



News & Notes

Issued confidentially to members and friends

No.119 May-June, 1989

Not for publication



Personal cylinder seal of LUGAL.DUR, showing him being presented to a seated god. (See page 4.)



Official cylinder seal of LUGAL.DUR, with a combat between heroes and animals. (See page 4.)

LETTER FROM NIPPUR

Baghdad
March 19, 1989

Dear Friends,

Since Nippur was an ancient religious center, it is probably appropriate that our two areas this season became known as "heaven" and "hell."

We came out to Nippur this year with two operations in mind. One was to investigate the critical transition from pre-Islamic to Islamic times in Mesopotamia. The other was to elucidate another crucial transition, that from the Early Dynastic to the Akkadian period, about 2350 B. C.

The Pre-Islamic/Islamic transition could be dealt with only by working at the very top of the mound, where the winds would make work very difficult. It takes only one season of work in an exposed place at Nippur to understand why the Sumerian god Enlil (translated by some as "Lord Wind") would have been thought the most powerful of the gods. We knew what we were getting into before we put our trenches in at the top of the West Mound. In February, 1889, when the pioneering expedition from the University of Pennsylvania came to the site for the first time, it pitched its tents and built reed houses on the highest part of the mound. The letters written by that expedition's members and the published reports mention time and again the cold, the dust, the blasts of rain, and the misery. Those conditions probably caused a great deal of the bickering that marked that first season. The expedition's running dispute with the local people ended in a burning of the hellish camp as the team scurried to its boats.

One hundred years later, we located our area WG directly on the campsite of Pennsylvania because it is the highest point at Nippur and we knew we would have here the latest material at the site. By

examining Penn's trenches on the edge of the area, we had determined that Islamic remains rested directly on Sasanian strata and that these in turn lay upon Parthian. We would, therefore, have the chance of recovering the entire sequence of the Sasanian period as well as the beginning of the Islamic.

The Islamic occupation at Nippur ended shortly after 800 A. D., according to the coins found on the surface. The same kind of evidence tells us that we have here the entire range of the Sasanian (224-640 A. D.). The Parthian levels should allow us to extend our knowledge of artifacts from that period (c. 150 B. C.-240 A. D.), already excavated at Nippur in 1964-65.

Although we expected that coins and other artifacts, and especially animal bones, would tell us when we had moved from the Sasanian period into the Islamic, we knew that there would be some haziness in the exact time of transition. There is always a time-lag in archaeological assemblages; although one or two important kinds of items might be changed immediately by decree of new rulers (e.g. coinage), most of the everyday objects would continue for some time, or evolve into slightly different shapes. Even the animal bones might not immediately show a change from pig to non-pig as Islam became dominant. Nippur was, after all, a very mixed city even a hundred years after the coming of Islam, with minority populations of various ethnic and religious groups (probably two or three kinds of Christians, Zoroastrians, and Jews).

Our first level in Area WG was the Pennsylvania camp, with its reed houses still visible as burned stubs of walls and wall supports. The finds were not numerous, just bits of string, some black paper used to cover glass negatives, some sticks left in an ancient pot that the expedition had reused, and a few bits of glass. Below this, we were in the early 9th century A.D., with some fine sherds of glazed

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Erica Hunter excavating an incantation bowl that was buried under a floor in Area WG.

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wares and much coarse, utilitarian pottery. In this level, we had the walls of a rather substantial house built of large, square unbaked bricks. Both the thickness of the walls and the size of the mudbricks were unexpected. Islamic houses I have seen before were rather less substantial. Below this upper Islamic level, we had another stratum datable to the early part of the Abbasid Caliphate (c. 780 A. D.). Directly below that was a level without coins, unfortunately, but still probably within the earliest part of the Islamic. Here we found several incantation bowls upside-down under floors, usually near walls, but not always. These bowls, sometimes called "Aramaic magic bowls," have inscriptions in Aramaic, Mandaic, or Syriac script and call upon various deities to protect specific persons or families and their goods from evil demons. Bowls like this have been found at a number of sites in Iraq, but Nippur is famous for them. Unfortunately, the exact findspots for bowls of this type have seldom been recorded. Penn published some photos of bowls upside down in place, but did not give exact plans or details of dating of the levels. Most usually, the bowls are dated to the Sasanian period, but our evidence seems to show that they were still being used to ward off evil spirits into Islamic times. We need to do more analyses of the pottery of the level to confirm the dating we give. When we excavated the last two almost perfectly preserved specimens, we happened to have with us Erica Hunter, who is an expert on these bowls. She is in Baghdad for the year studying the collection in the Iraq Museum. I invited her down to see our bowls and she came for ten days. She will publish these and other Nippur bowls in a forthcoming report.

