



News & Notes

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SAGA OF THE ARAMAIC TEXT IN DEMOTIC SCRIPT

By Charles F. Nims¹

The story begins in 1940. George Hughes² was working on William F. Edgerton's³ photography files of unpublished papyri when he came across a number of prints of a long document in demotic script. It was obvious to George that the language was not Egyptian—one which he could not identify—so he brought the photos to the office which he and I used jointly on the third floor of the Institute, just outside the entrance to the library stacks. As any member of the staff passed our open door, George would stop him to inquire whether the transliteration of parts of the document, which George had done, was recognizable as a known language. No one found anything familiar until Ray Bowman⁴ came along and suggested that it could be Aramaic.

As the conviction grew that the language of the papyrus was Aramaic, we decided to transcribe and mimeograph the entire papyrus for the compilation of a concordance, which would facilitate Ray's study of the Aramaic translation. Since I was free of other obligations at the moment, I undertook a transliteration of the demotic text, made vocabulary cards for filing, and started a list of what appeared to be words.

During World War II my overseas service was in Normandy. My next major involvement with this peculiar papyrus, which for want of other identification we had nicknamed the "Amherst Barbarophonos Papyrus," was in June 1945. After the end of the European conflict I was in England on a short leave. There I got in touch with Stephen Glanville, Professor of Egyptology at the University of London. We had corresponded with each other about his publication of demotic legal documents which Hughes and I had reviewed. He had been in naval intelligence, and also was still in uniform when I met him at his office.

He soon told me, "They would like to see you at the British



Amherst Barbarophonos Papyrus, Column 7.

Museum." One of the keepers there had seen a copy of the October 1944 issue of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* which carried an article by Raymond Bowman, entitled, "An Aramaic Religious Document in Demotic Script." What had thrown the museum authorities into a state of consternation was a footnote to the title which read, "Formerly in the Amherst collection, the papyrus is now the property of the J.P. Morgan Library. It has not yet come to this country. Our work up to this point has been done from photographs alone." No one at the British Museum had any knowledge of the existence or whereabouts of this papyrus!

As a result of the footnote a search was begun. It was discovered that more than a score of years before this papyrus and others had been left privately with the museum's expert in piecing together and mounting papyri. When the war

came the lot was placed in the museum's basement along with many of the museum's own treasures.

The British Museum was not yet open to the public, but through an appointment Glanville made for me I was met at the door and taken through a maze of dimly lit rooms. At last we came to one in which there were piled on a display case several boxes. These contained some of the papyri of the Amherst collection. The first ones I looked at were demotic documents which had been listed in the catalog of the papyri published many years before. In a large box we found, mounted between sheets of glass, the sections of the papyrus I knew so well from the photographs. This had not been listed in the catalog.

Eagerly I began to take measurements. The whole papyrus, eleven and two-thirds feet long, has been cut into six sections. It is of standard height, just under one foot. The beginning section, at the left, is badly damaged, and some of the text is

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1. Mr. Nims is Professor Emeritus of Egyptology, The Oriental Institute, who worked for 30 years in Egypt as epigrapher and for the last eight years as field director of Chicago House. He is the author of many publications, including the volume on *Thebes of the Pharaohs* (Paul Elek Productions Limited, London, 1965).

2. George F. Hughes is Professor Emeritus of Egyptology, The Oriental

Institute, former field director of Chicago House, and former director of the Institute.

3. The late William F. Edgerton was Professor of Egyptology, The Oriental Institute.

4. The late Raymond A. Bowman was Professor of Hebrew and Aramaic, The Oriental Institute.

Saga of the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script (Continued from page 1)

lost. The writing covers the front (recto) of the papyrus and much of the back (verso). There are all or parts of twenty-three columns of text, of varying width, with fifteen on the recto. Each column, except the last on either side, has from eighteen to twenty-four lines in rather large writing. The final columns fill about half the height of the papyrus, as if each had the end of a text.

After I had finished taking all the measurements, I was asked "Do you wish to take it with you?" Of course, it was not my property, and it would have been impossible for me to care for it, as I had to return to my military duties. After I returned to civilian life I had correspondence with the Pierpont Morgan Library which was instrumental in the papyri finally coming to it. On one of my return trips from work at the Epigraphic Survey in Luxor in the late forties I stopped at the library and saw it safely there.

Ray Bowman continued to work on a fuller translation following the publication of his article. He could give the work little time, however, due to other commitments, and in his latter years, due to failing health. After his death in October 1979, Mrs. Bowman kindly allowed George Hughes and me to bring to the Oriental Institute, his notes, the file of dictionary cards, and the word list I had made at the beginning of the work in 1940.

The papyrus is a literary text and not a commercial document like so many of the Aramaic papyri. The style of the writing dates the document to the Persian period, about 500 to 350 B.C. It is very important as an example of Aramaic literature of the pre-Christian period. The nature of the text, as far as yet can be made out, is a Babylonian or North Syrian litany. As a religious text, concerned with ritual, it should shed light on the religious thought and practices in the syncretistic milieu of late Achamenid or early Ptolemaic times. It also promises to be of great value from the point of view of language.

