

Field Museum News

Published Monthly by Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago

Vol. 2

MARCH, 1931

No. 3

NEW MURAL DEPICTS STRANGE REPTILES WHICH LIVED 215,000,000 YEARS AGO

By ELMER S. RIGGS

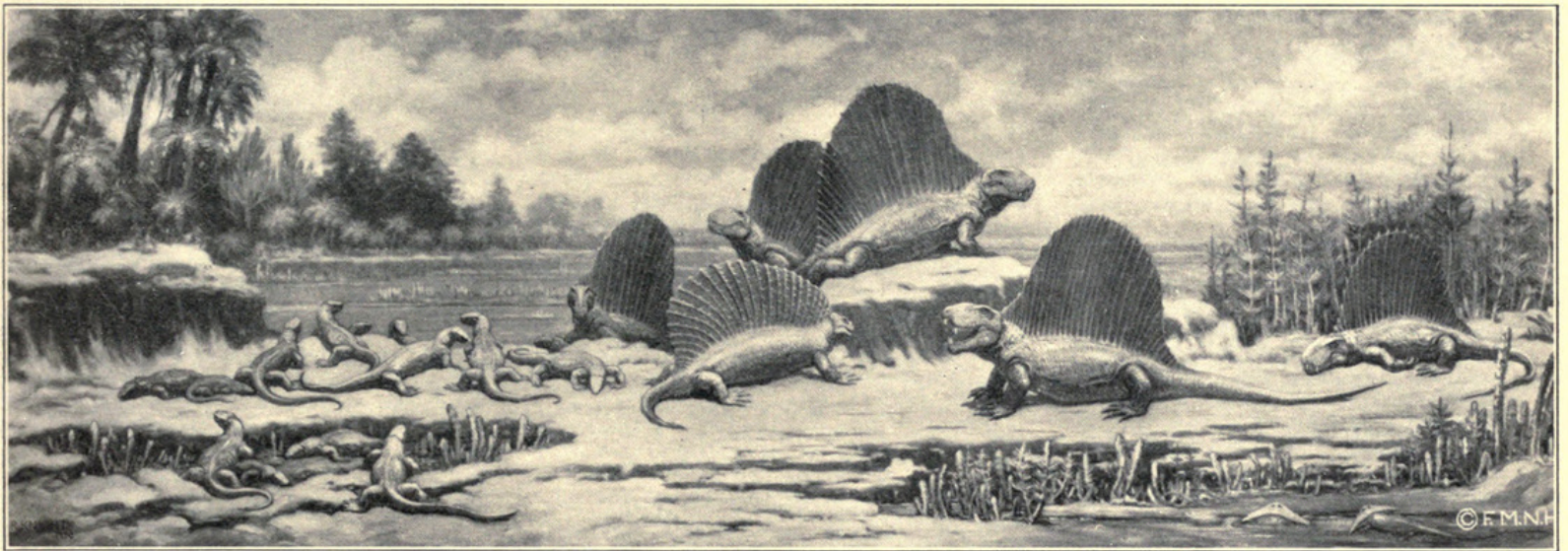
Associate Curator of Paleontology

A large mural painting, by Charles R. Knight, in which are restored some of the strange reptiles of the Permian period, is a recent addition to the series of twenty-eight murals which are being installed on the walls of Ernest R. Graham Hall (Hall 38). This painting shows a group of grotesque-looking creatures which lived in the earliest period of the Age of Reptiles. They date back almost

kinds represented, *Dimetrodon* (on the right in the picture), was armed with an ugly series of sharp-pointed teeth which proclaim him an animal of vicious habits and a flesh eater. On his back, spines arose to a height equal to the length of his body. The spines were connected by a membranous covering which extended along the back and formed a great fin-like projection. This fin may have served as a sail to propel the animal over the Permian seas, but as he was more fitted for

have less striking characteristics to distinguish them from modern lizards, but they belonged to an old order which has long since died out.