We carried this excavation down into Parthian levels, finding massively-constructed mudbrick walls. We ended up with a very good sequence of pottery from the Parthian, Sasanian, and Islamic levels, which Chris Ciuk, a pottery specialist from the Royal Ontario Museum, processed on the site. He is writing up a report on his work. James Armstrong, who was the Associate Director this year, was in charge of the area and will write up a report on the entire operation. Lorraine Brochu, a student of Egyptian archaeology at Chicago, was a site supervisor here and also acted as the registrar of objects for the season. We were able to find in our other operation one faience scarab, with three hieroglyphs, to make her feel at home. I don't know if that small object was enough to compensate for the weeks of wind-blast and dust that she endured in Area WG.

The heaven part of the season was spent in Area WF. Here, about a hundred and fifty meters east of WG, in a low, protected, bowl-like part of the West Mound, we began to dig a deep pit. In 1972, we had excavated a deep pit in this area and had found rich Akkadian levels about eight meters down. Since we wanted to see the transition from Early Dynastic to Akkadian, this seemed to be a good place to look. Having the two operations so close meant that we would have minimal problems in supplying equipment, water, and labor. We began with a ten meter trench and went down about two meters through sand that has accumulated over the past century. At this point, having reached the level of an ancient Seleucid trash pit (c. 200 B. C.), we narrowed the excavation to seven meters, leaving a bench on all sides to prevent the upper part of the baulks from collapsing and falling in on us. The Seleucid pit was enormous and deep. We found at one edge of it the doorway of a house that we can date to the Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid periods (c. 6th-4th century, B. C.). Below this was a level of houses and graves belonging to the time when Babylonia was under the Assyrian empire (7th century B. C.). These graves had important glazed and unglazed pottery which Jim Armstrong found extremely useful in confirming his ideas about the period. The graves were not so welcome to Augusta McMahon, whose operation this was. She is just beginning to work on a Ph.D. that will detail the transition from



John and Peggy Sanders mapping with the laser theodolite in Area WF.

the Early Dynastic to the Akkadian and the finding of these graves meant that the work had to slow down considerably, while each one was excavated. Fortunately for her purposes, if not for a human skeletal specialist's, most of these burials were very badly preserved, with only fragments or just dust to mark the position of the body. ("Dust to dust" is a very real thing.)

While the staff and workmen in Area WG were being blown off the mound or had to hunch over to carry away dirt or just to walk, everyone in Area WF was warm and unbothered by the elements. Even on the one or two days that it rained a bit, and the upper operation had to come to a temporary halt, those of us who by luck or design spent most of our time down in WF got a bit damp from drizzle, but the work never stopped.

At about seven meters down we reached a building made of unbaked plano-convex bricks, which have a flat bottom, but a humped top. Such bricks were formerly thought to be confined to the Early Dynastic Period (c. 2900-2350 B. C.) Our work in the past fifteen years has demonstrated that bricks of this kind were still commonly used through the Akkadian period (c. 2350-2200 B. C.). We assumed initially that this building was Akkadian, but the pottery and figurines soon made us realize that we had reached only the Ur III (c. 2200 B. C.). We had had some slight hints in 1975 that this kind of brick might last into Ur III, but this was the first evidence of a building employing plano-convex mudbricks at this late a date.

We finally reached Akkadian levels and were surprised to find that there were more than two meters of plano-convex mudbrick walls datable to this period. What we had was one small room and part of the courtyard of a house. The small room yielded finds that were very informative and of high quality in themselves. These included a group of five cuneiform tablets, mostly accounts. Nearby, we discovered bronze pins, vessels, and most surprisingly, a glass bead. A couple of days later, outside the building, we found another glass bead, confirming that the first one was not an intrusion from an upper level, but a definite find in good context. We were lucky enough to have with us during those days, Pamela Vandiver, a staff member of the Smithsonian's Conservation Analytical Laboratory. Vandiver is an expert on fired materials, including pottery, faience, and glass. She put the beads under her microscope, made a series of observations, and declared them to be real glass. These beads from the Akkadian period (c. 2300 B. C.), are the earliest definitely datable examples of real glass in the world. Other artifacts called glass have been found in equally early context, but the items have since been lost or have proven to be not true glass. Vandiver began writing up a report on the beads while at Nippur. We will be publishing a joint article in the near future. She also made observations and took samples of numerous glazes from all parts of this



