

The Oriental Institute

# News & Notes

*Issued confidentially to members and friends*

*Not for publication*

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No. 36: October, 1977

## Seen But Not Heard

by Irving L. Finkel

YOUNG CHILDREN who cried at night and kept their parents awake were considered something of a strain in ancient Mesopotamian society, just as they are nowadays. Such a commonplace of domestic existence could be safely deduced even in the absence of pertinent literature, but it just so happens that we have direct evidence to illuminate the question.

Generally speaking, many of the difficulties that cropped up during daily life could be removed or alleviated by a well-timed incantation. Many problems, it was believed, were caused by ill-tempered and malevolent demons who were always on the lookout to wreak mischief in a man's life, attacking him on all fronts. Should he for some reason have lost the protection of his personal deity, for example, he or his family could become ill, his business could fail, he would be socially ostracized, or suffer all manner of catastrophes. And while he might usually be on more or less good terms with his deity, things were never altogether predictable, and there were always some especially persistent ghosts or demons ready to make trouble. Along with all the other irritants, both physical and supernatural, that could plague a man's life was the case of the baby who, fed and pampered, still felt it had a right to make its voice heard.

Ashurbanipal's library in Nineveh, that remarkable storehouse of cuneiform knowledge to which Assyriologists are indebted for all kinds of literature, contained a good deal of magical writings, assembling great series of incantations that would cover a wide range of possible problems. On the family side, we note incantations to promote potency, institute fertility, prevent miscarriage, ensure a good supply of milk, and to still the crying of a fractious end-product.

Scattered examples of such "baby" incantations have turned up from the Old Babylonian period onwards. A Neo-Assyrian specimen from Ashur reads as follows:

He who dwelt in darkness, quite without brilliance  
Came forth; he saw the light of the Sun.  
"Why is he so worked up?" his mother is crying.  
Antum's tears fell in Heaven:  
"Who is this one who makes so much noise down there on the ground?  
If it be a dog, throw him a morsel!  
If it be a bird, throw him a clod of earth!  
If it be a naughty one, a human baby,  
Let them recite over him the incantation of Anum and Antum,  
That his father may lie down and finish his sleep . . . "

The accompanying ritual reads as follows:

Place a piece of bread on the child's head;  
Recite this incantation three times over it.  
Rub him (with it) from his head down to his feet.  
Throw that piece of bread to a dog;  
That child will be able to rest.

It is interesting to note that the wife of the highest deity in the pantheon should deign to be concerned, and to observe the simple means of transferring the malignant influence to the body of a dog.\*

We know from another Ashur tablet that incantations to pacify babies were an established responsibility of the *āshipu*, or exorcist. It may certainly be assumed that it was only the rich that could afford the services of a professional *āshipu*, and then presumably only when the child was suffering from some form of sickness. The poor, to whom the problem was probably more acute, must have resorted to less extravagant means. The royal archivist, it may be noted, was by no means neglectful of this particular problem. Our most informative source is from Nineveh, dating from the seventh century B.C. A section of this text, one of the more poetic cuneiform incantations, reads:

O little one who disturbs his father,  
Who weeps in his mother's face,  
Māy sweet sleep soothe you!

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May invigorating and relaxing sleep steal over you!  
 Lie like a drunkard! Snore ...-ly like a young gazelle!\*\*  
 Until your mother comes, touches you gently, picks you up,  
 May you be serene as the water in a well,  
 Calm as the water in a pond!

This was to be recited over oil, with which the baby was to be rubbed. The passage, known from more than one copy, comes from a huge six-column tablet, originally numbering well over 360 lines and containing a whole series of incantations interspersed with similar rituals. Was it just the usual spirit of detached scholarship and the desire to preserve knowledge that prompted the careful inclusion of such material side by side with the great medical and omen literature? Perhaps so, although one cannot help but wonder whether Ashurbanipal, wearied with state politics and demanding concubines, might not have found the incessant and high-pitched crying at night just a little too much to bear sometimes.

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 \*It should perhaps be observed that no incantations to cure vociferous canine insomniacs have as yet been recovered from Mesopotamia.

\*\*What especially characterizes the snore of a gazelle remains uncertain; such gazelles which are positively identified on cylinder seals, for example, seem possessed of a markedly antic disposition.

## URSULA SCHNEIDER

### 1906-1977



THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE was deeply saddened this summer by the death of Mrs. Ursula Schneider, one of the Institute's most talented and faithful photographers. Mrs. Schneider died on August 4, 1977, only four days short of her seventy-first birthday.

Ursula Schneider was born on August 14, 1906, in Berlin, the daughter of Dr. Fritz Wolff, author of the *Glossar zu Firdosis Schahname (Concordance to Firdusi's Book of Kings)*. She was married to the late Karl Schneider, one of the pioneers of modern German architecture.

