

My Career in Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology

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My father's grandparents and great-grandparents crossed the vast American plains in wagons drawn by teams of oxen from Arkansas to the Walla Walla area of Washington Territory in 1870 in a typical pattern of western migration in America before the coming of the railroads to the West. My mother's parents, on the other hand, were immigrants from Denmark in 1901. Like many other immigrant families from Scandinavia, they settled in a farming community peopled mainly by fellow Danes, first in Colorado, and subsequently near St. Andrews in central Washington State.

My interest in languages arose early. My Danish grandmother, who was in her mid-thirties when she came to America, learned to understand English and to speak a heavily accented English, but never learned to write in English. In the days before many farm families had telephones, family members wrote to one another a couple of times a week. My grandmother wrote, of course, in Danish, which was my mother's first language and which she had learned to read and write in summer Danish schools in her rural community. While still in elementary school, I wanted to learn to read my grandmother's letters myself. With the help of a small Danish-English dictionary and an elementary grammar that my mother had, I learned Danish vocabulary and Danish grammar well enough to understand her letters. By the time I was in high school, I had developed an interest in family history, so I began to write to my grandmother's sister and my grandfather's brother and sister who had remained in Denmark. At that time, hardly anyone—certainly not of their generation or even the next—in rural Denmark studied English, so I attempted to write to them in Danish. I certainly made many mistakes, but apparently they were able to understand what I wrote, and I could understand their responses.

In 1943 my parents moved from the small town of Hunters (near the Columbia River and across the river from the Colville Indian Reservation) to a 240-acre farm in Spokane County, Washington. We had no electricity or running water (water was pumped from a well by a windmill or by a hand pump). We children attended the local two-room school that was two miles away, but in 1945 our school district was split and consolidated with two schools in nearby towns. Our new school in Medical Lake was still small—two grades to each room. In high school, I had an opportunity to study Spanish—the only language offered at first. This was a lot of fun. The next year several of us who were interested asked the teacher of Spanish if she would also offer Latin. I did not realize at the time what an added burden that was, but she took it on cheerfully and offered us two years of Latin. In my junior and senior years, the same teacher

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offered German to a small class of about five of us, with textbooks that used the old German Gothic script.

I knew that I did not want a future life as a farmer. Especially in retrospect, I treasure some of the experiences of farm life, but the drudgery of twice-a-day milking and feeding of cows, the care of other animals, the discomforts of putting up hay in the summertime, the dustiness of planting and tilling and wheat harvesting, building barbed-wire fences, and such did not appeal to me. I definitely wanted something different in my future.

Having a younger brother and three sisters, I realized that there was no question of any family financial support for college, but as valedictorian of my high school graduating class in 1952 at Medical Lake, Eastern Washington College of Education (subsequently Eastern Washington University) in the town of Cheney offered me a scholarship of \$100 that paid most of my student fees. At that time, it was possible to get part-time work on campus that paid enough to cover room and board (the pay was 80 cents an hour). One year I worked in the college library, the next year on the grounds crew (raking leaves, chipping ice off sidewalks, digging ditches, etc.), and then did janitorial work in the college elementary school. I also earned extra money by editing and typing the term papers of other students for fifty cents a page.

I was excited by the opportunities to study languages in college. My Spanish was good enough that I could immediately take advanced classes. In my first year, I also began the study of French and Russian. Russian seemed a timely language to study, and indeed, the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, died in 1953 during the year I studied Russian. Unfortunately the professor of Russian (he was a native of Russia, but taught in the economics department) did not return the following year, so I had to give up on Russian. Hoping to be able to teach Spanish and French at the high school level, I pursued a degree in education.

Summers in my college years (and part of my graduate school years as well) were spent working in the Green Giant pea cannery in Dayton, Washington, the area where my father's family had settled in 1870. Most of the men working in the pea harvest were from Mexico (they were called *braceros* in Spanish), and I got acquainted with several of them. They appreciated having an American who was reasonably fluent in their language and who enjoyed the Mexican music with them on the jukebox in one of the local taverns.

In my first years at Green Giant, I had relatively low-skill jobs such as handling the empty wooden boxes that the peas were hauled to the cannery in. Eventually I had a much more responsible job—processing the peas in huge retorts with steam. About a dozen of these retorts were arranged in a circle. A crane lowered three large steel baskets filled with cans of peas into each retort, which was then clamped shut. My job was to turn on the steam, bring the temperature to a certain degree and to cook them for a specified length of time. So it was a matter of keeping an eye on six or eight retorts at a time both for temperature and timing, all a few minutes apart. Luckily, I never blew the top off

a retort or overcooked a load of peas. To this day, the smell of canned peas reminds me of my years working for the Jolly Green Giant.

When the pea-canning season was finished, I usually drove a truck in the wheat harvest for farmers in the area hauling a truck load of threshed wheat to the nearest grain elevator, about 20 miles away, thus earning money for clothing and books for the coming college year. Driving a wheat truck is not as easy as it sounds. The threshed wheat is held in a large hopper on the combine until it is nearly full. A man on the combine signals the truck driver who drives so that an auger moves the wheat through what looks like a huge spout and into the bed of the truck. So as not to lose any time, the combine does not stop or slow down, so the truck must keep the same speed. The driver has to be careful to keep the spout over the bed of the truck and also not to drive into the combine. This gets tricky on the rolling hills of the Dayton area. The combine has a leveling device that keeps the body of the combine level even on a hillside (and they do tip over occasionally nevertheless), but it can be a bit scary for a truck driver. Depending on the distance to the grain elevator and whether there was a line of trucks waiting to unload, there was often some time to read a bit between runs. Thus I had a chance to read several French novels, the memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir, and Shakespeare plays while I waited.

For recreational reading in my college years, I followed up on a youthful interest in ancient Egypt and its pyramids and mummies. At some point I had read Edward Chiera's They Wrote on Clay (Chicago, 1938, reprinted 1957) that was my introduction to the world of Babylonia and Assyria and its mysterious cuneiform script. I was fascinated by the thought of someone being able to read cuneiform and to read something that no one had read in thousands of years. It was also then that I first read W. F. Albright's From the Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore, 1940, second edition 1957) and it opened up to me a new window on the ancient Near East. I wondered if I was foolish to think of trying to study the ancient Near East seriously.

I became active in student government, particularly in my junior and senior years. In the summer of 1955 I was a delegate to the national meeting of the National Student Association at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The plenary sessions lasted late into the evening, with especially heated discussions on foreign policy matters. One of the hottest topics was whether the China seat on the Security Council of the United Nations should be the Nationalist government in Taiwan or the People's Republic of China. In 1956 I applied to attend a six-week seminar of the organization devoted to issues of foreign policy as they affected students. I was among those selected to attend the seminar, held at Harvard University. It was only many years later that it was disclosed that these seminars were secretly funded by the United States government through the Central Intelligence Agency.

In my senior year of college, my French teacher encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship to study for a year in France. The Dean of Students urged me to apply also for a Danforth Fellowship (funded by the founders of the

Ralston-Purina Company in St. Louis). To my great surprise, I was awarded both a Danforth (to pursue a higher degree) and a Fulbright. Since the Fulbright was for only one year, it was agreed that I should take up the Fulbright first. Thus, for the 1956-57 academic year, I was assigned to Toulouse in southwestern France (a city which I confess I had never heard of before). I crossed the Atlantic from New York City to Le Havre, France on the 1936 Cunard ocean liner, the original "Queen Mary," a wonderful Art Deco ship (now docked in Long Beach, California as a tourist attraction). Once in Toulouse, it was made clear to me that I was not obliged to pursue the course of study originally proposed, so I registered for a course in Greek and Roman art, and then I learned that across town there was the Institut Catholique where one could study Hebrew, Arabic, and even Akkadian! The Abbé Maurice Baillet welcomed me warmly in his courses of Hebrew and Akkadian, and I started Arabic with another faculty member. While I kept up with the other students in the classes, I have to confess that I did not learn a great deal beyond the scripts and rudimentary grammar.