An archaeologist getting into her work. Augusta McMahon demonstrates that a normal-sized person can fit into a "bathtub burial."

year's excavation and will write these up. Likewise, she redug a pottery kiln that Pennsylvania had found in the 1890s. We also got permission to return to the site of Umm al-Hafriyat, a pottery-making town 30 kilometers east of Nippur that we excavated in 1977, to map in and date more than 400 kilns visible on the surface. We did this in two days with the aid of a Lietz-Sokkisha Total Station (a laser theodolite) that John and Peggy Sanders used for the first time at Nippur this year. We have been wanting for some time to bring in such equipment, which works with computers. This was the first season that it was feasible. No one else is using this equipment for archaeological purposes in Iraq, although that will change very quickly. The equipment was so obviously superb that the Department of Antiquities asked John to do a demonstration, which was videotaped.

As we drew close to the end of our season, the objects from Area WF were beginning to overwhelm us. Each pin or jar must be repaired, photographed, drawn, registered, and otherwise recorded. On the very last day of the digging, March 13, we intended only to take two small search pits down further, just to be certain that we had gone through the Akkadian into the Early Dynastic. It was gray that day and it looked as if it might rain. Almost immediately we found graves in both pits. One, of a small child, was fairly clearly Early Dynastic. The other, cut from higher up, proved to be Akkadian. In the Akkadian grave were four pottery jars, all broken and needing lots of time to restore, seven or eight small bowls, broken to smithereens, and five bronze vessels. Bronze, although exciting to find and interesting in a number of ways to archaeolo-

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The painting of the mural in an early stage.

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gists, is very difficult to deal with even in museums, much less in field situations. We spent the rest of the day trying to expose, photograph, draw, and map in objects from the grave. As the bronze began to show up, a slow, steady drizzle began. (A hellish element had entered our heavenly trench.) When the badly decomposed skeleton came into view, we found a band of gold at the neck. Near the shoulder was a superb green marble cylinder seal, with a superbly carved presentation scene and an inscription, "LUGAL.DUR, scribe." A human being, arguably LUGAL.DUR, is being presented to a seated god by his personal god and a god who stands on a mythological creature. Having taken a number of acceptable photographs, as the end of the day approached, we withdrew to the house in muddy triumph and I paid off the last of the workmen. The next day, being clear, Augusta and I went out to WF again to make drawings of the strata visible in the vertical baulks of the trench and to clean up the grave cut to make sure we had not missed any objects and to prepare for additional photographs and mapping. In this cleanup, I found that indeed we had not gotten all the gravegoods. We had left one small pottery jar in the baulk, but it was collapsing due to breakage, so I violated the baulk and took out the pieces. In the jar was a light brown powder and a bronze object. This object became narrow at one end and was pierced with lines of holes. Inside the object were the remains of a reed. This object was a kind of sieve for a drinking straw. We collected both the brown powder and a bit of the reed for analysis and identification. I would be very much surprised if the jar and its contents were not connected with beer-drinking. As I was cleaning the area alongside the remains of the skeleton, I came upon a group of other objects. At the pelvis was a bronze axe and a spear head, as well as a long pin. Near the pin, and probably attached to it by a cord, was another cylinder seal of rock crystal or white quartz. This seal is as beautifully executed as the other one, showing two human heroes and a bull-man fighting against animals. This kind of scene is the mark of official Akkadian governmental business. The inscription, identical to that on the other seal, gives no specific office for the individual, but must be seen as an indication that he was in the service of the Akkadian king. The richness of his grave goods, as well as the excellence of the two seals, would seem to indicate that he was an important person in the bureaucracy. The finding of the two seals in one grave confirms a notion I have had

for some time that important individuals needed two seals, one for the office and one for personal business.

