over to this gang, whose idea of an artist is all too much mixed up with their idea of a draftsman.

Peter Shore is an Egyptological student from Cambridge who is pursuing the study of quarrying. Who has the right to quarry stone? The king alone, or can anyone order up a bit? I don't know how you find this out, but Mr. Shore at least finds it reasonable to go and look at some quarries (there are many at Aswan, including the one which still contains a half finished obelisk of Hatshepsut's which broke across the middle before it was even detached from its surrounding rock bed). It seems that the quarries have lots of inscriptions and shrines in them which commemorate the cutting of rock for certain important monuments. The great sill of pink granite which forms the cataract at Aswan is good for quarrying, too. And there are other types of rock in the vicinity.

Today Myrtle Nims and I walked into the Luxor market, mostly just to see what was being offered for sale. The sellers squat on the ground with their little display spread out in front of them on a mat. Mint in moist and sweet smelling bunches seemed to be the product nearest the main gate. Apparently it is understood that products of a like nature are sold in a certain spot because the fifteen mint sellers were together, and the 125 onion sellers, and so on. No one appears to have more than a basketful to sell. Rather pleasant looking mats woven of grass, a faded greenish color. Round baskets of grass, with lids. Crude pottery for cooking and for using on water wheels, unglazed and low fired. Knitted and crocheted beanies in interesting designs and colors made from undyed sheep wool and camel hair yarn — these beanies are worn by the men under their head wrappings or turbans. Various little household utensils made from old gasoline tins. Flutes of bamboo. Wooden clogs. These are the major products of local crafts.

There are the usual trinket sellers, and some little booths where machine made yard goods can be bought. There are a great number of shoe repairmen, who are working on the most tattered shoes you can imagine.

The women generally are selling their poultry or squab or vegetables. I saw no eggs, milk, or butter. Perhaps it's just as well. The livestock market is in a separate compound next door — we did not go into it. But there were lots of sheep, goats, and cows in evidence, as well as a few camels towering over the crowd. Everyone was very much aware of our presence, but no one bothered us at all.

Two odd bits of information emerged. Carrots sown from home-grown seed are radish purple and small after a few seasons. And lentils here are bright orange. Brown sugar is sold in hard cone-shaped cakes the size of an ice-cream cone. And the contents of the mysterious baskets carried on the heads of most of the women is poultry. I'm so glad to finally know the answer.

I guess that's all there's time for now.

Love to all — Margie





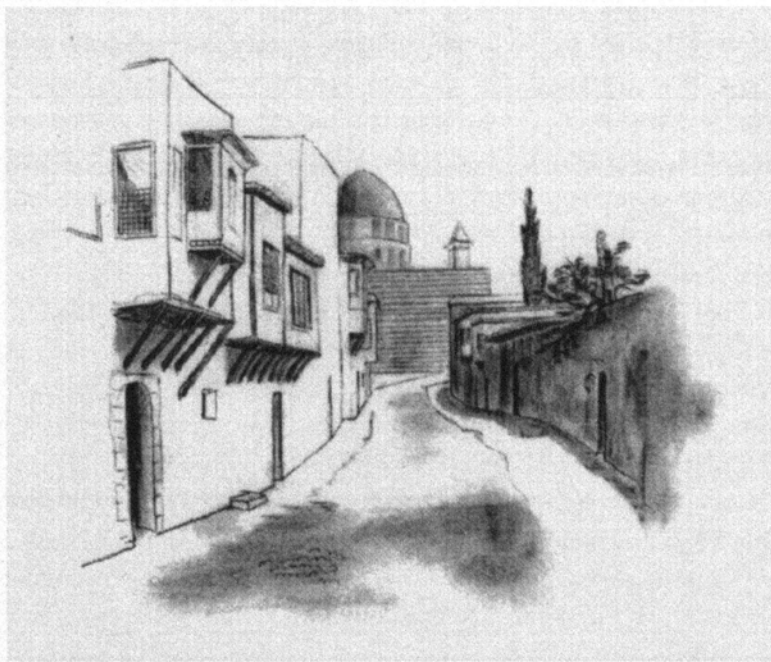
Chicago House

Luxor, Egypt

Thursday, February 4, 1954

Dear People,

I feel moved to write about the library of Chicago House since I put in a couple of hours' labor this morning on a library project. One of the indirect results of the Epigraphic Survey is the building up of several useful "tools" for Egyptologists. The most obvious tool to emerge is a dictionary. The usual practice in building a dictionary of this kind is to copy by hand units of inscription from the completed collated drawings. Then by means of blueprints as many copies of the unit as there are different words in the unit can be made. Each word is declined, transliterated, and translated and then the sheet is filed away. Pretty soon you have 150 samples of what you thought was "cow," complete with context, and with study you find that 130 of them were rightly "cow," but the other twenty were probably "heifer." Words like "great" and verbs like "to do" have infinite variations which emerge from a packet of these cards. There's no end to making them — it makes one

*A Street in Damascus*

wonder how a dictionary ever gets written and published at all. The dictionary here is made only from the inscriptions from the temples of Karnak and Medinet Habu. Even so it fills something like eighteen drawers of a file cabinet.

Another “tool” to emerge in the same way is known as the paleography. This is a study of all the forms which a hieroglyph can take. From dynasty to dynasty there is considerable variation in the style of the hieroglyph, and of course there is variation from sculptor to sculptor, too. By cutting out a little drawing from the blueprint, and pasting it on a card, one can quickly build up a useful file. It is especially valuable for restoration of doubtful inscriptions because all the little variants of a particular shape can be easily studied.

Dr. Nelson was working on a third “tool” before he died, one that was characteristic of his interest in all sorts of things. He called it an archaeological index, and in it he was collecting all the variants in shapes of dress, armor and weapons, horse gear, ornament, marine equipment, household wares, and anything of daily life that can change with fashion or with the introduction of new materials. Such a collection would have endless fascination, especially if one were able to trace the changes in, say, a horse’s bridle through the centuries of Egyptian civilization. This index is also restricted to the evidence offered by the temples of Karnak and Medinet Habu. It is at present in Chicago, where Dr. Nelson was working, but meanwhile George Hughes and Charles Nims have been collecting material for it, and they hope to continue building it up until all the collation on the two temples is completed — which is in the distant future.

The library proper is a fine collection of Egyptological works, indispensable here where the only comparable library is in the Cairo museums and hard to get at both geographically and curatorially. There are here some 8,000 volumes ranging from the reports of Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt to the latest 1953 report on excavations at Giza. The Napoleon volumes are very impressive, considering that they were published in 1820 and were the first of any kind that attempted a real survey of the monuments visible at that time. We compared some of the old engravings with some of our Medinet Habu drawings and found that the French artists were very much aware of the drama of the relief sculpture, but they clearly hadn’t the time to get all the detail in. Actually the

engravings must have been made from sketches, and the engravers I'm sure did some "improving," too. A map of the 1820s shows a much smaller Luxor town than now exists, and it marks the Avenue of Sphinxes which ran between Luxor Temple and Karnak. This avenue has been covered by dwellings since then, and only the ends at each temple are visible now. Napoleon's men saw the temples when they were still full of the deep debris that has since been removed. Even so they were impressed by the monuments of Thebes. And who wouldn't be?

Love — Margie



Chicago House  
Luxor, Egypt

Friday, February 12, 1954

Dear Family,

I've delayed my departure from here by two days, so I wouldn't have to spend so long in Cairo.

