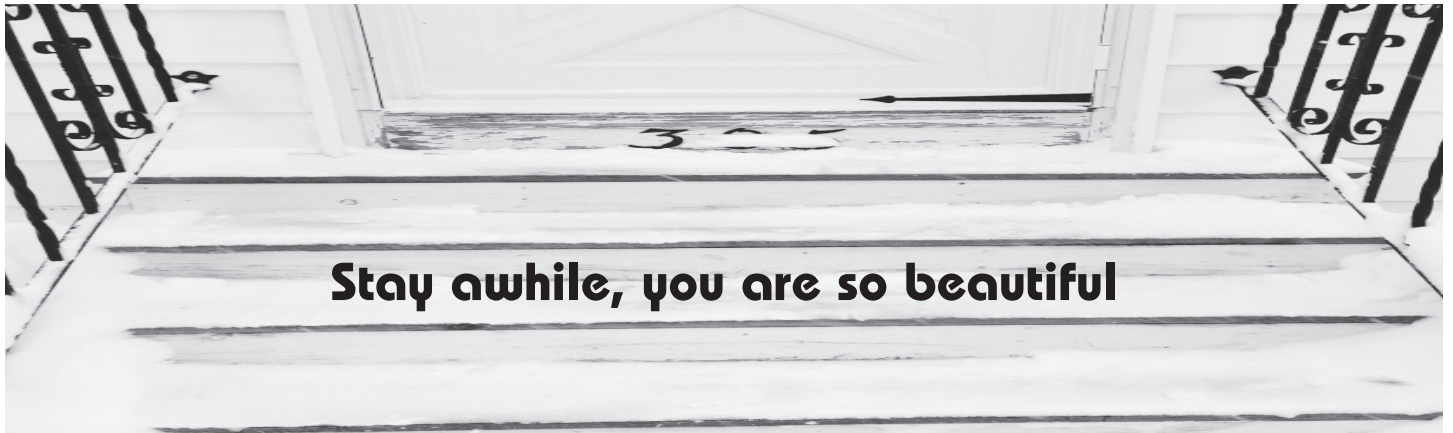


SOGLITUDES

notes from the thresholds

1/2016



Stay awhile, you are so beautiful

Verweile doch, Du bist so schön

You know how sometimes you receive messages from someone who does not write very often and you don't want to respond right away? You hang on to those messages for as long as you can, you consider them a treasure. Until you feel that the other person might become anxious to get a response from you, and then you write back, reluctantly letting go of the treasure, placing it in the other person's hands.

For Renaissance philosopher Giordano Bruno, the true hero could live in the moment and enjoy it fully. When you succeed in limiting regrets about the past, and wishes about how things should be different in the future to a minimum you are closest to happiness. All you want is what you have right now. For most of us, this blissful state is hard to obtain, and we feel the desire to hold on to moments or things we enjoy most. But in order to be happy, we should be ready to let go of the present moment and welcome the next one.

Faust makes a pact with Mephisto. Should he ever encounter a moment that would make him want to say "stay awhile, you are so beautiful" he would agree to die in that instant. If there were one superior moment, why would you want to wait for another? The desire to stop time is a reaction to its twofold nature. Time is made of present moments, but it is also duration. It is made of past moments where you notice paint decay, people getting older, but it is also built of evolutions looking towards the future where feelings grow stronger, children learn how to walk, leaves become colorful and fall from the trees. We would like, all at once, time to stop and have it go on forever.

Wishing to remain in one moment could be the expression of absolute happiness. Or, it could be the acceptance that we are ready to give in to the now. We are always in the eternally present moment that on both edges threatens to fall into the past or slip into the future. We can rest assured in the present. It is only a question of how to deal with the here and now. What we take with us from the past, how we want to build the future so that the past will not encumber possible future happiness.

Threshold thinking may facilitate this endeavor. By accepting that each moment is only a partial view of the whole that will always be out of reach, it should allow for a rush of happiness.

Time passes, yes, but only to give rise to one beautiful moment after another. Until we accept this wisdom to be found right here in the present, we try other things to conciliate time and space.

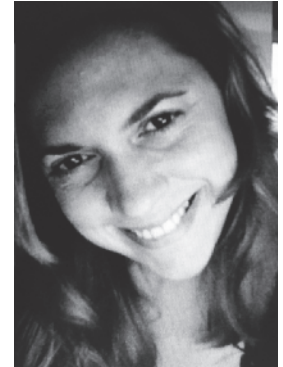
Orpheus wants to save his beloved Eurydice from the underworld. Hades allows him to take her back on one condition. He can walk out of the dark world with her behind him, but he is not allowed to turn around. She does not make any sound behind him and he needs to trust her being there if he wants her back. He does well until the threshold of light. There he turns around and loses her forever.

Love has its own special rules that have to do with time. You may want to hold on to it forever and enjoy as many moments as you can. But love needs patience, attention and respect for the other person's time and space. Sleeping Beauty sleeps a hundred years before she is awoken by the kiss. We hang on to messages for a little longer than we should, and build museums.

This issue focuses on research museums in America. It will be the first in a series about museums. This time it will focus on people who apply themselves everyday to the labor of love of conciliating time and space at three museums I visited during the fall of 2015. Harvard Semitic Museum, the Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago and the Penn Museum in Philadelphia.

Layers of history and layers of stories that all tell their own truth. An archaeology of knowledge following the thresholds from one moment to the next. There will be another part of my book "Phenomenology of thresholds" in French. And a chapter from the "Mystery of the Planet Alas-K". This issue is the first focusing on the inner workings of university research museums and builds around a reflection on passing moments and the continuity of time.

Should we reach the point of saying to the moment "stay awhile, you are so beautiful" ? Or perhaps the best mood we could be in would express "go ahead and pass, I know there will be another more beautiful moment soon."



Tatjana Barazon

Trois musées en Amérique

Ce nouveau numéro porte sur des musées que j'ai visités pendant mon séjour aux Etats-Unis cet automne. Ces musées sont liés à l'université et ne peuvent pas compter sur le grand public pour être rentables. Ils doivent chercher leurs propres donateurs, et selon la situation politique à l'université, ils peuvent être tenus en grande estime, ou non. Les musées visités et étudiés ici sont le Harvard Semitic Museum à Cambridge, le Penn Museum à Philadelphie et l'Oriental Institute à Chicago.

Les textes sont composés d'entretiens avec des membres du personnel, à travers lesquels on peut lire des descriptions du musée lui-même, de son histoire, et des difficultés rencontrées à l'heure actuelle. Ils font face à des changements souvent importants de leur architecture, en intégrant l'air conditionné et des ascenseurs, comme au Semitic Museum, ou en rénovant des galeries entières pour accommoder des nouvelles expositions, comme l'explique Julian Siggers, directeur du Penn Museum.

Le bâtiment du musée lui-même a souvent une histoire mouvementée qui permet de retracer son existence dans le présent, comme le raconte Joe Greene, Conservateur au Semitic Museum à Harvard. Peter Manuelian, le directeur du musée, raconte comment il a conçu une exposition au sujet du fondateur du musée, David Gordon Lyon, en s'inspirant de ses nombreuses notes prises dans un journal tenu tout au long de sa vie. Adam Aja, Conservateur Assistant au Semitic Museum, parle de son expérience avec la recréation de nouveaux moulages de reliefs Assyriens, ce qui a conduit à une réflexion sur l'authenticité des pièces et de la vérité des histoires racontées par les objets dans le musée. Cela rejoint la conversation avec Dan Rahimi du Penn

Museum au sujet des différentes vérités émanant des multiples couches de peinture sur la surface d'une statue de Guanyin.

Les musées liés à l'université mettent aussi en place des programmes à double emploi, pour attirer à la fois étudiants et chercheurs et les visites en famille les jours fériés, un défi déjà relevé par le musée d'Histoire Naturelle à Harvard ou du Peabody Museum, dont il sera question dans un prochain numéro. Ces musées organisent de nombreux festivals destinés aux familles, comme « I <3 Science », « Summer Solstice » ou « Day of the Dead », sous l'égide de Carol Carlson, responsable des bénévoles au sein des musées de Harvard.

