

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

Issued confidentially to members and friends

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Not for publication

JAMES HENRY BREASTED, 1935[†]
by John A. Wilson

It is forty years since James Henry Breasted died—December 2nd, 1935. He went so suddenly, in such full spate of his powers, that it seemed like an overwhelming tragedy. We were stunned. We could not find words suitable to the catastrophe. He had made the Oriental Institute. It was inconceivable without him. At the moment this was the Crack of Doom.

What happened to the Oriental Institute over the following five years, over the following forty years, is a story of resilient recovery. There was so much strength of scholarly purpose that the Institute remained strong and respected. Here I should like only to review that last year of Breasted's life. I should like to argue that there was a justice and a justification in closing the book precisely at the climax.

The Oriental Institute in 1934-35 and 1935-36 was an awesome phenomenon in the world of the humanities. There were at least nine expeditions in the field at the same time, with about the same number of other projects in some stage of activity. The Assyrian Dictionary was an international enterprise. The staff at home and abroad was the best in the world. Publications were rolling off the presses at an unprecedented rate. Breasted was the commander of an empire.

Breasted was at a turn in the road. His work had justified itself, and he might now look for other impulses to consolidate that work. Abroad he had thought of Cyprus as an area which needed definition by exploration and excavation. At home he planned to revise his "History of Egypt," still the most appealing presentation of the subject after thirty years. He was looking for young Americans who might fit into the Institute staff, to balance the eminent Europeans already present.

His wife Frances had died a year earlier, and he now married her sister Imogen, a more relaxed and companionable woman. At the end of the summer they started on a honeymoon, a business trip to the Near East, like the honeymoon he had had in Egypt with Frances in 1894.

The International Congress of Orientalists was meeting in Rome that September. Breasted was courted by those European scholars who feared the effects of the Hitler-Mussolini policies upon their studies. I remember him sitting in the courtyard of an Italian palace, while one man after another came to him, reported his current interests, and hinted that he might be available. Breasted was a figure of power in their world.

In Egypt he had an infectious enthusiasm about every new discovery. We made an excursion to the desert graffiti in the Wadi Hammamat, and he ran gaily up a hillside to inspect an inscription which he had known only in copies. In the evening at Chicago House he might tell stories out of his experiences, and his verve made every story exciting.

In Luxor he drafted for John D. Rockefeller, Jr., a proposal for the future of the Oriental Institute. The Institute was then dependent upon gifts from Mr. Rockefeller for three projects and annual grants from the Rockefeller boards for most of the others. Breasted proposed an endowment which would set the work on a continuing basis, free from the annual applications for grants. I remember the figure for the endowment as \$17,000,000, which at 4% would work out to something like the annual budget of the Institute at that time. He sent the letter off and expressed his confidence that it was so persuasive that it must have success. He believed so thoroughly in his work that he was certain that others must believe also.

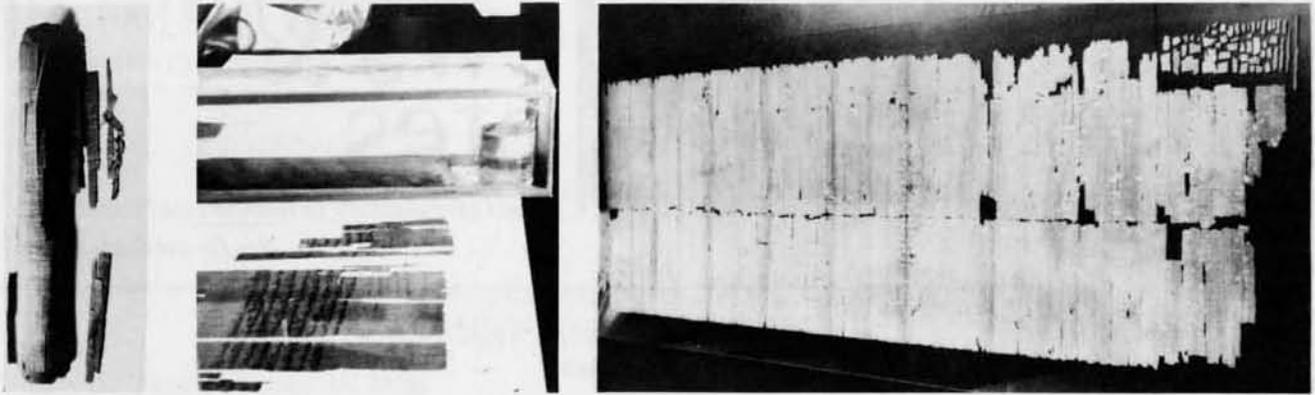
A last act in Cairo was a luncheon with his old rival, George A. Reisner of the Harvard-Boston Expedition. It was a friendly burying of the hatchet, which did honor to both men.

Then on the voyage home he came down with his fatal illness and died in New York. He never saw the answer from Mr. Rockefeller. The Depression and the current obligations of the Rockefeller boards would force a cancellation of their annual support of the Institute. Mr. Rockefeller himself regretted that he would have to stop his gifts. The future of the Institute was precarious.