The other afternoon Jim Harvey, Peter Shore, and I set off for Karnak to find M. Chevrier to ask him to let us in to see the Sesostris Shrine, which is the shrine I told you about, found in pieces inside the Third Pylon when they tore it down for repair. We looked about for the gent, but he wasn't to be found. So we just roamed around and looked at odd places in the back of the temple and Peter, who is an Egyptologist (budding), read inscriptions here and there. We were plenty weary from all that walking and climbing and were glad to get home for our cups of tea.

The next day we happened to mention at tea time that we hadn't yet seen the shrine (it is kept from the public eye because it has not been published yet) and Labib, who was there gossiping, said, "Come on, we'll see it now." So in the dusk we started off. Labib *Bey*, who was down on Chevrier at the moment, took the opportunity to snub him a bit

by announcing to the guards that henceforth George Hughes and Charles Nims would be admitted to the shrine at any time without having to ask Chevrier's permission! We could hardly see the sculpture by the time we got to it, it was so dark. So presently a *ghaffir* came with a lantern, and the remarkable shrine was made visible.

Sesostris is Twelfth Dynasty — around 1900 BC. The shrine is made of fine cream-colored limestone, a little building about twenty feet square, more like a pavilion than anything. It commemorates some cult of the fertility god, who is depicted very, very male indeed. The delicacy of the sculpture and the fineness of detail in the hieroglyphs just made me amazed. And we wondered how the stones of the shrine had survived the wear and tear of being built into a pylon. George says that he guesses that the shrine was removed from its original spot because the area was needed for something else. Because the building was sacred it was tenderly built into another sacred edifice, the pylon, and probably even cushioned carefully with sand or dirt to prevent chipping. Honestly the surface of the stone is as good as new, and only a few edges have been chipped. All but two or three blocks were found, so reconstruction was easy.

It was eerie walking through the dark maze of the stone-yard and through the quiet courtyard of Karnak, by the faint light of a quarter moon.

Labib also arranged for us to see two other closed-up treasures, the tombs of Kheruef and Nefertari. Kheruef (drop the K and gargle the H) was the chamberlain for Queen Tiye, wife of Amenhotep III, Eighteenth Dynasty, *circa* 1400 BC. Here are sculptures of the same quality as Sesostris' shrine — very delicately carved, and so smoothly it looks as if they had been done in soap, not in stone. The tomb hasn't been published yet — the person doing it is an Egyptian, a member of the Department of Antiquities, who has been transferred to Saqqara, where he has recently announced finding the foundation for another pyramid. Actually the whole tomb hasn't been excavated, but apparently the major sculptured wall is there.

At Chicago House we have a plaster cast of some sculptured dancing girls from this tomb. We would like to get it to the Oriental Institute, but it is too big to move comfortably without damage in transit, plaster

being kind of brittle, and no one really wants to take it along as luggage. The tomb is just about my favorite thing here.

Nefertari was wife of one of the Ramesseses, Third perhaps, who was apparently quite a babe — rather a more positive figure than most queens were. Her tomb was found by an Italian archeological mission not long ago, in perfect condition. Subsequent to its opening, however, it got damp somehow, and the damp has made a very sorry condition, where the salts in the stone come to the surface and cover the surface with a sort of growth, obliterating the carving pretty thoroughly, and also making the plaster separate from the rock. There are some spots in the tomb where even a deep sigh would cause something to chip away. This disease of rock has affected many monuments here and no one has been able to find out how to restore, or even stop the process. Like most royal tombs this one is full of mystic symbols, and its paint is bold and bright, and its sculpture nice. It is located in the Valley of the Queens, which is the southernmost edge of the Theban Necropolis.

There are some little princes buried there too — we saw at least three tombs of young sons of Ramesses III. It was interesting to see how all the tombs for Ramesses' family were done by one master artist — the colors and the style were identical throughout.

We visited the Ramesseum, too, mostly because I felt I should see the buildings that the Oriental Institute had published. Its unique location on the very edge of the cultivation gives it an odd aspect — all the area between the pylons is watered and it grows like a sort of wild garden, an aspect which to my mind improves the looks of the place considerably, as well as providing one with a branch of something like a juniper to use as a fly switch. I amused myself by making a little sketch of it while my companions read inscriptions.

The Luxor fire department has just gone by on its weekly exercise run. It would be difficult to date the truck — late 1920s model I should guess. It doesn't look awfully efficient, but it can go fast enough and it rings a nice bell like a streetcar bell as it charges down the avenue. The firemen weren't aboard, but they are equipped with shining brass helmets of a more dashing epoch.

We are having another batch of visitors, this time a professor from American University in Beirut and two children and an odd lady. The

odd lady is a Mrs. Bodman, aged about twenty-five, very lively and good looking, who teaches also at AUB, plus running a household and two children, the kind of young American woman who is to me very characteristic of our best products — well dressed, well groomed, intelligent, dauntless, and energetic. The dining room hums with fine argument between her and the professor's son who is probably about seventeen and very much the college freshman.

There has been a drought of mail this week. I hope something comes today.

All continues well.

Love — Margie



## LETTERS FROM IRAQ

Hotel Zia  
Baghdad, Iraq

Saturday, February 20, 1954

Dear Family,

Despite an inauspicious beginning (at 4:30 A.M.), this day so far has not been bad. But to go back a bit — in Cairo I didn't go to the opera after all because the escort never showed up. And also I came down with a cold that evening, too — low barometric pressure no doubt because yesterday it rained! But Willy Cates' friend, Varouj Minassian, came to pick me up yesterday to go see the treasures of the ex-king which are on exhibition at the monstrous great Qubba Palace. There was a large stamp collection which we didn't look at, but Farouk also collected ornate watches, snuff boxes, anything that can be enameled and studded with diamonds, such as sewing cases, binoculars, bonbon dishes, and the like.

I suppose I should have been more impressed than I was because certainly these things will scarcely ever be made again, but I kept thinking of the dusting! Well kings can't give each other books and candy, so I suppose not all of the taste was Egyptian. The prize pieces were the Fabergé enamels, presumably gifts to Fouad, Farouk's father, from the Russian royal family. And there was a very bejeweled and rococo box of the time of Frederick the Great encrusted with diamonds so enormous that they must have been something else — say white topaz, if there is such a thing.

The silver was displayed in another room and was apparently thought little of by the English auction company that is appraising the collection because it was piled together much too closely and hardly even dusted, to say nothing of being polished. If there was any good

eighteenth century English silver there I didn't see it. Most of it was highly ornate and not even very grand looking except in that size is grand. The pictures visible were of the Meissonier type — no filthy pictures at all!

I bumped into my friend Lady Lowther, who was my seatmate on the trip out on the plane from London. She asked me three times what I had been doing, and where I was going, and after the third time I just decided everyone there had heard the inquisition often enough, so we slipped away.