Les professionnels que j'ai rencontrés m'ont parlé du geste d'amour que représente le travail au musée. Un travail hors du temps, qui pourtant est tout à fait d'actualité. Jack Green du Oriental Institute a parlé des expositions qui rapprochent le visiteur du passé d'une ville comme le vieux Caire pour montrer comment les différentes communautés religieuses ont vécu ensemble. Ou lors d'une autre exposition, on faisait le lien entre les métiers de l'heure actuelle et des objets du passé.

Les musées que j'ai choisis cette fois-ci sont des musées d'archéologie, ils réveillent l'explorateur en chacun de nous. Ils mettent en avant les arcanes des civilisations anciennes avec des statues comme le Lamassu ou les tablettes cunéiformes qui renseignent sur les origines de l'écriture. Le musée de recherche est une institution au seuil entre le temps qui passe et le moment présent, entre les objets innombrables contenus dans les réserves et le peu d'objets exposés, au seuil aussi entre le public initié de l'université et le public à accueillir qui veut tout savoir aussi rapidement que possible. Les musées d'archéologie organisent l'espace en arrêtant le temps un moment et ont un peu d'avance sur chacun de nous parce qu'ils possèdent un petit élément d'information que nous ne possédons pas. Ils ont pour mission de placer des objets anciens dans un contexte moderne et créent ainsi une nouvelle vie pour la matière.

Institutions on the threshold

Three university museums in America: Harvard Semitic Museum in Cambridge, Oriental Institute Museum in Chicago and University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

Museums appear to stop time, but in fact, they create a slightly different flow. Showcases of life, they allow for a recreational reflection on aspects of human history. Museum professionals are experts in restoring past moments and creating a safe space. We are, as visitors, once we are allowed in, protected for a while from the fleeting time.

At the Harvard Semitic Museum, Peter Manuelian talks about his project of revitalization and the exhibit about David Gordon Lyon, the museum's founder. Joe Greene tells us about the history of the building and reveals many thresholds. Adam Aja talks about recreating ancient plaster casts. At the Penn Museum, I met Dan Rahimi who talked about the collections and the objects who tell stories over time. Margaret Spencer told me about her favorite object. Julian Siggers explained the big scope renovation of the museum. Steve Tinney talked about the cuneiform collection and the new projects with the university. At the Oriental Institute, I met with Jack Green who told me about colonial aspects of the museum's mission.

Museums
conciliate
space and
time

Museums offer a break from passing time, and they reinvent memory. Especially museums of archaeology, as their objects were not originally meant to be put on display in a museum, but had a specific use in everyday life. An archaeology museum is conceptually closest to the most contemporary sections of art or design museums where you can trace the technological evolution over time from the first telephone to the Iphone, or you can follow the changes in design of the Coca-Cola bottle. Archaeology museums recreate a continuity with our past by unearthing secrets about how objects were used in everyday life, for household purposes, trade or worship. At the Semitic Museum, Adam Aja, Assistant Curator of Collections, likes to show the evolution of the oil lamp over centuries by

explaining the way houses were kept and lit. The Oriental Institute has a dedicated display space for the evolution of the oil lamp over time.

University museums are institutions on the threshold of the protected study environment of the university and the general audience. They were mainly conceived for and by scholars, but at the same time they also want to reach out to the public. Spending time at the Harvard Semitic Museum made me want to find out more about university museums as institutions that harbor a collection that is only partly accessible to everyone. I visited the Penn Museum in Philadelphia and the Oriental Institute in Chicago to learn more.

Harvard Semitic Museum is a hidden gem. Even people who work close by don't always know where it is located. Right on Divinity Avenue, between the Herbaria and the Yenching Library, opposite the Peabody Museum stands the museum that was founded between 1889 and 1903 through the effort of David Gordon Lyon who was Hollis Professor of Assyriology and Hebrew at Harvard. During his time in Leipzig, studying at an "Orientalisches Seminar", he had developed the idea of an institution that would serve the purposes of teaching, research, publication and public display of artifacts all at once.

Parallel to that, the archaeologist James Henry Breasted who had studied in Berlin and was probably also acquainted with the Oriental Seminar tradition in Germany where cultures of the Ancient Near East were taught, developed the idea of an Oriental Institute. Joe Greene, Deputy Director of the Semitic Museum, believes that they both had the same idea and came home with the vision of an institution that would bring the wisdom and the wonders of the Ancient Near East to America. David Gordon Lyon founded the Semitic Museum at Harvard, and James Henry Breasted created the Oriental Institute in Chicago. Its current director Gil Stein combines archaeological digs with his teaching activities dedicated to a broader audience.

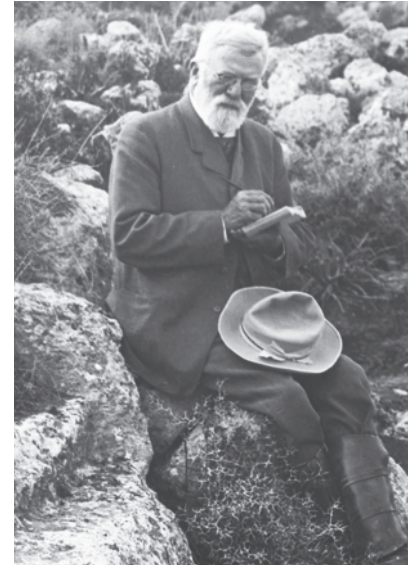
Gil Stein: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpldfpPKdz8>

Both institutions are dedicated to the study of the Ancient Near East: Mesopotamia, Babylon, Modern Day Iraq and Turkey, Israel, Egypt. The Semitic Museum has an impressive collection of

Harvard
Semitic
Museum and
Oriental
Institute in
Chicago

cuneiform tablets, ancient pottery and figurines from ancient sites like Ur and Nippur, Egyptian mummy cases and ethnographic materials from the Near East. Many of these objects come from excavations funded by Harvard, but Lyon also acquired casts from Ancient monuments from the British Museum and the Louvre. The idea was to illustrate the cultures from the Nile to the Euphrates and bring the wisdom and mystery of ancient civilizations to Harvard.

The Oriental Institute is part of the campus of the University of Chicago. The Gothic/Art Deco building was completed in 1930 and opened in 1931. It was designed by H.O. Murray of the architectural firm Mayers, Murray & Phillip. Both institutions depend on the university but also have some autonomy for raising funds. Admission to the Semitic Museum is free, and has always been free. The Oriental Institute accepts donations of 10 dollars.

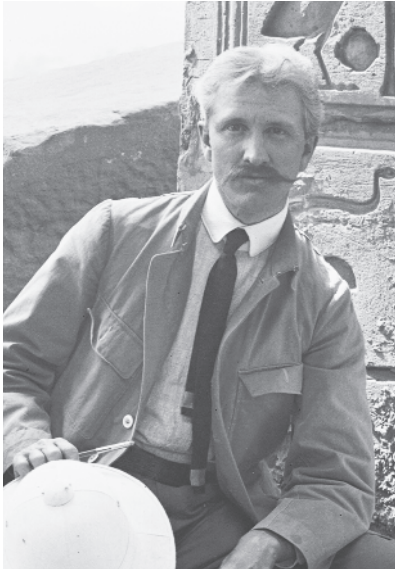


*David Gordon Lyon, 1907, in Samieh, Palestine
Courtesy Semitic Museum,
Harvard University*

**Modern
requirements
for
19th century
buildings**

Joe Greene, Deputy Director and Curator of the Semitic Museum, talks about the difficulties that a 19th century building faces when it needs to upgrade to modern requirements like air conditioning, or the addition of an elevator to facilitate handicapped access. The Semitic Museum has added a state of the art elevator in 2013 and is in the process of modernizing the air conditioning, the galleries and the displays. The Penn Museum in Philadelphia also faces the challenge to install air conditioning. “Have you been to Philadelphia in the summer?” Dan Rahimi, Executive Director of Galleries at the Penn Museum, asked me when I said it seemed nice and airy.