Breasted never knew that the Trustees of The University of Chicago, seeking every economy, were retiring the most distinguished professors at sixty-five and seventy, so that his tenure would soon be cut short. What would an electric figure like Breasted do in retirement?

He died while in triumph. The gods of Olympus did not visit him with nemesis for the hubris of stealing their fire. Rather they gave him rest while he was still crowned with all his laurels.

Dr. Wilson, Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Egyptology, succeeded Breasted as Director of the Institute.



Left, one of the papyri before unrolling; center, a partially unrolled section, showing the text of the document, in front of the humidifier box used to soften the brittle material (the liquid in the beaker at the right is water); right, the full length of one of the scrolls, back view, with the signatures of witnesses faintly visible in a column near the center.

THE DEMOTIC EGYPTIAN ARCHIVE FROM HAWARA

by George R. Hughes

When the late William F. Edgerton bought a batch of papyri in Cairo in 1932 for the Oriental Institute, he could tell Breasted this much about it without having seen more than the very beginnings of the lines of any of the texts: "The papyri are nine in number, eight of them large rolls, the ninth a nearly complete letter of the Persian period—that is, not later than the sixth century B.C. The eight large rolls are all contracts, two of them with Greek docket. One is dated in the reign of Nectanebo. They are nearly all complete, and Edgerton writes 'several of them will make impressive museum pieces.' All are decidedly worth publishing." (Breasted, *The Oriental Institute* [Chicago, 1933], p. 413).

One cannot account for certain discrepancies between this statement and the facts as revealed by the unrolled papyri, except by assuming that Edgerton saw a couple of papyri in the dealer's shop which were not in the batch eventually brought to Chicago. There are nine large rolls but no small roll bearing a letter of the Persian period, and only one document bears a Greek docket. Edgerton could not know that in the nine rolls he was getting eleven demotic contracts and one Greek tax receipt. It is unlikely that he was told by the dealer that they came from the region of the town of Hawara in the great Fayum depression or oasis west of the Nile valley in Lower Egypt, the town being best known for the pyramid of Amenemhet III and the famous Labyrinth. If he had been told that, he would probably have doubted it anyway. He certainly could not know that he had acquired a portion of a large family archive, other rolls from which were in the British Museum, the Copenhagen and Hamburg museums, and the Cairo Museum. Furthermore, only the completely unrolled papyri reveal that some of those that Edgerton got are by happy accident much the earliest documents in the archive. Only those in the Copenhagen Museum overlap chronologically with the very last of the Oriental Institute documents; the others are of a considerably later date. This statement is made on the basis of sparse information I have gotten from others who have seen and worked on the papyri in Europe, for only those in the Cairo Museum have as yet been published. (In the following the numerals in parentheses indicate the Oriental Institute documents in their chronological order.)

The oldest (1) of the Oriental Institute group is dated in the 17th year of Pharaoh Nectanebo I, in the month of December 22, 365—January 20, 364 B.C. (early demotic documents do not show the day of the month). It is the earliest Egyptian marriage settlement thus far known. It was unrolled by the late Herbert P. Burch in the winter of 1943-44. It was apparently accidental that the oldest papyrus was selected to be unrolled first. I do not know what prompted the unrolling at that time, over a decade after the acquisition, for most of the Egyptologists, including Edgerton, were on leave at the time for service in World War II. In any case, only that one was unrolled then. It was in a perfect state of preservation and was published by Charles F. Nims in 1958. It has been on display since about 1945 in the Oriental Institute Museum.

The other eight rolls remained a mystery until the late summer of 1960 when John A. Wilson, during his one-year interim directorship, urged the unrolling of them. The late P. P. Delougaz aided by Robert H. Hanson, who recently retired, undertook the task. However, they managed to get only six of the rolls flattened under glass by the end of the summer. Ursula Schneider photographed them in a hurry—in sections, for the longest one is 8 feet long—that I might take the photographs to Luxor that autumn. That was the year in which the Oriental Institute began work in Lower Nubia in the area to be flooded by the new dam at Assuan, and the Epigraphic Survey joined the Nubian campaign and went to Beit el-Wali to record the Ramesses II temple there. There was not much time in which to peruse the demotic papyri, but I did succeed in satisfying my curiosity about their contents and was able to transliterate, translate and annotate them the next summer. There was also an unsorted collection of fragments of varying sizes from the shattered edges of some of the documents to be put together and to be placed, if possible, at the beginnings of the proper texts. A combination of knowledge of what to expect in a text or what the context demands, the size and nature of the fragments (like a jig-saw puzzle), the handwriting, and occasionally the configuration of the fibers in the papyrus, which are somewhat like human fingerprints, all help in the matching of pieces. In any case, only a few pieces remain unplaced now, and they are generally very small and bear only small traces of ink or no ink at all.