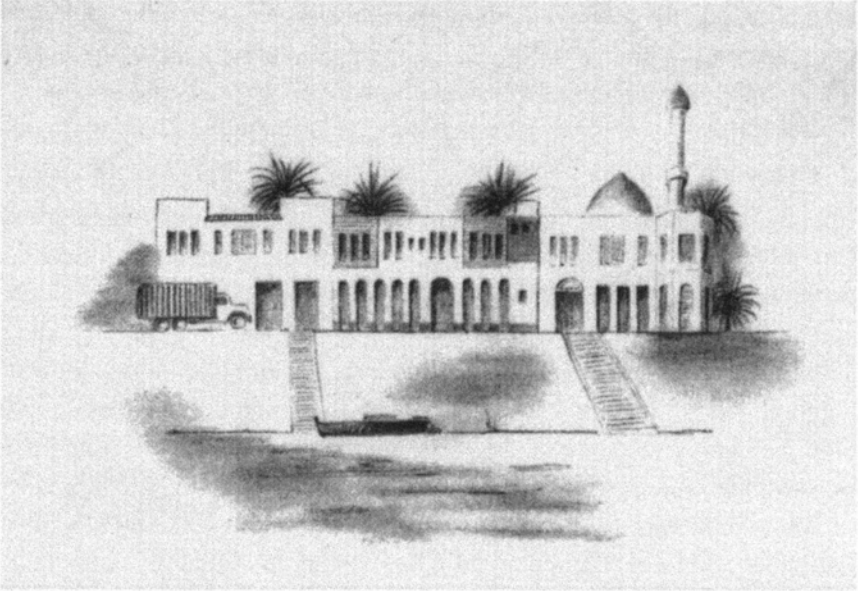
Lunched with Ann Bouscaren and her American girl friends on the houseboat-hotel *Arabia*. And gossiped with the girls all afternoon. Mrs. Eichelberger, whose husband was formerly in the sales department of the University of Chicago Press, has a poodle(!) — Robert. He must be a near relation of Jones Johnson, he looks so much like him. Robert came from Mrs. Morrison of Chicago, and his official kennel name has Blakeen in it, which I think Jones' name has, too. Robert walks like Jones, too, with his hind feet turned in.

The air trip to Baghdad was without incident except for the horrors of ear popping — or lack of popping — that goes with a cold in the head. Even six hours after landing my ears gurgle when I blow my nose.

It was mostly cloudy until we started to come down — well earlier we could see the Mediterranean and the coast of Lebanon, and the vine terraces seen from on high look most fascinating. We couldn't fly over Israel of course. We came down at Damascus and lost most of the passengers. Two-and-a-half hours later we dropped below the cloud and saw the Euphrates, very brown and meandering. Presently the Tigris comes in sight, and you're there! It was raining slightly, but the air had warmth — like an early April day at home.

No difficulty with passports or anything — Thomas Cook met me of course and in a few minutes we were here in time for a good lunch and a spate of mail, all from the Oriental Institute people. After lunch I walked for an hour up and down the main street, and I decided immediately that I liked Baghdad. Sidewalks are mostly under arcades, and ornate balconies on the face of all the buildings which aren't tall — two or three stories — and often nicely trimmed with fancy plaster work. I caught a glimpse in the distance of a large blue domed mosque, but I didn't want to walk that far.





*A Row of Houses on the West Bank of the Tigris at Baghdad*

Every other shop — size about ten feet square — sells watches, and the ones in between sell auto accessories, toilet goods, and sweets. There appear to be a couple of department stores, though I'm not sure about them as they were closed, as is the custom between 1:00 and 4:00 P.M.

I don't think I saw a single horse or donkey on the street — there were lots of cars and busses. I suppose the beasts must keep to the back streets.

Probably that tramp of mine did no good to my cold, but I'm glad I had it. I think I'll lie low tomorrow — perhaps the sun will shine and I'll be able to bake the cold out.

Enough for now — Margie



Hotel Zia

Baghdad, Iraq

Monday, February 22, 1954

Dear Family,

I have been doing a little discreet research about native dress for gents of Iraq. There are occasional dashing looking Arabs on the streets who wear Arab headbands, two coils of something wound round and round with black yarn, either wool or — if you're very classy — silk. These coils fit on your head cloth to keep it down. The stylish head cloth is white with a black stripy figure in it and fringes, not unlike a tablecloth. It's difficult to tell what sort of garment is innermost — it might be long underwear of the white not red flannel sort, or it might be the voluminous pants that are cut rather like a diaper, tight fitting at the ankles, and gathered around the waist — at least this is how the Egyptian drawers were described to me. Drawstring top. Over this you wear a cotton night shirt sort of robe — with a shirt type collar — no necktie. Over this another long robe, that is perhaps wraparound, and I don't know whether or not it has sleeves, but it peeks out rather as a waistcoat does. The material is men's suiting, usually brown. Over this you wear a matching suit coat European style. And over all a large black or brown robe made by sewing two lengths of material horizontally and turning back the ends toward the neck — just as Helen makes a sleeping bag for her babies. The neck opening is finished with gold or silver braid and the cloak hangs over the shoulders with a nice drape. On rainy days the streets are a sea of thin mud, so the daintier gents pull their robes around them closely, and you see their underdrawers and socks and shoes. Hardly anyone wears the *tarboosh* or *fez*, here. They have a sort of exaggerated army fatigue cap of navy woolen stuff that many youths wear. Many women are fully veiled, and most wear the usual black coverall shawls with their faces peeping out. I saw only one *tarboosh* — and that about twice the height of an Egyptian one. Perhaps the man was a priest of some sort.

You'll be happy to know that I'm nearing the end of this tablet of paper. The next one is a trifle thicker and therefore easier on the eyes. I must apologize to Miss Dunklau, but I'm too stingy to add extra sheets since the air cost from Egypt is so high. I've spent nearly three pounds on postage so far — about eight dollars.

Later: The cold is clearing up a bit I think. I couldn't lie low on Sunday as I had thought to because Michael Zia, the owner of the hotel, wanted me to see Ctesiphon, that great airplane hangar-like remains of a hall near here. Of course we didn't get there because the mud on the roads was too bad. Anyhow the picnic idea is an old one with Michael, who makes passes at all the girls. Even though he sang Arabic love songs and treated me very nicely, I still couldn't enjoy him too much — his build is just like Farouk's!! Imagine being plied with champagne out in the midst of the wild — not the desert but the flattest, most treeless part of the cultivation.

The hotel is small and folksy — holds about forty guests, I think. And they seem to be very nice. Several American couples — Embassy or Point 4.

Love — Margie



Hotel Zia  
Baghdad, Iraq

Monday, February 22, 1954

Dear People,

My letter of two days ago is still not mailed. I can't find the P.O. I still like Baghdad, but like Luxor, it is more agreeable seen from the luxury of the hotel than intimately mixed with the people. It is a howling mass of noise from auto horns and without European standards of cleanliness even in the public buildings.

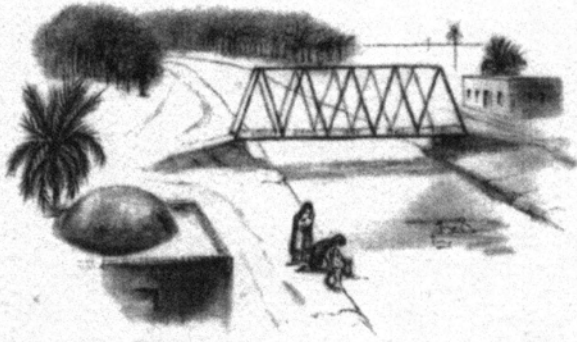
Don McCown, Field Director of the Nippur dig, came to take me to call on Naji al-Asil, Director of Antiquities. He wasn't there when we arrived, so we waited in two other offices that opened on the street and were so noisy with horns that we had to shout. I suppose these offices were clean enough, but they were certainly far from well kept, furniture, walls, rugs, and equipment all very shabby. I presently had a nice inter-

view with Naji *Bey* who is a small calm man in a large, large quiet office. I think he is kind of mystified by my presence here — no more than I am for that matter. And he gave me what they call sour tea — served in a small glass, very sweet, with lemon juice in it.

