



# News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

*Issued confidentially to members and friends*

No. 14: February, 1975

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## THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

cordially invites you to attend a lecture

**"HISTORICAL RETROSPECT AMONG THE HITTITES:  
Their Understanding and Use of Their Past"**

by

Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., The Oriental Institute

Sunday, February 16, 1975 2:00 P.M.

The James Henry Breasted Lecture Hall, 1155 East 58th Street

Admission is free. Museum halls and the Suq will be open as usual.  
Professor Hoffner will autograph copies of his books after the lecture.  
(The Quadrangle Club is closed on Sundays.)



★ The winter Members' Course, "Reading Egyptian Hieroglyphs," begins on Monday and Tuesday, February 10th and 11th. Participants may attend either the Monday morning or the Tuesday evening session, or both; the fee is \$30.00 for members, whichever session they plan to attend. The course is designed to teach the basics of writing and grammar, with the emphasis on reading specific texts from objects in the Museum's collection. Write or call Mrs. Jill Maher (753-2573 or 753-2471).

★ The Oriental Institute Tour of Turkey is still accepting members. Anticipation in the Oriental Institute Tour of Turkey is growing. There will be a February meeting of members and interested persons who were unable to attend in January. This will be at 1:00 p.m., Sunday, February 16th, in Room 210, preceding the lecture. For further information call Travel Plans at (312) 986-0330.

★ There will be a training course for Museum Docents and Suq Volunteers on ten Mondays from April 14th through June 16th. The course will be held in Breasted Hall from 10:30 to 2:30 with a break for lunch. Trainees must be members of the Institute and a fee of \$20.00 for materials will be charged. Parking will be available. Please call Mrs. Jill Maher at 753-2573 or 753-2471 for an interview.

### MR. ROCKEFELLER AND THE ORIENTAL INSTITUTE

by John A. Wilson

*On December 10, 1974, the Visiting Committee of the Oriental Institute and the University's Development Office gave a dinner to mark the opening of the exhibition commemorating the centennial of the birth of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. The speaker that evening was Dr. John A. Wilson, Andrew MacLeish Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of Egyptology. His reminiscences provide a valuable complement to the documentary history of Rockefeller and James Henry Breasted that was included in the exhibition's catalogue, a copy of which has been sent to each member of the Institute.*

Mrs. Wilson and I are very glad to be back again in Chicago. But I am not sure about my role in the Oriental Institute. Last June I thought that I was being driven out into the wilderness as the scapegoat, that hapless beast that carried away the sins of the community, freeing them from their past and giving them a new start. I was happy to accept this obligation to set you free. I sat in the New Jersey wilderness, being fed by the ravens and communing with my soul. Then came the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the still small voice over the telephone—of President Levi—calling me back, presumably like Elijah, for a thundering prophecy. So I cannot be your scapegoat. I am not Elijah. As Amos said: I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. Amos also demanded that judgment roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream. I am here tonight to render righteous judgment.

We are here tonight to pay tribute to a man born a hundred years ago. Probably not one of us would be here if it were not for that man. He was our founding father. We are quite accustomed to hearing laymen say to us, "You must have a fascinating life!" and then when we start to tell them about the fascinating life, they go off on their own concerns with no really effective interest in what we do. But John D. Rockefeller, Jr., thought that James Henry Breasted had a fascinating life, and he wanted to know more about it. And when he came to know more about it, he wanted to do something about it. Thanks to his generosity a university department focused on the Hebrew Bible and related subjects became a recognized leader in the analysis of the ancient Near East and those early cultures which gave us the foundations of the structure of our life today. The Oriental Institute became the greatest private agency in the world for the study of the beginnings of civilization.

As you know, early in 1919 Prof. Breasted wrote to Mr. Rockefeller outlining plans for an institution to study what was called "The Rise of Man." (That expression is not used anymore: it is a little embarrassing to insist that man has risen, but in those optimistic days immediately after the agony of the First World War it was still hoped that man might have risen and might still be rising.) Mr. Rockefeller responded with a pledge of \$10,000 a year for five years. The Trustees of the University added to that sum and started the Oriental Institute. In a few years that initial interest expanded into several million dollars from Mr. Rockefeller himself, from the Rockefeller Foundation, from the General Education Board, and from the International Education Board. On the ledger these direct or indirect Rockefeller benefactions far outweigh the contributions to our work from other sources.

There is a happy legend about Mr. Rockefeller's interest in Prof. Breasted, and I want to go on believing it as factual. Against his own judgment, Breasted had been persuaded to write a high school textbook, *Ancient Times*. It was a work of popularization, upon which scholars sometimes frown. But he did write it. The legend is that Mrs. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller discovered that book and read it to her daughter and her sons, so that Mr. Rockefeller came to know that there was a man named Breasted who was a lucid and persuasive enthusiast about ancient times. When the Breasted appeal came to him in 1919, he was prepared to be sympathetic.

