

# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

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Issued confidentially to members and friends

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## ADVANCE NOTICE

Next year's major tour for Oriental Institute members is now being planned. It will be a two-week visit to Egypt, February 11 to 26, 1976, including a five-day cruise on the Nile between Luxor and Aswan. The tour leader is David Silverman, Egyptologist. Only 45 places are available, and they will be assigned strictly in order of application. To make reservations for the tour, please call the Membership Office at (312) 753-2389.

## FROM THE CUSHITIC LANGUAGE PROJECT AND THE IRANIAN EXPEDITION

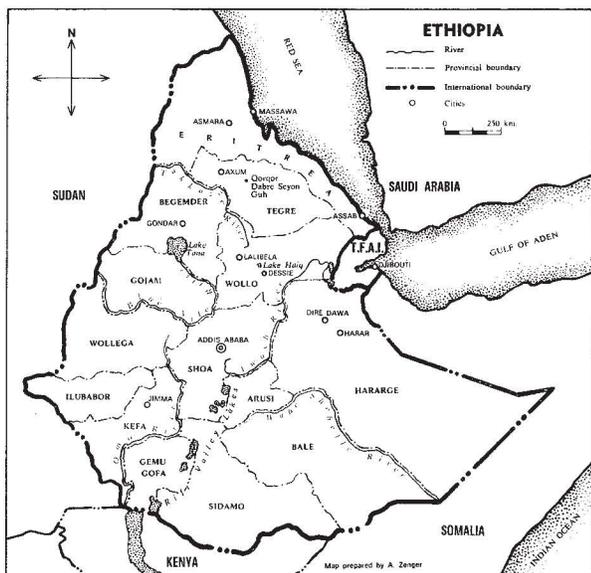
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
April, 1975

Dear Friends,

How to report on four months in Ethiopia? I would have liked to convey a clear, balanced picture of what it is like in Ethiopia in April, 1975 (or 1967, according to the local calendar)—but how do you convey a clear, balanced picture of a whirlwind? There is too much going on at once, too much history happening for any one person (especially a politically and economically naive one such as myself) to be able to say where all the pieces are, and how they all fit together. So let me stick to raw impressions. Addis Ababa has always been a city of paradox and contrasts: Near East and Africa, feudal princes and beggars driven to the city by drought and famine, Mercedes and donkeys, glass-and-steel towers and thatch-roofed mud huts. Add into this mixture the events of the past year, and the contrasts and paradoxes are stretched to the breaking point.

An example: Thousands of demonstrators celebrating a long-overdue land reform wave the green-yellow-red flag of Ethiopia and the red flag of socialism, shouting "Ethiopia First! May Socialism Flourish!" They pass, wave after wave, before the empty Jubilee Palace. From where we live behind the palace grounds we can hear the roaring of the emperor's lions.

Another example: Waiting for an early morning bus I can see in one direction a church surrounded by worshipers, head and shoulders covered by the traditional toga-like white *shamma*. (In Ethiopian services the faithful stand outside, around the relatively small round or octagonal church.) Hearing shouting in the other direction I see a group of well-wishers, many carrying palm branches in their hands, running ahead of a long line of army trucks. They are seeing off the first batch of beige-uniformed, vaguely-Mao-capped "campaigners" as they head down the Debra Zeit road to their stations in southern Ethiopia. (All Ethiopian university students, and high school students from the tenth grade on, together with their teachers, are being dispersed into the countryside until further notice as apostles of Ethiopian



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2 Socialism, to carry on literacy campaigns, and to work on various social and hygiene projects.)

A last, for me quite poignant example, among the many I could cite: "Victory Day" is now celebrated on April 6, the day the Ethiopian and Allied forces liberated Addis Ababa, instead of May 5, as in previous years, the day the Emperor returned to Addis. Veterans of the resistance are on parade with their traditional costumes and old-fashioned weapons. Overhead streak formations of Ethiopian Air Force fighter jets. In 1935 these resistance fighters fired helplessly with their Mauser rifles at Italian airplanes dropping bombs and, for the last time anywhere, poison gas on them, their villages, their families, their farms. Banners everywhere declare: "The victory over Fascism is given back to the people."