The three museums that I decided to look at here are different in size and they also differ in their



Dr. James Henry Breasted, Jr., 1906, beside the entrance to the great temple in Abu Simbel. Courtesy Oriental institute, University of Chicago

mission. The Oriental Institute and the Semitic Museum are the most similar. They were both founded as teaching and research institutions to promote knowledge and representations from the ancient cultures from the Persian Gulf through modern-day southern Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and northern Egypt: the “Fertile Crescent.” The expression was coined by James Henry Breasted who founded the Oriental Institute. He was a famous Egyptologist who befriended Rockefeller and convinced him to fund the museum he wanted to create, parallel to David Gordon Lyon who found an ally in New York financier Jacob Schiff for funding the Semitic Museum.

The Semitic Museum has a new director since 2013, Peter Manuelian who is Philip J. King Professor of Egyptology. He initiated a series of revitalization projects for the museum. Among those was the exhibit on the museum’s founder David Gordon Lyon, “From the Nile to the Euphrates – Creating the Harvard Semitic Museum” that has been on view on the second floor since December 2014.

“Teaching with objects” was the motto of David Gordon Lyon’s days and he acquired all sorts of objects, not only ancient, but also from contemporary Middle East, so the museum also has garments, children’s shoes and brass plates.

Peter Manuelian became interested in Lyon’s life because of George Andrew Reisner, his star student, who held the chair of Egyptology at Harvard in those days. Lyon was instrumental in creating the expedition that ran from 1905 until Reisner’s death in 1942 with the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the most successful and longest running Egyptian excavation in Egypt and Nubia that is

now Sudan. Peter Manuelian's goal is to bring everybody on campus to explore the Semitic Museum. He is also director of the Giza Project at Harvard. He works on modernizing the teaching with objects motto by using 3D technologies.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFTkBUQ9NBU>

Words from
different
times: Semitic
and Oriental

Both institutions need to defend their appellation in modern times. The Semitic Museum often gets confused with a Jewish museum and the Oriental Institute needs to defend the word "oriental" that has now become politically problematic. The option the museums have is to embrace their imposed identity and modernize it with innovative exhibits. The word "oriental" has become associated with Edward Said's book "Orientalism" (1978) and is now considered to mean a certain attitude associated with colonialism, expressing a rather condescending way of one culture looking at another. A little like the word Semitic has become associated with Judaism only.

Jack Green says, "We must be careful with the inherent colonialist point of view that still resonates within the approach to the Ancient Near East. Especially nowadays, when healthy dialogue among different cultural approaches is so crucial."

Joe Greene from the Harvard Semitic Museum says it is a matter of branding, more than of naming. The purpose of the institution must be clearly recognizable.

Penn
Museum is
the largest
university
museum in
America

Both the OI and the HSM are relatively small museums, whereas the Penn Museum in Philadelphia is the largest university museum in America. The OI is one floor of galleries that consists of seven rooms, with one dedicated to rotating shows. The Semitic Museum is three floors, the first dedicated to the House of Israel, the model of a Bronze Age house where the visitor experiences the daily life of a family, their farming and trade, as well as worship. The second floor is now occupied with rotating shows, right now it is "From the Nile to the Euphrates – Creating the Harvard Semitic Museum", and on the third floor the gallery is dedicated to Mesopotamia and Cyprus. The Penn Museum covers all aspects of human civilization on three floors, there is the Islamic Near East galle-

ry, multiple Ancient Near East galleries, an Asia gallery, a Mesoamerican gallery and two about Africa, one on Ancient Greece and Etruscan Italy, two major galleries on Egypt, one on top of the other, plus a gallery on Human Evolution and numerous changing exhibitions.

All three museums have gift shops, with the Oriental Institute's "Suq" being the most focused on items relating to the Ancient Near East. At the Penn Museum, the gift shop includes a well-furnished bookstore with volumes on Native American themes, Israel, Africa, Mexico and many attractive items relating to the exhibits. At the Penn Museum, it is also possible to watch conservators at work. At the Semitic Museum, Adam Middleton or Jeff Holman mind the gift shop when they are not busy giving tours to the public or doing conservation work, and sell rare books an Akkadian Grammar or T-shirts with cuneiform writing motives. "At a small museum, everybody does everything", as Adam Aja often points out.

Cuneiform tablets are a large part of the collections in all three museums. They reflect the beginning of writing and have the continuing fascination of the first step in human history to express states and feelings in a medium that lasts over time. Most of the time, it is receipts and accounts of commerce, but sometimes there are elements of ancient myths or stories, related to Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. Ryan Winters, a graduate student at Harvard is among the lucky few in the world who can read cuneiform writing. He knows how to decipher Akkadian and Sumerian, and he knows the differences.

Steve Tinney, Deputy Director of the Penn Museum and Associate Curator in charge of the Babylonian section is also a faculty member in the department of Near Eastern languages and civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. He explains that the Penn Museum has a very close relationship with the university, as most of the curators also have faculty positions. With 25,000 tablets, the curators of the Babylonian section do their own separate research and teaching. They teach Akkadian and Sumerian. Akkadian is a Semitic language, like Arabic or Hebrew, so it can be understood by comparison, but Sumerian is an isolate, it is more interesting, more difficult, Steve Tinney says.

The Penn Museum has created a teaching and research laboratory called CAAM (center for the analysis of archaeological materials) a year ago in a newly restored part of the building. It is a joint

Origins of
writing at the
Penn Museum

Drawing
students from
other
disciplines into
archaeology

endeavor between the Penn Museum and the University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) “These are teaching suites that teach different sub-disciplines of ceramics, digital archaeology, archaeobotany, archaeozoology, human skeletal analysis, lithics, archaeometallurgy, and conservation. We just started the second year, and it is amazing to see the number of students who apply to do these courses”, Julian Siggers says. “One of the goals is to draw people into archaeology. The Penn Museum has always been very strong in the study of the Ancient World and we wanted to enhance that, and it is something only a museum can do. The undergraduates have access to these vast collections to work on and hopefully publish.” Steve Tinney directs this center and says the idea was “to find out how archaeological science could be taught by the museum and the school of arts and sciences in conjunction.” There are people who teach lithics, ceramics, metals, archaeo-metallurgy, botany, zoology that introduce students to archaeology.

The first thing you ask a museum professional is “What is your favorite object?”

Everyone
has a
favorite
object

Their faces light up when they talk about their favorite collection, their favorite part of the Museum, their favorite room. Each person who works in a museum has a very personal reason for doing so. It can be something that connects them to their childhood or her ancestry or the culture they come from, or even a culture they are attracted to. Museums are safe places; they are labors of love and institutions on the threshold of past and future. Museums have to hold on to the now, as they have to decide how much to expose to the public. There is a hidden side to a museum that a visitor rarely thinks about. In the museums I visited, only about one or two percent of the objects are on display. The storage is bursting with unseen wonders. Behind the objects that are on view, carefully chosen for exhibition, there is the whole wealth of objects that need care and attention when no one is looking, so that for future exhibits, these objects can be picked out and put on display.

Margaret Spencer, Executive Assistant at the Penn Museum, likes an object from the rare books collection at the Penn Library :the bible her grandfather translated to Algonquin, a language spoken by Native American peoples widespread over Canada, New England and the Midwest. Dan Rahimi, Executive Director of Galleries at the Penn Museum, showed me the Egyptian columns he wants to

put in their original form one on top of the other but the museum will first engage in big scope renovations in order to do so.

A museum is a threshold institution, it is stable in its context as a building and an institution that lasts over time, but its content is moving and changing and keeps up with the present moment as much as possible. The university museums face the challenge of keeping the things they exhibit interesting, at the same time for research and to the public. The museum professional represents all at once the general public and the researcher and also acts as a link between the two.

Stable and in motion

Although the visitor comes back to a familiar place, he still hopes for a new exhibit, something temporary and exciting, as well as the well known spaces he loves to come back to. A museum needs love, people who stick together and enjoy stopping time together. Preparing an exhibit needs a lot of coordination between things that need to be done like research, picking out the objects and finding out why they are interesting, which story they tell or how they look. In a museum of archaeology, the myths prevail. The public, the students and the researchers come to the artifacts of Ancient Times and are mesmerized like children when they rediscover the artifacts every time for the first time. They marvel at 3,500-year-old jars and inscriptions, wondering whom they belonged to, what they were used for and that is how they like to travel in time. They take one moment and imagine the object in its original use, where it has been created, built or manufactured.

