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News & Notes

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1981 UPDATE ON EBLA

By Robert Biggs

Editorial Note: Dr. Biggs is Professor of Assyriology at the Oriental Institute. He has been studying the third millennium texts excavated in the Inanna Temple at Nippur, and has been particularly concerned with the texts from the cuneiform archives in the royal palace at Tell Mardikh/Ebla, discovered in 1975 in northwestern Syria.

Among recent Ebla-related activities there were two important conferences held in Italy last spring. The first, at which both Professor I.J. Gelb* and I were invited to present papers, was held in Naples. The second, held in Rome, was sponsored by the Italian expedition to Syria. It was addressed by members of the official international committee that is studying the Ebla tablets and by archaeologists as well. When the proceedings of these two conferences are published later this year, we will have at hand assessments on various aspects of Ebla from the perspectives of many of the world's leading specialists in the ancient Near East.

When I wrote on Ebla earlier (*New and Notes*, No. 43, April 1978), practically none of the texts had been published, so there was little possibility of giving effective scrutiny to them. The picture has changed considerably now that approximately 100 texts are published, including a huge volume which has just appeared in which 50 administrative texts are edited and translated. Another entire volume of texts (this one devoted to the Sumerian word lists) is due to appear later this year.

In addition to the PBS film shown last fall, a book on Ebla has been written by the director of the expedition, Paolo Matthiae. This book is now available in an English translation (*Ebla: An Empire Rediscovered*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1980), with a special preface in which the author updates some of the information given in the book, and gives his views on some of the controversies that have arisen concerning the tablets. Another book which gives a great deal of information, including views on the disputes among Italian scholars, is by Chaim Bermant and Michael Weitzman (*Ebla: A Revelation in Archaeology*, Times Books, New York, 1979). More authoritative than the latter will be Giovanni Pettinato's book on Ebla, available now in Italian and to be published in New York in English shortly.

The dispute between the director of the expedition, Professor Matthiae, and the former expedition epigrapher, Professor Pettinato, has not been resolved. As a result, some texts are appearing in the two series sponsored by the Italian Expedition in Rome; others, of which Pettinato has photos, are being published in Naples. Some texts are thus being

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Fragment of a list of geographical names from Abu Salabikh, now represented by a perfectly preserved copy from Ebla.

published twice, and while this might seem wasteful duplication of effort, it is interesting to see the results of different scholars who are not collaborating.

Professor Matthiae, in the preface to the English translation of his book, categorically denies that Ebla brings any proof of the historical accuracy of the biblical patriarchs, of the existence of a cult of Yahweh at Ebla, of the existence of Sodom and Gomorrah and other cities of the plain, or that there is a literary text with a story of the Flood. As he says, "These are tales without foundation." There remain differences of opinion among informed scholars, nevertheless. In November, we heard a lecture at the Oriental Institute by Professor Mitchell Dahood on Ebla and the Bible. While some of his proposals for relating words or names from the Old Testament to words in Ebla texts are striking, cuneiform specialists tend to be somewhat skeptical, and it cannot be said that his hypotheses are widely accepted yet.

Other questions, such as the much-discussed treaty with Assur, are still in dispute. Now that we know how the supposed Assur is written, some of us have serious doubts that it is Assur at all, and suspect that it is rather a town much closer to Ebla. A town mentioned frequently in the Ebla tablets has been identified as the famous ancient city of Byblos on the Syrian coast. There is a very real possibility that rather than reading Gub-lu (for Byblos), one should rather read Du-lu (the sign in question has the readings both DU and GUB). In both these cases, important historical considerations hang in the balance—whether there were diplomatic relations between Assyria and Ebla in the third millennium and whether Ebla carried on international trade through the port city of Byblos.

(Continued on pg. 2)

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BREASTED MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM DEDICATED



LIFE Graphic photo by Peter W. Souchuk.

From left: F. Jan Kopis, president, Board of Commissioners, Downers Grove Park District; Jon Council, Downers Grove mayor; Carolyn Livingood, Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago; Marjorie Wyman, Downers Grove Historical Society; and Ardith Thygesen, president of the society.

The village of Downers Grove, southwest of Chicago, dedicated on November 9, the James Henry Breasted Memorial Auditorium in Lincoln Center, which is a park district recreational facility. The Auditorium is located on the site of the little two-room red schoolhouse which Dr. Breasted attended. Representing the Oriental Institute at the ceremony was Mrs. John J. Livingood, Vice Chairman of the Institute's Visiting Committee.

Mrs. Livingood reports that the auditorium is small, holding about 150 people, a pleasant room; and outside its door, is a bronze dedicatory plaque to Dr. Breasted, unveiled during the dedication by the Mayor and the President of the Board of Park Commissioners. Mrs. Livingood was asked to say a few words about the life and work of Dr. Breasted. This occasion gave her an opportunity to make the following comments about the Oriental Institute:

1981 UPDATE ON EBLA

1981 Update On Ebla continued from pg. 1

There are other points of dispute (for example, whether a particular term is to be translated "mercenaries" or "donkeys"), but they are mostly of lesser overall importance.