I spent about an hour and a half in the museum which is certainly not as fine a thing as it should be considering the amount of excavation that has been done in Iraq. I don't know when the antiquities laws were slapped on hard, but it must have been about the time when the Oriental Institute began to dig here. The fullest exhibits of finds come from Khorsabad, the Diyala sites, and from Ur. I was especially interested in comparing the Ur jewelry with the stuff I had faked in brass for my little exhibit in the Oriental Institute. My newer stuff gives a far brighter picture than the old, and yet it is surprisingly accurate in color, shape, and design. The Sumerian sculpture from the Diyala sites is the same as ours at the Oriental Institute, and we have had the advantage of a modern museum with good display equipment. It was rewarding to find out that the inferiority complex developed by the Cairo Museum was dispelled somewhat here. I don't mean to indicate that ours is a better and more complete collection — only it is very representative of all the best here. The most beautiful items are the gold helmet of Ur and the bronze head of a helmeted warrior, whose provenance I have already forgotten, but it's from about the same period.

The Department of Antiquities is at present conducting two excavations, one in the Islamic site of Kufa, and one at Hatra, one of Dr. Kraeling's cities of the Roman Near East which is between Baghdad and Mosul. The installation of the finds from Hatra has been done with considerable dash. Four small niches lit from within and painted rosy red provide a fine background for small Roman statuary — or rather I should say provincial Roman because it is certainly not sophisticated sculpture. But it is all the more delightful to my mind. One large Sumerian statue, found last season at Nippur, dominates the new acquisitions room, but aside from this, it looked to me as if we had had an extremely fair share of the finds there.

I asked what other expeditions were at work in Iraq and was told it was a very light year on the whole. A German group is digging at Warka, and we at Nippur, and the Department at Kufa — that's all. Naji *Bey* said that a Japanese University of Osaka expedition was interested



*The Auto Bridge and Irrigation Canal at Afak, Iraq, Headquarters of the Oriental Institute Nippur Expedition. The Public Bathhouse is in the Foreground*

in excavating here, and I think it pleased him to think that so different and so ancient a culture should want to explore Iraq. The only hitch is, do they have an epigrapher? I should think that if you could read Japanese, you could read anything!

It's pleasant in the sun on the terrace of the hotel — on the Tigris, looking blue in the afternoon light. It is a muddy river, especially in spring as it swells with the spring rains.

Love — Margie



Hotel Zia

Baghdad, Iraq

Tuesday, February 23, 1954

Dear Family,

Today was a sight-seeing day and very pleasant. Faisal el-Wailly, who was a student at the Oriental Institute for five years until this last summer, is now teaching at the University here and also holding down a small office in the Department of Antiquities. He and his American wife very kindly consented to take me sight-seeing — partly, I think, because Anne had seen very little of her new home city since her arrival in December. The el-Waillys have no car, and sight-seeing by bus is awkward here.

Faisal comes from a strong Muslim family, so his acquaintance with Muslim habits and history is rather wider than that of our archeologists. We went to a mosque called Kathmiya, which is just exactly the way a mosque ought to look. It appears there are two major sects in Islam — Turkey is in general represented by one, Iran by the other, and Iraq splits them 50-50. This mosque is of the Shia sect and whether or not this makes any difference to the artistic style I was not able to discover. But because it holds the tomb of the leading “saint” of the sect, it is particularly revered, and also particularly elegant. A self-appointed guide said it was 900 years old, but I think Faisal doubted that. We were not permitted to enter without wearing the black veil of the women, so we could only look in the courtyard that surrounds the mosque, which is a meeting place for the whole community. Actually this mosque is in a suburb of Baghdad. Anyhow the outside gates were just gorgeous, being decorated with colored tiles with ornate flower patterns looking more eighteenth century French than Islamic.

And through the gate we could see the exterior wall of the mosque-tomb, even more gorgeously arrayed. The effect is very gay since the tiles have white backgrounds with red, blue, and green flowers and ornament. The doors of the mosque inside were equally flowered, and in addition there was ornament of mirrored glass, framing the actual door like a great icy series of stalactites (or mites). The glass was laid out in the squinch form which is a characteristic feature of Near Eastern architecture — one of the ways of making the transition from rectangular walls to round dome — or a way to ornament the pointed arch. The

domes of this mosque are all gold — gold leaf it is said, but I should guess gold leaf fused into tile would be more like it. The minarets I apparently didn't notice because I can't remember what they were like — they did have small gold domes on top.

Alongside this mosque is a *souk*, covered over with corrugated iron roofing, so it is dark and pleasantly mysterious. All sorts of goods were on sale, and in a way it was no different from the ordinary native street except that it was a little more concentrated. There were nice smells of fruit and spices and cooking food, and the tiny shops sold shoes and socks and yard goods just like anywhere. Even those poisonously printed velvet cushion covers that one meets in a Wyoming filling station have penetrated this far, with swans, water-lilies, gazebos, and almost Niagara Falls competing with equally gaudy imitations of prayer rugs. Practically no native arts and crafts visible, except the copper cooking pots. We walked through one narrow street with wonderful tiny balconies overhanging it and were surprised at how it did not smell badly at all.

We dropped in briefly at the mausoleum for the king's family — Feisal I, II, and their various mothers and relatives — three domed rooms connected by breezeways through small simple gardens, built of the local burned brick, a pleasant yellow. No ornament at all, other than the pattern the brick made in the dome. It was a very impressive building by its very simplicity.

The Department of Antiquities is engaged in restoring a very interesting building on the edge of the river known as either the Mustansyria or Old Baghdad University. It is a mosque with college, the mosque part being very tiny. I get mixed up here because Mecca is on the opposite quarter than it is in Egypt — one must face southwest here. The building was all brick, ornamented with carved plaster, or with tile that is like carved plaster. No visible color. There is a large open courtyard with a kind of two-storied cloistered look on the long side, and at ends and center a deep two-storied niche, purpose to me unknown — perhaps just to provide shady sitting places. The building was put up by one of the Abbasside rulers, but no one would actually say just what the date was — I guessed around AD 900–1000. An Ottoman ruler added a little bit to it — lengthened the handsome inscription from the *Koran* which decorates the riverfront and which is made of the same buff-colored

burned brick — molded raised letters made before the brick was set in place.

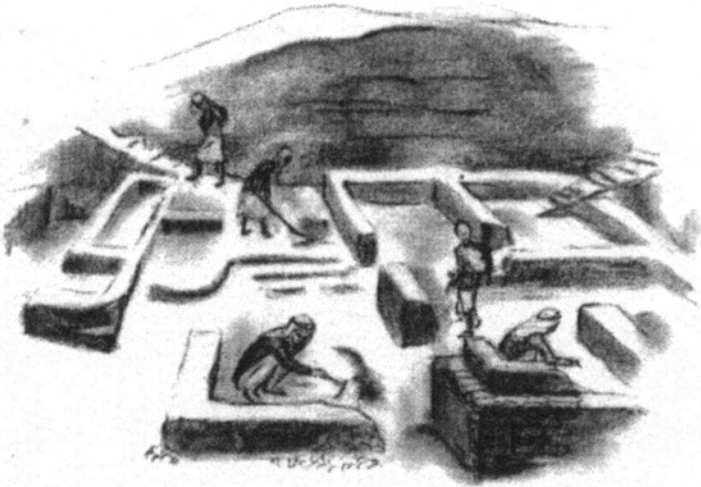
For some years, starting no one knows when, the building gradually fell into disuse, until it was simply used for storage, stables, and a *souk* spread into it. The yearly floods filled the brick with damp and salts and weakened the lower courses of the walls most dangerously while smoke blackened ceilings of ornamental plaster work, and roof leaks made salts come out there, too. The Turks also plastered over some fancy ceilings, perhaps in an effort to preserve them from further chipping.