The person that comes to this kind of museum loves the atmosphere of secret and wonder, like being granted access for knowing something that other people don't. They love the atmosphere of secrets and adventures; ancient times and unknown spaces where bits and pieces reveal some information, but the motion is constant, it is never quite finished and never quite the same as the last time you were there. Always on the verge of completion, the university museum faces a constant struggle for grants and donors, but gets relief when the volunteers come knocking, graciously offering their hands, for the chance to be part of the adventure, albeit for a little while, even for a seemingly minor task, just for the pleasure of being let in to the secret for a little while, where time stops and mystery lives.

New aspects of colonialism

Talking with Jack Green, Chief Curator at the Oriental Institute Chicago

Jack Green has been the Chief Curator at the Oriental Institute Museum for the past four years. As of January 2016, he was appointed Deputy Director of the Corning Museum of Glass in New York. At the Oriental Institute he has managed the staff, the projects and the collections of the museum, as well as the special exhibits. He has also worked on the public face of the museum, how to represent it. “One of the important things”, he says, “is to represent the past and the Ancient Middle East to the public and we do that through a variety of programs, exhibits and also a website. We facilitate a lot of teaching and research with the collections in the context of the university, which is the speciality of a university museum.”

A temple for
archaeology

The Oriental Institute, or OI, has been around since 1919, but its history goes back a little earlier than that. In 1894, James Henry Breasted started assembling the Haskell Oriental Museum, which was also on campus. That was the beginning of the now existing museum. The museum became filled with too many artifacts and there was not enough space to do what Breasted wanted to do. In 1919 he got funding from John D. Rockefeller Jr., the oil magnate and heir to the Standard Oil fortune, and was able to support early excavations and exhibitions at the Oriental Institute, as well as the new building of the Oriental Institute with its faculty. He created it as a research laboratory for exploring the beginnings of human civilization in the Ancient Near East. He was particularly interested in the beginnings of writing but he also focused on prehistory. Breasted was himself popularized in archaeology and Egyptology and he became a celebrity in America in the 1920s and 1930s. Although he has not gone treasure hunting, his life is thought to have been one of the inspirations for the creation of the figure of Indiana Jones (his fictional archaeology professor, Abner Ravenwood, was at the University of Chicago).

“The museum as we have it now is seven permanent galleries and one special exhibits gallery. We have one of the most comprehensive range of artifacts from Ancient Mesopotamia in the western hemisphere. The collection is similar to the ones of other university museums in North America that were also founded at around the same time like Harvard Semitic Museum, or Penn Museum. Our collection was acquired through excavation or formal division, “partage” as it is called, where the museum keeps half the finds and gives the other half to the country where they were excavated. We also have objects that were acquired through purchase by James Henry Breasted himself who would buy objects for the collection, especially from Egypt.”

T: For how long has Breasted been active with the museum?

JG: Breasted was active from 1894 when he was hired, up until 1935 when he died, so about forty years within the University of Chicago. The building itself is seen a little like a temple to Near Eastern archaeology. It feels and looks like a temple. It is a quadrangle, with a hidden courtyard in the middle that no member of the public can really see. But it has very high ceilings and room for monumental sculptures, like the lamassu, a Human-headed winged Assyrian bull, a protective spirit that was placed usually in pairs at the entrance of palaces or rooms. This one was found in Khorsabad, Iraq, a site Breasted visited in 1920. The OI obtained concession to excavate from 1928-1935. The upper part of the lamassu was found in 1929. It had fallen downward on the pavement in Antiquity, covered in debris, and therefore preserved. Edward Chiera who conducted the dig immediately cabled Breasted and wanted to know if he should ask for the bull in the division of finds. Breasted eagerly agreed even though he had no money in his budget to pay for the shipment. Khorsabad stands on the ruins of Dur-Sharrukin (“Fort Sargon”) built by the Assyrian king Sargon II (721-705 B.C.). The bull once stood at the entrance to the throne room of the King of Sargon II. It has the head of a human, the body and ears of a bull and the wings of a bird. When viewed from the side it appears to be walking, when viewed from the front it appears to be standing, that is why it is represented with five legs rather than four. It is one of the star pieces of the Oriental Institute, along with the bull’s head from Persepolis, Iran. The Oriental Institute is among the few institutions in the world that have a lamassu, like the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the



*Jack Green, Chief Curator of the Oriental Institute Chicago
Photo: Akemi Horii*

**Finding the
Lamassu**

British Museum, the Louvre has a lamassu also, and a cast of ours, and of course the Iraq Museum in Baghdad. Ours is looking to the side, which is a more unusual posture for these statues.

T: How many objects do you have on display?

JG: About 4500 objects.

T: How much is that?

JG: Let's see, we have an estimated 300,000 objects in the collection, so it is less than 2% of the collections. We have bulk archaeological material in storage, especially sherds and stone tools which is why the size of the collection is so large.

T: Where is the storage space?

JG: Underneath, in the basement, in climate controlled conditions.

T: Who works in the basement?

JG: Two registrars and our Head of Archives. The conservation lab is upstairs. Two conservators work there. We also have some storage space on the first floor for organic materials like wood, basketry, paper, papyrus, things that have special conservation needs.

T: Do you yourself work with the collections a lot?



Lamassu, an Assyrian protective deity, Yelda Khorsabad, Courtesy Oriental Institute, University of Chicago

JD: Not as much as I would like to. When I have a catalogue entry to write then I will take the objects out and look at them. But it is hard to work with the collections when you have so many administrative tasks to do. But I get to do that occasionally and that's the sweet spot about being a curator, when you get to work with the collection, it would just be nice to do that a little more.

T: But when you work on the exhibits?

JG: Yes. I really enjoyed working on the “Our work: Modern Jobs – Ancient origins” exhibit that was on display between August 2013 and February 2014.

<https://oi.uchicago.edu/museum-exhibits/special-exhibits/our-work-modern-jobs-ancient-origins>

We have exhibits rotating roughly every six to nine months. This one was an exhibit of photographs that connected a person from Chicago to an ancient object through their job, connecting to something represented by an object. That was a lot of fun. We got to connect people and objects and I learned quite a lot about the objects.

T: How did you find the people?

JG: It was mostly my colleague Emily Teeter who made the connections, who contacted the people. We had a horse rider, a real estate agent; we have an ancient stone that is the equivalent of a real estate contract. And she ended up being my real estate agent, and we are still good friends. We worked with a dressmaker as well. Some of these experiences were very emotional. We felt a connection with the person. The moment you make the connection between the object and the person it really sends a shiver down your spine; it is not just dispassionate objects but teasing out what people feel about objects. This was about crossing boundaries, making connections, between people, between past and present, and also across cultural boundaries. The dressmaker, an African American woman from Hyde Park, she makes prom dresses, and she knows how long it takes to make a dress and so she was looking at the figurine and

related to her. She said, I can see this dress takes a real long time to make, it will take about two weeks, and she talked about her experiences and she says she likes that the statue is praying, she can relate to that, she is a spiritual person, I am a spiritual person and she relates to her. That kind of connection just blows you away.

Blurring the boundaries between art and archaeology was part of the fun doing the projects here. But recently it was so much about heritage destruction in Syria and Iraq. That was really depressing. We are trying what we can to make a difference, but it is very hard. The exhibit about Old Cairo for example, “A Cosmopolitan city: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Old Cairo” was on display from February through September 2015. It was about medieval Egypt and there I learned a lot about that topic. Among the objects on display were richly illuminated manuscripts of the Koran, Coptic and Hebrew manuscripts. There was also a carved door from the Ben Ezra Synagogue from the cabinet that held the Torah. It is dated to about 1030 and is carved with a passage from Psalm 118:19 “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.” We were able to have it on loan from the permanent collection of the Walter’s Art museum in Baltimore and the Yeshiva Museum in New York to have it shown for the first time in the Midwest. It incorporates the different communities living together with Jewish texts and Islamic design motifs. It was a thousand year old object and the history and the cultural connections that made it possible to have this object at the Oriental Institute were a lot of hard work. The message about all these communities living together – everyone was saying that this was so timely. We had been planning that for years, but it had a lot of resonance with the public. The Oriental Institute tries to distance itself from religion, but I tried to engage a lot with religious communities. I find that really important.

