

News & Notes

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The Oriental Institute

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Not for publication

Kaspar K. Riemschneider, 1934-1976



Kaspar Riemschneider was born in Jena, now in East Germany, on April 3, 1934. He studied at the Humboldt University in East Berlin from 1952 to 1956, earning his B.A. in Assyriology. For the next three years he did research in Hittite at the Institut für Orientforschung in East Berlin and then went to Prague to continue his Assyriological studies under Professor Lubor Matouš. There he earned his doctorate in 1962 and served as lecturer in the renowned Charles University in 1961. There too he met and married (1961) Božena Chalupná, who was to accompany him in his work to many countries.

Dr. Riemschneider's first assignment was in Iraq, where he taught cuneiform studies at Baghdad University (1962-1964) to the modern descendants of the ancient Babylonians. In 1964, he returned to the Institut für Orientforschung, where he served as Chairman of the Hittite Thesaurus for the next seven years and lectured occasionally at the Humboldt University. In 1971, he made his way to West Germany, where he served in Munich as Research Fellow for the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (doing research in Akkadian and Hittite) and later taught Akkadian for one year at the University of Munich. Here in Munich his daughter, Julia, was born on June 28, 1973.

In 1974, he was invited to the Oriental Institute as the James Henry Breasted Research Associate to work on the Assyrian Dictionary project. For the past two years he had been writing manuscripts for the "N" volume of the dictionary. In May, he and his family began their vacation, taking a long driving tour of the American West and Southwest before their planned return to Germany in the summer. On June 5, just south of Pocatello, Idaho, Dr. Riemschneider and Julia were killed in a one-car accident. Mrs. Riemschneider, despite serious injuries, has been gradually recovering.

Dr. Riemschneider will perhaps best be remembered around the Institute for his quiet smile, his gentle kindness, and his friendly readiness to answer questions from staff and students. As a scholar, he will be remembered for his books on Babylonian and Hittite omen literature. But, in some respects, his greatest memorial may be the book born of his love for teaching Babylonian to the beginning students in Baghdad: Lehrbuch des Akkadischen ("Reading-book of the Akkadian Language") which has come to be used as a standard introductory textbook for the Babylonian and Assyrian languages and has recently been translated into English.

A fund to assist Mrs. Riemschneider has been established and contributions to it may be sent (marked "Riemschneider Fund") in care of Bernard Lalor, Membership Secretary, The Oriental Institute, 1155 E. 58th St., Chicago 60637.

J. A. Brinkman

SEP 8 1976

Grantsmanship

Despite the continuing shortage of money due to the recent economic recession, Federal government support for the research of scholars at the Oriental Institute passed the \$1,000,000 mark this spring with the awarding of six new grants. The largest of these is from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary Project, directed by Professor Erica Reiner, to help prepare future volumes of the dictionary. The amount of this grant could be as high as \$510,000. \$350,000 has been given outright and another \$160,000 will be forthcoming if the Oriental Insitute can match this latter amount with donations solicited on its own.

The NEH has also provided generous support to the Hittite Dictionary Project directed by Professors Harry Hoffner and Hans G. Güterbock. This grant is for \$219,000 and will underwrite three years' work on the dictionary, which was begun several years ago by Dr. Hoffner. (We are also pleased to announce that publication funds for the dictionary fascicles have been provided by a generous donation from a member of the Oriental Institute Visiting Committee.)

Apart from dictionaries, Professor Emeritus I. J. Gelb has recently received a joint grant from both NEH and the National Science Foundation to prepare a "Source Book" of readings for the socio-economic history of ancient Mesopotamia. Dr. R. M. Whiting, a research associate of Dr. Gelb in the study of the oldest land-tenure systems in ancient Mesopotamia, has now received a grant of his own from NEH to publish the cuneiform tablets from Tell Asmar (excavated by the Institute in the 1930's). In addition, the National Endowment for the Arts is helping us in the conservation of antiquities by providing some of the funds for the construction of a climate-controlled Metals Storage Chamber in the Institute basement.

Finally, the National Endowment for the Humanities has also provided the Oriental Institute with approximately \$57,000 to help defray the costs of our participation in the upcoming exhibition of the treasures of Tutankhamun. Fifty-five pieces of the funerary equipment of this Egyptian pharaoh will be shown at Field Museum of Natural History from April to August 1977. The Oriental Institute, as co-sponsor of this exhibition, is providing the Egyptological expertise for the concomitant activities, which include tours to Egypt, a special exhibition of New Kingdom art in our own museum, and a series of related lectures.

Naturally, we are proud of the confidence expressed in our scholars' abilities by their continuing success in procuring grants from the Federal government. But, we are also deeply appreciative of our members' more public support for our activities. We have every hope that this support will continue and even increase, especially in view of the challenge of the matching grant for the Assyrian Dictionary.

