SHERDS ON THE BEACH OF AQABA, JORDAN

Donald Whitcomb

Sir Richard Burton, before he translated the Thousand and One Nights, visited the sleepy port of Aqaba in 1878. He admired the “beach of the softest sand, which would make the fortune of a bathing-place in Europe.” Little could he imagine that some 100 years later those beaches would be full of Europeans and Americans, many of whom would take the bus to visit Petra, an arduous adventure in his time. These tourists, while in Aqaba, usually see the old castle in the center of the Ottoman and earlier Mamluk town, which is being preserved and restored by the Department of Antiquities.

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RITES OF SPRING: LUXOR 1986

Ingeborg Aeschlimann and Jill Carlotta Maher

Chicago House, the Oriental Institute outpost in Luxor, Egypt, is not the place you would normally look for innovation. After all, the Epigraphic Survey still follows the program of work and uses the same methods originally laid out by James Henry Breasted in 1924. The painstaking production of facsimile drawings of scenes and inscriptions from the monuments proceeds quietly and predictably.

So it was a surprise to find Chicago House the scene of an elegant cocktail event and the focus of an entire weekend in May, the weekend of the Egyptian spring festival, “Shemm el-Nessim,” which has the charming translation “Sniffing the Breezes.” Those who follow the adventures of the Chicago House staff will remember that Director Lanny Bell, Martha Bell and Jill Carlotta have been spending many working days in Cairo, acquainting the business community with the mission of the Survey and asking for help with the financial crunch at Chicago House. Indeed, most of the business leaders in Cairo, both American and Egyptian, had no idea that an American expedition from

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John Meloy standing on a mud-brick wall (area B): to the far left is the edge of the city wall.

Shemm el-Nessim group listens to Chicago House Director Lanny Bell in Karnak Temple.
As Burton noted, "Inland and to the north (of the beach) rise the mounds and tumuli, the sole remains of ancient Elath... A line of larger heaps to the north shows where, according to the people, ran the city wall... Between it and the sea the surface is scattered with glass, shards, and slag..." At the height of its prosperity in the 9th century, the geographer Yaqubi stated, "The city of Ayla is a great city on the shore of the salt sea and in it gather the pilgrims of Syria, Egypt, and the Maghreb. There are numerous merchants and common people..." Muqaddasi, writing in the 10th century, called it a great city, "active and important, with palms and its fish; it is the port of Palestine and the granery of the Hijaz." Curiously, no one seems to have paid attention to comments of travelers and geographers for over a century.

Aqaba is now a large town and thriving port and it was with some surprise when I got off the bus last November and walked across the Corniche road that I could begin picking up sherds on an open field near the center of the city. Unlike the castle and other standing ruins in Jordan, only flat sand and a palm grove can be seen on a slight rise near the beach. I discussed my finds with Dr. Dureid Mahasnah of the Aqaba Region Authority, who warned me that the site was about to be sold for hotel property. After our winter excavations in Luxor, I hastily put together an emergency excavation with the help of Dr. Adnan Hadidi and Dr. Ghazi Bisheh of the Department of Antiquities and Mr. Nasri Atalla of the Department of Tourism. These excavations revealed that beneath the sand and palms lies a great walled city, its walls and buildings preserved at least 4 m in height. Medieval (and possibly ancient) Aqaba had been re-discovered.

The medieval city of Aqaba (or Ayla, as it was then known) was square in plan, 120 x 120 m, of which the northern half, cut by a deep drainage ditch, called the wadi, is still preserved. The stone walls of the city were discovered in two places, near the north corner (area D), where it is 3m wide and part of a tower can be seen, and on the edge of the wadi (area B). The latter area was excavated by John Meloy, a University of Chicago student who was with us at Luxor and proved his ability to excavate stratigraphically while climbing like a Middle Eastern goat. Here he clambered up and down some 6 m of the near-vertical wadi face, revealing the massive mud-brick walls inside the city wall, preserved over 4 m high. Further inside the city he found a succession of stone walls and floors from the Umayyad into the Fatimid periods (7th to 12th centuries). This area is the highest part of the mound, over 7 m above sea level, and the discovery of a limestone column base suggests that a columned hall, possibly part of the administrative center of the city, lies in this area.