The text seems to be the work of a scribe who wrote demotic. He had memorized Aramaic texts which he did not fully understand, or they had been dictated to him. He used determinatives to divide words, but sometimes he ran words together, and broke up others into syllables. Demotic writing makes great use of ligatures for writing several letters together, and uses consonantal signs. It is not surprising, therefore, that the scribe sometimes used ligatures for some sounds which he heard in Aramaic. For the common preposition mn (from), he wrote the demotic negative which in earlier Egyptian had been written bn but which later became pronounced mn. The scribe also used the writings of the names of the gods Min and Amun for the same preposition and for other occurrences of the same two letters together.

The most frequent word in the text seems to be brk (to bless). In most instances, the scribe wrote for b the group we usually transcribe bw instead of the b used in most other words. For r, he wrote the ligature ir, instead of the one of the two writings of r which he used elsewhere. Since there was no l in the demotic of this period, the scribe used one of the r's wherever l occurred. During this period also, the sound of d no longer existed in Egyptian. Instead, the scribe used one of several forms of t. Both Egyptian and Aramaic at this time had one letter for sh; but demotic in this document uses only one s for both sin and samekh, which have similar pronunciation in Aramaic. We have not yet determined how the Aramaic letter z was written in the text. The Aramaic letter tsade (ts) may be written as t+s in the word for "north", but this cannot be certain unless we find other words with the same usage. The

common determinative is that usually designated as "man-with-hand-in-his-mouth". Other occasional determinatives show that the scribe had some understanding of what he wrote. The name of Babylon, written bbr, has the "foreign land" determinative; and the name of the god Baal is followed by the "god" determinative.

From these few samplings, one can understand why the work of transliteration and translation is so slow. Ever since the publication of Ray Bowman's article, various scholars have wished to take over the work. But Ray Bowman, George Hughes, and I have put too much effort into the project for it to be separated from the Oriental Institute. George and I are continuing to work on the script, and with Ray gone, Peter T. Daniels, manuscript editor of the Assyrian Dictionary, is working on the Aramaic. Together, we aim to complete the work which was begun four decades ago!

INSTITUTE OPEN NEAR EAST EXHIBIT



Medinet-Habu. General View of the Small Temple, Detail of the Portal (Egypt). Collection of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House.

Exhibit of "Remembrances of the Near East: The Photographs of Bonfils, 1867-1907", opened February 17 in the Palestinian gallery of the Oriental Institute, and will remain on display through March 31. It is from the collection of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House and the Harvard Semitic Museum. On exhibit, too, is a selection of Near East costumes from the Klingeman collection recently made available to the Institute by Mrs. Harold Klingeman, of Winnetka, Illinois.

Felix Bonfils was born in 1831 at St. Hippolyte du Fort (Gard), France. He studied photography, and in 1867 moved to Beirut, where in four years, he produced 15,000 prints and 9,000 stereoscopic views. Bonfils's anthropological structure falls into five distinct photographic sections, and is followed in the present collection: (1) Egypt, (2) Palestine (The Holy Land), (3) Syria, (4) Constantinople and Greece, and (5) the costumes, scenes and ethnographic types of the Orient.

Mrs. Klingeman was born in Haifa, the year that Bonfils died. Her father was the American Vice-Consul there, and her uncle, G. Schumacher, was one of the first excavators of Megiddo. She became interested in costumes as a child when she saw so many in the countryside. Some dated back to the Crusades. Her collection of costumes and jewelry are mostly from the turn of the century, and come from Yemen, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. Once the Klingeman collection is properly documented, and studied in terms of its historical value, design, embroidery, and various technical aspects, it will be of deep interest to many. Meanwhile, the selection displayed in the exhibit is a good sampling.

INSTITUTE TO WELCOME FIRST STUDENT FROM CHINA

The Institute is honored to be selected to provide the first instruction for the birth of a whole new academic discipline in China. This autumn, the first Chinese student begins professional training here in an ancient Near Eastern field.

The student is Mrs. Yang Zhi from the People's Republic of China. She is coming to the Institute to begin her studies in Akkadian and Sumerian. Currently, she lives in Beijing (Peking). One of the assignments with which she has been entrusted is the writing of the chapters on the history of Sumer and Akkad for China's new encyclopedia. She hopes to finish that project after she has completed her studies here. We at the Institute hope to the best of our ability to assist Yang Zhi to live up to her new responsibilities.

As director of the Institute, Prof. Brinkman first heard from Mrs. Yang last summer, when she wrote:

"I am a Chinese. My name is Yang Zhi and I work in the History Institute of Social Sciences of China. I am assigned to the field of ancient history of Mesopotamia, but I do not have the facilities here to teach myself Akkadian and Sumerian. I would like to know if there is a possibility for me to do graduate study in your Institute spending 3 - 4 years mainly to learn Akkadian and Sumerian, and also more general knowledge of the Ancient Near East."

