

4,000-YEAR-OLD TABLETS BROUGHT TO LIGHT

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IT IS AN OLD and well-known story that, like the ancient buried cities of the Near East, our modern museums are fertile soil for the would-be discoverer of antiquities. Dug up from their ancient resting places and shipped along with a host of other objects to a museum, valuable items are sometimes stored away and forgotten for years until a lucky stroke of fortune brings them to light again.

The rediscovery of the now famous Babylonian Chronicle telling of the fall of Nineveh is a case in point. Excavated and



EXAMPLE OF AKKADIAN WRITING

The cuneiform inscription on this particular clay tablet in the Museum collection consists of disconnected words and is believed to have been a vocabulary exercise of a school child who lived more than 4,000 years ago in Mesopotamia.

brought to the British Museum in London toward the end of the last century, it lay hidden and unrecognized for years before it was finally brought out of its oblivion and published in 1923. Immediately it became evident that this long-lost document was of fundamental importance for the correct understanding of the historical events in the last days of the Assyrian Empire.

A similar discovery, though not of such epoch-making proportions, has been made in Chicago Natural History Museum. Shortly after World War I the late Lieutenant-Colonel J. H. Patterson, D. S. O., British Army of Occupation in Iraq, purchased a collection of cuneiform tablets from an Arab at Babylon and presented them to the

Museum. There they remained unrecognized until they were rediscovered years later by Richard A. Martin, then Curator of Near Eastern Archaeology, who requested me to investigate the collection.

There has never been any question about the importance of the collection. The tablets are inscribed in a dialect of the Old Akkadian language and date back more than four thousand years, almost to the very beginning of written history in Mesopotamia. Their importance is immediately apparent from several points of view.

These texts are a most important source of material for the study of the oldest Akkadian dialect. Since Akkadian (also known as Assyro-Babylonian), like Hebrew or Arabic, belongs to the Semitic group of languages, the new texts provide us with the oldest known materials in the whole field of Semitics. Important, also, is that the many personal names mentioned in the texts help in the reconstruction of the ethnic background of the area in which the tablets originated. However, the importance of the collection is not limited to the ethnolinguistic sphere. Containing as it does a respectable number of legal, business, and administrative texts, the material sheds new and important light on the rise and development of socioeconomic institutions in the Near East.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS

The most important group of texts in the collection is that of legal documents pertaining to the sale of property. Here is the translation of a typical legal text: "1 Ili-rabi the priest, 1 Zuzu, 1 Ilulu, 1 Enanra, 1 Hulium, 1 Ilala, 1 Ea-ili, 1 Dan-ili. Total of 8 witnesses who attested the sale of the house of Mututu to Ilum-asu." The texts are terse and they give neither date nor the size and location of the property. But the transactions are witnessed, making the texts legally binding business documents, in contrast to such other texts in the collection as the one quoted below, which are not witnessed and must therefore be classified as administrative texts or memoranda for private use: "1 female lamb given on loan to Kalis-tab, free of interest. 4 PI [i.e., 240 quarts] of barley given on loan to Isasa [presumably, on interest]." While some of the administrative texts are very short, containing only about five to six lines, the largest text in this group contains 62 lines and had to be subdivided into four columns because of its size.

I wish to express my gratitude to Colonel Clifford C. Gregg, Director of the Museum, for giving me the opportunity to study the collection and for approving its publication by the Museum press, as well as to Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology, and Miss Lillian A. Ross, Associate Editor, for their kind help in technical matters pertaining to the publication of the monograph.

WHAT MAKES A DOG TICK SHOWN IN EXHIBIT

VESTA, the Transparent Dog—a life-size model of a large Great Dane—will be on exhibition at Chicago Natural History Museum from July 15 to September 15. This special exhibit will be of particular interest to all dog owners, especially young folks. It is of value also as a demonstration of the general anatomy and physiology of mammals, and thus it can give a number of lessons applicable in a broad way to many vertebrate animals including human beings.

Vesta, named for the Roman goddess of the hearth and guardian of the home, is able to tell her own story. She is equipped with a recorded voice that delivers a lecture about the structure of dogs, which varies very little from the tiny Mexican hairless to such giant dogs as the Great Dane itself. Vesta is also equipped with a complex system of electrical mechanisms and controls by means of which the parts of the transparent plastic body can be made to light up as they are referred to in the dog's lecture. Thus attention may be concentrated in turn upon the respiratory and circulatory systems, the brain, and the viscera. One side of the dog shows a detailed reproduction of the muscular system; the opposite side shows the skeleton.

Vesta was built at the Deutsches Gesundheits Museum in Cologne where a staff of naturalists and technicians devoted more than two years to her creation. She was



EXHIBIT TELLS STORY OF DOG

Champion Fury, prize-winning Great Dane, stands beside Vesta, the Transparent Dog that will be shown at the Museum from July 15 to September 15.

made for the Gaines Dog Research Center of New York, under whose auspices she is now touring the United States. Dr. Bruno Gebhard, Director of the Cleveland Health Museum, served as consultant.

Museum Electrician Dies

With regret the Museum records the death on June 9 of Christ Schnur, at the age of 72. Mr. Schnur was an electrician employed in the Museum's Division of Engineering since 1944.



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