From the 13th to the 18th of March we worked late into the night to record all the finds from the Akkadian levels of WF. As always happens at the end of a season, the electricity failed us on many occasions, and we were able to work only with the help of our generator, which has seen better days. We must replace it next season. As the pressure of the recording grew in that last week, there was an added problem. My attempts to replace our guard Nur Kadhim, who died last year, still had not been successful. There were some intrigues involving one of the house staff, who wanted the position for himself or his friends. Finally, on the last day, we got a man, installed him and his family in Nur's house, and turned over the keys. I have every confidence in him. Of course, he cannot exactly replace Nur who served Chicago for 40 years.

The transition to a new guard was not the only change at the house this year. We also finally walled in the garage and put in windows and doors to make this space usable for pottery analysis and storage in coming seasons. We also began to paint murals in the house, as we have planned for fifteen years. The work was done mostly by Peggy Sanders, with an initial impulse from Nuha al-Radi, one of Iraq's best-known artists and a personal friend. Every member of the team worked for at least a few hours in the early part of the season, applying color to the outlines drawn by Peggy. The figures in the landscape are the members of the expedition and the staff, in Mesopotamian guise. My own persona is that of an Akkadian god or divine king, mounted not on a chariot but on a dumper (which I bought but found out would not work properly, so I returned it). The dumper is full of money which flies out over the mound.

A good portion of our funds this year came from a grant given by the National Geographic Society. Pam Vandiver's work was paid for by the Smithsonian. The rest of the season was supported by the Oriental Institute and the Friends of Nippur, whose generosity continues to make our work possible. I hope that this unusually long report gets across the idea that the money did not just fall on the ground, as it seems to do in the mural, but was put to good use. We had a very successful season, having obtained the information we went out to find as well as discovering major objects. Our next season, which will concentrate on the large trench, just to the north of Area WG and to the west of Area WF, should be even more productive. We intend to begin exposing the stack of temples that we found in 1972 but were prevented from continuing to excavate because of the inrush of sand. The results should be extraordinary. Stacks of temples have been dug before, including the Inanna Temple at Nippur, but we will be applying new techniques of digging, recording, sampling, and conservation. We will also be seeking to answer questions about the social and economic network that supported the temple in various periods. We expect to find a few houses around the temples, at various levels, which may tell us a great deal about the relationship of the temple as a religious institution to its immediate surroundings. These are questions that have not been addressed in previous excavations of temples in Mesopotamia and we think the search for answers will be exciting.

Next January we will begin that work. The entire effort will be in heavenly low areas on religious structures. Iraq is now open to tourists and visas are easy to get. You could come out to see us while we work.

McGuire Gibson

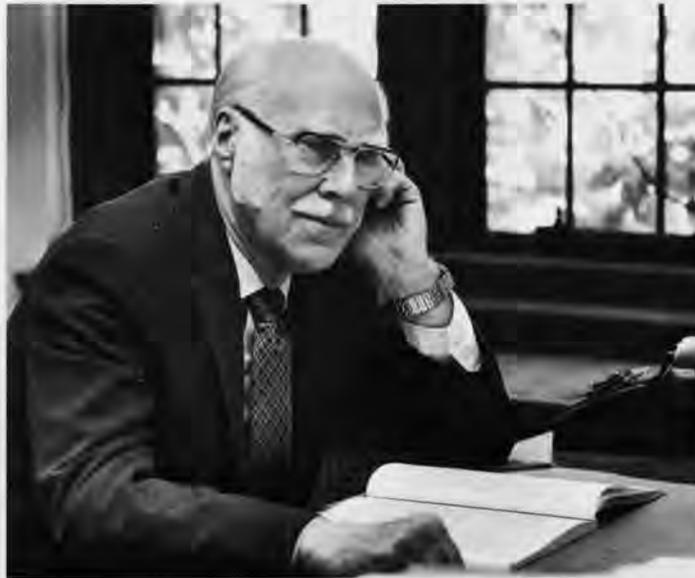
IN MEMORIAM
CHARLES FRANCIS NIMS
OCTOBER 19, 1906 - NOVEMBER 19, 1988

Charles Francis Nims was born in Norwalk, Ohio, on October 19, 1906. He was reared in Toledo, and received his B.A. degree from Alma College in Michigan in 1928. That autumn he enrolled in McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, at 2330 North Halsted Street. He received his Bachelor of Divinity degree from McCormick in 1931 and was awarded the Nettie F. McCormick Fellowship in Old Testament which provided him with two more years of study wherever he wished to go.