Hebrew and Arabic use alphabetic scripts, so the script is not a real hurdle to learning the languages. Cuneiform is another matter. As the name implies, the script is made up of wedge-shaped marks. In the case of clay, the wedges are made with a reed stylus in the damp clay. In the case of stone, the wedges need to be chiseled into the stone. Cuneiform is a script that has been used to write many different languages, the first of which was Sumerian, the language of ancient Sumer that is unrelated to any other known language. Later, it was adapted, and somewhat modified, to write Akkadian (the term used to include both Babylonian and Assyrian). The script utilizes several hundred signs.

While I was in Toulouse, I had an opportunity to meet with Professor Georges Boyer, an elderly historian of law who was also a scholar of cuneiform. He was then preparing an edition of legal texts discovered by French excavators at the Syrian site of Mari and which appeared in 1958 as *Textes juridiques* in the series Archives Royales de Mari. He was the first professional Assyriologist I ever met.

Being in Europe meant it was possible to make brief visits to other areas of France. I was also able to make two trips to Spain, one to central Spain where there were lots of remnants of the Roman period. In the spring I hitchhiked with a German girl to Barcelona where we were able to get a boat to Palma de Majorca. In the long Easter recess, I took a train to Denmark to visit my mother's relatives for the first time.

Even though the Fulbright paid enough for living expenses and a bit of travel, more extensive travel required other strategies. At that time, it was quite common for students to hitchhike (called "auto-stop" in some European languages) throughout Europe, so I decided I would hitchhike to Greece or as far as I could get, stopping at night in youth hostels or inexpensive hotels. I especially wanted to visit the Roman ruins across southern France (Narbonne, Arles, Nimes, Fréjus, etc.) In Trieste, Italy I was able to get a visa to travel through Yugoslavia. I had no concept of how little traffic there would be in

Yugoslavia—the main north-south highway was cobblestones, and so little traveled that grass grew in the roadway. Yugoslavia was then still only slowly recovering from World War II. I saw many people walking barefoot along the roadway carrying their shoes, obviously to prevent unnecessary wear. Cars were few and far between, and I even had a few rides on donkey carts. Somewhere south of Belgrade, a young Greek man driving a German car stopped for me. I soon realized that he had a double purpose—not only to have someone to talk to for the long trip, but also to have an accomplice in his smuggling operation. He asked me to hide a number of wristwatches and women's nylon stockings in the bottom of my knapsack to smuggle into Greece. But his main purpose was to smuggle the car into Greece by having documents altered and the serial number filed off at a small town near the border. The customs agent gave up searching my knapsack before he got to the watches and nylons under my loaf of bread. My friend had no problem with the car. We crossed the border into Greece and drove on to Athens where I stayed with his family for several days. He also took me to Mycenae and Epidaurus (famous in the history of Greek medicine). Of course I visited the Parthenon and other famous sites (including the Areopagos where the Apostle Paul had preached) before taking an overnight boat to the island of Crete.

I had had a year of Classical Greek in college, but that was not much help with Modern Greek, though of course I could read the street signs perfectly well.

After a few days in Crete, during which I got to visit the site of Knossos (about 1600 B.C.), home of the legendary king Minos, I was able to go on to the Island of Rhodes for a few days, and then to get passage on a tiny fishing boat to the small fishing village of Marmaris on the southwestern Turkish coast. Marmaris is now a tourist center, but it certainly was not at that time. I was able to find a small hotel. The sheets had obviously been slept in before, but there really was not much choice. I asked why the legs of the bed were sitting in cans of water. I was told that the water prevented bedbugs from getting into the bed. Maybe this worked—I did not get any bedbug bites! After a day or so there, I took a bus to Istanbul, where I stayed in an inexpensive hotel while I visited Hagia Sophia, the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace Museum, the covered bazaar, and other major sites of Istanbul. But I wanted to go inland as well, so I took a bus to Ankara, the capital in central Anatolia, which had a fine museum of Hittite culture. I had hoped to visit the ruins of the ancient Hittite capital, Hattusha, but time was running out, so I took a train back to Istanbul and then to Western Europe. But the time in the Moslem areas of Yugoslavia and in Turkey had given me a foretaste of the Middle East.

The Danforth Fellowship paid not only tuition but also a stipend for living expenses and books. I applied to several graduate schools, but I really wanted to go to Johns Hopkins in Baltimore to study with W. F. Albright, whose book *From the Stone Age to Christianity* had so excited me some years earlier. After a cross-country trip by Greyhound bus from Spokane, Washington to Baltimore, I showed up at Johns Hopkins. Albright was Chairman of the Oriental Seminary

(now called the Department of Near Eastern Studies), so, of course, I had to see him. He was interested that I had just spent a year in France, so he began to speak to me in French. I had read of his great language prowess and of the many languages he could speak, so I was curious to hear how good his spoken French was. It was only a couple of years later that I learned that this conversation was my language exam in French, which I had passed! I did not know in advance that 1957-58 was Albright's final year and that he was retiring, but I was glad to have had his courses in ancient Near Eastern history and Palestinian archaeology as well as a seminar on the Dead Sea Scrolls. I stayed in touch with him until he died.

In 1957-58, an advanced graduate student, Edward Campbell, taught Akkadian at Johns Hopkins. The next year, as I recall, Thomas Lambdin taught the second year course. But fortunately for me, the following year, 1959, Johns Hopkins hired a full-time Assyriologist, W. G. Lambert, who, though originally from Birmingham, England, had been teaching in Toronto. His Toronto student, Kirk Grayson, followed him to Baltimore, so there were two of us who were serious about Assyriology.

The Johns Hopkins tradition was the study of a number of languages. Everyone took several years of Biblical Hebrew. Most of us took two or three years of Classical Arabic. I also had a couple of years of Egyptian hieroglyphics, as well as Ugaritic, the language written in an alphabetic cuneiform script in the area of ancient Ugarit on the coast of Syria. The only one of these languages that I have followed up on or that has proved particularly useful is Arabic, though the Classical Arabic we studied is a far cry from the Iraqi Arabic heard on the streets of Baghdad or spoken by our workmen. Nevertheless, I can usually get the gist of a radio news broadcast or a newspaper article in Modern Standard Arabic, which is based on Classical.

I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation under Lambert on Babylonian potency incantations, of which he had identified and copied new fragments, particularly in the British Museum (the dissertation was published in an expanded version in 1967 as ŠĀ.ZI.GA: Ancient Mesopotamian Potency Incantations). Kirk Grayson and I both were awarded our doctorate degrees on the same day in June 1962. While Grayson had been recruited for work on the Assyrian Dictionary in Chicago, Lambert had supported my application to the Baghdad School of the American Schools of Oriental Research for a fellowship to study Sumerian incantations in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. Dr. Vaughn Crawford of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, who was a member of the Baghdad School Committee, had arranged for me to stay at the British School of Archaeology in Baghdad, with whom he had worked several seasons at the old Assyrian capital Nimrud (ancient Kalhu, Calah of the Old Testament). When passing through Chicago that summer, I visited the Oriental Institute and met with Professors Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner, but I also met Donald Hansen who was a member of the Oriental Institute expedition to Nippur. He urged me to pay a visit to Nippur while I was in Iraq.