A large trench was placed near the edge of the wadi in the center of the town (area A). This was the responsibility of Joe Greene, taking a busman's holiday from his own archaeological survey in northern Jordan. His wife and
daughter, Eileen and Laura, helped with the registration and commissariat and studied the “softest sands” on our hotel beach. In area A, a residential part of the city, Joe found a building made of white sandstone, which was 14 m long, probably square, and probably a merchant’s house. South of this building was part of another house, mostly destroyed by the wadi, with a courtyard between the buildings. A street, 2.5 m wide, ran beside these two houses and more houses are visible on the other side of the street. These houses were excavated only to a depth of 2 m but, judging from the remains in the side of the ditch, at least 2 m more remain. Nearby was a small probe (area C) which traced mud brick and stone walls to a depth of 4 m but still did not reach the bottom. The walls have two stages, the lower is Umayyad and the upper is Abbasid (8th to 10th centuries). The upper wall has pilasters, and the stone foundations strongly suggest that the building was a columned hall, possibly an urban khan or merchants’ hall.

These small trenches reveal a historic sequence from the late Byzantine, Umayyad, Abbasid and Fatimid periods (from the 7th to 12th centuries). The artifacts have revealed much more of the remarkable character of this city, testifying particularly to an international commerce stretching from Jordan as far as China. Many of the ceramic bowls and jars were imported from Egypt and from Iraq. The Iraqi ceramics are identical to the types found at the capital of the Abbasid caliphate, Samarra. The presence of fine lustre wares (with a golden metallic shine), deep blue, yellow and green decorative patterns shows that the finest vessels available were imported. Spices and other products from the East were sent to Aqaba in large decorated storage jars made in Basra. Much of the glass was imported from Syria and Egypt. Perhaps the most fascinating is the discovery of Chinese ceramics, fine celadons and porcelains of the Sung period. These fragments once belonged to the highest quality Chinese ceramics ever made, showing that the merchants of Aqaba were connoisseurs and very wealthy.

As late as the 15th century, the historian Maqrizi commented that Ayla was “formerly the last place of the Roman empire.” Mixed with the Byzantine and Islamic ceramics, particularly in the matrix of the city wall, we found quantities of Roman and Nabataean sherds. The Nabataean pleased our Department of Antiquities representative, Mr. Suleiman Farajat, who is from Petra. Unfortunately our small trenches could not determine whether the ancient site is beneath the later periods or somewhere in the vicinity.

This is just one of the many questions arising from our brief three-week season. The site of medieval Aqaba is unique in Jordan and although half of the city has been destroyed, it is almost miraculous that so much of it remains to be studied. The vast commercial network of the early Islamic period is but an extension of that of the Roman period. When we found our first Iraqi sherds, I commented to an interested observer, “This is from Samarra, which is in Iraq,” “Yes,” he answered, “I’ve been there, I’m an Iraqi.” He would often visit us, when his own mercantile duties allowed him, as would Jordanians, both residents of Aqaba and visitors. Hopefully, future seasons of excavations will reveal more of the city, its towered city walls, its streets and houses. Tourists in the future will no doubt first go to the beach, then to incomparable Petra, but then perhaps stay to learn something of the ancient and medieval history of Aqaba.
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Group on the Nile sailing past Luxor Temple.

Group returns to the ship, The Neptune, after touring Dendera.

the famous University of Chicago existed in Egypt at all. They were amazed to hear we had been operating for 62 years (longer than many of them) and through all kinds of political ups and downs.

It was definitely time to bring these friends we had made in Cairo to Chicago House, and the perfect moment presented itself. We do not normally watch the sky for omens, but two lunar holidays, Shemm el-Nessim and Coptic Easter, lined up with a Friday and May Day to make May 1-5 a very long weekend. At times like these Cairo is hot, closed up, and boring so that its inhabitants are ready for something new.

Eighty guests flew from Cairo to Luxor on May 2 at 6 a.m. (Two guests had longer trips: Francesca Bennett flew from New York City and David Maher from Chicago to join the group!) We were met at Luxor airport by Lanny Bell and taken on sleek busses to the Mövenpick Jolie Ville resort south of Luxor. This is the favorite getaway spot for Americans with its excellent pool, tennis courts, and attractive bungalows. Visitors from Cairo at the Jolie Ville often prefer relaxing to touring in order to gain strength before they resume the daily battle of life in Cairo; this group, however, was different. Lanny and our dear friend from American Express in Luxor, Fathi Salib, guided us quite literally night and day! We had an all day boat trip to the Ptolemaic temple at Dendera (with a lavish buffet and private cabins on board) and a tour of Luxor Temple by
night. The really tough members of the group dragged Lanny back to the West bank on the last morning and barely made the plane back to Cairo.