Following his graduation from McCormick, he was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

He also married Myrtle Keillor whom he had met at Alma College. That summer of 1931 he was also invited to be a member of an archaeological expedition to Beth Zur in Palestine under the direction of O.R. Sellers, his McCormick teacher of Hebrew, and W.F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University. Charles was made the expedition photographer and began developing a skill which went far beyond archaeology or a hobby.

In the fall of 1931 he became a student at the Oriental Institute on his McCormick Fellowship and in the 1931-32 academic year he participated in the dedication, by Robert M. Hutchins and James Henry Breasted, of the new Oriental Institute building at 58th and University Avenue. In 1934 Charles became the Egyptologist on



the Oriental Institute expedition recording the Tomb of Mereruka at Sakkarah in Lower Egypt. In 1937 he received his Ph.D. in Egyptology from the University of Chicago, and in 1940 he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Eldorado, Illinois.

From 1943 to 1946 Nims was a World War II chaplain stationed in France and in 1946 he returned to the Oriental Institute to be a photographer and an epigraphist on the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in Luxor, Upper Egypt. In 1964 he became Director of the Epigraphic Survey and held that post until his retirement on June 30, 1972.

Upon retirement Myrtle and Charles returned to reside in the Hyde Park area of Chicago. Besides pursuing his avid interest in photography and numerous cultural duties here in the community, Charles continued working at Egyptological projects. He provided his expertise in the Demotic Egyptian script to assist Aramaists in reading and interpreting a text written in Demotic but in the Aramaic language. His often cited volume, *Thebes of the Pharaohs, Pattern for Every City*, was published in 1965.

Charles Nims had a long, varied, and productive career in the Oriental Institute following his first appointment as a Research Assistant by Breasted in 1934. *Requiescat in pace!*

George R. Hughes

FREE SUNDAY MOVIES AT THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

All films will be shown at 2 p.m. in Breasted Hall

- MAY 7 Rivers of Time: Civilizations of Mesopotamia
 14 Myth of the Pharaohs/Ancient Mesopotamia
 21 Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
 28 Of Time, Tombs, and Treasure
- JUNE 4 Megiddo: City of Destruction
 11 The Egyptologists
 18 The Royal Archives of Ebla
 25 Egypt: Gift of the Nile

JUST PUBLISHED

American Expedition to Idalion, Cyprus, 1973-1980, L. E. Stager and A. M. Walker, general editors. Oriental Institute Communications 24. This volume, a second preliminary report, presents the results of some of the project's work from 1973-1980 at the urban site of Idalion and the neolithic site of Dhali-Agridi on Cyprus. Contributors include C. Adelman, P. Ålin, P. Allen, A. Bieber, S. Brown, P. Carter, P. Croft, P. Gaber, A. Graham, F. Koucky, Y. Leheavy, I. Nicolaou, J. Sallade, C. Schulte-Campbell, A. Steinberg, J. Waldbaum, and the project directors. Pp. xxiv + 516, including 93 figures and 82 plates. Paperbound. Price \$40 + P & H (Oriental Institute Members' price with 20% discount is \$32 + P & H and 8% sales tax if delivered to an Illinois address). Please write or telephone us and we will send you a prepayment invoice. Publications Sales Office, The Oriental Institute, 1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, (312) 702-9508.



ROYAL VISIT TO THE SITE OF AQABA

His Majesty King Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan paid a visit to the Oriental Institute's Aqaba excavations at the end of the 1988 season. Accompanied by his wife Queen Noor and their children, the King toured the site in November with excavation director Donald Whitcomb. The Jordanian government is actively working with Whitcomb to preserve the site of this early Islamic port city as an educational and tourist attraction. Queen Noor has a special interest in the teaching aspects of the permanent Aqaba exhibit which is now housed in a museum close to the site (see News & Notes No. 118).

From the left, excavation director Donald Whitcomb, King Hussein, Queen Noor, the royal children, and Dr. Ghazi Bisheh, Director of Antiquities.

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOUR TO EGYPT

October 14-November 1, 1989

This 19 day trip will provide a fascinating look at the art, history and culture which originated in the Nile Valley over 5,000 years ago. The tour will be led by Egyptologist Lorelei Corcoran, Ph.D. Special features are a day-trip to Alexandria in the little-visited Delta area, and the ever popular five-day Nile cruise on a Sheraton ship. A complete trip itinerary is available from the Membership Office. The cost of the trip from Chicago is:

\$2890	Land arrangements
\$1125	Round trip air fare from Chicago (APEX)
\$350	Single supplement, hotels only
\$650	Single supplement, hotels and ship

plus a \$350 tax-deductible contribution to the Oriental Institute. A \$400 deposit is required at the time of booking.