The last two rolls (4 and 10), which had lain dormant since 1960, were unrolled by Barbara Hall in the summer of 1975, forty-three years after the batch was bought. One of those two rolls proved to consist of two apparently quite unrelated contracts dated 53 years apart.

There was one document (11) on a very small piece of papyrus inside another large one and it was written 110 years later than the contract on the large piece. Presumably it was simply shoved inside the older, large roll for storage. Whoever "filed" it thus can scarcely have expected himself or anyone else to find it again. The small papyrus, taller than it is wide, was broken down the middle, and the middle portion was in loose fragments when I first saw it. Dr. Edgerton, when I showed it to him, was convinced that I had merely the beginnings and ends of the lines of a long document. However, after much trial and error in matching the middle fragments, a relatively complete and coherent receipt of repayment of half of a loan of money has emerged, but it has no connection with the contract, a marriage settlement, inside of which it had been placed. It is the latest of all the Oriental Institute Hawara group, dated in year 1 of Ptolemy IV Philopator, in the month of February 15–March 15, 221 B.C.

Another very small document, tightly rolled, tied and sealed, was inside a much larger one. It is an official Greek receipt for the 2% sales or transfer tax on the mortgage of 1/3 of a house in 245 B.C. as security for a two-year loan of money. The transaction itself is recorded in dual demotic documents, both written on the same large outer piece of papyrus. One of the demotic documents (7) is a contract of provisional sales of the third of the house and the other (8) records the terms of the loan and mortgage. The tax was paid at the time the loan and mortgage were made, thus on the provisional transfer of the property, although the actual transfer would take place only if the loan was not repaid by the end of the two years. I was making heavy weather of some of the cursive Greek script of the tax receipt when it happened that Prof. E. G. Turner of the University of London came to stay with us a few days at Chicago House in Luxor in early 1963. I showed him a photograph of it. He spent some time on it in Luxor and read most of it but asked to take the photograph to London to show to T. C. Skeat of the British Museum. That summer I got the combined efforts of the two peerless Greek papyrologists, and that problem was solved as well as it could possibly be.

The earliest of the Oriental Institute papyri from Hawara, and the earliest in the whole archive, as has been said, is dated to just about January 1, 364 B.C. The next one (2) chronologically is dated almost 34 years later in the month of October 10 to November 8, 331 B.C., that is, at the end of Alexander the Great's first year as king of Egypt. This is the earliest date in an Egyptian document in the reign of the great conqueror. As a matter of fact, there are only two other demotic papyri in existence dated in his nine-year reign. One from his third year is in the Louvre and the other, from his ninth year, is in the Strassburg Museum. One of many such bits of evidence that the Institute papyri are from the archive of one family is the fact that these two earliest papyri bear marriage settlements, and the woman in the second contract is the daughter of the couple in the first. Given the custom of early marriages, the daughter was very probably not the eldest child of her parents but was born perhaps twenty years after her father had made the property settlement for her mother.

—To be concluded next month.

Dr. Hughes is Professor Emeritus of Egyptology.

Through an oversight, the name of Mrs. Ursula Schneider was omitted from the list of Museum Volunteers on page 81 of the Institute's *Report for 1974/75*. We take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Schneider for her continuing devoted work in the Museum Office.

The Western Suburbs Affiliate Group of Oriental Institute Members will hear a lecture by Mr. Lee C. Ellenberger, official photographer for the Shechem Excavations, entitled "Tell Balata Reveals Its Secrets." The lecture is scheduled for Sunday, January 18, 1976. Please call Mrs. Linn Buss, 354-4285, for further details.

The ten-week course for training new Museum Docents and Suq Volunteers will begin Monday, April 12, 1976. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer guide in the Oriental Institute Museum, please call Mrs. Jill Maher, 753-2573 or 753-2471, to arrange an interview.

On December 2, the fortieth anniversary of Breasted's death, Messrs. Brinkman and Hughes attended a memorial service at Breasted's grave—marked by a slab of Assuan granite—in Greenwood Cemetery, Rockford, Illinois. The Rockford Chapter of the Archaeological Institute of America, Mr. Stephen A. Ellis, President, sponsored the service, which was conducted by Dr. Joseph Cleveland, Pastor Emeritus of the Second Congregational Church of Rockford.

4 **THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE**

*cordially invites you to attend
an illustrated lecture*

"EXCAVATIONS AT TEPE YAHYA"

by

Carl Lamberg-Karlovsky
Harvard University

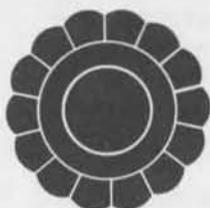
Tuesday, January 13, 1976

8:30 P.M.

The James Henry Breasted Lecture Hall
1155 East 58th Street

Admission is free. Museum Halls and The Suq will be open one hour before the lecture.

(The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Mrs. Schlender, 493-8601. Please remember that the privilege of the use of the dining room at the Quadrangle Club is a courtesy extended to members of the Oriental Institute only on nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.)



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