In late summer 1962 I headed for Iraq, traveling on the Norwegian ship “Stavengerfjord” to Copenhagen, where a cousin met me and traveled with me to Jutland, the peninsula which is the mainland of Denmark, where I was to visit Danish family (I stayed with my grandfather's youngest brother and his family). While there, I fell ill with hepatitis, conjectured to have been contracted from eating contaminated shellfish in Baltimore. I spent a month in a hospital in Skive, the principal town in that part of Jutland, and then recuperated with cousins before I was strong enough to continue by train to Baghdad, stopping each night to spend the night in a hotel to rest. After a couple of days of rest in Istanbul, I boarded a train bound for Baghdad. On the platform I heard the news that Eleanor Roosevelt, the much-admired widow of President Franklin Roosevelt, had died. The slow train (I think it was an extension of the Simpleton Orient Express, though certainly not the luxurious one made famous by Agatha Christie) made frequent stops across Turkey, where passengers could get off and buy provisions or buy from vendors on the platform who crowded near the train windows at every station. Among the passengers in my compartment was an elderly Iraqi couple traveling to Baghdad. They had a small primus that they lit occasionally to brew tea, which they shared with me. The further we traveled the more the sights and smells became Middle Eastern—the calls of the muezzin, the herds of camels, the sound of spoken Turkish and then Arabic. As the sun rose on the last morning, I caught sight through the train window of the Malwiyah (the spiral minaret in Samarra which I recognized from having seen it on a series of Iraqi postage stamps). After the long dusty overland journey, it was a relief to arrive at the British School where I heard native speakers of English for the first time in a long while. Despite the horrors we associate with Baghdad these days, it seemed then to be a magical moment, the culmination of a long dream.

The British School of Archaeology was then headquartered in an old Ottoman Turkish house on the bank of the Tigris directly across the river from the Zia Hotel (I believe it is called the Tia Hotel in Agatha Christie novels) where archaeologists had traditionally stayed in Baghdad. The house had the typical central courtyard, surrounded by rooms on the ground floor and on the second floor (first floor in British terminology).

Among the young British who were at the School that year was Julian Reade, who has become well known as an authority on Assyrian sculpture and on British excavations in Assyria. He went to the Iraq Museum each morning, so he showed me what bus would drop me right across the street from the Museum and he introduced me to officials and young colleagues there. This was the original Iraq Museum, not its successor on the other side of the Tigris that was looted in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The old museum was small and there were no special facilities for visiting researchers, but the Director of the Museum, Faraj Basmachi, had a small table set up for me in his office near a window so I had good natural light for reading cuneiform tablets. He facilitated my getting the cuneiform tablets I wanted to study.

The Iraq Department of Antiquities was without doubt one of the most

professional of any in the Arab world. When I arrived in Baghdad, the Director General of Antiquities was Taha Baqir and the Director of Excavations was Fuad Safar (a Christian). Both had graduate degrees from the University of Chicago. Taha Baqir retired from his position and died a number of years ago, but Fuad Safar remained a towering presence and the intellectual center of the Department until his tragic death in 1978 in an automobile wreck when en route to visit a site in an area of salvage excavations.

In November 1962, there was a bit of excitement at the British School when they got word of the impending visit of the British archaeologist Max Mallowan and his wife Agatha Christie. We were all told that we were to address her only as Mrs. Mallowan and that we were not to mention her mystery novels or her plays. As it happened, when they arrived, they had just the night before attended a celebration of the fifteenth year of her play, "The Mousetrap," in London and they were still wearing the clothes they had worn to the celebration the evening before. Due to turbulence en route, a flight attendant (they were called stewardesses then) had spilled a whole tray of Coca Cola on her but, nonplussed, she soaked her skirt in a bathtub and changed. The next day (a Friday) a trip had been planned for Babylon, so I finally got to see fabled Babylon. It was a disappointment to find that the Tower of Babel was now a deep, water-filled hole in the ground, and that no one knew for sure where the Hanging Gardens of Babylon had been located. However, there was a wonderful tranquility walking among the groves of date palms along the slowly moving Euphrates. Now, so many years later, the phrase that comes to mind when I think of Babylon is from Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept."

At the School, all residents had breakfast on their own schedule, but lunch and dinner were taken together in the ground-floor dining room. The Brits apparently all learn at school the art of telling amusing stories, and we heard a good many, but I felt somewhat out of my element. One evening at dinner, Mrs. Mallowan good-naturedly called me "Robert-the-Silent," and it is true that I was rather silent. Following British custom, tea was served every afternoon around 4:30 in the second floor sitting room, usually with small cookies that the Persian cook, Ali, had baked. Mrs. Mallowan was often sitting there reading a murder mystery or knitting.

Tea might be the traditional British black tea, or what is called chai hamuth (literally "bitter tea") that is made from dried crushed Basra limes (numi Basra). The latter is nearly always sweetened with sugar. Both chai hamuth and regular tea are served in Iraqi teahouses in small glasses called istakhan. If one does not specify, the tea will be served with several teaspoons of sugar added. I always found it necessary to say "kullish qalil, very little."

Normally at meals (and especially at breakfast), the local Iraqi flat bread (called khubuz) was served. The local Iraqi wine (from northern Iraq) was not especially good, and was only rarely served, but one could get Lebanese wine occasionally. Each person could keep a personal bottle of alcohol in the bar in the sitting room for a cocktail before dinner. The local drink was araq (the Iraqi

version of Turkish raki, Greek ouzo, etc.) an anise-flavored alcoholic drink to which water is added. Unique to Iraq varieties of araq, as far as I know, is one called mastaki that tastes, to most non-Iraqis, like turpentine.

When I was first in Iraq, the value of the Iraqi dinar was tied to the British pound. In fact, the banking system was really a holdover from earlier British influence in Iraq, even to banks being closed on Boxing Day (the day after Christmas). Across from one of the main banks, the Rafidain, were the small stands of the moneychangers where most of us changed currency as needed.

One of the pleasures of living in Baghdad was visiting the suq (the Arabic word for what is elsewhere called a bazaar). Different areas were specialized in different things. The silver suq was dominated by elderly men with long beards (they were predominantly members of a religious group known as Mandaean, whose religious rites, focused heavily on water, we could often see from the British School on the bank of the Tigris). Here one heard the gentle taps of the smiths' small mallets on the silver as they made the typical Iraqi niello work (napkin rings, cigarette cases, sometimes whole tea sets) decorated with scenes of boats on the Tigris, camels, and mosques. The copper suq was a very noisy place, with a great deal of hammering as the coppersmiths made copper pots and pans and other household utensils. There one had to shout to be heard over the din of the hammering. There was also a carpet suq. In the cloth suq one could choose a fabric, have measurements taken, and come back in a day or so to pick up a disdasha (the long dress-like garment traditionally worn by men) or a warm wool abba (very welcome for warmth in unheated rooms). This is the old, traditional part of the suq, between the Tigris and Rashid Street, one of the main thoroughfares of old Baghdad. On the other side of Rashid Street is the Shorjah, the spice suq, the area where one buys tea, coffee, pots and pans and kitchen wares, but also the area where used Western style clothing was sold (an inexpensive place to buy warm clothing for wear on archaeological digs). A report I first saw on April 20, 2005, says that the Shorjah has been destroyed by fire. Baghdad, along with Aleppo, had one of the great old suqs, largely unmodernized, except for dangling electric light bulbs. I think it is a cultural calamity that any part of it be lost.