Most of the Ebla texts that have been published so far are administrative documents, mainly concerning metals and textiles. These, thanks in part to the amount of Sumerian terminology used, can generally be understood. This is not the case with some other groups of texts, such as the incantations. Even though some of them are in Sumerian, a good many lines cannot yet be translated. A number of the Sumerian word lists have already been published. Surely the most interesting is the list of geographical names (this list was previously known from fragments discovered by the Oriental Institute at Abu Salabikh in Iraq in 1963 and 1965). Now, with the Ebla version having the names written syllabically, it is even more interesting and one can see that some of the towns listed are clearly Syrian. Assur is definitely in the list, but the major Sumerian cities of southern Mesopotamia are not. Attempts are being made by several scholars to identify the names on the list with historically known cities.

Excavations continued at Ebla in the fall of 1980, but details are not yet available, though I have heard a report that the Italian team seemed quite satisfied to have found only half of a single cuneiform tablet!

"The Oriental Institute was created in 1919, and the building was dedicated in 1931. It was and is based on Breasted's idea that archaeology would unearth cities, temples, objects, and writing (inscriptions on buildings, tablets, and papyri); the writing would be brought back for philologists to translate; the objects would be housed in the Museum for study and display; and historians would interpret the evidence unearthed. In the basement are over 70,000 objects, part of which are research collections which bring scholars from all over the world. . . . The upper two floors of the Institute contain the offices of the professors of ancient Near Eastern languages and history, of archaeology, and the projects of the Assyrian dictionary, the Hittite dictionary, and the Egyptian dictionary."

Mrs. Livingood quoted Dr. Breasted on why one should study archaeology and ancient history in this busy modern world:

"The Oriental Institute Museum mirrors a relentlessly changing past. Here we can see the records of ancient wisdom, old mistakes, and lessons that were not learned in time. Out of archaeological research can come knowledge and inspiration by which man can, if he chooses, find his way with sure footsteps to a fairer future."

At the end of the ceremony, the Institute's film, The Human Adventure, was shown. It focuses on some of Breasted's visits to the Institute's excavations; the pyramids, temples, and tombs of Egypt; Megiddo in Palestine; Tell Asmar in Iraq; and Persepolis in Iran.

COMPLIMENT, CORRECTION, COMMENT

Mrs. Elda Maynard

Editor, Oriental Institute News and Notes

Dear Elda:

Thank you very much for your recent coverage (News and Notes, No. 65) of the current activities of the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor, which, as you noted, next season celebrates its fiftieth year in the headquarters known as Chicago House. In recognition of your thorough review, we are ordering 100 copies of your article to distribute to interested visitors who might want a concise summary of our work.

There are one or two points, however, to which I would like to draw your attention. In your list of the publications of the Survey, it is Khonsu III which is the architectural volume, while Khonsu II is a plate volume which is now with the publishers. In addition, The Battle Reliefs of Seti I is not yet in press, but will be in the publishers' hands by the end of 1981. Concerning your reference to our present renovation program, the repairs which are currently underway should be seen as a tribute to the quality of the original construction. Chicago House is so soundly built that former Field Directors needed only to provide for routine maintenance. Few buildings, however, can boast of fifty years' occupation without need for major repairs, and it is coincidental that so many of the buildings' physical systems are in need of simultaneous repair. It has also been incumbent upon us to effect as many of these repairs as possible before the curtailment of the Smithsonian's counterpart fund program. If Chicago House weathers the next fifty years as well as it has the first fifty, we may have the satisfaction of knowing that we also have built soundly on the foundation laid by our predecessors.

Sincerely,

Lanny Bell

Field Director, Epigraphic Survey
Luxor, Egypt

ACCLAIM FOR CHINA TOUR SPONSORED BY THE INSTITUTE

The Oriental Institute sponsored its first tour to China this fall, so it is with keen and critical interest that reports from participants have been read. Excerpts can always be subject to suspicion, but if the comments are enthusiastic, why question? Just enjoy!



1980 Oriental Institute China Tour. Photo by Bud Haas.

"Among the many scenes and buildings we saw, the most outstanding to us were the digs at Xian, where the pottery warriors and horses of the Emperor Qin had been found buried in the ruins of the approach to his tomb. Though prepared by the oceans of publicity we have seen, and by the magnificent display at our Field Museum, we were completely overwhelmed by the vast vista of the pits, protected by glass roof and walls. From the well placed platform we could see acres of activity, beginning with the fully exposed and restored soldiers and horses below us, continuing through piles of half-revealed complete figures, hundreds of heads, legs, arms torsos, projecting from the soil, waiting to be further uncovered. Farther in the distance were many sections known to contain more figures, but not yet excavated. Scattered through this scene were dozens of archaeologists and assistants, attacking the huge assemblage with tiny brushes and other tools, bringing to light more and more of the ancient sculptures that have lain hidden for centuries." --Dominic F. Shortino