T: Yes, museums like yours can do a lot for the communication and understanding between the communities through the Ancient cultures.

JG: When you try to promote peace and you are not really representing people from the Middle East, that’s where the big challenge is, how to engage with people from there. You can do that by sharing the collection, sharing your knowledge and training. But those kinds of things can be colonial

in their framework, you are at the center of power where you have all this knowledge and information and objects stored. I have always thought you should be very mindful of these things and break down some of these boundaries. Even the name of the institution “Oriental Institute” is from the viewpoint of the Westerner looking towards the East, the idea of knowing and owning the past of that region and understand it, because it is about inheriting that knowledge.



The Oriental Institute in Chicago

T: But above the entrance, there is the Tympanum that is called “The East teaching the West.”

JG: True, but the museum here is framed as colonial, as there are all these representations and objects from the Middle East that are owned by the University of Chicago that are here, within this amazing institutional building, and it’s basically saying “we possess that, we own that, we understand that”, but what it doesn’t really say is how to share our knowledge and provide resources and do collaborative work with the Middle East. That is actually happening in many areas, for example in Egypt and Afghanistan, but it isn’t yet expressed in the museum. For excavations in the past, archaeologists worked with the people there, but then you took the objects home. Now, for the most part, you are not allowed to bring objects home anymore.

T: Ok, you have a good point here. But still, you always have to start from somewhere, and your point of view is now this one, you possess certain objects at your museum, you know certain things, but that doesn’t mean that someone else can’t come and say “I know something else about that object”, and thereby adding another layer of truth.

Colonialist
points of view
still prevail

JG: You are right. This is the thing we really tried to do with the exhibit “Our work – modern jobs, ancient origins.” We chose objects and tried to match them with jobs and people in the present. That was a way to make it more human and get the perspective of people who really live the lives that the objects represent.

T: What are the projects for the future?

JG: The University and the Oriental Institute decide what to endow in terms of faculty positions, and this can be a high priority. In terms of other priorities, there is Chicago House, the facility of the OI in Luxor, Egypt. There are also many archaeological expeditions and more recently cultural heritage projects in the Middle East. It all costs a lot of money. The museum is important but not necessarily as important as faculty or research. There does need to be a shift, more integration of the museum with the university needs and research. That would be the best thing.

T: How do you find the money?

JG: You often need to develop relationships with supporters, ranging from individuals to corporations. But we only get 50,000 visitors a year, so we can't really approach large companies, it would be a bit of a mismatch. But local companies or organizations, yes, for specific exhibits or projects. Grants and awards from foundations are other ways to obtain funds, but of course can be very competitive.

T: Thank you, Jack. And good luck with your new job.

Making Harvard Semitic Museum a go-to destination for all

Peter Manuelian is professor of Egyptology and director of the Semitic Museum

Peter Manuelian has been appointed director of the Semitic Museum in 2013. He is Philip J. King Professor of Egyptology at Harvard and has been responsible for the Egyptian section at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston before that. Since becoming director, he has worked on revitalizing the museum. A state of the art elevator was added, the third floor has a new lounge, and most of all, he initiated and conceived the exhibit about David Gordon Lyon, the museum's founder, "From the Nile to the Euphrates – Creating the Harvard Semitic Museum" that opened in December 2014 and is still on display. The Semitic Museum gets ready for the 21st Century on all fronts.

Peter has been inspired to do this exhibit and explore the beginnings of the museum in order to better understand where he should take it from there. He feels that it is important to understand the inspiring ideas and the mission of the museum and its collection in order to know how it is different from other museums with similar collections.

The exhibit about Lyon was conceptually built on the information gathered from Lyon's own daybooks, reports, glass slides with photos from his travels, and most of all, his diaries that he kept throughout his life. The objects in the exhibit are the pieces Lyon collected to show the coherence of interest he brought to the details of the pottery and the figurines he acquired. In 38 handwritten diary books the reader learns about trivial facts about Lyon's life, like when he



Peter Manuelian is professor of Egyptology and director of the Semitic Museum, Courtesy Semitic Museum, Harvard University

**Creating the
Harvard Semitic
Museum**

got a haircut or when he ate oysters, but we also learn about his relationship with his wife Tosca, the president of Harvard at that time, and how he went about to convince the university and his financial backer Jacob Schiff of the necessity of a museum that would serve as a teaching and research institution dedicated to the Ancient Near East. David Gordon Lyon was also interested in bringing back artifacts from the contemporary Middle East and so the collection also grew with ethnographic material.

One of Lyon's students was George Reisner, an Egyptologist who conducted the Harvard excavations in Egypt between 1905 and 1942. Lyon was instrumental in this endeavor, Reisner was his star student.

Peter Manuelian was instrumental in having the Lyon diaries scanned and made accessible online at the Harvard archives. There is a lot of typing and deciphering involved when the diaries should also appear in printed form. He secured a grant for his students to type the diaries. His other projects include the Giza Archives that he started when he worked for the MFA in Boston and that he brought to Harvard. Peter takes the motto "teaching with objects" to modern standards and has his team create 3D graphics of the interior of Egyptian palaces. The experience is stunning and with a headset it is possible to walk around in a pyramid and look left and right, up and down and get dizzy with the virtual reality. The models of the pyramids become more and more precise and detailed with the developing technology.

Peter says that most people were at one point fascinated with Egypt as children, but he never grew out of it. His fascination takes him to negotiating contracts with companies like Dassault Systèmes that support the technology he needs for the graphics. His team also works on creating a comprehensive data resource on Egypt that should hold everything we know about that part of the world.

His eyes sparkle with true joy when he says he wants to make the Semitic Museum the go-to destination for students, scholars and the general public alike. "Bring them all in!"

History of the building of the Semitic Museum

6, Divinity Avenue, Harvard Campus, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Discussion with Joe Greene, Deputy Director and Curator of the Harvard Semitic Museum

Joe: The Semitic Museum building was built in 1900-1902. The galleries formally opened in 1903. The building itself was not just meant to be a museum, but a home for a teaching and research institution involved in the investigation of the Ancient Near East, envisioned by David Gordon Lyon, the founder.

T: Where were the collections then?

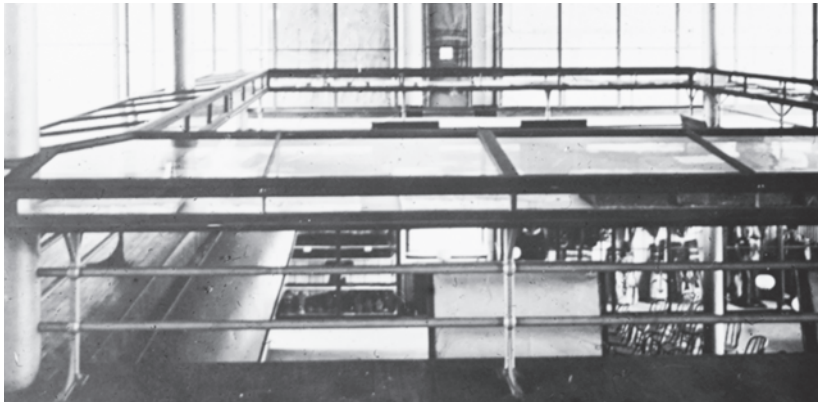
Joe: The basement, where the collections are now, was only a machine space. There was a large storage space underneath the vitrines where the rest of the collection was stored. As it is typical of late Victorian nineteenth century museums, everything was on display. Now, most things are in storage, and very few things are on display.

T: Did they have as many things then as you do now?

Joe: Well, from 1889, when the museum collection started to be assembled by Lyon, there were cuneiform tablets, plaster casts of certain Near Eastern monuments and some artifacts. From 1889 to 1902, Lyon was busy collecting things for the museum. In the 90s of the nineteenth century, the collection was exhibited on the 4th floor of the Peabody Museum across the street, on Divinity Avenue. We have records in Lyon's diaries and daybooks about unpacking material that was stored in the basement of the Divinity School Library, which is now Farlow Hall.

