



News & Notes

The Oriental Institute

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EXPEDITION TO YEMEN

by Raymond Tindel, Museum Preparator

"We've got money for Yemen, Ray," came Mac Gibson's voice over the phone; he had just received word of a National Geographic Society grant and suddenly our dream of an expedition to Yemen became real. There followed six weeks of near frantic preparation, with plans to make and equipment to purchase. The staff of the Yemen expedition included Dennis Collins (see photo), Stephen Lintner and me. Our purpose was reconnaissance: we know less of the culture of early South Arabia than of any of the other high civilizations of the ancient Near East. Much of what we do know comes from texts; modern Yemen has remained generally inaccessible to the outside world and very little archeological work has been done there. We had secured permission to work in an area south of Sana' near the cities of Dhamar and Yerim to locate interesting sites and to evaluate the prospects for later, more intensive, expeditions.

The history of the many powerful kingdoms that arose and flourished in early South Arabia before the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D. is largely unknown. The most famous of these kingdoms was Saba, known in the Bible as Sheba, whose queen courted Solomon in the 10th century B.C. and whose capital city at Marib had a great dam 700 yards long. Other kingdoms in the region included Ma'in, Qataban, Hadramaut, and (later) Himyar. They fought interminably among themselves, but for a thousand years they were Arabia Felix, their trade in spices and incense the envy of the Mediterranean world.

We chose to concentrate our efforts on the site of the old Himyar capital of Zafar. The Himyarite kingdom came into being perhaps a century before Christ and attained such prominence that later the Moslems would refer to any of the early South Arabian cultures as "Himyarite." The kingdom was periodically wracked by fierce internal religious strife, some kings embracing Judaism, others Christianity, with attendant persecution of subjects of the wrong faith. Military invasions from Ethiopia and Sassanian Persia into the area weakened the Himyarites



The staff of the Yemen Expedition (l. to r.): Stephen Lintner, Dennis Collins, Khalid al-Mindi, Selma al-Radi, Rosalind Wade, and Ray Tindel.

further, paving the way for the introduction of Islam and a northward shift of the center of power, to Mecca and Medina.

Our site at Zafar showed indications of extensive ancient remains, though these are obscured by a modern village, agricultural terraces, and rubble. We mapped a large area of the site, recording both ancient and modern features, and did a photographic survey of ancient structures on the rest of the site. The government of Yemen had just built a small museum at Zafar and was collecting antiquities from the site gathered over the years by local residents. In return for our help in organizing the new museum and preparing displays we were given publication rights to the collection. We catalogued and photographed the nearly 700 pieces of statuary and bas-relief, including some memorable hybrid creatures depicted as

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A closeup of the entrances to two plundered tombs at Zafar.

part animal and part plant, and a fragmentary relief of Hercules in a lion-skin cloak. These photos of the objects should add considerably to our knowledge of Himyarite archeology, much of which shows a strong Greco-Roman influence consistent with what we know of the site and its historical context.

Like much of the Near East Yemen is presently enjoying considerable prosperity, with the result that ancient remains are being torn down at an alarming rate as the modern inhabitants scavenge for building material and clear new areas for farming. Villagers at Zafar regaled us with stories of how Himyarite material used to be sold for one riyal (25¢) per camel load. In the face of such a situation, we



Plaque showing mythical creatures—a leaf-donkey, a scorpion, and a centaur,

hope to continue our survey as soon as possible, and at least to photograph and map the ancient structures before they disappear into modern buildings. We have enjoyed the enthusiastic support and cooperation of the Yemeni Department of Antiquities and of the U.S. Embassy and the State Department, which we appreciate very much. There now remains only to secure that final and essential element for another successful expedition, money.

Editor's note: *Raymond Tindel and Dennis Collins will discuss their expedition in a lecture with slide illustrations to be given on Tuesday, Nov. 14; see page 4 of this issue for more details.*

CHALLENGE GRANTS AWARDED FOR ORIENTAL INSTITUTE PROJECTS

Two invaluable research projects now under way at the Oriental Institute have been awarded grants totaling more than \$132,000 by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Moreover, NEH will match dollar-for-dollar contributions towards these projects raised over the next two years, up to an additional \$70,000. Money given towards the support of these projects will thus be doubly effective.

The Demotic Dictionary Project will provide an essential reference tool for Egyptologists. Demotic is the most difficult of ancient Egyptian scripts. Though there is a vast number of extant Demotic documents, many of which are of the greatest interest (including, for example, the archives of individual families from as early as 500 B.C.), very few scholars are trained to read them. The Dictionary will open up a great many areas for research that are now inaccessible. The project, under the direction of Prof. Janet H. Johnson, has received an initial grant of \$76,000 from NEH, and will receive up to an additional \$50,000 to match funds raised by private contributions.