One evening, before a gala dinner at the Isis Hotel, Martha Bell and Christian Loeben (the Chicago House administrator), aided by Ingeborg who lives in Luxor with her husband, prepared a splendid cocktail buffet for us at Chicago House. The group wandered through the gardens, was photographed in and on the historic '50 Chevrolet that the director uses as his personal vehicle, and learned about the purpose and the method of Chicago House. It was at this event that a "Friends of Chicago House in Egypt" was created by popular demand, and these new friends have already begun to help.

The whole weekend required enormous amounts of energy to plan and execute. Guests paid their own way, but names and number of reservations fluctuated up to the last moment as more people signed on. Boggles and potential disasters were handled gracefully and coolly by Ann and Ron Wolfe, our special friends in Cairo who run a business support and computer training service and who volunteered to handle the complicated logistics for the weekend.

One of the traditions associated with Shemm el-Nessim is the eating of green onions and a special dish, "fisikh," that tastes to Western palates like a fish that has been kept at room temperature far too long. Some of us chose to omit that particular bit of the festivities but decided that in every other way "Sniffing the Breezes-1986" was a wonderful celebration of spring at Chicago House.

FALL MEMBERS' COURSES

INTRODUCTION TO ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHS

Utilizing a very supportive and structured approach, this class will teach the students to read the language of ancient Egypt. Specifically, this refers to that phase known as "Middle Egyptian," which the ancients themselves considered the classical form of their language, and in which most of their great literary and religious texts were written.

In the very first lesson students will begin to translate the quaint little birds, snakes, rabbits and other animals which make up the cacophonous barnyard of the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing system. By reading texts in class and performing various assigned exercises, the students, under the thoughtful tutelage of their Egyptologist-teacher, will learn the subtleties of the Egyptian grammatical system.

Hand in hand with learning to read Egyptian, the students will also learn to write ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs. Thus, the object of this class is not only to foster reading acumen but also to develop a fine hieroglyphic hand. In the nine weekly lessons of this course, the students will translate and make hand-copies of authentic ancient Egyptian historical, literary and religious inscriptions which will be provided by the instructor.

Students will also learn the origins of Egyptian, its place in the tree of human languages, as well as any relationship to modern language. In this regard, students will encounter the sizable corpus of ancient Egyptian loan-words which have descended nearly intact into twentieth century English.

Required texts for this class will be the Egyptian Grammar, by A. H. Gardiner (3rd., rev.), and the Egyptian Reading Book, by A deBuck. A packet of ancillary readings, bibliography, hieroglyphic inscriptions, charts and diagrams will also be distributed in class. Enrollment will be limited.

INSTRUCTOR: Peter Piccione, Ph.D. candidate in Egyptology at the Oriental Institute. Mr. Piccione is an experienced teacher of hieroglyphs. He has also developed a 10-part cassette tape course, "The Life of the Common Man in Ancient Egypt," and reconstructed rules for "King Tut's Game," based on the ancient Egyptian game of senet.

The course will meet for nine sessions on Saturdays from 1 - 3 p.m. at the Oriental Institute beginning Saturday, September 27 and continuing through November 22. Tuition is $70, plus $25 annual membership in the Oriental Institute.

HITTITE ANATOLIA

From their stronghold in the mountains of Anatolia in the second millennium B.C., the Hittites grew into a great power of the ancient Near Eastern world. Hittite kings raided far-off Babylon and vied with Egyptian pharaohs for control of vassal states as they extended their influence eastward into territories of the Levant. Except for biblical references, little was known about the Hittites until the
Fall Members' Courses (Continued)

early part of this century when archaeologists unearthed an archive of clay tablets from the site of their capital at Boghazkoy. These texts give us a picture of the Hittite state based on their treaties with other nations, their laws, royal letters and religious writings.

The military and diplomatic interactions of the Hittites with other peoples of their time made them an important element in the ancient world. This course will investigate various aspects of Hittite civilization and examine the role of this early Anatolian civilization in the larger context of ancient Near Eastern history and culture.

The class will begin with a discussion of geography and prehistory of Anatolia and continue with a session devoted to the Old Assyrian Colony period. For several classes it will concentrate on the Old Hittite state and the Hittite empire, discussing cultural features including language, literature, religion and art. The course will finish with a session on Neo-Hittite Anatolia.

Participants will have an opportunity to see Hittite art facts from Aşşar Hüyük in the collection of the Oriental Institute. Extensive use of slides from Mr. Gorny's recent year of study in Turkey will illustrate class lectures.