It had been arranged that in late December I would go south to Afak to visit the Oriental Institute excavations at Nippur. I took a train to Diwanayah, where the Nippur driver, Jabbar, was to meet me with the expedition Land Rover. The expedition had rented a house beside the canal and a few feet from the suq in Afak (and drove daily to the site, some seven miles away). There I met Donald Hansen again, and the Field Director, Carl Haines, as well as Giorgio Buccellati, a student at the University of Chicago who was that season's epigrapher (responsible for finds of cuneiform texts). I greatly enjoyed visiting the site and participating in the work. I spent Christmas with the Nippur Expedition, but I then returned to Baghdad so Robert McCormick Adams, the new Director of the Oriental Institute, could have what had been my room.

In the early spring of 1963, I took a train north to Mosul so I could visit the

British excavations at Nimrud. While I was there, they arranged a Friday outing to visit some of the Christian monasteries in Assyria, including Mar Behnam, one of the best-known monasteries and which is still in active use. A couple of the monks gave us a tour of the monastery. Especially in view of the very early establishment of Christianity in Assyria and its continuity to the present and the continuity of the population, I think there is every likelihood that ancient Assyrians are among the ancestors of modern Assyrians of the area.

In 1981 I was able to visit additional monasteries on a trip to the north arranged by the Directorate General of Antiquities. On this occasion they had arranged for the whole group to have lunch at the monastery. We were served some of the local wine. The extent and importance of Christianity in northern Iraq is probably little recognized in Europe or America. An excellent study (of which I own a set) is J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie chrétienne: contribution à l'étude de l'histoire et de la géographie ecclésiastiques et monastique de l'Iraq* [Christian Assyria: Contribution to the study of ecclesiastical and monastic history and geography in northern Iraq], 3 volumes (Beirut, 1965-68). He also wrote a separate volume on Christian Mosul. Unfortunately, I have never had an opportunity for independent travel to Christian towns and villages in Iraq. In Baghdad I knew the Assyrian scholar, Donny George, who is now the Director of the Iraq Museum. Ironically, most Assyrian Christians I know I met in Chicago, beginning with the late Fred Tamimi in the 1970s, subsequently his brother-in-law, Robert Paulissian, M.D., who is the editor of this journal, the Northwestern Illinois University linguist, Edward Odisho, Daniel Benjamin, and Norman Solkhah of Chicago who founded a Mesopotamian museum in Chicago, to name only a few with whom I have had long and most cordial friendships.

In 1962-63, there were relatively few foreigners in Baghdad, and most were in the diplomatic corps, though several were there as commercial representatives (such as an American, who was married to an Italian woman, who was head of the Pan American Airlines office). I was readily integrated into the Anglophone group (which included a Danish couple who lived at Abu Ghraib—at that time, the center for dairy research). One of the frequent activities was a Friday picnic outing to visit various ancient sites reachable from Baghdad. This was a wonderful opportunity to get a feel for the geography and the climate and to see the native wildlife. The picnics usually featured bread and cheese, sometimes canned hams, and one couple regularly brought a thermos of martinis. But there were also frequent dinner parties at the homes of various diplomatic personnel where there was vivacious discussions of current political events, particularly in British homes where the men in the group separated from the women, usually for cigars and brandy after dinner. Later that year, and in subsequent years, many of these people used their Fridays for visits to our excavations, invariably bringing fresh fruits and vegetables that we could not get locally, and occasionally an imported Danish ham. When the weather was hot, a cooler of beer such as Pilsner Urquell (or the excellent Iraqi beer, Ferida) was especially welcome.

Circumstances—and probably just plain luck—triggered events that were to

lead to extraordinary finds of cuneiform tablets. Oriental Institute Director Robert Adams had decided that at the close of the season at Nippur, the Nippur Land Rover (owned by the Oriental Institute) should be used by the Oriental Institute's expedition at Choga Mish in Iranian Khuzestan (southwestern Iran), directed by Pinhas Delougaz and Helene Kantor, two of the senior professors of archaeology at the Oriental Institute. Adams asked Donald Hansen to drive it there, and agreed to Donald's request that I accompany him. Due to Iraqi customs regulations, we were not allowed to take the Land Rover out of the country without posting a security deposit (something like \$1,500 as I recall), which Adams authorized the Oriental Institute in Chicago to wire to Baghdad (wiring funds was perfectly easy in the banking system then in use). We got our Iranian visas, and then drove to Basrah and spent the night, but then there was a heavy rain, so we spent another night hoping the mud that lay between Basrah and the Iranian border would have dried sufficiently. Despite being bogged down in the mud several times, we made it to a sleepy border crossing where we crossed into Iran and made our way to Ahwaz, where we spent the night before going on to Choga Mish. We had been in Iran only a couple of days when we got word that there had been a revolution in Iraq, and the Leader (el-za'im), Abd al-Karim Qassem, had been killed (February 9, 1963) and the borders of Iraq had been closed. I spent ten days or so participating in the excavations at Choga Mish. I was also able to visit the nearby site of Jundi Shapur, well known as the location of one of the Nestorian (also called the Assyrian Church of the East) schools that had a leading role in preserving (in Syriac) Greek writings on medicine, astronomy, and mathematics. There is a new book by Raymond Le Coz, Les médecins nestoriens au Moyen Âge: les maîtres des arabes [The Nestorian Physicians in the Middle Ages: The teachers of the Arabs] (Paris, 2004). He has an excellent discussion of the medical school at Jundi Shapur on pp. 53-66. I also took advantage of being in Iran to visit Persepolis, Shiraz, Isfahan, and then Tehran, before joining a busload of Shiite pilgrims en route to Baghdad.

When Donald Hansen returned to Iraq, he found that the security deposit could not be refunded and taken out of the country. He then made a bold proposal to Director Adams. There was a site a few miles from Nippur that he had visited several years before where the surface of the tell was littered with pottery of the Early Dynastic period (mid-third millennium B.C.) and earlier, levels that lie many meters below the surface at Nippur. He proposed using that money for a brief sounding at the site of Abu Salabikh. The Department of Antiquities approved the request, and loaned us two or three large canvass tents that served as work areas, dining room, and sleeping quarters. I was listed as epigrapher. Vaughn Crawford was to join us later from his season with the British at Nimrud and was to be the photographer. Donald Hansen hired as a cook an elderly man from India who had come to Iraq in the time of World War I. He had cooked for various foreign families in Baghdad, and in spite of our limited facilities, was innovative in serving us good meals with locally available products (in the spring it seemed to be mostly zucchini squash, tomatoes, and onions, though we could

buy eggs and live chickens from local farmers). Iraq had good plants for processing jams made from local fruits—especially figs, though they also made jam from carrots). Dates were always available, and very cheap. From the Nippur Expedition we had borrowed cots, mattresses, sheets, pots and pans, and dishes (the English-made set which had been used by the Oriental Institute in its excavations at Megiddo in Palestine in the 1930s). We also borrowed their refrigerator, which operated by burning kerosene. Kerosene lamps provided our lighting. Some of these lamps used mantles (defined by the dictionary as “a lacy hood or sheath of some refractory material that gives light by incandescence when placed over a flame”). Such lamps had to be pumped up constantly to maintain enough pressure to provide a good light. The disadvantage of such light is that it attracts vast numbers of insects, making it a challenge to do much work at night by lamplight.

People who live in cities can have no idea of how much more of the heavens are visible at night when there is no light pollution at all. It is easy to understand that the rise of astronomy should have occurred in such a land.