What business does an Oriental Institute staff member have in Addis Ababa? The impressive physical location itself of this fascinating city in a way symbolizes its importance for my project. Situated just over the rim of the Great Rift Valley, the city is dominated to the north by a ridge of green mountains from horizon to horizon. This is part of one of the important divides of Africa. On the other side of those hills, everything drains into one or another tributary of the Nile, and eventually into the Mediterranean. On this side we are in the drainage system of the Great Rift Valley, which stretches down (we are more than 7000 feet up!) towards Kenya by way of a chain of lakes, beginning in Ethiopia and culminating in the great lakes Rudolph and Victoria. Standing on one of the many impressive high vantage points in Addis, say in front of the very modern City Hall (now completely repaired after the bombing of last November), and looking out over the arid, down-sloping plain dotted with volcanic-looking hills, one really has the impression of standing not only on an important natural division, but on the frontier of two worlds. In back of those green hills is most of the Semitic-speaking part of Ethiopia (the vast majority of Semitic speakers are behind a line which is roughly at the latitude of the east-west course of the Blue Nile), and behind that is the Red Sea and the Near East—a world with many familiar features for a linguist with a background in Assyriology. In front stretches out Africa, with its unfamiliar peoples and unknown languages.

It is up this valley that the Oromo people stormed some four hundred years ago, sweeping all before them. Known to the Amhara (highland Semitic Ethiopians) as the Galla, this people started out, for reasons which are still unclear, from a limited primitive nucleus probably located in the Bale highlands on the eastern ridge of the Great Rift Valley (the second highest mountain peak in Ethiopia, Mt. Batu, is located here). They moved south into Kenya, east and northeast into the region of Harar, north as far as the northernmost of the lakes, Lake Zway, then west and northwest to the present Sudanese border and the Blue Nile, and due north in a long, narrow penetration along the eastern escarpment of the Abyssinian plateau, into the present Tigre province. The result of this explosion is that today Oromo is the most widely spoken language of Ethiopia. Out of a population of some 26.5 million, perhaps eleven million speak Oromo, eight million Amharic (the national language), and 3.5 million Tigrinya (Eritrea and Tigre provinces); the remainder is divided among nearly seventy other languages, most of them spoken in the area south and west of the two principal axes of the Oromo.

What is of concern to me is that Oromo, the most widely spoken Cushitic language, is an important source of information on the Afro-Asiatic (Hamito-Semitic) family of languages, whose five major branches are Cushitic, Chadic, Berber, Egyptian, and Semitic. Paradoxically, perhaps because of its intimidating size and diversity, and also because of its politically sensitive nature in the former, very Amharic-oriented regime, it has been studied less intensively than some less prominent members of the family. Also of concern is the important area of language contact, where Oromo is interesting because of its intense, and frequently violent, interaction with Amharic. For this Addis Ababa is an interesting vantage point, since it was deliberately founded by the Emperor Menelik II in 1887 as an Amharicized island in an Oromo sea. For a very rough European parallel one might set up the following proportion: Addis Ababa: Amharic:Oromo::Bruxelles:French:Dutch.

Whatever the ultimate consequences in other areas, for my own work the recent turn of events in Ethiopia could not be more favorable. My concrete objective is to produce a modest, phonologically accurate dictionary of Oromo in order to fill a major gap in Cushitic studies. A year or so ago I probably could not have obtained permission to work in Ethiopia on a project which touched on such a sensitive spot in Ethiopian consciousness. Even people engaged in officially approved humanitarian and missionary projects in Oromo areas could not officially be taught Oromo—one training center labeled its Oromo courses "Amharic" in its official course list. As it is, I arrived in Addis during a full Oromo renaissance—almost as though it had been arranged for my convenience! On the day we arrived, Radio Ethiopia in Addis Ababa broadcast its first Oromo program. A few weeks later the first Oromo play was publicly presented in Addis. Members of the National University linguistics staff are preparing literacy materials in Oromo, as well as in a few other of the more widely spoken languages. Members of the new government address mass meetings of peasants in Oromo—the Oromo have traditionally had a strong representation in the Ethiopian armed forces.

Linguistically interesting problems are being met. How do you use in mass media a language with a wide diversity of dialects, and no single recognized standard? What type of orthography is to be used in writing the language? (The Ethiopian syllabary used to write the Semitic languages allows for only seven vowels, but Oromo has ten.) By means of the radio, speakers of one dialect are becoming familiar with the pronunciation and vocabulary of other dialects. Frequently when two different words are used for some concept, for example "medicine," which is *qoriðça* in the west and *d'awwaa* in the east, both of them will be used, connected by *yookin* "or" in a virtual hendiadys. In this way the vocabulary of both dialects is enriched, and the way is cleared for creating a standard mass media dialect. Also a certain amount of havoc is bound to be wreaked in dialect distinctions—making a dialect survey in the not too distant future an urgent necessity.