Anyhow the building was a perilous mess when the Department of Antiquities took it over in 1945. Almost all the brick in the lower courses has had to be replaced, and all the arches and cloisters strengthened. Where the ornamental tiles are still whole, they are left in place, and new casts made from molds have restored the lacy surfaces. It is a really tasteful job of restoration — nearing completion — and it will certainly be an attractive place for tourists to visit in a city that has few such attractions, and very little that is as old as that. Some of the classes of the *faculté des arts* meet in the restored rooms — both Fouad Safar and el-Wailly teach archeology there.

The rain of Saturday has swollen the Tigris so that it has raised about three feet overnight. Its flood peak is in May, when the snow in the Turkish mountains adds so much water to the river already loaded by the earlier melting snows of the Iraqi mountains that are drained by a number of tributaries feeding the Tigris. If the spring flood comes too fast there is a general inundation of all the lower half of the country — occasionally even spilling into Baghdad and making streets and gardens a mess for a week or two. The normal inundation can be controlled by canals and dikes, and its only menace is that the floods can come before the end of the growing season, differently from Egypt.

Here winters are colder, so planting time is January and February and harvest is April and May and even June — just when the waters are highest. Egypt can have two crops, one planted in October and ripening in January and a second planted now and ripening in the early summer before the high waters come in August. There is far more arable land here than in Egypt, but far less of it is under cultivation due in part to poor irrigation policies of the last 100 years. The British are blamed, of course, as they are blamed for every disaster here.





*Uncovering 5,000-year-old Floor in the North Temple, Nippur*

The Point 4 and Embassy people that I've talked to feel that Iraq is in very good economic shape now, thanks to its oil revenues, and many fallow agricultural areas are being reclaimed by new irrigation as rapidly as possible. Certainly Iraq is getting ready to take the progressive lead in Near Eastern affairs being not hamstrung by over population like Egypt or bankrupt like Iran.

I trust you all realize how superficial these remarks are.

Love and so forth — Margie



Headquarters for Nippur

Afak (pronounced Effejj), Iraq

Thursday, February 25, 1954

Dear Family,

What a day yesterday was! The expedition car called for me at the hotel at 7:30 and we started off to drive down to Afak, which is about 150 miles southwest of Baghdad, and with good conditions about a six hour drive. However, good conditions did not prevail since there had been two days of rain on Friday and Saturday. The road became bad and bumpy even inside of Baghdad, but one soon gets used to bumps and is very brave.

The contrast of the countryside to what I was used to in Egypt was amazing — there seems to be no limit to this land, which is flat, flat, flat, and arable everywhere where water can be brought. Villages are low, tent settlements almost equally invisible, and so only mounds and palm groves are seen to break the plain. The soil here is a more agreeable color than Egypt's, a light pinky beige, while Egypt's is really mud color. The crops are just beginning to show green, so I couldn't identify anything except for a grasslike stuff, which will probably turn out to be wheat. Inside walled enclosures the palm groves shared their water with fruit trees, apricots and peaches, all now in bloom and very beautiful and delicate against the coarse palm leaves.

The few villages we went through were built along major irrigation canals and had their groves of palms around them. The rains had laid the dust temporarily, but I could imagine how dense it could be where the main road passed down the main street of the village. The houses are usually set back fifty feet or so from the road and the areas in front filled with children and dogs, or with wooden benches, usually painted light blue, on which the men sit, seemingly all day in the sun outside the coffee shops.

The little family groups of women and children tending goats, squatting by the roadside or by patches of fodder that is so characteristic of Egyptian farm living, is completely absent here — probably plenty of food is available so they can graze larger flocks. There are many flocks of sheep visible, tended by two children, a couple of dogs who are apparently more companions than herders, and a couple of donkeys, for rounding up strays. Flocks of camels a-plenty — wonderful silly beasts

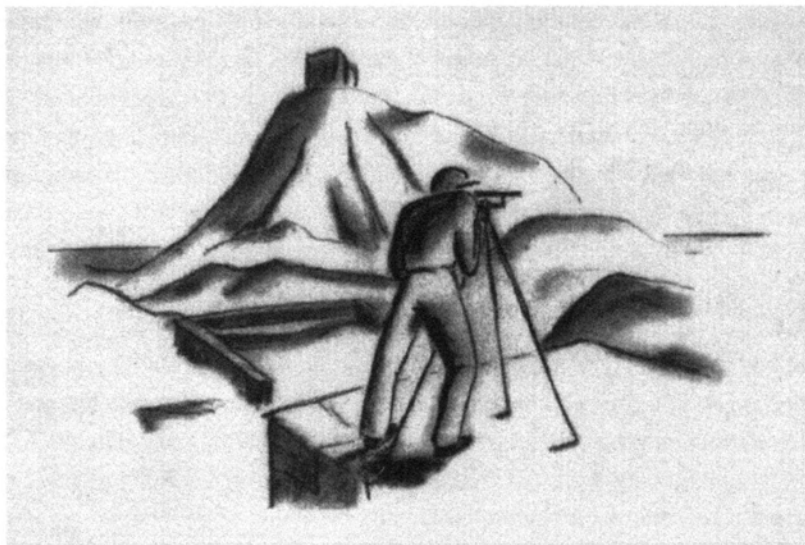
about twice the size of Egyptian camels, and a rather unpleasant brown color.

The road was incredibly rough but hard for about fifty miles. But then trouble came. Because the roads are not built on dikes, they have no drainage from rainstorms, and large puddles — nay lakes — can form, which will only dry out by evaporation. The fine mud is very slippery, and with the churning of wheels of cars and busses that can manage to get through them, the bottoms of the puddles get slurpier and slurpier. Generally the puddles were not too difficult for the four wheel drive jeep to pass — but, oops, in one the wheels went into a hole where a previous vehicle had gotten jammed, and there we were stuck. The driver waded about trying to dig us out and spinning the wheels so we just went deeper. I took off my shoes and stockings and waded to dry land with a book to read and an orange to eat, and we waited. After about three-quarters of an hour the road mending crew that we had passed a way back caught up to us, and the men tried to push the jeep by hand. No go. But lo, a fine pulsating sound of a heavy vehicle was heard and the road scraper hove in sight. With just a touch from him, and we were on our way.

We would pass busses (which are really large Chevrolet trucks with wooden station wagon type bodies built on them) coming in the opposite direction, so we knew that we would probably be able to get through — with luck. After an hour or so, however, another disaster — this time in a puddle so deep that the water came into the engine. This was hopeless, as we couldn't even start the engine — the battery was low anyhow — so I again waded to shore and settled down. It was 12:30, so we ate some sandwiches and resigned ourselves.