"The three weeks of the China tour were most exciting, and we came home with a new understanding of what China is today. There were sights that stirred our souls—the Great Wall snaking its way up and down rugged mountainsides on a brilliant autumn day; the solemn dignity of the Forbidden City in Peking, and the gaiety of the Summer Palace pavilions and shimmering lake—Shanghai and its twelve million people; Suchow and the Grand Canal—and more awesome than all else, the rows upon rows of terra cotta soldiers standing at protective attention in their eternal guard of a dead Emperor at Xian."--Nancy and Paul Eller



Photo by Bud Haas

"It was a great trip—from start to finish. All arrangements but one meshed perfectly, and the exception turned out to be a great advantage. Our stay in Shanghai was altered due to the

pressures of another tour group and, with facile re-scheduling, the China agency was able to give us a beautiful day in Suchow and an overnight at the new hotel in Bao Shan, which is part of an incredibly enormous recent industrial development north of Shanghai on the banks of the Yangtze.

"Accommodations everywhere were reasonably comfortable, food abundant and interesting, service and consideration always excellent. It was a great privilege to be on a tour which included the several ancient capitals, the extensive museum collections of bronzes, pottery, jade, scrolls, and stele, and, here and there, to get special consideration because we were associated with the Oriental Institute." --Dr. Henrietta Herbolsheimer

"Sue and I returned Saturday from one of the most memorable trips that we have ever experienced. The China tour exceeded our expectations. . . We have never travelled with a group before, and if this trip is an example of tours sponsored by the Oriental Institute, then your program will be very successful." --William W. Oelman

". . . rather than go to my journal for excerpts that may be redundant, I would like to share with you the result of our pleasant visit to the University of Peking with Professor Lu Bin, his associate, and the dean.

". . . Professor Lu mentioned to me that a student of his was newly arrived at the University of Chicago, and I told him that my daughter Leila had graduated in 1979. Perhaps his student might like to meet her?

". . . A few days ago Leila had to dinner Feng and her cousin Francis Sai, a microbiologist at Billings Hospital, and his wife Grace, a pharmacist at St. Elizabeth's. I have not yet met Feng, but Leila tells me that 'they are the nicest people' and that . . . their talk, ranging from China to U.S. politics, to economics, to medicine—livened the evening. I am so grateful to Professor Lu for sending on our card to Feng, and delighted to know that these three charming and talented young people are in our midst."--Mrs. Cameron Brown

Space is still available for 1981 China Tour. Contact Membership Office 753-2389.



Photo by Bud Haas

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP OFFICE

Dear Members:

We had a fine turnout for the December 3 Members' lecture held at the Chicago Public Library Cultural Center. I was very pleased to meet a number of members, who had been unable to attend our activities here at the Institute, but found the downtown location more convenient. The Library staff members noted to me that our count of about 100 was the largest public activity they had for the winter months. Usually their major activities are in the summer. In all likelihood, we will hold another lecture downtown during next year's lecture series.

John Carswell, the Museum Curator, wishes to invite all members to the opening of a special exhibit in the museum: "Remembrances of the Near East: The Photographs of Bonfils 1867 - 1907" on Tuesday, February 17, 6:00 - 8:00 P.M. The Bonfils collection represents some of the most remarkable 19th century photographs of both the monuments and the people of the Near East. The show, which runs from February 17 through March 31, will be exhibited in the Palestinian gallery of the museum. In addition to the travelling exhibit, there will be shown some of Bonfils' photographs currently housed in the Oriental Institute's photo archive. A catalogue of the exhibit will be available in the Suq.

The February Members' lecture will be presented on February 11 (Wednesday) at 8:00 P.M. in Breasted Hall. Prof. Matthew Stolper will talk on "Persepolis and the Redefinition of the Persian Empire". A reception in the museum galleries will follow the lecture.

Please note the following corrections to your 1979/1980 Annual Report: Malinda Winans, Membership Assistant, was inadvertently left off the list of Institute staff members

(p. 120). Also, Shirley Jean Anderson, one of our devoted docent volunteers, was omitted from the list of "Regularly Scheduled Museum Docents" (p. 80). We regret these errors.

I have heard from several people, from both the northern and southern suburbs, concerning the possibility of restarting the suburban affiliate groups. I have also unearthed from the files the records of the old Western Suburban Group. I will be contacting various people, after the beginning of the year, to start laying the groundwork.

More news next month.

Sincerely,
Eugene Cruz-Uribe
Membership Secretary

February Members' Lecture

"Persepolis and the Redefinition of the Persian Empire"

Matthew Stolper
The Oriental Institute
Wednesday, February 11, 8:00 P.M.

The Quadrangle Club, 1155 East 57th Street, will be open to Oriental Institute members who wish to make dinner reservations. Please call Nancy Miller, 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 the nights when there is an Oriental Institute lecture.



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