In any case it is an auspicious time to be gathering Oromo lexical items, and your correspondent is making the most of the opportunities. My principal difficulty now, in fact, is acquiring too much material, the assimilation of which would put off unduly the appearance of the dictionary.

A final reflection. When I first began to lay plans for an attack on one aspect of the question "what can be known

about the ancestral language of Chadic-Cushitic-Berber-Egyptian-Semitic, spoken perhaps somewhere in northeast Africa (how far north? how far east?) in the sixth (?) millennium B.C.?" I had no idea that the quest would lead me into the heart of one of the major political and social upheavals of the decade. But that's just one more of the paradoxes.

Gene B. Gragg

Ghaleh Khalil near Chogha Mish  
March 26, 1975

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

We have noticed that the weather is the predominant topic in the beginning and the end of our recent newsletters and that is probably not inappropriate in a region where from time immemorial man has been so intimately dependent upon the vagaries of the weather. At the moment neither we nor our friends and neighbors complain of the excess of rain—on the contrary. While the countryside is still in its lush spring garb, the myriads of wildflowers that can be seen even on the site itself are beginning to wither and the workmen begin to whisper that if rain does not come soon, within the next few days, the crops will fail. We ourselves, while still enjoying relatively cool and marvelously quiet early mornings on the dig, begin to suffer from the increasingly heavy winds and dust clouds in the afternoon, which sometimes make work almost impossible. A brief thundershower with incredibly heavy raindrops moistened the earth and temporarily beat down the dust this mid-afternoon; it was heavy enough to stop our day's work somewhat earlier than usual. However, all the older and more experienced of the workmen, although drenched by the downpour, knew at once from the direction and the formation of the clouds that this was not the rain that they had been praying for.

Another topic dealt with at some length in our previous newsletters was the visitors we had expected or were fortunate enough to entertain. With the approach of the Persian New Year (March 21) the number of visitors to the site increased considerably and hardly a Friday passed without several carloads, Iranians, Europeans, or Americans, from the nearby communities. Among them we were happy to see again some old friends whom we had known when we first arrived in Khuzestan, and also to meet many newcomers to the region who work in the various scientific, agricultural, technical, and military projects of the country. It is a special pleasure to mention the visit (if only for a few brief hours) of Dr. Firouz Bagherzadeh, the Director of the Archaeological Centre, who has long expressed a keen and friendly interest in our work; and also that of our friend and colleague, Professor Heshmat Moayyad, and his family. They were able to spend a number of days with us and actually participated in various aspects of our work. We, on our part, kept our single social engagement of the period by attending the now traditional party and dinner given by Professor Ezat Negahban every year on the eve of the Persian New Year in the museum which he has built at Haft Tepe. This provides an occasion for archeologists from various expeditions working in the region to meet and exchange "views and news" as well as for us to get acquainted and talk with the scientists and management personnel of various projects in Khuzestan.

As to the archeological developments, we have been working, as mentioned in the previous letters, in various sectors of the site and in various cultural periods. The most sensational new discovery, that of the burned edifice on which we reported briefly in our last newsletter, has developed considerably in area, even though its complete configuration is not yet clear. To the east instead of a single exterior wall we keep on finding large areas of solidly laid brickwork extending more than seven meters from any recognizable room. The relative shallowness of this brickwork precludes the possibility of its being part of a platform. If this brickwork is the lower part of walls it may mean that the building lay adjacent to a city fortification wall or that it had tremendous fortifications of its own. On the west adjacent to the rooms first discovered is a new series of rooms with burned walls, which we have begun to clear. However, these lie deeper and deeper under the overburden of Protoliterate houses, which before being removed have to be excavated layer by layer below the floor levels to which they had been dug and recorded in previous seasons. In the course of this work new discoveries are constantly being made which add greatly to our previous (fairly extensive) knowledge of the Protoliterate houses in this area. Not only are new wall alignments, drains, and modifications in house plans being revealed, but tremendous amounts of Protoliterate pottery are being recovered, especially from the pits that are closely spaced over this area. No less than eight large Protoliterate pits have been found, close together, cutting through the walls of the earlier, Middle Susiana, burned building. Some significant small finds have also been added to this unplanned (at least for this season) removal of Protoliterate houses. One of them is a miniature bone carving of a nude female, which compares favorably in style and craftsmanship with some of the better known sculptures of the period except for the material and the miniature size.