INSTRUCTOR: Ronald L. Gorny is a Ph.D. candidate in Anatolian Archaeology at the Oriental Institute. His main area of interest is in Hittite studies. Mr. Gorny has excavated in Israel and Turkey and recently spent a full year studying in Turkey.

Class will meet on Saturdays, 10-12 noon for eight weeks, October 4 through November 22 at the Oriental Institute. Tuition is $60 plus $25 annual membership in the Oriental Institute.

Readings will be assigned from these required books:
Edwards, I.E.S. The Pyramids of Egypt. New revised edition

This course is the first part in a sequence which will cover Ancient Egyptian history from its Archaic Period (ca. 3000 B.C.) through the Roman conquest (ca. 30 B.C.). Students who take the entire sequence will participate in a comprehensive and orderly study of the history of this ancient nation throughout its 3000 years of almost continuous native rule. As space permits, students may also enroll in only those courses of special interest to them; however, priority will be given to those who have taken earlier courses in the sequence.

INSTRUCTOR: Frank Yurco is a Ph.D. Candidate in Egyptology at the Oriental Institute. He has taught numerous courses in Egyptian history and hieroglyphs at the Oriental Institute and the Field Museum.

Class will meet on Saturdays, 10-12 noon for eight weeks, October 4 through November 22 at the Oriental Institute. Tuition is $60 plus $25 annual membership in the Oriental Institute.

Classes meet on Saturdays at the Oriental Institute. Starting dates and times are listed under each course. Please note that Hieroglyphs is given in the afternoon and begins one week earlier than the other courses. For further information, please call the Education Office at 962-9507.

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HISTORY, PART I:
ARCHAIC PERIOD AND OLD KINGDOM

From the final stages of the Naqada II (Gerzean) period of Pre-dynastic Egyptian culture arose the unified state of the First Dynasty, dated to about 3150 B.C. Its roots lie in the moves toward kingship seen at Qustul-Ballana in Nubia and Hierakonpolis and Naqada in Egypt, as both Egyptian tradition and archaeological evidence indicate. This course will trace the evolution of the Egyptian states from these late predynastic antecedents, through to the glories of the Fourth Dynasty when the largest of the pyramids were built, reflecting the absolute centrality of the state. It will continue into the Sixth Dynasty when centralization culminated in the record long reign (90 or more years) of Pepy II and led to the collapse of the central government of the Old Kingdom. Chronological sources, kinglists, biographical texts, and archaeological evidence will all be studied. Readings will be assigned from books recommended for the course and handouts from scholarly sources. In addition, a tour of the gallery will focus on Old Kingdom materials in the collection of the Oriental Institute.

Please register me for the course(s) checked below.
I have enclosed a check for the proper tuition(s).
☐ Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs—$70
☐ Hittite Anatolia—$60
☐ Egyptian History, 1—$60
☐ I am not a member but enclose a SEPARATE check for $25 to cover a one year Oriental Institute membership.

Name

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City State Zip

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Please make all checks payable to
THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE. Please register by the Wednesday before the class starts. Mail to:
EDUCATION OFFICE. The Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, IL 60637.
SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

THE UNSEEN COLLECTION:
TREASURES FROM THE BASEMENT
October 21, 1986 - January 4, 1987

A special exhibition, “The Unseen Collection: Treasures from the Basement,” featuring objects long stored in the Oriental Institute basement, will open October 21, 1986. Some of the Museum’s unseen treasures will be brought out of storage and put on display for the first time. The exhibition will feature objects recovered from the Institute’s excavations, as well as objects which have been donated to the Museum over the years. This is a unique opportunity to view objects in the Museum’s collection that are not normally on display to the public. Institute members attending the gala “Passport to the Past” benefit for the Museum on October 20th will have a special preview of this exhibit. The exhibition closes on January 4, 1987.

ART FROM THE FERTILE CRESCENT:
MASTERPIECES FROM
THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM
November 12, 1986 - January, 1987

The Art Institute of Chicago will present a special exhibition of objects selected from the Oriental Institute’s permanent collection. The exhibit will consist of approximately twenty-five masterpieces of ancient Near Eastern art. Several of the Institute’s best known pieces will be exhibited, as well as a few from the basement which have never been on display before. The exhibition will open November 12, 1986 and run through January of 1987. The Art Institute is open Mondays and Wednesdays—Fridays 10:30—4:30, Tuesdays 10:30—8:00, Saturdays 10:00—5:00 and Sundays and Holidays 12:00—5:00. Admission is free on Tuesdays. For further information, call the Oriental Institute Museum Office at 962-9520.

