

Welcome to Participants of the 62nd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale

Grant Frame

On behalf of your fellow Assyriologists and Near Eastern archaeologists and art historians at the University of Pennsylvania, I wish to welcome you to the 62nd Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale in Philadelphia, the only World Heritage city in the United States. This is only the fifth time the Rencontre has met in North America and it is the second time it has come to the city of “Brotherly Love.” In 1988, twenty-eight years ago, it also met on July 11–15 and we hope that this Rencontre on “Ur in the 21st Century CE” will be as successful as the last one, on “Nippur, the Holy City of the Sumerians.”

The University of Pennsylvania and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (or the Penn Museum as we now call it) have long and distinguished histories with regard to their involvement in the study of ancient Mesopotamia and the ancient Near East in general. These histories have been described in great detail in such works as C. Wade Meade’s *Road to Babylon: Development of U.S. Assyriology* (1974); Cyrus H. Gordon’s *The Pennsylvania Tradition of Semitics: A Century of Near Eastern and Biblical Studies at the University of Pennsylvania* (1986); Dilys Pegler Windgard’s *Through Time, Across Continents: A Hundred Years of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University Museum* (1993); Bruce Kuklick’s *Puritans in Babylon: The Ancient Near East and American Intellectual Life, 1880–1930* (1996); and most recently Barry Eichler’s article “Cuneiform Studies at Penn: From Hilprecht to Leichty” in the volume *If a Man Builds a Joyful House: Assyriological Studies in Honor of Erle Verdun Leichty* (2006). Leichty was the individual most responsible for the 1988 Rencontre here in Philadelphia.

One can say that the study of ancient Mesopotamia at Penn began one hundred and thirty years ago, in 1886, when John Punnett Peters and Morris Jastrow gave a series of public lectures on “Ancient Civilization of Babylon” and “Assyrian Literature and its Bearing on the Old Testament” respectively. However, it was the appointment of Hermann Vollrath Hilprecht, also in 1886, that truly began the teaching of Assyriology at the University of Pennsylvania. He became the first holder of the Clark Research Professorship in Assyriology, the first endowed chair of Assyriology in the United States and one now held by my colleague Steve Tinney. Even before Hilprecht’s appointment, there had been discussions of sending an expedition to excavate a site in Babylonia and in 1888 the “First Babylonian Expedition” set out under the direction of Peters. I won’t repeat the fascinating story of those early excavations or the ensuing Peters-Hilprecht controversy, but

will note that Penn's four seasons work at Nippur until 1900 resulted in the creation of the Penn Museum, as a place to store and display its discoveries. In 1887, Penn's Provost William Pepper had persuaded the Trustees of the University to erect a fireproof building to house artifacts from the upcoming expedition to the ancient site of Nippur; this was necessary to ensure the funding for the expedition. One could argue that American archaeological work in Mesopotamia really began at Penn, and Penn continues to be at the forefront of work there.

Over the years, numerous renowned Assyriologists and Near Eastern archaeologists and art historians have taught at the University of Pennsylvania or been curators in the Penn Museum, and much important work has been carried out here. I may mention the names of such individuals as: John Peters, Morris Jastrow, Hermann Hilprecht, John Henry Haynes, Albert Tobias Clay, Edward Chiera, Arthur Ungnad, Léon Legrain, George Aaron Barton, Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, Cyrus Herzl Gordon, James A. Montgomery, Samuel Noah Kramer, Francis Rue Steele, Robert H. Dyson, Irene Winter, James Muhly, Bruce Routledge, Fred Hiebert, Åke Sjöberg, Erle Verdun Leichty, and Barry Eichler.

Steve Tinney, the current professor of Sumerology at Penn, and myself, the professor of Assyriology, stand in the footsteps of numerous distinguished predecessors, and it is truly humbling to do so. I am sure that Holly Pittman, Lauren Ristvet, and Richard Zettler, Penn's faculty in Near Eastern art and archaeology, feel the same way. The five of us come from three different University departments—Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Anthropology, and History of Art—and from two different sections of the museum—the Babylonian Section and the Near East Section.

The list of scholars that I just read did not include any of the research associates who have spent time at Penn working on various Penn-related projects. Among these, one can mention, for example, Miguel Civil, Piotr Michalowski, Darlene Loding, Stephen Lieberman, Hermann Behrens, Margaret Green, Jacob Klein, Antoine Cavigneaux, Niek Veldhuis, Wu Yuhong, Tonia Sharlach, Fumi Karahashi, Jeremiah Peterson, Matthew Rutz, and Jamie Novotny. The list of scholars who received some or all of their academic training in Assyriology and ANE art and archaeology is even more extensive and impossible to recite here. Åke Sjöberg and Erle Leichty, former curators of the Babylonian Section, fostered a tradition of hospitality to outside scholars and a policy of open access to our collection, and Steve Tinney and I have tried to continue this.