We do know that the relation between the two men developed into a warm personal friendship, more cordial than that between the usual patron and client. The position of a benefactor is a lonely one. Mr. Rockefeller was grateful that Prof. Breasted had come to him, not as a humble suppliant, but as a benefactor himself, one who was offering ample opportunity to share in exciting adventures. One night when Breasted was visiting, Mr. Rockefeller came into the bedroom and sat on the bed and said, "You know, I'm not supporting an institution, I'm supporting a man—a man in whom I believe." There is a visible symbol of their intimacy in a handsome dressing gown which Mr. Rockefeller gave to Prof. Breasted. That was distinctly personal, not official. As a revered antiquity it should be in the Institute exhibits today, but after Mr. Breasted's death I inherited it, and it is now rather ragged, I regret to say.

Before Prof. Breasted accompanied members of the Rockefeller family through Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon in the spring of 1929, Raymond Fosdick of the Rockefeller Foundation warned Breasted that the pleasure of the trip should not be sullied by new requests for money. Breasted was amused. He had no intention of imposing upon his friend with appeal after appeal. He brought along a whole trunkload of slides (those old-fashioned glass slides, and the trunk weighed a ton—I once helped carry the confounded thing). He was planning to give, not to get—to give the pleasure of his enthusiasms in the great story of man's civilized beginnings. It was Mr. Rockefeller who was caught by the beauty of Mrs. Davies's paintings from the Egyptian monuments, by the fine copying of Miss Calverley at Abydos, and by the challenge of the Sakkarah tombs. The trip was an honest sharing of pleasure.

From my worm's eye view of Chicago House, Luxor, that 1929 trip was a great success. Mr. Rockefeller was keenly interested in the detailed story of the process by which the temple of Medinet Habu was being recorded. At one point he exclaimed: "David must hear this!" and sent out for his fourteen-year-old son. David may not have been so grateful for the call. He was—and is—a student of beetles, and he was happily off in the photographic studio, because the Chicago House photographer, Arthur Morrison, had collected some dung beetles—scarabs—and a rhinoceros beetle. How could the seventeen stages of copying an ancient Egyptian scene compete with that?

There are some other legends about that visit to Egypt. Mr. Rockefeller did not want the members of his family to be photographed by the press. But his name was well known in Egypt, because back in 1926 he had offered ten million dollars for a new museum in Cairo, an offer which Egypt never accepted. When the Rockefeller family landed in Alexandria and when they disembarked from the train in Cairo, avid newspaper photographers were present. Very curiously, all members of the family seemed to be suffering from colds, as they were always busily blowing their noses whenever a photographer approached.

In Cairo the Semiramis Hotel was graciously pleased to make available their best suites for the party. However, Mr. Rockefeller had already been advised what the normal rates should be. When he learned what the hotel proposed to charge, he refused to accept that and suggested a more normal rate. The hotel manager bowed and agreed. Later the manager confided to an assistant that it would be all right, because he would make up the difference by the wine bill. He did not know that Mr. Rockefeller's Baptist principles limited the "wine" bill to a few bottles of Evian water.

Tonight I am beating my breast, throwing ashes upon my head, and confessing that I have sinned, because in the spring of 1936 I was not so grateful to Mr. Rockefeller and the Rockefeller boards. That was when the Rockefeller interests refinanced the Oriental Institute, forcing a reduction of the annual budget down from about \$600,000 to \$200,000. In the shock of that critical surgery, I felt that they had cut off an arm and a leg. As I view the patient after nearly forty years I have better perspective. The refinancing removed dangerous fat, and there was a blood transfusion which brought the

patient out of shock. The chart over fifty-five years shows continuing health.

The Rockefeller tour of the Near East took place only a few months before the stock market crash of October 1929 and the following Depression. The generous commitments to a new Chicago House in Luxor, the Davies-Gardiner paintings, the Abydos project, and the Sakkarah expedition were made before the collapse and were honorably carried out. However, within a few years it became painfully clear that annual allocations from the Rockefeller boards and new benefactions from Mr. Rockefeller himself were out of the question. The incubus of the Depression lay heavy over the world. Prof. Breasted remained optimistic and drafted a proposal for an endowment, which I remember as totalling \$17,000,000. But in the autumn of 1935 Mr. Rockefeller wrote him a letter—which Breasted never lived to read—outlining a financial situation in which the Rockefeller interests would have to terminate their interest in the ancient world.

When I took over the directorship of the Oriental Institute in 1936, it soon became clear that there had to be a re-financing which would cut our activity by two-thirds. Our budget in 1935-36 had been about \$640,000. In the future it would have to be about \$220,000. In the shock of that experience I felt that we were being cut off with a shilling. In actual fact I can now see that we were generously treated.

The Rockefeller Foundation had promised Breasted a million dollars for endowment if he could match that sum from other sources. Now his personal magnetism was gone, and in the crisis they acted with understanding generosity. The General Education Board put up the matching million. That was the blood transfusion which I mentioned; it saved our life as a research institution.

Consider the situation in 1935-36—do you remember it? Do you remember that thing called the Depression? All investments had shrunk, so that Mr. Rockefeller and the Boards were over-extended in terms of their outstanding commitments. Further, six years of distress had turned the attention of philanthropic foundations to the economic and social problems of the present. Archeology might be a valuable pursuit, but it could not compete with poverty, with world food production, with enervating disease, or with Negro education. Philanthropy was forced to turn its eyes away from the past and to face the present and future.