T: Is the Peabody room still there?

Everything was on display



*Semitic Museum installed on Peabody 4th floor, ca. 1890s,
Courtesy Semitic Museum, Harvard University*

A cluster of museum buildings

T: That building was already there then?

Joe: Yes, that building is the oldest building on the street, from 1832. It is on the register of historic buildings in the US. Across the street there was the Peabody Museum that opened in the 1870s, the Museum of Comparative Zoology which is of a similar era, so there was on Divinity Avenue a cluster of museums and institutions for the study of the Ancient world. The construction of the Semitic Museum in this location sort of fit in with everything else that was happening on Divinity Avenue at that time. When this building opened, the collection was removed from the Peabody and brought here. Lyon's major financial backer Jacob Schiff not only underwrote the building but also the acquisition of the collection. We know from the collections record that Lyon traveled in the Near East in 1902 collecting things, so we have a lot of material that came in with the registration number 1902. A lot was purchased from dealers in Damascus, Jerusalem, Beirut. That was Lyon's effort to find things to fill up the cases.

Joe: The 4th floor of the Peabody until recently had an exhibition of South Pacific material, but its general arrangement is very much as it was when the Semitic Museum collection was displayed there. There was an atrium opening between the 3rd and 4th floor and a railing around that atrium where the cases were built. We have photographs of the Semitic collection being displayed there before 1902. (photo)

T: Where was Lyon working before the building was finished?

Joe: He was the Hollis professor of Divinity. So one presumes that his office was in Divinity Hall, next door, beyond the Bio Labs today.

T: How many rooms did he have to fill then?

Joe: There were two large rooms on the second floor and on the third floor and you have to imagine it without all the offices that now surround the perimeter, a huge amount of floor space, all open. Lyon acquired a large number of casts from the Berlin Museum, the Louvre and the British Museum.

T: What else did he purchase?

Joe: There was also a large ethnographic collection, costumes and objects of everyday life. And also a large number of stuffed birds. These came from an already assembled collection of a variety of ethnographic material from a man named Selah Merrill, an American, long time resident of Jerusalem, some time Vice Consul for America. He was an archaeologist who assembled a collection of antiquities, ethnographic material, and natural history specimens. Mostly birds, that he himself shot and stuffed. There was a large demand for those specimens. Ultimately, his collection was purchased by subscription from students and alumni of the Divinity School, they raised the money, paid Merrill and the collection came to the Semitic Museum. This material was installed in the Semitic Museum when it was finally opened to the public in 1903.

T: Lyon inaugurated a publication series, the Harvard Semitic Series, very early on, what was it about?

Joe: It was intended to publish material from the collection and also results of the museum's excavations and research in the Near East. The first set of publications was devoted to the excavation at Samaria, which took place in 1908/1910. The final publication of the results was delayed by the intervention of the first World War, the publication didn't appear until 1923/24. Because of the nature of the Ottoman antiquity administration at that time, none of the finds of 1908/09/10 were divided to the museum. They all remained within the Ottoman Empire. Important finds were all sent to the Imperial Istanbul museum. Things that were not sent to



*Joe Greene, Deputy Director
and Curator of the Harvard
Semitic Museum*



*Semitic Museum, 1903, Architect: Alexander W. Longfellow
Courtesy Semitic Museum, Harvard University*

Excavations in Samaria

directed by one of Lyon's graduate students, George Reisner, who made his career as an archaeologist in Egypt, but he was enlisted by Lyon to superintend the excavation at the archaeological site known to be the Biblical capital of the Northern Kingdom of Samaria. In 1910, Reisner made this extraordinary discovery of a set of ostraca, inked writing on potsherds written in Old Hebrew. It is still debated what these ostraca represented; tax records, receipts or some other sort of bureaucratic apparatus.

We have all the documentary material from Reisner's excavations: photos, glass plates, field books and administrative records, and records of the publication, but not any artifacts. There was clamp down on the export of antiquities from anywhere in the empire because they were now trying to protect their cultural heritage.

the Istanbul Museum were kept in the Ottoman Regional Collection in Jerusalem, which ultimately became the core of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, also known as the Rockefeller Museum.

T: And what happened to the collection then?

Joe: Regional finds were concentrated in Jerusalem in the late Ottoman period, and with the coming of the First World War, the museum was dismantled, the objects were put in crates around the city to protect them with the thought they would be removed to Damascus or Istanbul, but the British got to Jerusalem first and they captured the museum as a spoil of war.

T: But there are things from Samaria at the Semitic Museum.

Joe: Yes, there was another set of excavations at Samaria in the 1930s that were regarded by the British Colonial administration as a continuation of the earlier Harvard excavations. The Semitic Museum has a series of finds from the 1930s excavations, but none at all from the pre-war excavations. The excavation in the field was

T: Could you tell me a little more about Lyon?

Joe: Lyon taught oriental languages, primarily Assyrian but also Hebrew and the Old Testament history. He also studied all kinds of languages from Egyptian to Italian throughout his life. As the Harvard Crimson news reports, his lectures were hugely popular, hundreds of people came to his classes, they had to move to new classrooms to accommodate all the people coming in.

T: How come his lectures were so popular?

Joe: In that era, there was a great deal of interest in the Ancient Near East, especially what had to do with the Bible, because it plays such an important role in Western culture. And the opening up of Western research in the Ottoman lands in the Ancient Near East was just beginning. That was the wave that Lyon was riding. In 1922, he formally retired from teaching, but he remained as honorary curator of the Semitic Museum for another ten years.

T: What do you think was the true motivation behind creating this museum?

Joe: The teaching of languages and cultures needed to be done within the framework of an institution that had a collection. There was this huge popularity and eagerness to learn more.

T: What was the idea behind calling it Semitic Museum and not Jewish Museum? Or even the Biblical Museum?

Joe: You see, I think that this is where his relationship with Schiff comes in, because Lyon expected that there would be more interest among New Englanders, but all the support he got was from Jacob Schiff, a German Jewish financier based in New York. There may have been this creative tension between the two. I think Schiff was interested in making accessible the contributions of the Semitic peoples to the Western Civilization, he may have been speaking in code for Jewish. The other wrinkle in this might be that Lyon's training was in Germany with a German scholar named Delitzsch who was one of the proponents in Europe of the controver-

Lyon, advocate of the origins of the Bible

Semitic or Jewish: support from Jacob Schiff

The Code of Hammurabi and the Bible

sy “Bible versus Babel”, the primacy of the Biblical text or the primacy of the Babylonian text that was just beginning to be discovered and deciphered.

Things like the parallels between the Code of Hammurabi, the law code of Ancient Babylonia written in cuneiform Akkadian that stated laws for commercial and social behavior, and the laws of the Deuteronomy. An eye for an eye is a famous law that comes from the Code of Hammurabi. The account of the flood in early Genesis was compared to the account of the flood in the Code of Hammurabi. Chronologically these cuneiform writings precede the Bible. Until then, Biblical chronology was accepted and implicitly everything that we know about the Ancient Near East springs from reading the Bible. Clearly there was tension over that, a lot of debates in scholarly circles, primarily in Europe. I think that Americans were still very much convinced that the Bible was the entrée into the Ancient Near East, to understand how the Bible fit into this wider Near Eastern world. You dug up proof that the Biblical accounts of the Ancient Near Eastern history are correct.

There was also this mistaken impression, in which Lyon partook of, that the traditional society in the lands of the Bible was still contemporary, and therefore was an accurate reflection of Bible times, and to observe a Palestinian fellah was to gaze upon Father Abraham. And that’s why ethnographic material figures so largely in the displays of the Semitic Museum.

Decline and gradual emergence

T: The collection of the Semitic Museum is very coherent.

Joe: Well, it was coherent in the design that Lyon articulated when he first founded it, up to the point that Lyon ceased to be involved in it. After Lyon’s retirement from the scene in 1932, his student Robert Pfeiffer succeeded him as curator. Pfeiffer presided over an institution in decline. In the 1950s there was a radical change that suppressed the museum. The history of the museum since then has been a gradual emergence.