The number of scholarly publications by the individuals already mentioned and by numerous others who have come to Penn to work on the cuneiform texts in the Museum's Babylonian Section (a.k.a. the Tablet Room) or on archaeological materials in its Near East Section, or who have been associated with Penn excavations and scholarly projects, is truly amazing. I will only mention the fourteen volumes of the series "Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania, Series A Cuneiform Texts;" four volumes of "Series D Researches and Treatises;" the fifteen volumes of "Publication of the Babylonian Section;" the seventeen volumes of the "Occasional Publications of the Babylonian Fund" and later "Occasional Publications of the Samuel Noah Kramer Fund;" and seventeen years of issues of the *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* that Leichty edited beginning in 1972.

Archaeological work has been carried out throughout the Near East under the sponsorship, or with the support, of Penn and the Penn Museum. I can mention:

Nippur (Nuffar), Ur (Tell al-Muqayyar), Tepe Gawra, Nuzi (Yorghana Tepe), Tell Umar, Shibaniba (Tell Billa), Tureng Tepe, Shuruppak (Fara), Damghan, Tepe Hissar, Khafaje, Tell Agrab, Rayy, Persepolis, Hasanlu, Tell al-Rimah, Anshan (Tall-i Malyan), Tell al-Hiba, Qabr Sheykheyn, Tell es-Sweyhat, the Bat Archaeological Project (Oman), Gordion, the Naxcivan Archaeological Project (Azerbaijan), Konar Sandal South and North, the Rowanduz Archaeological Project, Idu (Satu Qala), and Kani Shaie. In addition, current faculty, staff, and students have been involved with work at such other places as: Arslantepe, Hacinebi Tepe, Togoluk (Turkey), Tell Fadous-Kfarabida (Lebanon), Tell Leilan, and Zinjirli.

Current archaeological, but non-fieldwork projects include the already mentioned Ur Digitization and Ur Online project (with William B. Hafford as the project manager at Penn), the Al-Hiba Publication Project (led by Holly Pittman), the Analysis of Skeletal Materials from Hasanlu and Tepe Hissar project (led by Janet Monge and Page Selinsky), and the Tepe Hissar Ceramic Chronology project (led by Ayşe Gürsan-Salzmänn).

Present textual research projects include the ePSD (the electronic Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary) led by my colleague Steve Tinney, with the aid of Philip Jones; this is of course a development from the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary project founded by the late, lamented Åke Sjöberg. There is also my own RINAP (Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period) project that is currently being carried on with the help of Joshua Jeffers. And, of course, Oracc, the Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, was created by Tinney, is hosted on a Penn site, and mounts various Penn-related projects, including the online version of RINAP and Tinney's BLMS: Bilinguals in Late Mesopotamian Scholarship.

I can also mention our current work on designing three new permanent Near Eastern galleries in the Penn Museum, work that involves about ten of us curators. These galleries are to open in November 2017 and I hope that you will all come back to see them and some of the many fabulous items discovered by Penn excavations, from the Ubaid temple frieze to slipper coffins from Parthian Nippur, from the Royal Cemetery's so-called Ram in the Thicket to the Ur-Nammu Stele, and from the Sumerian Flood tablet to some of the Murashu documents and incantation bowls.

Perhaps I should apologize for reading the aforementioned lists of people, places and projects, but remember that I am simply following in the tradition of the scribes of ancient Mesopotamia who were noted for making lists. I am sure I have neglected to mention numerous relevant people, places, and projects, and I apologize to those forgotten, but do remember that the ancient Mesopotamian scribes also made mistakes and occasionally omitted items in one exemplar that were found in a parallel exemplar.

To conclude, the University of Pennsylvania and the Penn Museum have had a one-hundred and thirty year-long history in the study of the ancient Near East and in particular ancient Mesopotamia, a history that continues today with its current cohort of scholars who are involved in numerous and varied projects, and who have plans for many more. Long may Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern art and archaeology thrive at Penn! I hope that one hundred and thirty years from now the 192nd Rencontre will be held here at Penn, and with ten times the number of participants as today, and that Penn will again stake its claim to be in the vanguard of the study of ancient Mesopotamia and the ancient Near East.