Ancient Egypt In Fiction

A GOD AGAINST THE GODS by Allen Drury (Doubleday, 1976) \$10.00

I began A GOD AGAINST THE GODS by Allen Drury with high expectations, tempered by the suspicion that everything anyone could say about the famous Egyptian king, Akhenaten, had already been said. Happily, Mr. Drury has fulfilled my hopes and put aside any doubts I had about his choice of subject. For his book offers a compelling narrative replete with fresh insights into the principal personalities of the Amarna Age.

The author of any serious historical novel must examine the motivations of his characters and try to present in them a realistic blend of self-interest versus genuine concern for the needs of their time. Drury's Akhenaten is grounded in a political consideration inherited from his father, Amenhotep III: the restraining of the power of the priesthood of Amon by supporting a countervailing cult of the Sun-Disk, the Aten. This straightforward objective, however, is distorted by the increasing psychosis of Akhenaten, a result of the disease that struck him in his early years and left him physically deformed.

In believing that the gross abnormalities with which Akhenaten is sometimes represented in Egyptian art are indications of a real disease, Mr. Drury has followed the lead of many Egyptologists. He has relied heavily on the interpretations of Mr. Cyril Aldred, former Keeper of the Edinburgh Museum and the author of several important treatises on this period of Egyptian history, for the basic historical framework that appears in A GOD AGAINST THE GODS. Not everyone will agree with these interpretations—in particular the existence of a joint reign of Amenhotep III and his son, Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten), lasting over a decade—but at least Mr. Drury has been a faithful disciple and thereby produced a very consistent narrative.

The story begins with Amenhotep III scheming against the priesthood of Amon in a number of ways. He even dedicates his newborn son, Amenhotep IV, to the inchoate rival cult of the Sun-Disk, the Aten. Unfortunately, at the age of seven, the boy is struck down by a wasting disease arrested only after serious physical and psychological injuries have been sustained. Cloistered in the palace during the years of his illness, Amenhotep IV has developed deep feelings of resentment and humiliation about his condition, but apparently is able to suppress them as he finally comes back into the public eye. He seems to sublimate their energies into the furtherance of the Aten cult. Still, these feelings are never very far from the surface. On the one hand, he and his wife, Nefer-

titi, try to close the gap of ridicule that separates him from the people because of his strange appearance by "living in truth," i.e., revealing all through a relaxed and more realistic style in art and ceremony. But Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) also intends the awareness of his physiognomy to be an instrument of awe and terror throughout the land.

The public acceptance of the strange king or the cult of the Aten does not increase, and this failure induces a series of narcissistic responses on the part of the king, coupled with increasingly severe retaliatory measures against Amon and the other gods. First, Akhenaten withdraws from Thebes, the center of Amon's power, to found his own city, Akhet-Aten, "the Horizon of the Aten;" at the same time he slights Amon by changing his own name from Amenhotep ("Amon is pleased") to Akhenaten ("The Incarnation of the Aten"). Thereafter, the restrictions on the priesthood of Amon increase to the point at which half of its wealth is confiscated. Concurrent with this move is the flowering of a homosexual relationship between Akhenaten and his younger brother, Smenkhkara whom the king sees as a comely paragon of his former self before the awful disease. These actions, of course, only serve to strain all relationships and lead finally to further bizarre actions by Akhenaten. He orders the cult of Amon and those of all the other gods aside from the Aten to be extinguished and simultaneously declares Smenkhkara to be co-ruler with him. Akhenaten even strips Nefertiti of her throne name and gives this to his beloved Smenkhkara.

In *A GOD AGAINST THE GODS* we are also permitted to follow the thought and reactions of the other people in the court, as they view with alarm the developments in Akhenaten's personality. They are called upon to suspend belief in one of the central tenets of their Egyptian heritage—that the king is a god on earth—in favor of a growing realization that his removal is integral to the continued welfare of Egypt (and their own personal advancement!). This glimpse into the minds of the other principals is achieved by means of an unusual format. The story is divided into five "books," each one constituting in effect a mini Greek drama. There is no overall narrator, but each of the characters delivers one or more soliloquies in each "book," relating his thoughts and actions up to the time of that "book." In fact, the comments and expressed fears of the "bystanders," the people not immediately involved in the course of the action, resemble very much those of the choruses of Greek drama. Of course, this format could easily have turned the book into a string of boring speeches, but Mr. Drury has craftily avoided this pitfall and used the technique to deliver a tight narrative and provide a valuable perspective on this unusual and important time in the history of Ancient Egypt.