The driver speaks a little English but not enough for conversation! Peasants passed by on foot, women drove sheep and donkeys, the two children tending a flock of sheep nearby came and stared and stared. It was windy, so I tried to find shelter behind a low palm tree, which gave the shelter but which was too close to the edge of the puddle for real sitting comfort. Anyhow the day was beautiful and the sun warm, and I didn't worry about getting out — not for a while at least. Two R.R. trains went by, in good sight and I wished I had been on the train.

Occasional groups of laborers would walk by, discuss the affair, leave their spades and their cloaks on a palm tree, and wade out to try to



*The Field Architect Leveling at the Inanna Temple  
at the Foot of the Nippur Ziggurat*

push the car. No luck. A police official appeared presently and with much palaver succeeded in assembling a third batch of laborers to try to push the car. At that moment another car — a Ford V8, convertible sedan, containing about ten passengers, splashed by, and one of the big rickety busses. No one could push by car because it was too deep — actually knee deep. I think it took about twelve men, chanting a cheering song, and rocking the car up and down, to get it unstuck. With cheers and smiles and no *bakshish* at all! So after two hours we were off again.

We had only two more puddles to negotiate before we got to dry road again — and in one of them the Ford got stuck. We pushed him out successfully and with a great wave of relief on my part were on our way again. I'd had visions of bedding down in the back seat of the station wagon for the night. We were still nearly three hours from Afak — and it was 2:30 in the afternoon.

Perhaps that part of the road was extra wet because it runs along the main large irrigation canal of this region — a good wide full canal. Once that road left its side, all was dry and hard — but bumpy, oh my! With great enthusiasm I greeted the town of Diwanieh, a provincial town, obviously the district center. The same attractive balconies — or rather overhanging second stories, in wood in patterns — giving rather

the same effect as the old English half-timbered buildings do. Minas bought me a Pepsi Cola, and we got some gas and struck off across the howling wilderness to Afak.

There is very little cultivation in that twenty mile stretch, but there could be — it's mostly grazing land for camels and sheep — but not real desert. In the distance presently we could see the mound of Nippur, and the palm groves of Afak. Soon welcoming servants unloaded the car, and I walked into the Oriental Institute headquarters in Iraq.

The house faces on the canal, part of the usual row of house fronts — one story high in front, and two in back. Built of yellow burned brick with beams in the front room that are probably railroad rails. There is an attractive little shallow barrel vault of brick between each beam. Brick floors, and all the necessary furniture for dining and sitting in the front room. Behind it is the "museum" and work room — facing onto the court which is wash-up place as well as passage. There is nothing elegant or convenient here at all, but it is surprisingly comfortable.

Irene Haines greeted me with two children, Carleton and Alice, nine and eleven respectively. Later Vaughn Crawford of Yale showed up and Carl Haines, expedition architect, and Thorkild Jacobsen. Don McCown stayed in Baghdad with his wife who was not feeling well. It was good to settle in for a gossip with old friends over a cup of tea, and to get introduced to my new home for a week. I'm settled in a room in the Haines' house which is on the other side of the canal. There is pure water here now, and electric light, and warmth from kerosene stoves. Grass mats on the floors, chests of drawers for clothes, and hot water available on one's own stove or ready on the Primus in the morning. Camp beds with air mattresses and sleeping bags are very comfortable for me, and my first quiet, quiet night was good.

A letter from mother came today. I still haven't heard what hotel we will be in Rome. It is necessary for me to know that soon. Very pleased to know that Boots is a Friday Club member. High time, too. All continues well. Cold still noisy, but not bad. Hope it goes before I have to fly again.

Love — Margie



Headquarters for Nippur

Afak, Iraq

Friday, February 26, 1954

Dear Family,

There was a feeling amongst the powers that be here that I should be broken in gently to life at Afak, so Irene Haines and I just had girl talk in the morning and roamed about the village, looking at the *souk* and "dressmakers row," where sewing machines are busy making clothes for the natives, each sewer, always a man, in his own little shop. Nothing but knitted goods, underwear, and socks is available ready made. As usual, there are practically no locally made things, excepting the reed mats and baskets. There was a yarn shop where the very coarse yarn was dyed and made ready for home weaving of rugs. The local rugs are exceedingly gaudy in color, featuring orange and red and blue and green. The quiet earth colors are naturally not so much appreciated by the people who live too close to the earth anyhow. What they want is the brightest possible contrast.

Vaughn Crawford was taking a photograph of an oven, on the banks of the canal, where only a few days ago he had seen some men repairing a boat by applying melted bitumen for caulking. This oven is really more like a built-in melting pot than an oven. There is a shallow mud-brick basin, about two feet by three, heated from a firebox beneath. It is exactly the same as one found at Nippur, built some 4,000 years earlier. Bitumen was the universal glue — it was used as mortar, as waterproofing, caulking and for mending broken sculpture, and anything else one can think of. Its fine black substance has kept its identity well through the years of burial.

I wrote a letter and Irene mended a pot so that it could be measured and drawn by Izzet Din, who is the Iraqi representative of the Department of Antiquities assigned to the dig.

In the afternoon Carl Haines and Thorkild took me the bumpy six miles in the truck (the jeep and the station wagon being temporarily out of commission) out to the mound of Nippur. It is beautiful — I was surprised at how much grandeur can remain in such a pile of rubble. The great mound that was the ziggurat dominates the scene as a mountain can because its height, though not great in feet, is so enormous in comparison to the dead-flat countryside. No wonder the Sumerians built

mountains for their gods to live in. I won't attempt to describe the excavations because everyone knows what they look like in general. A photograph can never show the delicate variations of color that can give dimension and life to an excavation. And nothing can describe adequately the sounds — the busy delicate thudding of the picks, the quiet conversations, the whisper of the constantly blowing sand, and the occasional twentieth century rumble of the U. of C. and McK. railway cars in which the debris is dumped.

With the usual encouraging statement "you should have seen it yesterday" we proceeded to explanations. But at first view I couldn't make any sense out of the walls and doors and floors, so I just settled down to watch one or two pickmen hacking away, while Carl and Thorkild tried to figure out some odd architectural feature of the North Temple which seemed to be baffling. The pickmen were all destroying Level 8, whatever that is, which had been completely mapped and studied, and were feeling their way down to a new level — which in some cases meant they were finding a floor about ten inches lower than the one they had already cleared. Often the pickman starts in the middle of a room to search for the new floor, which he discovers more by feel and by the way the chunks of mud break away than by any change in color or texture. Once he is satisfied with the new level, he works carefully toward a known wall, to see if the lower level of wall will be in the same position as the already exposed one. In many cases the walls are found easily where they are expected to be, and then the pickman moves along the wall to the corner. I imagine the sound that the pick makes as it strikes the mud is as important a guide to the experienced man as the look of the chunk as it falls away. Carl and Thorkild held much palaver about the way a wall and a door lintel were meeting. There is constant uncertainty about architectural features. "If we can make sense out of this, it will be very amusing," says Thorkild. There's no altar yet, and there should be. But one can't know until a whole new layer is peeled off.

They are moving down so fast in the North Temple that Carl is as busy as the well-known one armed paperhanger keeping the mapping up to the pace of the digging. Normally a whole area is cleared down to a certain level and then every one gets out while the architect maps. Carl is so speedy that he can map a room at a time, even while the pickmen are starting down to the new level. Any miserable spoiled domestic ar-

chitect at home should see what a field architect has to contend with — not only a multitude of walls to map — but floors on different levels, and the very bricks as they are laid in the floors and walls — every find of size must be pinpointed on the plan — both horizontally and vertically, and drains traced. And to make things worse, occasionally there is a burial of a later period that cuts down through the evidence of earlier days and really bollixes things all up!