To return to the Middle Susiana burned building, not only is there still uncertainty about its total size and limits, but also whether it is a single building or a series of adjacent structures. The doorways that we were fortunate to discover show communication only serially as it were, from south to north but not from east to west. Nor is it possible yet to tell whether the entire building so far discovered perished by fire at a single time. As to the character of the structure, its monumentality would indicate that it was not an ordinary private dwelling. We know that it was a manufacturing center where flints were being made, but this fact does not exclude the possibility that such an "industrial" center could also have been part or the center of an administrative building or even a temple. A set of about eighteen complete or nearly complete cups, bitumen-lined on the interior for waterproofing, has been found between two buttresses against what seemed at the time to be an exterior wall of the burned building. The innumerable accidentally baked clay impressions of beams, rafters, and layers of reeds will provide excellent material for the reconstruction of the ceiling and the roofing of the structure.\*

\*Only a few such rafter impressions in unbaked clay with an ancient wasp nest against them were sufficient evidence for the reconstruction of a ceiling in the so-called House D in the Temple Oval at Khafaje. Cf. P. P. Delougaz, *The Temple Oval at Khafaje*, OIP 53.

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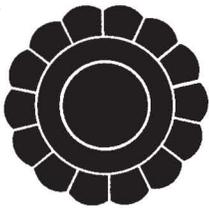
A second sector is that of the so-called Gully Cut, where an overburden of Middle Susiana remains, as well as some Protoliterate material, has been removed in order to trace the extent and character of the Early Susiana buttressed wall discovered last season. We have found that this wall turns so as to form at its southern end a small rectangular room, which appears to be the center of the complex. The resulting plan is unusual and therefore of special interest. Below the Early Susiana level we have dug a relatively large expanse of Archaic Susiana 3 occupation, characterized by unevenly sloping masses of river pebbles, "stone carpets" as our workmen call them. Such big stone-covered areas are a new feature which did not exist in the trenches of previous seasons where contemporary Archaic brick walls were found. We are thus beginning to get some idea of the configuration of the Archaic settlement, with houses flanked on the sloping periphery of the site by stone "paved" exterior areas where many everyday activities must have been carried on. The Archaic "stone carpets" remind us of the courtyard of our own expedition house, where year by year we add pebbles to keep down the mud and dust. The numerous finds of Archaic pottery are in the process of washing, mending, and sorting. They promise an excellent harvest of new information for the period, as do also such small finds as stone vessel and figurine fragments.

After an interruption of several seasons we have returned to the west slope of the high mound where traces of a massive Elamite fort had been identified directly overlaying earlier Protoliterate brickwork, also of massive size. The two brick massifs were practically fused and only by articulating single bricks were we able to establish the demarcation line in the single sloping surface to which the storms of centuries had eroded the remains of the two periods. This season we decided to probe along this demarcation line to

find whether there is any feature leading through the solid Elamite brickwork towards some architectural features of the Protoliterate period that may have survived exposure to the elements between the abandonment of the site sometime before 3200 B.C. and the erection of the Elamite building over a thousand years later. Our first indications were a few baked bricks among the masses of unbaked ones. By following what at first seemed to be a floor of mostly broken baked bricks of the well-known Protoliterate standard size, we soon came upon an imposing drain construction slanting upwards. It is now extended for more than ten meters and leads to an apparent "catch basin" on which secondary drains converge from all four directions. While the drain may not lead us to any still remaining monumental building, its size and construction undoubtedly testify to the existence of some such structure at this point. One would be unduly optimistic to expect much more than this result, considering the circumstances that as the drain slopes upward it is approaching the modern surface and that the number of days left to us for excavation this season are very few. Yet one may always hope, and this site has produced some surprises before.

Actually the season is practically over, with four of the staff leaving the day after tomorrow. The usual pressure for closing camp, completing the absolutely necessary records and photographs, surveying the newly excavated parts of the tepe, and the myriad of other imperative tasks that always face us at the close of every season are still to come. Somehow, as usual, we hope to finish and round off things in time to be with you as scheduled, *inshallah*. In the meantime we send all of you our best wishes in the mood of the New Year happiness and hopefulness that prevails here at this holiday season.

P. P. Delougaz / Helene J. Kantor



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