At the highest point of the mound was an area where heavy burning had turned the soil a reddish color. We decided to start our excavations there. We soon found that mud-brick walls had been so thoroughly baked in a conflagration that they were baked red. In the first few days, two cuneiform tablets were discovered, both baked hard, apparently in the huge fire that consumed the building. They had to be soaked for days in changes of water to dissolve the accretion of salt on their surface. Later, a number of small, unbaked fragments of tablets began to turn up in the debris. Vaughn Crawford took these to Nippur, where he baked them in the Nippur kiln (fueled by diesel). It was soon obvious to me that some of these fragments had lists of geographical names and that others appeared to be literary. One very thick tablet had a colophon on the back (giving the name of the scribe). Amazingly, the names were Semitic, that is, of the same language group as Babylonian and Assyrian, rather than the unrelated Sumerian language expected in the mid-third millennium. Adams, back in Chicago, seemed sufficiently impressed with the finds that he sent some additional funding, so we were able to continue until early June, when it became much too hot for field work in southern Iraq.

We wanted to return to the site, but were not able to arrange it until late December 1965. Almost immediately, in the same area, we came upon a huge pile of unbaked cuneiform tablets, obviously thrown into a rubbish pit along with broken pottery, fish bones, and bones of slaughtered animals. Selma al-Radi, the representative of the Iraqi Department of antiquities, and I spent the next several weeks with the help of one Shergati workman (Shergat is the modern village near the ancient site of Assur; men from the village were trained by the Germans excavating Assur early in the twentieth century in the art of excavating mud brick; their descendants have been the traditional skilled workmen on most archaeological expeditions until comparatively recently) carefully excavating the tablets—several hundreds of fragments, and some very large tablets with

hundreds of lines of writing. It soon became obvious that some of these were truly literary in the sense of belles lettres. Selma has given an account of the adventures—and misadventures—of this season in her article, “Digging with Donald,” in Erica Ehrenberg, ed., Leaving no Stones Unturned: Essays on the Ancient Near East and Egypt in Honor of Donald P. Hansen (Winona Lake, Indiana, 2002), pp. ix-xii.

After the close of the brief season, we transported the tablets to Nippur to the newly constructed expedition house where, for the next couple of months, I labored daily at baking and cleaning the tablets (along with Selma al-Radi). So that I could bake every day, I constructed a second kiln, for after firing, the tablets need to cool in the kiln for a day or so before they are cool enough to handle.

Before turning the tablets over to the Iraq Museum, I made Latex molds of most of them so that they could be cast in plaster of Paris in Chicago for study. Back in Chicago, with access to books, I was able to identify some of the literary texts as the same compositions known from copies from hundreds of years later. I spent several years of evenings and weekends working on my drawings of the inscriptions—a slow and laborious task. This involved several trips to the Iraq Museum to compare my drawings with the originals so I could further revise them. One of these visits was a month in the summer of 1972. Summer temperatures in Baghdad are often in the 120 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit range. The Iraq Museum had its air conditioning system turned to the maximum, so I was more comfortable wearing a sweater in the museum, but one was hit with a blast of hot air when stepping outside. At the time, only a couple of luxury hotels had air conditioning. Most hotels had only an overhead fan. I decided then not to plan another summer visit to Baghdad.

Thus the site of Abu Salabikh (ancient name still unknown), and its tablets, whose discovery was due to fortuitous circumstances, revealed an important, and unexpected, aspect of mid-third millennium literature and scholarship and demonstrated that people speaking a Semitic language, rather than being simple herdsmen tending their flocks, were deeply immersed in a center of Sumerian learning. I published these texts in a thick volume in 1974 (Inscriptions from Tell Abu Salabikh, Oriental Institute Publications, vol. 99 [Chicago, 1974]). Several compositions were present in a number of fragmentary or somewhat damaged copies and it was possible for me to reconstruct several compositions in virtually complete form and to present them in transliteration. The conventions for writing Sumerian were substantially different in the mid-third millennium than in the texts from several centuries later that are more familiar to us. While some passages we can translate with reasonable confidence, and can present tentative translations of others, some still defy us, though a great deal of progress has been made (mainly by other scholars) since I first published these texts more than thirty years ago.

Because of my extensive experience with texts of the mid-third millennium B.C., I was in a unique position to appreciate the importance of an extraordinary

discovery in the mid-1970s of tablets of similar age by an Italian expedition from the University of Rome at the ancient site of Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh) near Aleppo in Syria. Initial reports, both in the popular press and in scholarly journals, caused great excitement among Bible scholars who were hearing that the names of Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, and a wealth of other names familiar from the Old Testament were found in these new tablets. Several of us, including my late colleague Ignace J. Gelb, who were experienced in the peculiarities of third millennium cuneiform spelling conventions, were skeptical. Gelb's initial analysis was published as "Thoughts about Ibla: A Preliminary Evaluation, March 1977," *Syro-Mesopotamian Studies* 1, pp. 3-30 in 1977. In 1978 I was invited to discuss these finds in a lecture to the Chicago Society of the Archaeological Institute of America. Then I was asked to give my perspective on the topic in an article in *Biblical Archeologist* ("The Ebla Tablets: An Interim Perspective," *Biblical Archeologist* 43 [1980], pp. 76-87), which is an updated and shortened version of my 1978 lecture. About that time, a film was produced for airing on PBS stations. It was called "The Royal Archives of Ebla" and included interviews with both Gelb and me. Such was the frenzy in some biblical circles that a well-known radio evangelist included Ebla on his Holy Land tours! In the end, sober scholarship prevailed and the question of Ebla and the Bible is now a dead issue.

In 1982 I had an opportunity to visit the site of Ebla. I had accompanied two Chicago couples and a couple from Australia on a trip to Yemen and Syria that spring. While the others terminated their visit in Damascus, I wanted to stay on to visit Ebla, since it had been a focus of a lot of my scholarly activity for several years. The Syrian ambassador to Washington (whom I had met when he was in Chicago) had urged me to present myself at the Department of Antiquities. Indeed, I found that because of my publications and lectures concerned with the disputes about the Ebla tablets, my name was well known to the Director General of Antiquities and other officials and they received me most cordially.

It was easy to get a ticket on a modern bus going to Aleppo. En route we passed through the ancient city of Hama (especially famous for its water wheels) and saw with our own eyes the recent devastation of the city caused by the putting down of a local uprising. In Aleppo, I stayed at the Baron Hotel, the same hotel where archaeologists normally stayed in the 1930s (Agatha Christie and her husband Max Mallowan were regular guests during their years in Syria) and which had been little modernized since then. That year Chicago friends and colleagues, Paul Zimansky and his wife Elizabeth Stone, were in Aleppo, so we jointly hired a car and driver to take us to Ebla and to some of the Roman and medieval ruins in the area. The Italian team had not yet arrived at Ebla for that season's work, but we were able to visit the site and get a good idea of the architecture of the third millennium palace where the tablets had been discovered.