DAWN OF DESIRE by Joyce Verrette (Avon Books, 1976) \$1.95

The Twelfth Dynasty of Ancient Egypt (ca. 2000-1800 B.C.) is rarely the setting for a story, so *DAWN OF DESIRE* by Joyce Verrette initially sparked my curiosity. Unfortunately, the author's ignorance of Ancient Egyptian history and culture is so profound that the book fails dismally as a historical novel, although it does provide some entertainment as a fast-moving and undemanding romance.

Ostensibly, this is the tale of the love between Amenemhet I, founder of the dynasty, and his little-known wife, Nefrytatanen (she is known to history only from a single statuette that was stolen in the French Revolution of 1830). But Ms. Verrette leaps into historical fantasy right away by inventing a royal lineage for Amenemhet that never existed (he worked his way up from vizier), and by proposing that the marriage was a political ploy to unite the kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt (actually, they had been reunited under the previous dynasty). As the narrative proceeds, the adventures of the royal pair become more improbable and evolve into a journey to Atalan (presumably the supposed lost continent of Atlantis) in a papyrus boat reminiscent of Thor Heyerdahl's Ra.

The author's method of choosing names for her characters is disconcerting and owes nothing to the historical record. The principal antagonist of Amenemhet and Nefrytatanen is named Sinuhe after the anti-hero of the famous Middle Kingdom story. The king of the land of Atalan is none other than Sahura, really a king of the 5th dynasty (ca. 2450 B.C.). And, appropriately enough, I guess, the captain who directs the royal vessel to Atalan is Necho, the 26th dynasty pharaoh who organized the first circumnavigation of the African continent around 600 B.C. Even more amazing is the way Ms. Verrette treats the journey from Memphis to Thebes as an overnight jaunt. Compare this with the royal progress made by Nitocris, daughter of King Psammetichus I, in 656 B.C., when her entourage covered the same distance in a little over two weeks.

Page after page of *DAWN OF DESIRE* is filled with such historical and cultural faux-pas. Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings, Ms. Verrette's novel is an easy way to spend a rainy weekend at home this fall.

M. W. Ciccarello

John A. Wilson
Professor Emeritus of Egyptology and former director of the Oriental Institute

Dr. Wilson died suddenly at his home in New Jersey on Monday, August 30, 1976. A special issue of *NEWS AND NOTES* in commemoration of Dr. Wilson will be issued shortly. In accordance with his wishes, contributions may be made to: Cancer Research Fund, Children's Hospital, 1740 Bainbridge St., Philadelphia, PA 19146 in memory of his granddaughter, Margaret Myers, who died of cancer. Mrs. Wilson's address is: 47-06 L Meadow Lakes, Hightstown, New Jersey 08520.

Notices

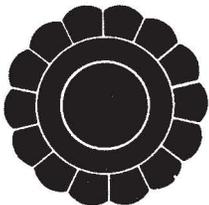
ESCAPE THE COLD, SNOW, AND ICE. JOIN EGYPT 1977 FOR A JANUARY DEPARTURE. PLACES STILL AVAILABLE. REGISTER NOW OR CONTACT BERNARD LALOR (312-753-2389).

REMEMBER THE OPENING LECTURE AND PREVIEW OF MESOPOTAMIAN EXHIBIT, OCTOBER 5. Edward L. Ochsenschlaeger, "Modern Marsh Arabs and Ancient Sumerians," 8:30 P.M. at Mandel Hall. Preceded by special preview dinner at the Quadrangle Club. Reservations in writing by October 1.

"TUTANKHAMUN AND EGYPTIAN ART OF THE SECOND MILLENNIUM," by Dr. Charles Francis Nims. Members' fall lecture course offered in conjunction with Field Museum of Natural History and University of Chicago's Extension Division. Fee is \$45.00. Register before October 1.

The Western Suburbs Affiliate Group of Oriental Institute members will resume its activities Tuesday, September 21, with a festive evening of Middle Eastern dining. In addition, three lectures are scheduled for 1976-77, to be presented in the Hinsdale area. For information, call Mrs. Linn Buss, 354-4285.

The Suq, our museum store, badly needs volunteers for work in its office and stock room. Workers who could put in even short periods of time (a few hours a week or every second week) on a regular basis would be much appreciated. No special previous experience is necessary. The Suq was founded by volunteers ten years ago, and it now needs stronger volunteer support if it is to continue. Proceeds from sales in the Suq go to finance the Oriental Institute library, which is for the use of Institute members, volunteers, students, staff, and faculty. Anyone who wishes to offer help should contact Joy Pell or Elena Druskis at 753-2471 (Monday through Friday, 9 A.M.-noon, 1-4:30 P.M.).



The Oriental Institute
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Our newsletter, News & Notes, is undergoing change. In this issue and the next several issues the format will be altered to increase the speed with which current information will reach the members and to decrease higher printing costs. We hope that these changes will provide a mutually more beneficial vehicle of communication.

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