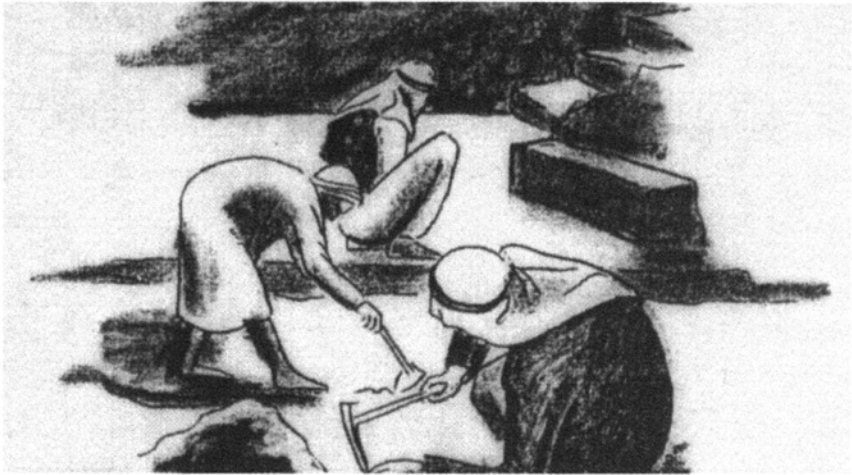
Shop talk at night gets very mystifying to me, but no one seems surprised at that.

It rained again a bit last night, and the trip home on the slippery mud was not much different from walking on ice. Luckily Thorkild had an extra pair of rubbers, so that I could take off my shoes and paddle home in Donald Duck flappy feet. The wind has shifted to the north, and the air is cold again. The sand blowing at the dig has discouraged me from going out there again today so I am improving the happy hour by typing the list of tablets found in 1949/50, with tiny descriptions of them, to be ready for “the Division” (which means the divvyng up) which Thorkild will supervise when the dig closes down in two weeks time. There were 700 odd tablets found in 1949/50 and 900 odd in 1951/52, so you can see I have a long way to go yet before the list is complete. This kind of hack work is just what an expedition always lacks, especially at the tail end of the season.

Irene has started to pack up pots and sherds to send to Baghdad for the division, and Vaughn is numbering the last batch of tablets before it gets too late. There is no time to assess any of the finds while one is on the dig. Finds can only be quickly registered and described, potsherds sorted only enough to find out which ones will be valuable for study later, and which are well known for type and so on. I have no notion of what you learn from potsherds, but learn you do. Don McCown, the Field Director, is the potsherd expert here, while Thorkild of course supervises the tablets. Every one can do everything actually, at least as far as “dig duty” is concerned.

What no one can do is maintain the vehicles to everyone’s satisfaction. There is a mechanic, Minas, an Armenian (I seem to be running into a lot of Armenians, don’t I?) whose normal life is spent running a shoe shop in Basra. He is the driver and he is supposed to be able to fix the cars when they go wrong. But there seems to be a lot of dissatisfac-





*Shergat Pickmen at Nippur*

tion. I think poor Minas is the goat of the expedition's minor irritations, and perhaps it's better to have it be him than for the staff to be cross with each other. When you live so closely together it's not hard to get on someone's nerves. On the other hand, it's hard for me to imagine how any of these nice people could irritate each other. A common purpose is doubtless the magic element.

I'm hoping to get a chance to sketch a bit at the mound. When I look over my sketchbook now, I see that it is very feeble indeed. Fun while it was happening, but surely not to be published.

I may not be too regular in reporting after this. One can't tell how frantic things will get. I will start soon to address letters to Trumpington Rd. A letter from Daddy today tells of Rome Hotel.

News of Naguib's resignation came today. Very odd. There are many Egyptians who will be highly distressed because the old General was greatly admired not only for the fact that he represented the Revolution, but also for his own personality.

Time to go to bed now. All well, no gippy tummy. Nothing.

Love — Margie



Headquarters for Nippur

Afak, Iraq

Tuesday, March 2, 1954

Dear Family,

I feel that it is time to sing a little praise about Carl Haines, who is the field architect. This week, in addition to the plotting duties, he has been Field Director also, because Don McCown has been staying in Baghdad where his wife is not well. Normally an architect's duties are roughly these: as soon as the dig is reached at the beginning of the season, he fixes a "base line" from some well-seen landmark, in the case of Nippur, the ziggurat. For details of this, ask your nearest surveyor. You fix points, I know, on high places, and all other measurements are made in exact relation to these points. A little concrete is poured to affix a mark to and I'm sure plumb-lines and all come into it, too. As the dig progresses downward one must set up new points of reference that are closer in to the work than the original points. Then when you need to record the walls that have been uncovered, you set up a plane table which holds your drawing and sight your fixed points each time you draw to make sure that the table is facing the right way. Various tools help this operation, but the basic tools are the open sight alidade, the long tape measure, a sharpened pencil, a ruler of the right scale, and a boy to hold the pole which is sighted through the alidade. All very clear, no doubt. Anyhow, the boy holds a pole at the corner of the door that you want to plot on your drawing. You line up the pole with the slot in the alidade, and then draw a little line along the side of the alidade. The measuring tape is to tell you how far the pole is away from you, and you have a nice little ruler that turns meters into centimeters, and so it is easy to make a scale drawing. All cogent points like corners, doorjambs, wobbles in walls, fireplaces, wells, whatever, can be quickly plotted, and quickly is the right sentiment, especially now, at the end of the season, when everyone must work fast. The North Temple is being cleared so rapidly that the architect is really kept jumping.

He must also be available to consult the pickmen about the odd appearance of this wall, or that floor, and of course be on hand if an exciting find is made. I have been a pretty good Jonah while I've been here because there have been almost no finds at all outside of potsherds.

Then also, there is the constant problem of trying to figure out what the evidence really is, a subject that can last well into the night.

In the North Temple, for instance, the pattern of temple walls which had remained fairly consistent down to the level called Early Dynastic II (*circa* 3000 BC) suddenly took on a new look, as if the temple were going to peter out. In other words, it looked as if we had got back to the period before the temple was founded. But no, one pickman working a little faster than the others, finds that one wall of the cella, or holy of holies, was superimposed on an older floor, and the floor can be traced underneath to the south. Cheers. Thorkild had become depressed at the thought that the temple would not give us an unbroken history down to bedrock, so to speak, because it appeared that we were finding the pre-temple private houses. Today the floor, now two levels below what it was day before yesterday, dived beneath the south wall of the cella, and two little tunnels were underway. Meanwhile, on the other side of said wall, but much higher up, many men were digging like mad to get down to meet the tunnels. Fortunately it looks as if there had been something like a street outside this wall, so the digging can progress with all speed without running into important remains that have to be plotted. Clear as mud, isn't it? It's astonishing how fascinating such adventures can become to the greenhorn like me.

I sketched for a bit, with considerable giggling on the part of the men when they discovered they were being drawn. Such awful pictures. I wonder if I shall ever get the hang of it again.