I now backtrack in time and geography to Washington State. As a child and teenager, I attended the only local church, the Evangelical United Brethren (a

denomination which subsequently merged with the United Methodist Church). Our exposure to other Christian denominations, even Protestant ones, was limited, and I doubt that many of us were even acquainted with any Roman Catholics. College was a bit more diverse, but not much. It was not until I lived in France that I had regular contact with Roman Catholics. One was a fellow Fulbright Scholar with whom I planned a trip to Italy during the Christmas vacation. He had a cousin who was a priest in Rome and who was able to get us tickets for a “semi-private” audience with Pope Pius XII. The Pope who succeeded Pius XII was John XXIII, whom I came to admire greatly. In June 1963 I was ready to leave Baghdad, so I reserved a seat in a shared taxi to go to Jerusalem. Because of the extreme heat in the daytime, the taxi traveled across the desert at night. Upon arriving in Damascus the next morning, we learned that Pope John had died during the night. After a change of taxis in Damascus, it was on to Jerusalem. At that time, the Old City of Jerusalem was under the control of Jordan, and could be reached easily from Damascus. Because I was a Fellow of the American Schools of Oriental Research that year, I was able to stay at their facility in Jerusalem for a modest charge. In Jerusalem, it seemed that everyone was talking about the Pope's death, and church authorities announced that there would be a High Pontifical Mass in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which I was able to attend and which I found very moving.

While in Jerusalem, I took a day's trip to visit Bethlehem. Whether the Church of the Nativity covers the real birthplace of Jesus or not, it is very moving for anyone raised a Christian to visit the site so long associated with his birth.

I made my way from Jerusalem to Beirut and then on to Istanbul where I visited the archaeological museum. This museum has a fabulous collection to Near Eastern antiquities since, when Middle Eastern countries were still part of the Ottoman Empire, the government's share went to the capital, Istanbul. I met colleagues there, including Muazzez Cig, who was in charge of the collection of cuneiform tablets, as well as Veysel Donbaz, who is now the head of the collection. I went on to Berlin to study some of the tablets in their collection from the German excavations at Assur. At that time (and for a number of subsequent visits in the next years) one found a pension or hotel in West Berlin and made the daily crossing of the Berlin Wall at Checkpoint Charlie into East Berlin. Colleagues there (among them Liane Jakob-Rost and Evelyn Klengel-Brandt) were warmly welcoming.

I eventually got to London, where the annual meeting of Assyriologists (*Rencontre Assyriologique*) was being held. The *Rencontre*, normally an annual event, was held mostly in Western Europe in the earlier years, but in 1967 it was held in Chicago for the first time in the US. Most recently it was held in South Africa, and the 2005 meeting is again being held in Chicago. It is a collegial gathering of scholars of ancient Mesopotamia and nearby lands, whether philologists, archaeologists, or art historians. At the 1963 London *Rencontre* I was able to meet (or at least see and listen to) some of the leading scholars whose books and articles I had studied. Although I have returned frequently to the

British Museum to study cuneiform tablets, for the duration of the conference, the Students' Room was closed to visitors, so I was not able to study any tablets at that time.

While still in Baghdad, I had received an offer of an appointment as a Research Associate on the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, which I eagerly accepted, as my first employment as an Assyriologist. The annual salary of \$5,000 sounded good to someone who had never had a salaried job. I arrived in Chicago in the fall of 1963 to find a small apartment and to take up my appointment at the University of Chicago. I soon found a congenial group of people, mostly either graduate students or Assistant Professors, who were approximately in my age group and who shared an interest in the ancient or modern Middle East or the Mediterranean area in general. Every couple of weeks one or the other of us would host a small party, sometimes enlivened by a young American woman who had learned to play the Turkish saz (a stringed instrument) very well and who had a beautiful singing voice. One such gathering turned out not to be a party, but rather a solemn gathering of mourners, the day after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

One of the young women in our group worked in the Oriental Institute administrative office. She advised me that, if I expected to get a better salary, I would stand a better chance if I had a job offer from elsewhere. As it happened, my Johns Hopkins classmate Kirk Grayson had been teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia but had been appointed to a position in his native Canada. I applied for his position, and received an offer. This resulted, in 1964, in my receiving a modest salary increase, but also an appointment as Assistant Professor of Assyriology in the Department of Oriental Languages (as it was then called, for it included Chinese and Japanese) and an appointment as Associate Editor of the Assyrian Dictionary.

An administrative peculiarity of the Oriental Institute is that it is a research institution that grants no degrees. Degrees in its subject matters are offered through what is now called the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, which is one of the departments in the Humanities Division. So this meant that I was then in a tenure-track position. Several years later, when I received an offer of an appointment at Johns Hopkins, I was promoted to Associate Professor (with tenure).

I enjoyed my work on the Assyrian Dictionary, but I was also eager to follow up my own research interests. I often returned to the Oriental Institute in the evenings after supper and usually came in on weekends as well, either to use the vocabulary files of the Assyrian Dictionary or to use the library.

It was exciting to be working with some of the top scholars in the field of Assyriology, and they fostered an attitude of expanding one's scholarly horizons. We young Research Associates were encouraged to sit in on courses, especially the courses in Sumerian, the very ancient non-Semitic language of Mesopotamia. There was also a tradition of weekly reading sessions where we collectively read through newly published volumes of texts that had been published only in

drawings of the cuneiform (a practice several of us continue, even in our retirement). It was partly an effort to document new occurrences of words that would be cited in future volumes of the Assyrian Dictionary, but also, for us young Assyriologists, to develop our skills at reading a variety of genres of texts.

In 1963 the first volume of Franz Köcher's Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin was published. While it was his intention to follow up the publication of his hand drawings of the cuneiform with transliterations and translations, at his death in 2002 only the six volumes of his drawings had been published. Babylonian medical texts are a special challenge to read, as they include a great many names of plants (mostly unidentified) whose Babylonian names are often hidden behind the Sumerian words that served as sort of an abbreviation. In addition, the texts are filled with technical vocabulary for the procedures of preparation of medications and their administration. But I was determined to learn to read these texts, so I plunged in, reading and rereading as I became more familiar with the genre. Babylonian medical texts have been one of my principal specialties within the vast domain of cuneiform studies.

Another interest I developed was Babylonian divination, that is, the “science” of foretelling events from omens. There are vast collections of such omens of many different kinds. The Babylonians believed that the gods wrote messages on the livers and other organs of sheep that experts could interpret. Especially in the first millennium B.C. astrology became increasingly important, especially for the Assyrian Court. Monstrous births (such as a three-legged chicken or a two-headed lamb) were considered very bad omens that might affect the king. I have made a particular study of the liver omens, which, like medical texts, form a highly technical genre.

Leo Oppenheim and Erica Reiner were very flexible about the months I spent working on the Assyrian Dictionary, thus permitting me to serve as epigraphist on the Oriental Institute's Nippur Expedition in 1964-65, 1976, 1977, 1981, and 1985. Nippur, the ancient religious capital of Sumer, was first excavated by Americans from the University of Pennsylvania in 1888. In 1948 the Oriental Institute, in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania (and at times other institutions) resumed excavations there. By far the greatest proportion of Sumerian literature known to us has been recovered from the excavations at Nippur, principally those carried out by the University of Pennsylvania at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1964 en route to Iraq I stopped in Jordan to visit my Johns Hopkins friend and colleague, Ray Cleveland, who was living in Jericho. A friend of his from the Jericho refugee camp joined us on an overnight trip to visit Petra. We got up the next morning to snow, the first the young man had ever seen. Despite rain, we spent an enjoyable day visiting the spectacular site. Back in Jericho we were able to visit the Dead Sea and the area of the caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls had been discovered.

Occasionally when we had visitors at Nippur, we would arrange for camel rides (there were plenty of camels in the area). On one occasion a member of the

Oriental Institute Visiting Committee and her daughter were visiting, and a camel ride to the nearby (several miles) site of Drehem was planned. Camels have notoriously bad breath and can be rather contrary, not to mention providing a rather rough ride, and we were all rather sore by the time we got back to the expedition house.