Arrangements may be made beforehand with the travel agent (Archaeological Tours, Inc) to travel in Europe or the Near East before or after the tour. Archaeological Tours will be glad to help you with these arrangements, but you will be responsible for any additional travel costs or surcharges.

ORIENTAL INSTITUTE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS TO EGYPT REGISTRATION FORM



Please enroll me/us in the Institute's 1989 tour to Egypt:
October 14-November 1, 1989

- Share room (with) _____
 Single room, hotels
 Single room, hotels and cruise
 Send detailed itinerary

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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(\$400 per person) as a deposit to hold my/our place(s),
payable to: ARCHAEOLOGICAL TOURS, INC.

Mail to: Membership Office, The Oriental Institute,
1155 East 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637,
(312) 702-9513.

SUMMER MEMBERS' COURSES

Ancient Egyptian Literature

Strong evidence of a literary tradition is found throughout the three millennia of ancient Egyptian history. Surviving texts and monumental inscriptions provide a rich sampling of ancient Egyptian literature from poetry to historical annals, and even include a list of notable scribes. This course will offer an overview of writings representing the variety of literary forms known from ancient Egypt. Readings will be selected from all periods of Egyptian history.

From the Old Kingdom period (ca. 2750-2230 B.C.) the class will investigate autobiographical inscriptions from private tombs, as well as wisdom literature and early religious poetry from the Pyramid Texts.

Middle Kingdom (ca. 2020-1786 B.C.) readings will include the fictional and historical-fictional stories of *The Shipwrecked Sailor* and *Sinuhe*. In addition, royal testaments or teachings, literature concerned with social problems, and texts extolling the scribal profession will be considered. Religious literature will be studied in hymns, prayers, and the funerary texts, known at this period as the Coffin Texts.

Discussion of the New Kingdom and Late periods (ca. 1570-332 B.C.) will explore the further development of these forms including funerary texts, known in this period as Book of the Dead, and will introduce several new literary forms, such as allegorical tales, love poetry, and propagandistic tales.

Required texts: Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 volumes, University of California Press, 1975, '76, '80. Optional and recommended text: William Kelly Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, Yale University Press, 1973.

Instructor: Frank Yurco is a Ph.D. candidate in Egyptology at the Oriental Institute and an experienced teacher of hieroglyphs and other Egyptological topics.

This class will meet at the Oriental Institute on Saturdays from 10 a.m. until noon for eight weeks, from June 17 through August 5.



The History and Archaeology of Mesopotamia

This course is the second half of a two-quarter-long introduction to the archaeology and history of Mesopotamia. It will cover the period from the rule of the Kassites to the rise of Islam (ca. 1600 B.C.-700 A.D.). Within a chronological/historical framework, we will examine significant archaeological discoveries at such sites as Nippur, Nineveh, and Babylon, and how they have enabled us to reconstruct the history and culture of this ancient land. We will also consider such topics as the relationship of the Mesopotamian people to their environment, the changing relations between the Mesopotamian states and their neighbors, and the Mesopotamian cultural legacy, artistic, literary and intellectual.

Readings will be assigned weekly from *Ancient Iraq* by Georges Roux and *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia* by Seton Lloyd. Additional selected readings will be distributed in class.

Instructor: James Armstrong is a Ph.D. candidate in Mesopotamian archaeology in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. He has just returned from a season of excavating at the site of Nippur in southern Iraq.

Priority for enrollment in this course will be given to those participants who have completed the spring quarter course and new students will be admitted only as space permits. If you are interested in this course, please call the Education Office at 702-9507 to see if enrollment is still open and when the class will meet before mailing in your registration.

Tuition for either class is \$60 plus \$30 for annual membership in the Oriental Institute if you are not already a member.

SUMMER MEMBERS' COURSES REGISTRATION FORM

Please register me for the following course:

- Ancient Egyptian Literature (\$60)
 The History and Archaeology of Mesopotamia, II (\$60)

- I am a member and enclose a check for tuition.
 I am not a member, but also enclose a SEPARATE check for \$30 to cover a one year Oriental Institute membership.

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