Work officially stops here in two days, but they hope to carry on for another two weeks with a skeleton crew. Much putting away has to be done anyhow, such as the Decauville R.R. being taken up and the tools cleaned and stored, as well as the packing up of the household goods. This house remains ours, which is handy. There is a guard in residence all summer, so one only need move the equipment into rooms and lock the doors. Everything is all ready for the next expedition to use, stationary, bedding, cutlery, hammers, and saws, what have you.

I am sending this letter to Boots. No copies were made by me.

Love to all — Margie



Baghdad, Iraq

Saturday, March 6, 1954

Dear Boots,

My plane to Damascus was canceled after I'd sat in the airport for three hours — leaves tomorrow morning at 8:00 — and there's no other flight out of here tonight. A fine kettle of fish because the hotels are all full of some sort of welfare convention — social workers yet, and I'll probably have to spend the night in Michael Zia's home well chaperoned by his two sisters — but he's Baghdad's chief wolf who has been earnestly in my pursuit for several days now. Bulletin: Some arrangement will be made in the hotel!

I can't remember just what I said about Afak and Nippur. There are a few more things to say, anyhow, before I see new fields to describe.

It surprised me how comfortable it all was there despite the dirt (mud-brick floors), the dust and the lack of plumbing. Garnet McCown, who brought her two smalls (four and two and a half) out here this year, felt that it was too awful for anything and she had to beat a retreat to Baghdad, where more modern facilities could be found. The boy got typhoid despite his shots and the purification of the water. He was always susceptible to any disease anyhow, and no one was surprised, except his mother, when he became ill. He's O.K. now, but typhoid is not an easy disease to nurse. But that's beside the point — I want to try to describe Afak (I think I've done the house).

Afak is a village of some 5,000 souls according to the local police. By our standards it is about four blocks long and four blocks deep — no, even smaller — say ten acres. That's a pretty small village to house 5,000 people, so you can guess how they live doubled up — the whole family and the animals sleeping together. The main irrigation canal of the district runs through the village — a shallow brown stream about twenty feet wide — occupied by large numbers of white geese, picturesque and comical. The houses on either side of the canal are apparently a peg finer than the others — anyhow they are inhabited by the posh members of the community — the judge, the Khameer Khamey (that's what it sounds like — he's the mayor), the chief of police, and so on. They are one-storied houses, plaster of a yellowish color built of burned brick, around an interior courtyard. There are no gardens visible — just mud — and there is an advancing birthrate it seems — although what is

really true is that public health is improving all over Iraq and fewer babies are victims of all the diseases that filth can produce.

The streets are mud, all yards are mud, and it really isn't as dirty as it looks. It's hard as a rock when it's dry, and of course powdery, so it's all over all the urchins. The children love any sort of vehicle, so there is always a swarm of them watching the jeeps and trucks go by. There was one little menace of about age three who charged out of nowhere whenever he heard us coming and made passes at the front wheels, so that the car had to be stopped if it couldn't escape him. One day Thorkild chased him and caught him when he tumbled down on his face, baring his little brown behind (they never wear underdrawers), and gave him the padding of his life. Apparently that did the trick because the next day he was watched by an older child, and when the car came in sight the older one simply toppled the menace right over like a ten pin before he had a chance to chase the car.

The roads are no different from any other surface except the cultivated parts — mud as hard as cement when dry and as slippery as slush when wet. The roads are never rolled or scraped — either would be impossible under either wet or dry conditions — so they just seem to change with the traffic. After a rain the trucks leave great ruts which eventually solidify — and presumably after enough feet and tires pass over them the ruts get worn down a bit. Roads are incredibly bumpy especially in the town and villages.

Along one side of the canal is a nice row of trees — eucalyptus — and of course the palms dot the village and give it shade of a sort. Every morning you can see the girls and women setting out on their search for firewood — they find a kind of tumbleweed that no one wants. Sometimes they have to walk five or six miles to find the fuel which is carried back in great indescribable piles on their heads. From a distance a group of these women look like haystacks on legs. One sees them carrying the fuel and washing in the canal — dishes or laundry — and that's all you ever see of them. In the village the women are gradually getting used to foreigners and they even attempt to salute you as the children do with "Good Morning" — or whatever remark of that nature they have learned. Women without *abas* are suspect in Afak — like many rural communities it is extremely conservative. The judge's eldest daughter is one of the three teachers at the girls' secondary school. She is nineteen

and wants to be emancipated from wearing the *aba* — the black coverall cloak the women wear over heads and all. Public opinion in Afak, however, made itself well known on the subject and the girl must wear an *aba* if she is to teach the young ladies!! I don't know what the men do with themselves all day — presumably they farm — or do something agricultural. There are a lot of them visible in the coffeehouses all day long. The most dashing coffeehouse is at the corner where the *souk* street meets the canal. It is full of bright lights at night — all fluorescent tubes, and a radio blaring Arabic music goes all the time. It is the male social world, the pub, the club, where conversation is presumably considered an art — and where gambling games like backgammon lead the villagers from the straight and narrow. I suppose the reason for this kind of night-life is simple — there's no place at home to sit, and papa doesn't want to go to bed as early as the kiddies.

There is a very studied indifference to the presence of the *farangi*, the foreign ladies. It would be extremely rude of the men and women to appear to notice us at all. But of course they do, and the Haines' children feed us with the gossip about ourselves that the local children tell them. There's always a welcoming committee when the jeeps get in from Nippur in the evening, and one is aware of many eyes watching one's progress from the Haines' house to the expedition house on the opposite bank of the canal. The children are all friendly — this is permitted of the young. Only officialdom is entitled to speak to us — the police chief and so on. Of course I was never able to recognize one person from another. The Arab headgear tends to hide the face a bit, and all these headgears are the same. Therefore all the men look alike. Horrible thing for a woman to confess — who is so conscious of headgear on other women.

Thursday, the 4th, was the last official day of digging — all but eleven men were being laid off. So the Shergatti (the remarkable men from the village of Shergat who have built up a sort of guild among themselves as skilled pickmen — for further description read Linda Braidwood's book *Digging Beyond the Tigris*) had themselves a party — the expedition bought them two veal, and they doubtless feasted themselves on the first real meat binge any of them have had in a long time. I watched the payroll being handed out — it's a little ceremonial dear to them all — and I was much impressed and touched by their cal-



*Part of the Via Dolorosa in the Old City of Jerusalem*

lused sensitive hands and fine brown faces — faces like the one on the great Assyrian winged bull in the Oriental Institute Museum.

Boots — all other letters I'll send to you, too — but they will taper off now. I may have a newsletter-type about Jericho and Jerusalem — we'll see. Anyhow I'll send that direct to Dr. Kraeling. If Miss Dunklau can copy this her eyesight must be terrific.

Love — Margie



Jerusalem

Friday, March 12, 1954

Dear Carl,

Went to Jericho today with the ASOR group. Gave your greetings to Miss Kenyon and pumped the hand of Mr. Harding who happened to be there. Wow. What a place this Jordan is. Such scenery, such flowers, such shattering drives, and very nice weather to boot.

All the ASOR people have been very cordial, including the domestic help. Muilenburgs have been grand!!

Everyone hopes that you will put in an appearance this year. I'm not surprised at your fondness for the place, but how you could stand the weather last year, I don't know. The school is like a tomb, despite the warm midday sun. American Colony Hotel is the most attractive place I've stopped in yet, and centrally heated!

But I won't mind leaving. I'm ready for going home now and restless to get to Rome.

Yours till trees bark, M.

P.S. (Happy birthday the other day. I forgot. Imram remembered!)