Basking along the shores of quiet lagoons, these animals formed a distinctively reptilian community. No inquisitive mammals roused them from their drowsy sleep under tropical suns; no birds perched upon the giant horse-tail rushes which bordered the shores. Great dragon flies may have skimmed over the



Mural painting restoring reptiles of the Permian Period. Presented by Ernest R. Graham and on exhibition in Hall 38. Charles R. Knight is the artist.

to the coal age, 215,000,000 years ago, according to estimates.

The animals reproduced include curious fin-back reptiles of two kinds, and several lizard-like reptiles. The former are remarkable, not because of their size, but on account of their unusual proportions. One of the

land habits, it is probable it was of no use beyond the decorative effect.

Naosaurus, the other "fin-back" shown (center of picture), was quite similar to *Dimetrodon* but was inoffensive, and given to feeding upon plants. The lizard-like reptiles shown in the picture (on the left)

waters or rested on a snag of a broken tree, but no hum of busy insects filled the air. It was a time of heavy atmosphere and sluggish life which waited through the long ages until awakening intelligence should dawn upon the animal world to give more activity to the scene.

ROYAL PERSIAN PALACE UNEARTHED AT KISH

The first well-preserved palace of the Sassanian dynasty of Persian kings ever found has been discovered at Kish, in Irak, by the Field Museum-Oxford University Joint Expedition to Mesopotamia, according to reports from Professor Stephen Langdon, director of the expedition.

The discovery was largely accidental, Professor Langdon states. The field director, L. C. Watelin, waiting to begin excavations on the main hill over the site of the ancient city, set his Arab workmen to leveling the mounds of earth near-by. They had not been at work for a week before one wall and two gateways of the royal Persian palace had been laid bare. Professor Langdon estimates its date at about A.D. 350.

Below it, in layers which represent various stages of the civilization at Kish, are the ruins of buildings which preceded the palace. Vertical shafts in the great hill where ancient rulers built temples to the mother goddess show buildings dating back to the Sumerians, probably the first of civilized peoples.

The new discovery is regarded as of the greatest importance for the light which it will throw on the history concerned. The present chief sources of information regarding the Sassanian dynasty are Greek, Arabic and Persian, and it is hoped that the contents of this palace will supplement information already available.

The Byzantine empire was constantly at war with the Sassanian kings, and Professor Langdon believes the palace will contribute new information on this period of the Roman empire. Gold ornaments and pieces of sculpture already found show a blend of Persian and Greco-Roman influences. There is the characteristic Sassanian lotus flower, and on the plaques and friezes on the palace wall are the figures of plants, animals, giants and soldiers. The gateway is decorated with twelve female figures on a lintel. The excavation has not progressed far enough to gauge the size and plan of the palace.

Another report from Professor Langdon indicates the discovery of another huge temple believed to be the greatest monument of the Sumerian period, dating back to about 3500 B.C., but this is not yet confirmed.

THE LARGEST SMALL PLANT

By PAUL C. STANDLEY

Associate Curator of the Herbarium

A branch of what is probably the largest plant in the world was received recently by Field Museum.

Professor Stanley F. Cain of Butler University presented to the Museum a specimen of the box huckleberry (*Gaylussacia brachycera*), that he collected in June, 1930, near Rugby, Fentress County, Tennessee. This plant has been supposed to be one of the rarest American shrubs, known only from Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia, and in most of those states from very few localities.

It is an evergreen shrub that trails over the ground and forms mats or colonies sometimes one hundred acres in extent. Botanists who have investigated the colonies are of the opinion that often they consist of a single plant, hundreds of years old. If they are right, the box huckleberry, in spite of the fact that it rises scarcely six inches above the ground is perhaps the largest plant of the whole world.



Standley, Paul Carpenter. 1931. "The Largest Small Plant." *Field Museum news* 2(3), 1-1.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/25718>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/350528>

Holding Institution

Field Museum of Natural History Library

Sponsored by

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the Chicago Field Museum.
For information contact dcc@library.uiuc.edu.

Rights Holder: Field Museum of Natural History

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.