Prof. Brinkman quickly responded that we would welcome her application to study here at the University, and expressed hope that some financial aid might be arranged for her. She returned the application soon afterwards, and has since been accepted into the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. She will begin her graduate classes next autumn quarter.

The cost for tuition, room and board, fees, books, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses for the three years of required study is estimated at almost \$50,000. Contributions from members of the 1980 Oriental Institute China tour, who visited China last October, have provided funds for almost her first year. We hope that your interest and support will match their enthusiasm. For more details on this project, contact Mr. Albert Haas at 987-1130, or write him in care of The Oriental Institute.

ENROLL NOW FOR MUSEUM DOCENT COURSE

The annual spring training course for Museum volunteer guides will begin on Monday, March 30, and end on June 1. There will be no session on Memorial Day, which is commemorated this year on May 25. A Saturday study seminar is offered for those who are unable to attend the Monday sessions and can volunteer for week-end duty.

The course consists of lectures by members of the Oriental Institute faculty and by Ph.D. candidates; there is also gallery study. A fee of \$20.00 covers cost of xeroxed materials.

For information on requirements and registration, call Peggy Grant, Volunteer Chairman, or Joan Barghusen, Educational Coordinator, at 753-2573.

FROM THE MEMBERSHIP OFFICE

From February 13 through March 13, I will be away from the office leading the Oriental Institute tour to Egypt - then in London for a week, doing research at the British Museum. During that time, Malinda Winans, our very able Membership Assistant, will be here to handle all of the membership affairs.

The March Membership Lecture, "The Urban Development of Sardis", will be presented in Breasted Hall by George Hanfmann on March 4 (Wednesday) at 8:00 p.m. Prof. Hanfmann is the director of the Sardis Expedition sponsored through Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. A reception in the Museum galleries will follow the lecture. I am finding that to put on the receptions is becoming more challenging and rewarding. Members indulged in ice cream sundaes after the January lecture. More surprises are yet to come!

Two recent additions to our membership roles deserve mention. Miss Mia Fiterman, age 11, and Miss Melanie Falina, age 10, both of Chicago, have joined the Institute as annual members. Miss Fiterman has expressed to Joan Barghusen, the Museum Education Coordinator, an interest in becoming a docent volunteer. Miss Falina says that her interest in the Museum, and especially in Egypt, has been a long one. She says that her grandmother brings her here every so often, and that she loves to buy books and things from the SUQ. We wish to welcome both of these young ladies!

Due to rampant inflation over the past years, the budget of the Oriental Institute has suffered a great deal. Recently, there have been some discussions on whether to raise the annual membership dues from \$15 to \$20. (The dues have remained \$15 since 1968). It was decided for the present not to raise them but to seek additional help elsewhere. How can you help? Additional contributions over the membership dues are always welcome. Perhaps you would like to raise your support to the next higher membership classification. Due to the nature of the membership program, our costs have remained proportionately low. However, you can save us a certain amount simply by renewing your membership when you receive the first notice, or ahead of time if you remember to check your expiration date on your membership card. The cost for labor, materials, and postage more than doubles if it is necessary to send out a second REMINDER notice. (At present it is necessary to send out second notices to 25% of our members.) So next time your membership comes due, help us a little more and renew right away. Thanks!

The Spring Membership Courses will be the Archaeology of Daily Life in Ancient Egypt and GRANDEUR AND EMPIRE; Persia, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt during the Persian Empire. More details and registration form will appear in the March News and Notes.

More news next month.

Eugene Cruz-Uribe
Membership Secretary

Come to the Sunday Movies

For your convenience and easy reference, we have made up the schedule of movies which are shown in Breasted Hall every Sunday. These movies are open to the general public, and there is no admission charge. The shows all begin at 2:00 P.M. each Sunday.

- Feb. 1: Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
- 8: Egypt: Gift of the Nile
- 15: Megiddo: City of Destruction
- 22: The Rivers of Time
- March 1: The Egyptologists
- 8: Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
- 15: Egypt: Gift of the Nile
- 22: Megiddo: City of Destruction
- 29: Rivers of Time
- April 5: The Egyptologists
- 12: Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
- 19: Egypt: Gift of the Nile
- 26: Megiddo: City of Destruction
- May 3: Rivers of Time
- 10: The Egyptologists
- 17: Iraq: Stairway to the Gods
- 24: Egypt: Gift of the Nile
- 31: Megiddo: City of Destruction

March Members' Lecture in Breasted Hall

"The Urban Development of Sardis"
George Hanfmann
Fogg Art Museum
Wednesday, March 4, 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.

Just Announced at Press Time!

Thorkild Jacobsen
will speak on
"The History of Sumer"
Thursday, February 26, 2:00 P.M.
in Breasted Hall



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