T: Where did the collection go meanwhile?

Joe: In the mid 1950s Harvard considered two problems separately. There was a dean’s com-

mittee that looked at the department and there was a report commission from a law firm at Harvard evaluating what could be done with the Semitic Museum based on its status. As the Semitic Museum had been established as a trust between Harvard and Jacob Schiff, Harvard couldn't just sell it off. So they dismantled all the exhibits and put them in the basement.

The department was a different matter. Harvard wanted the top people in Semitics, so they hired a new Semitist named Frank Moore Cross, who was making a name for himself with the Dead Sea Scrolls in the late 1940s and 1950s who rebuilt the department. The collection was packed up in tea chests, so the oral tradition goes. We have no records or photographs from that time, only records from movers. From the 50s to the 70s, that was the way things stood. The basement had become a space for teaching. It has been transformed through the 30s and 40s and was receiving objects from excavations.

T: Can you tell us a little about the excavations?

Joe: It was the heyday of Western archeology in the Near East. In the 20s and 30s, Palestine and Iraq were under the British mandate; Syria and Lebanon under the French mandate. There



*Lyon and students at Samieh, Palestine, 1907
Courtesy Semitic Museum, Harvard University*

**The Dead Sea
Scrolls and Frank
Moore Cross**

Frank Moore Cross (1921-2012) Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages at Harvard University, famous for his work on interpreting the Dead Sea Scrolls, published in 1973 "Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Ethic".

was a lot going on: British, French, Americans and others were given concessions to excavate. They reintroduced the notion of division of finds, of “partage”. When you went to an excavation and you dug, then the national museum, representing the Department of Antiquities, would accept a division of the finds; the unique things stay in the country, and the excavator was allowed to take away up to half the finds.

T: Where did the finds go?

Joe: The collections went to the institutions undertaking the excavation. In British mandate Palestine there was a division of finds between the excavators and the Palestine Archeological Museum, the Palestine Excavation Fund and Harvard University. When the material came here there was another division: some were considered ancient art and they went to the art museums, the other things came here. Likewise, the excavations at Nuzi in 1927 and 1932 were undertaken under the mandatory powers of Britain in Iraq, and there was a division of finds between the Iraq Museum and Harvard. And again there was a division here between the Semitic and the art museums: the glazed lions are there, they are art museum objects, the tablets came here.

In the years between first and second World War, there were still things coming in the collection, but because of how the museum was arranged there was no way to display them. No personnel who had the initiative to change things. In the 1940s it was taken over by the Armed Forces.

T: When did they put in the office spaces?

Joe: Coming to that. After the war, the museum slowly re-emerged in its pre-war guise. But it was even more diminished as an institution. Harvard was thinking about turning it into the Center for the Study for Islamic Art. They considered dismantling the museum, so they reconfigured it as an office building. Between the 50s and 70s, the Semitic Museum was occupied by a think tank to solve problems relating to the Cold War. They installed the Center for

Henry Kissinger
at the Semitic
Museum

International Affairs, where Henry Kissinger sat when he was at Harvard. The third floor was a reading room. The center moved out in the late 70s and the Center for Near Eastern Languages moved in, it had been spread out all over campus. In 1994 the space was reconfigured as a gallery, and the elevator was added in 2013.

T: What are the plans for the future?

Joe: Now we are trying to create a museum of the 21st century in a building of the nineteenth century, facing challenges of security and climate control. University museums face the challenge to meet the modern standards. The Peabody also has nineteenth century collections, the Museum of Comparative Zoology as well. With our new director Peter Manuelian, we continue to move forward with many exciting new projects.

T: Thank you, Joe.

New challenges

*The challenge: Creating a museum of the 21st century in a building of the nineteenth century
Courtesy Semitic Museum,
Harvard University*



Casting the original

Copies carry the narrative of an object to a new state of life

Museums put objects on display that are original and authentic. But this does not necessarily mean that they aren't copies. Museum professionals work on choosing which story to tell among the many layers each object hides. Museums are becoming more and more places of wonder, rather than places of truth.

Authentic does not mean unique

For German cultural critic Walter Benjamin a work of art was considered authentic when it was made by the artist himself. That's how it carried the creative process within. Each piece of art was made at a certain time, through a certain process, the duration of its creation being a vital part of the result. When Benjamin developed his theory in the 1930s, it was unthinkable to be able to "own" a film because it was way too expensive. The aura was this unnamable something that characterized the original, the special flavor that was only to be experienced when you were face to face with the authentic work of art. Now, texts or photos can be reproduced endlessly without losing any of their originality. An image on one smartphone looks the same on another one. What is still unique is the author.

The authenticity of the piece that Benjamin was talking about had to do with the very specific moment it was created and the time and space the object occupies. The aura of the object would be lost if it was copied. This theory states that when you make more of one original, you copy the original and take somehow away its uniqueness. But isn't it possible to think that each piece, whether it looks exactly like another one or doesn't, is an object in its own right? If you

paint a tree, or someone's face, you are not pretending to reproduce the original, you are just aiming to produce something that looks similar to it. American philosopher Nelson Goodman has made the distinction between depiction and representation by pointing out two different intentions. Depicting is only making a picture or something, but representing is aiming for someone to recognize it as showing something else when they see it.

When a cast is made, the new object does not tell the same story as the original one. It tells another story, adding another layer to the history of the original object. When it comes to authenticity, museums are the institutions that visitors turn to. Why else would you go to a museum if you didn't see find valuable, authentic pieces?

Nowadays, the role of museums has changed. They are becoming more and more places of life, rather than storage places of valuable art or artifacts only. Active institutions of playful learning, archaeology museums and art museums alike face the challenge to attract visitors more reluctant to leave their homes unless there is the promise of a really exciting adventure. The museum has therefore become more interactive. The visitor enjoys the feeling of adventure rather than being simply told what he is looking at. As in museums of science, in a museum of archaeology, the visitor is an explorer, he is allowed into a secret place, allowed to discover secrets that ancient objects reveal only reluctantly.

**Museums are
places of life**

Benjamin's theory has been expanded to the reproduction. A reproduced piece of art can also carry an aura, not the one that was created by the artist himself, but the one that detaches itself from the object and becomes its story, the narrative of the object. The stories that the object tells are not connected to one unique piece. As it is the awareness of ideas rather than of objects that carries us through time, the story might convey emotions, even when it is detached from the object. The story told by a famous piece like the Mona Lisa or Michelangelo's

Recreating ancient reliefs and telling new stories

David transcends the object itself and does not necessarily need the physical presence of the authentic piece to tell it. It is not so much about reproducing works of art or copying an original, but about variations on a theme that carries on a story.

For a museum professional in an archaeology museum, it is important to be knowledgeable about molding and casting. The exciting original pieces are oftentimes broken, and the art of repairing missing parts becomes the craft that allows the curator to be part of the object's life and go beyond uniqueness by adding authenticity because a new life is added to the object. However, Adam Aja, Assistant Curator of Collections at the Harvard Semitic Museum says, "A cast is instructive, an original is exciting."

Creating a new cast from an existing one can reveal layers of the creative process that brought about the original one. He explains that he is able to tell if the beard of a figure on a relief was broken recently or trace back original chisel marks from the original relief itself. Recreating an object or making a cast are among the exciting things a curator gets to do. When he goes on excavations and finds original objects, the archaeologist puts his hands in the sand of the past and uncovers layers of life. But when he is back at his museum and recreates parts of a relief, pure creative playfulness can come out, and he can safely recreate in his own way what has been there before, and become a living part of it.

The right cast – Recreating ancient reliefs at Harvard

The authentic piece is ideal, but casts allow for a larger scope of experience

Adam Aja, Assistant Curator of Collections, recreates casts from original plaster casts at the Harvard Semitic Museum for an upcoming exhibit focusing on Mesopotamia. This involves restoring the original relief and preparing modern materials including silicon, epoxy and resin for the production of a new cast. He talks about how much he enjoys creating things and recreating the past by telling stories with objects.

T : What are these casts ? Why do you have to make new ones?