A "Source Book for the Social and Economic History of the Ancient Near East" is being written under the direction of Prof. Ignace J. Gelb. The Source Book will contain a rich selection of documents il-

lustrating aspects of social and economic developments in this area and will include an extensive scholarly commentary placing these documents in their proper contexts. It will be of great use to scholars of ancient languages untrained in the special character of economic and religious texts and to social scientists and historians not acquainted with ancient languages. The project has been awarded \$55,646 by NEH, which will provide matching funds up to an additional \$20,000.

The challenge grants from NEH offer a special opportunity for members interested in supporting these important and unique activities. Your tax-deductible contributions are warmly solicited and will be deeply appreciated. Checks should be made payable to the Oriental Institute and should be marked clearly—either on the check itself or on an accompanying paper—as "Matching Funds for NEH Demotic Dictionary Grant" or "Matching Funds for NEH Source Book Grant." Special simplified forms are being printed and will be sent out with the next *News and Notes*.

The Museum of the Oriental Institute has been awarded a grant of \$15,000 from the Institute of Museum Services, a recently created Federal agency within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

NEW EXHIBITS TO ATTRACT CHRISTMAS SHOPPERS

From a *Syrian Suq*, a new exhibition at the Oriental Institute Museum, opens on November 17th, running through December 13th. The exhibit consists of a wide variety of handmade articles, purchased earlier this year by John Carswell, the Museum Curator, when he was in Syria on a research project. All of the objects are handmade, and all of them come from the *sucs* (bazaars) of Aleppo and Damascus. In order to display them, a corner of an imaginary *suc* is being created at the end of the Palestinian gallery in the museum.

Among the many objects—all of which will be for sale—are hand-blocked silk scarves, Syrian dresses, embroidered felt jackets, beaded purses and jewelry, crocheted hats, children's clothes, cummerbunds, harnesses and horse trappings, metalwork and turned wooden goods.

Starting on the same date will be a second exhibition, *Children's Cut-out Toys from Damascus*, which will run until January 10. These children's paper cut-outs include many different subjects: animals, birds, cowboys, camels, airplanes, ships and warriors, and even a do-it-yourself mosque. The toys are designed to be pasted down on cardboard, then cut out and fastened together. The exhibition will include both completed and uncut toys, and the latter will also be for sale.

In order to accommodate the two exhibits, the Palestinian gallery is being cleared and redecorated; this has provided the opportunity to re-organize the Palestinian material, and to include a number of new



Inside the suq at Damascus.

objects not previously on display. A new lighting system is also being installed. When both shows are over, Mr. Carswell plans to use the space at the north end of the gallery for a small display of early Christian and Islamic material from the Near East. The Museum will then have on display objects representing a chronological continuum, from the prehistoric period to the nineteenth century.

NUBIAN ART DISPLAYED AT BROOKLYN MUSEUM

As part of the most extensive exhibition of Nubian objects ever mounted, nine pieces from the Oriental Institute's collection are now being shown at the Brooklyn Museum (through Dec. 31). Excavated by Prof. Keith C. Seele near the southern border of Egypt before flood waters caused by the Aswan High Dam covered the area, these nine pieces include three of the most significant of the exhibition.

Bruce Williams, Research Associate at the Institute, reports that the Qustul Incense Burner described in *News and Notes* last year (No. 37, Nov. 1977) contains the earliest self-evident representation of a king ever found. After the finds at the tombs at Qustul were compared with other Egyptian remains which are dated, it was found that the king on the Incense Burner was made in 3300-3400 B.C., about 60 years earlier than other known predynastic depictions of Egyptian kings.

Skillful detective work by Bruce Williams and Joanna Steinkeller, an artist working at the Institute, resulted in the restoration of a second important piece, the complete figure of a hippopotamus, whose powerfully modeled head is pictured in *Time* magazine's article on the exhibit (Oct. 2, 1978, p. 85). The foot of this or a similar figure had also been found at the excavation site; and, using other smaller figures as guides, the two were able to reconstruct an animal about 19" long by 13" high, originally made in 3000 B.C.

Also shown in Brooklyn is a rare incised pottery bowl encircled by three rows of cattle and beautifully colored. Only one other significant example of this type of decorated bowl exists, found by Dr. Seele on the same day, only a few yards away. The bowls date from about 1800 B.C.

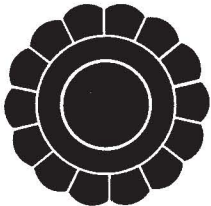
The Oriental Institute cordially invites members and friends to two illustrated lectures:

Tuesday, November 14: **Yemen, Ancient and Modern**
Raymond Tindel and Dennis Collins, Oriental Institute Museum

Wednesday, December 6: **Tell Madhhur (Hamrin Salvage Project, Iraq)**
T. Cuyler Young, Jr., Royal Ontario Museum

Both lectures will be at 8:00 p.m. in Breasted Hall at the Oriental Institute, 1155 E. 58th 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. — The Museum Halls and The Suq will be open one hour before the lecture.)



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