

News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

No. 25: March, 1976

*Issued confidentially to members and friends**Not for publication*Ghaleh Khalil near Chogha Mish
January 25, 1976

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

The first news letter of the current season reported on the Archaeological Symposium held in Tehran at the beginning of November. The short interval between that brief trip and the start of the actual season allowed little time for the many preparations necessary. I was fortunate in having the efficient aid of Mrs. Carolyn Livingood.

The seven members of the expedition gathered gradually from far separated spots. On December 21st, Mr. St. John Smith and I met at Boston Airport in a snowstorm which delayed our departure for many hours. As a consequence, we arrived too late at London Airport to keep our rendezvous with Miss Johanne Vindenas, who had come in on schedule from Oslo. We caught up with her eventually in the hotel in Tehran after meeting with something of a mischance en route, namely, the disappearance of our baggage, which contained records and charts needed for the new season. This rather dampened our arrival in Tehran, where we waited until 3:00 A.M. at the airport in the hope that our missing suitcases might have accidentally been sent by a later flight (they have now been found, and we hope that the problems of getting them from Tehran to this village will soon be solved).

It was heartening to be warmly received the next morning by Dr. Firouz Bagherzadeh, Director General of the Iranian Centre for Archaeological Research, Miss Anne Saurat, and many other good friends at the Centre. The remaining practical arrangements for the season were swiftly completed, including the appointment of Mr. Aghil Abedi as our colleague from the Archaeological Centre; he was also with us last year. The first day in Tehran closed with a trip through the terrors of Tehran traffic, in a Landrover put at my disposal by Dr. Bagherzadeh, to purchase supplies not available in Khuzestan.

On December 27, Miss Vindenas, Mr. Smith, and I reached Khuzestan by train, and were brought to the expedition house by Mohammed Basirifar, our driver since 1961. Gholam Amiri, our cook and between-season guard, was awaiting us there. It was impossible to return again to the expedition house without feeling keenly the immensity of the loss of Professor P. P. Delougaz. It is a loss which is ever present, though one cannot dwell on it continually. In a very real sense the house and the expedition are so permeated by his work and contributions that one feels his presence here strongly. In truth, he is still an essential part of the Expedition.

The next three members of the Expedition arrived on January 1st. Mr. Daniel Shimabuku from UCLA, who participated in the seventh and eighth seasons, Mr. Aghil Abedi, and Mr. Richard LeFevre, an architect from London and the only newcomer this year, had all met in Tehran and after various complications due to the difficulties of travelling in winter, reached the house together. Dr. Charles Adelman, who participated in the 1969-1970 season when the Expedition House was inaugurated, arrived a week later from New York.

Inevitably weather is one of the main topics of our newsletters since it so strongly affects our lives and work. This winter can be summed up as an exceptionally rainy one. In fact, since we opened the house, we have not had more than seven or eight sunny days. The rest of the time we have had either steady downpours or drizzle. We have so much material to work on in the house that our time is well spent. On the other hand, every one feels pent up after days of continual rain and greyness.

One of my first duties has been to collect information about the changes in the local economic situation since our departure last season. Khuzestan is a rapidly developing area with an ambitious agricultural program supplemented where feasible by new factories. Wages have escalated even more here than in many other parts of Iran. In fact, the tremendous rise of both prices and wages is both amazing and discouraging. The effect on the Expedition budget is very serious. The number of workmen employed this season will have to be reduced. Another way of coping with the new situation is to reduce the days of

2 digging, disappointing though it may be to cut off work as results begin to accumulate geometrically in the later part of a season. This year the weather itself has curtailed our days of digging.

Only on January 15th had the mound dried out sufficiently for us to begin excavations and on January 18th drenching rains set in again. After only three days of digging it is surprising that there is anything at all to report. We started from the surface along the northern edge of the East Area of the Protoliterate city. Well-defined and quite thick walls had already appeared by the second day and we were eagerly following them. After returning to the house on the third day, we all sat down to open the bags of "small objects" found by the pickmen. This is often a real chore. The inspection of shapeless clay lumps, the dilapidated hind legs of unbaked clay animal figurines, spindle whorl fragments, and chips of flint, and their dutiful recording is enough to cure anyone of the "romance of archeology." That day, however, the first object to come out of a bag was a portion of a large clay ball bearing cylinder seal impressions. Even before cleaning, the figures of a large lion, a bull, and intertwined snakes could be made out. Usually Professor Delougaz, with infinite patience and skill, cleaned the seal impressions, so that it was with much sadness that I worked on this one. Afterwards the fine quality and details of a beautifully carved Protoliterate cylinder seal were clear.