One of the facts of life in southern Iraq is the occurrence of sandstorms, sometimes lasting several days at a time. On the excavation site wearing goggles helped somewhat, but nevertheless, one's hair and clothing were soon full of fine sand. To minimize the amount that filtered in between gaps between windowpanes in my room at the expedition house, I employed the old technique of wetting newspapers and stuffing every crevice as tightly as possible. While this helped some, fine sand was always ubiquitous on tables, chairs, and in one's bed.

In addition to my several seasons at Nippur, I was able to join Donald Hansen and Vaughn Crawford as epigraphist and archaeologist on the Metropolitan Museum-New York University, Institute of Fine Arts Expedition to al-Hiba in 1968-69 and 1970-71. Each year a student from the University of Chicago accompanied me, first Elizabeth Carter, now a professor of archaeology at the University of California at Los Angeles, and in the second year Abdullah Masry, who returned to his native Saudi Arabia to a position in the Department of Antiquities.

The site of al-Hiba, first mentioned above, is now known to be ancient Lagash, the capital of one of the Sumerian city-states of the third millennium B.C. It was a low mound that lay on the very edge of one of the great marshes of southern Iraq. The nearest town was Shatra, but the site could be reached then only by canal, meaning a couple of hours by a motorized boat. The people in the area lived much as their Sumerian predecessors did thousands of years ago, for ecological conditions had changed little. In excavations, we find baked clay model boats that look just like the ones called *tarada* that are the means of locomotion in the marshes, propelled by long punting poles.

The only practical building material in the area was reeds from the marshes, so all our structures for sleeping quarters, work areas, dining, etc. were made of reeds by local workmen accustomed to building with reeds. (For illustrations of such reed structures and the process of constructing them, see Ochsenschlager's book cited below. Such structures very closely resemble depictions on ancient cylinder seals from Mesopotamia.) To our chagrin, we discovered that in their first year of use, reed houses leak when it rains, which it did a lot! The marshes were an area of incredible beauty and tranquility, teeming with waterfowl and fish. Flocks of storks often flew overhead. Occasionally, especially after a heavy rain, we also saw a wild boar. The local economy was largely dependent on reeds and water buffalo. They provided milk, and their dung was collected and mixed with straw for fuel for baking bread. The way of life of these people, before many modern developments reached them, and before Saddam Hussein largely destroyed their way of life by draining the marshes, has recently been

documented by Edward Ochsenschlager in his book *Iraq's Marsh Arabs in the Garden of Eden* (Philadelphia, 2004). A great many of his photographs were taken in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Although not easily accessible for residents of Baghdad, at Christmas 1968 our Danish friends from Abu Ghraib, Kirsten and Hans "Bielle" Bielefeldt, came to visit with their two children. Although we could not have a traditional Christmas tree, we fashioned one from a dried shrub and decorated it with small red and white Danish flags and some foliage from the marshes. On Christmas Eve, following Danish customs, we sang and danced out one end and in the other of the reed house that served as our living room and dining room. Such are the memories of Christmas in the marsh area of Iraq, far from the Santas and the commercialism of an American Christmas.

Our workmen were entirely from local villages, and there needed to be a certain delicacy in hiring men from the various sheikhs' groups. This is a very conservative area, and there was a discreet request, made through the representative of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities, that the female members of our staff cover their lower extremities more carefully (this was the era of the mini-skirt!). Nevertheless, at lunch break, there would often be someone who played a drum and someone else a flute. One small elderly man, obviously something of a "character" among the group, sang and danced with many lewd gestures, much to the merriment of the other workmen. Our 1970-71 season at al-Hiba ended tragically. While I and a couple of others stayed behind to close up camp, the first boatload of our expedition members and some of the household staff left to return to Baghdad. Another boat speeding on the canal in the opposite direction rammed their boat, and Roberta Lewis was killed instantly.

I decided in 1968 that en route to Iraq, I would visit Afghanistan, a country that held a great fascination for me, especially the small area which used to be known as Kafiristan, "Land of the Heathens," for the area had never been converted to Islam until forced to convert in the nineteenth century, when it was renamed Nuristan, "Land of Light." Afghanistan's national airline had flights to Kabul from Beirut, so I went, staying in an old and somewhat decrepit hotel in Kabul. One of the young managers there spoke quite good English and offered to accompany me if I hired a car and driver to an area in the south where his uncle owned a number of villages. It happened that the uncle was away, but the family welcomed us, and we slept on mats in the small building that served as the compound's mosque. We spent a couple of days walking to the various villages, always warmly welcomed for tea or fresh watermelon. Here in these villages I could see traditional craftsmen at work making rope, making bullets, and watched a woman weaving on a large flat loom. Returning to Kabul, I hired another car and driver to take me to Bamiyan in the heart of the Hindu Kush Mountains. En route, we passed great numbers of nomads coming down from the mountains for winter, with small children, chickens, and lambs tied to loaded camels. The women in particular were dressed in colorful clothing. At Bamiyan there was a rest house that offered beds and a simple meal for visitors. From

there I could look across the valley and see the two giant statues of the Buddha carved into the cliff and which I was able to explore in detail the following day—the same Buddhas that the Taliban destroyed several years ago. Unfortunately, because of political tensions, no foreigners were allowed in Nuristan. However, I was able to purchase in Kabul a Nuristan harp that very closely resembles harps played in Sumer thousands of years ago. After getting an export authorization from the National Museum, I was able to have it sent to me in Chicago, where it still sits, unplayed, in my Chicago home.

One of the pleasant aspects of my years in Baghdad was the possibility of accompanying Iraqi friends for an evening in a casino along the bank of the Tigris. An Iraqi casino is not a gambling establishment, but a sort of outdoor café. These are located along Abu Nuwas Street, named for the Abbasid poet Abu Nuwas (born about A.D. 756) from the time of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid when Baghdad was at the height of its glory. At street level, one can choose a live fish (called masguf) from several held in a tank of water. The fish will later be roasted over wood. In the meantime, one descends to a lower level where tables are set up fairly far apart in a grassy area. Here one can order araq or beer and typical appetizers such as pistachios, jajik (a yogurt and cucumber dip), or fresh fruits in season (such as plums). Typically songs sung by Umm Kalthum, a famous Egyptian singer who was much loved throughout the Arab world, would be played from tape recordings. Especially in hot weather, this is probably the coolest place in Baghdad, and certainly provides a relaxing evening.

In all my years in Iraq, I never felt I was in the slightest danger (except on the two-lane highways where Iraqi drivers take death-defying risks constantly especially when behind a slow-moving truck). In fact, I used to say that I felt safer on the streets of Baghdad than I did in Chicago. Our expeditions have been in Iraq at various times of international crisis, including the 1967 Middle East war, but we never felt that we were personally at risk.

In 1971, at the death of Keith Seele who had been Editor since 1948, I was appointed to the editorship of the Journal of Near Eastern Studies. William Rainey Harper, who was later to become the first President of the University of Chicago, had founded its predecessor journal, Hebraica, in 1884. The Journal of Near Eastern Studies is one of the principal journals in America devoted to the Near and Middle East, though its coverage is generally prehistory to the end of the Ottoman Empire about 1918. I have served now as its editor for 34 years, but anticipate being relieved of the responsibility within a year or so. For most of those years I have had the expert help of Paula von Bechtolsheim, who is now Managing Editor. Her background in studying Turkish and other modern Middle Eastern languages has been an invaluable complement to my own studies of the ancient Near East, and her knowledge of German and French has also proved to be important.