Mr. Rockefeller's own interests were pressing. At this University the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, International House, and the Oriental Institute building had been finished, but elsewhere projects were still in some stage of development, such as Colonial Williamsburg or Jackson Hole in the Grand Tetons. And in New York there was real concern about Rockefeller Center, which had been started in 1931 and was not yet out of the red. Things were very tight in that year 1935-36.

Nor were the Rockefeller boards free to support the Institute in the style to which we had become accustomed. Just think of the pressing demands of the day. In medicine there had been the tremendous push for better medical schools. There had been the Rockefeller Institute's triumphs over hookworm and yellow fever, and now there was the attack on malaria and pioneer work on the role of the viruses. In agriculture new conquests were being made in the development of sturdy types of maize or grain. I have read that in Mexico the new Rocamex corn increased the yield from 10-12 bushels per acre to a potential of 125 bushels. Physics was demanding the recognition of a completely new world, within which the Rockefeller boards would help in the construction of a thing called a cyclotron at Berkeley. There already was a new commitment to the improvement of education in colleges for the blacks. And there already was a concern for knowing more about that world which lay outside of Europe and North America, a concern which would lead to the explosion of area studies in the universities, ultimately running down into the secondary schools. All this was new and exciting, and it puts our concentration on the ancient world into a better perspective. After all, when the Rockefeller Foundation and the General Education Board combined for that final gift, we commanded about \$4,000,000 toward endowment in late 1936. That was a solid backlog.

The second World War came and went. When the Oriental Institute went back to work, it found itself in a tight pinch. We could not afford to publish the reports from those activities at home and in the field which Prof. Breasted had started. Such volumes are very expensive. Further, we did not have the funds to mount a publicity campaign which would raise other money. Carl Kraeling, then the Director of the Institute, went to Mr. Rockefeller and set forth this plight. Mr. Rockefeller gave \$100,000, some of which was to permit an educational outreach to the schools and individuals in the Chicago area, while most of it enabled us to publish the so-called "Breasted backlog" of volumes—the Assyrian Dictionary and the Book of the Dead at home, and in the field the Epigraphic Survey, the Iraq Expedition, and so on. That brought the Institute out of its restricted scope into a healthy new era. We could publish reports at a satisfactory rate. And Kraeling was able to start that explosion of popular interest carried on by the Volunteer Docent Program and the busy Suq in our lobby, and the Membership Program. When I started in 1936 we had 135 or 140 members, and today the number is 1240. Mr. Rockefeller showed his continued belief in Breasted and Breasted's work.

Permit me one more Rockefeller story. It was the autumn of 1936, when Alf Landon was running for President of the United States and all loyal Republicans were displaying the Kansas sunflower. A Trustee of the University brought Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Rockefeller to see the campus here. When they visited the Oriental Institute, I conducted them around the museum. They showed a friendly interest in the Egyptian Hall, on which I had worked so hard, and in the Assyrian Hall. Then we went into the Babylonian Hall, and I prepared to talk about the lion in glazed tiles, that display where the striding lion is framed in colorful rosettes. Before I could start, Nelson Rockefeller exclaimed: "Sunflowers! Kansas sunflowers!" It did not turn out to be an omen in 1936, but let us pretend that our Babylonian lion and his rosettes launched Nelson Rockefeller on his political life. When I read the headline in tonight's paper\* I like to think that maybe the Oriental Institute had some little part in launching him on his career.

\*The *Chicago Daily News* for December 10, 1974, read, "SENATE OK'S ROCKY 90-7."

4 In 1925 John D. Rockefeller, Jr., wrote to James H. Breasted: “The most important factor in the advancement of the well-being of Mankind is men and women, well-trained, with high purpose and fine spirit. . . . You are such an one—unique in your field. . . . The contributions which I have made to the Oriental Institute have been based partly upon my interest in the field which it covers—largely because of my belief in you. Clearly your training, your experience and your knowledge can be put to larger usefulness, if additional workers and sums are made available.”

We are the additional workers who profited by Mr. Rockefeller’s belief in Prof. Breasted. We may be humbly grateful.

Three thousand years ago an Egyptian poet contrasted the excitable man and the quiet man. The excitable man was like a tree that puts out its leaves quickly and loses them quickly. Very soon it is cut down and may serve as fuel for the fire-place.

“But the truly quiet man holds himself in reserve.



He is like a tree growing in a garden.



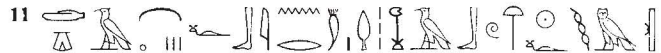
It flourishes and doubles its yield,



As it stands before its lord.



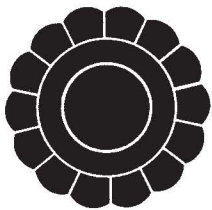
Its fruit is sweet, its shade is pleasant,



And it reaches its end in the garden.”



We of the Oriental Institute have savored the fruit and relaxed in the shade of such a tree, the “truly quiet man,” John D. Rockefeller, Jr.



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