The "bag session" ended with a small box of sherds found towards the end of the day. While still in situ they had seemed unusual enough to merit being brought back directly to the house instead of going to the sherd yard for washing and mending there, but who could have expected to unpack a hedgehog! A skillful Protoliterate potter had changed a small ovoid jar into a hedgehog by adding at one narrow end two large ears and a spout for the nose, and at the opposite end a small tail and two stubby hind legs. The incised lines covering the entire vessel suggest the hedgehog's spines. We hope to find the missing forelegs and body fragments when digging resumes. Despite its somewhat incomplete state the hedgehog vessel is amazingly lifelike. Charles Adelman maintains that it is the original piggy bank and that the small round hole in the back was used for depositing clay tokens. Much as we would all like to accept this suggestion, there is a more likely explanation for this vessel. In Protoliterate temples animal-shaped vessels were used for libations as shown by representations and the two actual vessels found by Professor Delougaz at Khafaje in the Diyala Region. Our hedgehog most likely served the same purpose. It could have been filled through the hole in the back and the libation poured out through the hedgehog's snout.

After the excitement of the third day's finds, we were all extremely keen to get back to the mound the next morning. In addition, on that day our driver was to bring Mr. and Mrs. Maurice D. Schwartz of Los Angeles, long-time friends of the Expedition, from the airport at Ahwaz and we were eager to show them the excavation in progress. Heavy rain on January 18th, their arrival day, spoiled our plans. To make a long story short, it rained throughout the five days of their visit; when they departed our driver had to disconnect the Landrover's fanbelt in order to ford flooded rivers on the way out to the highway. Both times that we took them to the mound it rained, as it did when they went to visit Susa, Jundi Shapur and Dezful. We were able, of course, to show them the work in the house, both that of several sherd boys who mend and restore pottery here when we are not on the mound and our own. We explained to them our pottery recording system and Mrs. Schwartz soon began to help with the sorting of sherds from last season's backlog. As the Schwartzes collect and work rocks, the detailed study of the stone artifacts from Chogha Mish which Daniel Shimabuku is undertaking was of special interest to them. They also saw the painstaking work of St. John Smith and Richard LeFevre in drawing pottery.

The Schwartzes were wonderfully good sports and took the bad weather in their stride. At least they saw one aspect of our life here, including the hazards of mud brick architecture in the rain with large chunks of straw-mud plaster falling from upper parts of the house walls. I took them to visit our senior pickman in his house in the nearby village of Dowleti and introduced them to some of our close friends in Dezful, so that they saw a cross section of Iranian life. They were such good company that we miss them greatly. I hope that sometime their travels will bring them back again to Chogha Mish when there is sunshine.

Paradoxically, the skies have been clear since the Schwartzes left yesterday. While we are waiting for the mound to dry, Johanne Vindenas, Charles Adelman, and Aghil Abedi are fighting their way through the small crates of unrecorded sherds newly stratified in the house at the end of last season.

We send our greetings to all of you and hope that everything is well on the home fronts.

Cordially, Helene J. Kantor
Director, Joint Iranian Expedition,
Oriental Institute & UCLA

"THERE'LL BE SOME CHANGES MADE"

by Judith A. Franke, Assistant Curator

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I have to admit that I'm secretly grateful to the lady I heard about who walked out of our museum with a satisfied sigh saying, "I love the Oriental Institute Museum. It never changes. It's exactly like it was when I was a child!"

The lady's memory is not very good. There have been many changes over the years. But she's right in thinking that major changes have been few and far between. Our small staff has such difficulty keeping up with even small special exhibits that we're happy to know there are at least some people in the world who don't expect us to perform miracles.

We are conscious of our problems:

"Please keep in mind that everything on the left side of this hall is from Palestine and everything on the right side is from Nubia, except for . . ."

"The objects in the cases are Egyptian, but the reliefs behind them, of course, are Assyrian."

The Babylonian Hall was one of our biggest trouble spots. The exhibits were originally planned in the 1930's as a showcase for the exciting new materials being found in our Diyala excavations. As the years passed and excavations at Nippur and Chogha Mish produced new finds, special exhibits displaced many of the original cases—and many important objects were put into storage where they have been sitting ever since. The original plan has been so disrupted that there is little coherence any longer in the arrangement of the hall and our fine collection is not being shown to best advantage. For these reasons we decided several years ago to make the Babylonian Hall the focus of major renovations.