My editorial experience has been put to use in several other publications. My friend and colleague, McGuire Gibson, organized a symposium at the Oriental Institute on seals and sealing practices in the ancient Near East. I did

most of the editorial work (and in the days before most of us had computers, it involved a lot of retyping on a manual typewriter and cutting and pasting by hand) that was published as Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East in Malibu in 1977 as a volume of the series *Bibliotheca Mesopotamica*. He also organized another symposium, this one on bureaucracy in the ancient Near East, for which I again did a lot of the editorial work. It was published as The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East by the Oriental Institute in 1987 (it went out of print so quickly that a slightly revised version was published in 1991). In between these two symposiums, the Chicago Rug Society, of which I was a member, decided to mount an exhibition of Kurdish weavings at the Block Gallery at Northwestern University. I served as editor for the beautifully illustrated book that accompanied the exhibition and symposium, Discoveries from Kurdish Looms (Evanston, 1983). Among the participants and authors was William Eagleton, an American diplomat who had spent considerable time in Iraqi Kurdistan and whom I knew from his posting at the American embassy in Baghdad. I saw him again in Damascus in 1985 where he was then the American ambassador.

In 1974 I was asked by the chief editor of the Time-Life series *Great Ages of Man* to be their principal consultant for the book The Birth of Writing. While the actual writing was done by one of their professional writers, they employ scholars as consultants to advise on factual matters, questions of emphasis, on sources for photographs, and to advise on other areas to explore. This involved a number of visits to their headquarters in New York City, and even a trip to upstate New York to consult on the premises of their artist who was doing the drawings and paintings for their illustrations. Their pay at the time was \$100 a day, which earned me a nice supplementary income that year, plus giving me the satisfaction on working on a worthwhile project. Later I was asked to advise them on the second edition of The Cradle of Civilization (about ancient Mesopotamia).

While the Oriental Institute was not able to follow up its soundings at Abu Salabikh in 1963 and 1965 with full-scale excavations, the British School of Archaeology, recognizing the site's great potential to provide information on the third millennium in that part of Iraq, decided to undertake excavations. In 1976 Nicholas Postgate, the Field Director of the expedition, invited me to join the expedition as epigraphist, which I was happy to do. Once again, it was a matter of living in tents, though this time it was the fall of the year, so instead of the weather getting hotter and hotter as in 1963, this time it got colder and colder. Late in the fall, at the time of a fairly long religious holiday, Postgate allowed several of us to take the Land Rover for a trip of a couple of days into Kurdistan, an area that had generally been largely inaccessible to foreigners. So for the first—and only—time I got to visit Kurdish towns and villages whose names were then largely unknown to most people in Europe or America.

In 1981 the Iraqi government invited me (and several other colleagues from Chicago and other American and European universities) to attend the Third

International Symposium on Babylon, Ashur and Himrin in Baghdad in November. It was well organized, with copious lunches and dinners. The tours included a two-day trip to northern Iraq, including a stop in Fallujah. One of the overnight stays was in large tents. Evening entertainment that day included singing and dancing by Iraqi gypsies (singular *Kawli*, plural *Kawaliyyah*) such as we had seen a number of times in southern Iraq. Weather in northern Iraq was getting decidedly cold, so we had a certain amount of discomfort, but the hospitality was warm and generous, typical of the Iraq I knew.

In 1984 the international meeting of Assyriologists was held in Leningrad (whose name was subsequently restored to St. Petersburg). This provided an opportunity for me to visit the Soviet Union for the first time. I went a couple of days early to visit museums (such as the Hermitage) and various other attractions in the city. My Toronto friend and colleague, Grant Frame, had earlier suggested that we sign up for a two-week guided tour of Soviet Central Asia (this was the only practical way to visit this area at the time). I eagerly jumped at the chance. Following the Rencontre in Leningrad, we spent several days in Moscow, where our tour was leaving from. We had two young women as our tour guides. They were very friendly and congenial on the tour buses, but they were not allowed to sit with us at meals. At each stop, local guides gave detailed talks. Seeing the Islamic monuments in Samarkand and Bukhara was especially interesting. Tblisi, in Soviet Georgia, was quite different, for here one saw churches rather than mosques. It was interesting to find that one could buy Danish beer more cheaply in Central Asia than in Copenhagen, where I had a day's layover en route to Chicago.

In the 1985 season at Nippur, few cuneiform tablets were found, and I was not normally needed on the excavation, so I took over the responsibility of driving to Afak to buy the canisters of cooking gas we needed, to do shopping, and to pick up bread. I stood in line at the bakery to buy bread hot from the oven. That year we had not hired a local cook, and Beverly Armstrong, wife of staff member James Armstrong, did most of the cooking. However, I made the rice for both lunch and dinner, preparing it Iraqi style with a golden crust on the bottom. Among our guests that year were James Akins, the American ambassador to Saudi Arabia in the Nixon administration, and his wife Marjorie (Marney) who had been great friends of the Nippur Expedition when they lived in Baghdad in the early 1960s. I drove us one day to visit the nearby site of Isin, which had been excavated by a German expedition. The site has since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 been totally destroyed by looters.

That year my Danish friends from early Baghdad years, the Bielefeldts, were living in Bahrain and they had invited me to visit them at the close of our season. Kirsten had maintained her interest in archaeology, so she drove me to visit various sites. On a Friday the three of us took a picnic lunch and drove to the other end of the island. From Bahrain, I went on to Damascus, where I had been invited to give a series of lectures at Damascus University.

The looting of the Iraq Museum in the immediate aftermath of the invasion

of Iraq caused great anger and outrage among members of the archaeological community and, indeed, caused embarrassed consternation in the U. S. State Department. In an effort to take some kind of remedial action, a meeting was called of people from the State Department, the Department of Homeland Security, U. S. customs officers, law enforcement agencies from European countries, representatives of international cultural organizations such as UNESCO, and international police. The meeting was held at INTERPOL headquarters in Lyon, France. To aid these people in recognizing the kinds of antiquities they should be on the lookout for, several scholars were invited to give illustrated talks. The State Department asked me to make the presentation on cuneiform tablets. I would like to think that our efforts have helped in the recovery of some of the stolen antiquities.

While I would never claim any professional qualifications as an archaeologist, I have greatly enjoyed my many seasons on expeditions in Iraq and my many visits to ancient sites, both in Iraq and in other countries. Because of my interest in archaeology, I joined the Archaeological Institute of America in the 1960s. In 1985 I was elected President of the Chicago Society of the Archaeological Institute and remained president until 1992, so my terms in office included my presiding over the celebrations for the centennial of the Chicago Society in 1989. I remain a member of the Executive Committee.

My years at the University included teaching courses frequently, most often in Babylonian literature, Babylonian divination, Babylonian medicine and other scientific texts, as well as Babylonian religious texts, and, occasionally, a course in Old Akkadian, the Semitic language of Babylonia in the third millennium B.C. But I decided that I would take retirement in June 2004, just short of my 70th birthday—at least retirement from teaching and from committee responsibilities, though I continue (for now) as Editor of the Journal of Near Eastern Studies. I continue my commitment to the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, and will this year help with verifying the references for the final volume, U/W.

I am truly grateful to the Oriental Institute and to the many friends, colleagues, and students who have made my long tenure here so professionally and personally rewarding. I hope that my contributions to accomplishing the mission of the Oriental Institute and to the field of Assyriology and the study of the ancient Near East in general have justified the confidence shown by my appointment more than forty years ago. As a late colleague said a few days before his death, “It’s been fun!” But I expect my fun to continue for a while. It is my hope that eventually some of my ashes can be scattered at Nippur, reuniting me in a sense with a land I came to love and whose ancient culture has been the focus of my professional life.