Mrs. Schneider studied photography in Vienna, Berlin, and Hamburg. In 1928 she opened her own studio in Hamburg, where she specialized in architectural, art historical, and archeological photography while also photographing educational feature series for two of Germany's largest newspapers. This work involved extensive travel throughout Europe. In 1932, she was commissioned by an art historian to photograph ancient architecture and sculpture in Greece. A number of these photographs are in the collections of major museums and archeological institutes in the United States, England, Italy, Germany, and Greece.

In 1937 the Schneiders came to America and settled in Chicago, and it was in 1942 that Mrs. Schneider began her long career as photographer for the Oriental Institute. From this time until 1955 she worked exclusively for Professor Erich F. Schmidt, preparing the photographs and layouts for the three Persepolis volumes. In 1955 she became the chief photographer for the Oriental Institute but continued working for Professor Schmidt until his death in 1964.

After her retirement in 1973, Mrs. Schneider continued to serve the Oriental Institute with devotion as a volunteer in the Museum Office. She is survived by her brothers, William and Immanuel Wolff.

\* \* \*

AS A TRIBUTE to her talents, the Bergman Gallery will be sponsoring a special exhibit of her photographs from Wednesday, October 26 to Saturday, November 12. It will include mostly her early works from Hamburg and her travels through Europe.

An opening reception will take place Tuesday, November 1, 4:00 - 6:00 p.m. at the Gallery, and *all are invited to attend.*

The Bergman Gallery: 5811 S. Ellis Ave. (fourth floor of Cobb Hall)  
 The University of Chicago

Hours: Monday through Friday 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.  
 Saturday and Sunday 12:00 noon - 5:00 p.m.



Feluccas on the banks of the Nile—photo taken on last year's tour

(James Swartchild)

## EGYPT TOURS FOR MEMBERS

FOLLOWING LAST YEAR'S eminently successful (and fully booked!) tours to Egypt, the Oriental Institute and Field Museum of Natural History are again sponsoring four tours to Egypt's legendary sites, with Chicago departures January through March. Major sites of the ancient Egyptian kingdoms—including the actual tomb of King Tutankhamun—will be visited.

Each of the 19-day, 18-night tours, limited to 19 persons each (except that departing January 24, which will have 23), will be led by an Oriental Institute Egyptologist, a representative of the sponsoring institutions, and accompanied by a local Egyptian guide and a tour manager.

In addition to the numerous historic sites, superb museum collections in Egypt will be visited, and special arrangements have been made to acquaint members

first-hand with the activities of the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House, Luxor. There will also be a deluxe boat cruise between Aswan and Luxor. Tour dates are: Jan. 5 to 23, Jan. 24 to Feb. 11, Feb. 28 to March 18, and March 27 to April 14.

TOTAL COST of each tour, per person, is \$2,695.00, which includes a tax-deductible contribution of \$500.00 to the Oriental Institute/Field Museum. The price also includes air fare and all other transportation and transfers, hotel (double occupancy), and nearly all meals and gratuities. Itineraries, registration forms, and other information may be obtained by writing or calling Bernard Lalor, membership secretary, the Oriental Institute (753-2389).

### WESTERN SUBURBS AFFILIATE GROUP

Judith A. Franke, formerly Acting Curator of the Oriental Institute Museum, will present a slide lecture, "From Excavation to Exhibition: The Adventures of an Artifact." This lecture is open to the public without charge to encourage membership in the Oriental Institute and the Western Suburbs group. Sunday, November 13, 7:00 p.m., Unitarian Church, 17 West Maple, Hinsdale. For information call 354-4285.

THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

cordially invites you to attend  
an illustrated lecture

"A Provincial Artist and the Coming of the Hyksos to Egypt"

by

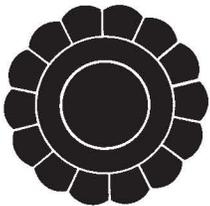
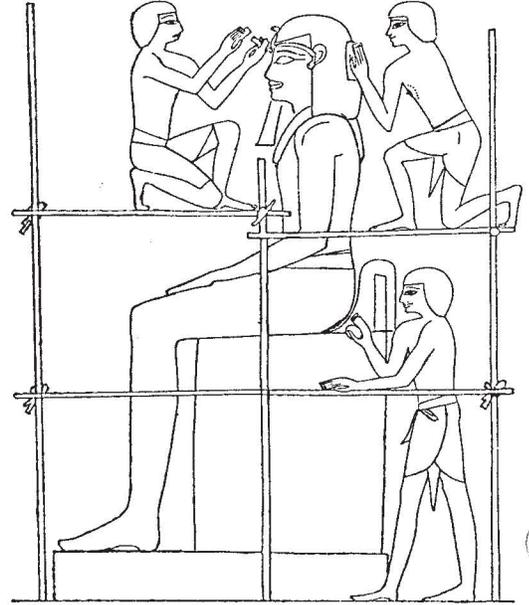
Klaus Baer  
The Oriental Institute

Tuesday, November 15, 1977

8:30 p.m.

Mandel Hall  
University Avenue at 57th Street

*(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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