You will see the first concrete evidence of our work the next time you visit the hall—you will find it closed! We will begin by the Ishtar Gate, and this area, with luck, will be finished by the middle of the summer. The rest of the hall is scheduled to be open by the end of September.

We are working with an astonishingly small budget for a project of this size—\$52,000, of which half has come from the National Endowment for the Arts and the remainder from the University. If you think that this sounds like a lot of money, you haven't seen the exhibit budgets of other local museums. We hope to make up for some of

our deficiencies in funds through imaginative planning, good advice, and doing all of the construction ourselves.

Heading our special staff is Frank Madsen, our designer, from the faculty of the Institute of Design at IIT. I'm continually delighted to find him taking on more and more of my most difficult problems and he is so much more patient than I am with all of the delays, criticisms, and setbacks which accompany a project of this sort. Helping Frank with graphics will be Mary and Jim Montague, from the faculties of the School of the Art Institute and IIT respectively. Marty Sáfranek will help in exhibit construction as will our preparators, Ray Tindel and Honorio Torres. Our conservator Barbara Hall will be kept busy refurbishing objects. We are utilizing as well a growing crew of volunteer helpers with special skills for some of our more tedious tasks.

We are fortunate to have so many experts here to assist in specialized areas. Bob Biggs is helping with magic and medicine, omens and exorcism; Miguel Civil with the history of writing, scribal training, and literary texts; I. J. Gelb and Bob Whiting in the selection of tablets to illustrate exhibits on crafts and technology, agriculture, trade and the like. I'm counting on Erica Reiner to help out with astronomy (although she doesn't know it yet!); the Güterbocks are helping with the music section.

The exhibits will present our best objects in an attractive setting and in a context in which we hope that Mesopotamian culture as a whole will make more sense to the Museum visitor. There will be more emphasis than in the past on a topical arrangement rather than on classes of archeological objects. In regard to the style of the exhibits themselves, we are trying to come up with something which is attractive, which shows the objects to greatest advantage, and which will not look terribly dated in a few years. I'm most often heard saying pessimistically, however, that the one thing I know for certain about the exhibit at this point is that at least no two people will dislike the same thing: the person who loves the colors won't like the cases, the one who loves the cases won't like the labels, the one who likes the labels won't like the lighting, and so on.

And as for that anonymous lady—she will be very unhappy, because the next time she comes she'll notice at least one big change.

The Babylonian Hall forty-five years ago when the museum opened.



The Hall when it reopens.

(You'll have to come and see for yourself!)

COME SEE WHAT WE DO!

Please keep your calendar free
for our Open House

MEMBER'S DAY

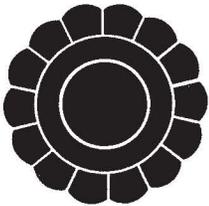
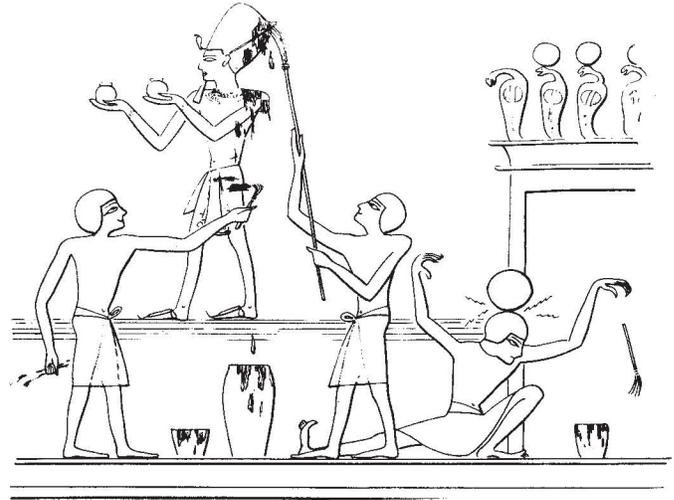
Sunday, April 25, 1976 1:00-4:00 P.M.

R.S.V.P. 753-2389

The Offices and Workrooms
of the Oriental Institute
1155 East 58th Street

Admission is free. Museum Halls and The Suq
will be open as usual.

(The Quadrangle Club is closed on Sundays.)



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