Striding figure of a ram, a sculptor’s study or votive plaque, limestone, 332-30 B.C., Egypt, OIM 18212.

Female and male statuettes, gypsum with traces of red paint, Tell Fakhariyeh, Syria, possibly 9th century B.C.

Head of Ramesses VI, black granite, 1141-1134/33 B.C., Dynasty XX, OIM E3946.

Among the objects in “The Unseen Collection: Treasures from the Basement,” will be this C-Group bowl depicting cattle, excavated by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition, Adindan, Nubia, dated about 1950-1850 B.C., OIM 23452.
JUST PUBLISHED

OIP 107 (Oriental Institute Publications)
Reliefs and Inscriptions at Karnak, Vol. 4: The Battle Reliefs of King Sety I by the Epigraphic Survey. Chicago, 1986. Pp. xxiv + 166 including 2 figures (paperbound); 50 black and white plates + key plan; all in sturdy portfolio (15° x 19°). Price $125.00

AS 23 (Assyriological Studies)

Members of the Oriental Institute receive a 20% discount on Oriental Institute publications. Members, faculty, staff, and students may order one copy of each of the above books at a discount of 50% on the prices listed if the book is purchased by October 31, 1986. Please send your request to the Publications Sales Office at the Oriental Institute and an invoice detailing the price, discount, and postage and handling fees will be sent to you. Book lists of the current publications are also available from the Publications Sales Office upon request.

LECTURE SCHEDULE

We have not yet completed our lecture schedule for the coming year. A separate card with the list of lectures will be sent to you shortly. Lectures are at 8 p.m. in Breasted Hall at the Oriental Institute. Reminders of the upcoming lectures will be printed in each issue of News & Notes. Institute members may make dinner reservations at the Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, 753-3696 before membership lectures. They will bill the Oriental Institute and we, in turn, will bill you. Please print your name and address at the bottom of your dinner check, as well as signing it, so that we know where to send your bill.

October 1, 1986 Opening Lecture

October 20, 1986 “Passport to the Past” benefit for the Museum

November 13, 1986 Fr. Stanislao Loffreda, Franciscan Biblical Institute, Jerusalem, Excavations at Capernaum. NOTE: this is a Thursday lecture.


NOVEMBER LECTURE

Father Stanislao Loffreda, Director and Dean of the Franciscan Biblical Institute in Jerusalem, will present an illustrated lecture, Excavations at Capernaum, on Thursday, November 13, 1986 at 8 p.m. in Breasted Hall.

HIEROGLYPHS-BY-MAIL TO BEGIN IN OCTOBER

The Introductory Hieroglyphs-by-Mail course taught by Frank Yurco will begin in mid-October. It will consist of ten lessons. As you complete each lesson and return it to the instructor, he will correct the exercises, answer any questions you might have, and return them to you along with the next lesson. It will take about twenty weeks to complete the course.

The two necessary texts will be Gardiner’s Egyptian Grammar and Faulkner’s Middle Egyptian Dictionary, both of which can be ordered from the Suq.

Tuition is $80 plus the annual membership fee of $20 ($25 in the Chicago area). Please register by October 10.

Please enroll me in the Egyptian Hieroglyphs-by-Mail course.

_____ My check for $80 is enclosed
_____ I am a member
_____ I enclose a separate check for annual membership
_____ I would like to order Gardiner’s Egyptian Grammar from the Suq and enclose a separate check (price: $46.00 less 10% member discount, plus 8% sales tax if shipped to Illinois address, plus $3.00 shipping charge).
_____ I would like to order Faulkner’s Dictionary from the Suq, and enclose payment (price: $30.00 less 10% member discount, plus 8% sales tax if shipped to Illinois address, plus $2.50 shipping charge).

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C.A. Keller
The University of California at Berkeley
Wednesday, October 1, 1986 at 8:00 PM
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Please write or telephone 1155 East 58th Street to make a reservation by 962-9513
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14  Egypt: Gift of the Nile
21  Megiddo: City of Destruction
28  Preserving Egypt's Past

OCTOBER  
5  Myth of the Pharaohs/Ancient Mesopotamia
12  The Big Dig
19  Egypt's Pyramids: Houses of Eternity
26  Rivers of Time

NOVEMBER  
2  The Egyptologists
9  Iran: Landmarks in the Desert
16  Of Time, Tombs and Treasure
23  Turkey: Crossroads of the Ancient World

DECEMBER  
7  Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
14  Egypt: Gift of the Nile
21  Megiddo: City of Destruction
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