AA: The relief collection we have here was assembled through purchases from the Berlin Museum, the British Museum and the Louvre. Some casts represent artwork from Neo-Assyrian palaces in the ancient cities of Nimrud and Nineveh. The originals are large stone reliefs. They were found by the archaeologist Austen Henry Layard (1817–1894) who uncovered in Nimrud the library of Ashurbanipal in 1851. The founder of the Semitic Museum, David Gordon Lyon, purchased large quantities of casts that were made from the reliefs. They were used for an exhibit on the second floor. When the museum closed to the public in 1958, these plaster casts were taken down and stored in the attic and in the basement. They cannot be exhibited in their current state, unless we would be telling a story about how casts were used and then mistreated.

T: Would you have liked to exhibit the originals?

AA: Yes, to bring the authentic pieces here and have people experience them, that would be ideal. A great exhibit came to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts a few years ago, where they brought in a lot of loans from the British Museum. But we have neither the display space nor the means to do that here.

T: Do the original casts have a value?

AA: Yes, they do, because they are not being made anymore. Casts fell out of favor during the 20th century when many museums took their cast collections off view. Museums all over the world had these collections. They still exist in some institutions' basements but they don't broadcast that they have them.

T: Were those made especially for Lyon?

AA: In some cases, yes. The cast makers from the British Museum, even in 1902, said they were worried about what the molding/casting process would do to their objects. So, even at the time they were limiting the casts they made, and they were becoming even more rare. They were teaching tools that were put on the wall to illustrate some aspects of the culture. But as original pieces they didn't have much intrinsic value. Not everyone could go to the British Museum to see the authentic pieces, so having them brought to a local museum in New England was very exciting. I think it is important to get a bit of the original feel. You gain something from being in the presence of these at full scale that you can't get just by looking at a line drawing or looking at a black and white photograph in a book.

Political
propaganda
800 BC

T: Is the process in which they are made similar to the original?

AA: Yes. We are using modern techniques and material, but it is something that has been done for decades.

T: Do you feel like you are creating something new?

AA: I have always enjoyed creating, building things. My mother was an artist, so she always

had us drawing, or cutting out construction paper. We were always making something as kids. I spent a lot of time in my father's woodshop with him, using power tools and sand paper. Making things has always been a natural part of my life. I have come to understand that not everyone does this. Sometimes I sketch something out quickly and it doesn't strike me as something complicated to do.

T: Would you mind describing the scenes on the reliefs?

AA: It was basically political propaganda. There were scenes of the king making offering to the gods, demonstrating his might and vigor, slaying beasts of the wild, or his armies being victorious in marching across territories. Everything to project the image of the king's power.

T: Can you date them?

AA: They are from the Neo-Assyrian period, about 800 BC, the time of Ashurnasirpal II. Layard was very lucky in finding those wonderful pieces. Some of the text carved into the reliefs at Nimrud was repeated over and over again, so Layard would often keep the scene and leave the inscriptions on the site.

T: He took them to England? And he had permission to do that?

AA: Yes. He had permission to excavate. These types of agreements don't exist anymore.

T: How were the casts first exhibited?

AA: The reliefs were discovered in the 1850s, almost the era of the American Civil war. When D.G. Lyon put the casts of the reliefs on view here, they were only 50 years old. They were still very impressive and dramatic. It was a time when the world was getting excited about Egypt and the Ancient Near East, so putting them on display here was quite a feat.

T: And now?

AA: And so for us now, with a smaller display space than Lyon had before, we could just pick a few and rebuild them. The idea is to put them on the third floor, which is our biggest display



*Adam Aja, Assistant Curator
of Collections at the Harvard
Semitic Museum*



Figurine of a woman playing a hand-drum. Painted terra-cotta. Eighth-seventh centuries B.C.E. Semitic Museum, Photo: E. DeLozier

space. We will combine them with some authentic pieces we have in our collection, like cuneiform tablets and cylinder seals. We couldn't re-exhibit those plaster casts as they were so I wanted to do something more attractive.

T: What did you decide to do?

AA: We opted to recreate them using modern resins. They are lightweight and durable, and they can be painted. I am experimenting with paints so that they would look like the reliefs in the original palace, as opposed to the blank white images that we imagine.

T: So it was all painted?

AA: Yes! We imagine everything was pure white in the Ancient World, but this is just false. It is just that paint degrades over time. Imagine Ancient Egypt, Assyria, Rome, Greece – everything was colorful.

T: How did you choose which cast to reproduce?

AA : First, we had to make a selection of the plaster casts, in consultation with an Assyriologist who is a professor here. We chose scenes of war, or scenes of the king presenting to the gods, and defeating enemies, showing lions, scribes, warriors. Depending on the pieces that we choose, the stories will get more elaborate.

T : Would you describe the process a little?

AA : After we made a choice of objects to tell the stories from, we lay them out on a level table. And then we fix all the original damage but not to the level of a full

On the way from the "old age" to 3D

Adam Aja: I was very interested in trying to give viewers access to things in a way that they didn't have. We had one object on loan from Penn Museum, this was a crouching lion. Originally, they were paired up in a temple in Nuzi, which is a late Bronze Age site, now around Kirkuk, Iraq. 3D scanning was still pretty new in the 2000s. They were crouching lions, red with a blue glaze over them. The blue glaze had decayed over time. Copper was revealed, it oxidizes to blue, a coppery blue. There were two lions; the Penn Museum was involved in the excavation and the Semitic Museum too. In the division of objects, the Penn got a complete crouching lion, we got the partial crouching lion, which was just the front paws and the hindquarters but we were missing the entire middle. But they were mirror images of one another they probably stood on each side of a deity figure; so the tails were curled in opposite directions.

So the vendor created a 3D model of the Penn Museum's object, we had permission from Penn to do this. Rather than a 3D scan which we would do now, what they did was take a lot of photos all around the object and then the computer program knitted them together, based on the lighting and the geometry, it figures out how they should go together. 2009 was early in the development. So they created a mirror image of the Penn lion and then digitally removed the hindquarters and the forequarters, the portions

that belonged to us, so theoretically the middle part that was left would have been what ours looked like we then went to a 3D milling machine and they milled our middle portion, then we put our authentic hind and front paws on to create a whole. Then I painted the model to match what we think the original colors would have looked like before they degraded over time. It is very bright, red and blue garish to our eyes.



Photo: E. DeLozier

The cast
reveals
details about
the original

restoration, just a cosmetic repair, for example with some powdered limestone and glue to seal a hole. That's how the surface is repaired. We made sure it was sealed on the surface before we painted over the silicone. We filled the seam or crack on the plaster cast and used smooth-on products from Reynolds Advanced materials, a local provider, they were very helpful. Then we put on the silicone in thin layers. We build it up to a thickness of 3/8 of an inch to create a new flexible mold. That is covered by a rigid epoxy shell, which will hold the mold when you are casting. Once that cures, you move the hard shell, invert it and you lay in the flexible mold. You make sure it is clean, and that there are no air bubbles, and then you pour in a liquid resin. I have been using a product called Feather Lite®, once it is cured it is harder and lighter than the original plaster.

T: It looks great. How did you get so much detail?

AA: We found out that silicone picks up all the detail, even errors in the original casting. Sometimes the original artwork has ancient chisel marks, and you can see the rough marks where the sculptors cut. The British Museum casters were probably using latex molds, back in the early twentieth century. Eventually the mold would give out and would have been disposed off. On some of these plaster casts you can see air bubbles that need to be filled. The silicone would pick up any modern damage to the plaster, but it also picks up modern repairs.

T: How did you put them together again?

AA: When Layard cut them apart, he didn't always pay attention to the scene on the relief. It happens that an individual that was perhaps leading a horse may have been cut through the arm, so in one piece there is an arm hanging on to a horse, and in another there is the armless groom. The British Museum actually restored some portions of these scenes. They made artistic choices so they would recast the arm on the groomsmen and sometimes the horse, or they may have cut it at the rope or at the end of his hand, or at the leash. There is sometimes a little bit missing from the scene, and sometimes those repairs are visible. The silicone is great for picking up a lot of the history of the original object. Everything from the original chisel marks to our own repairs. It is like the archaeology of museum life.

Mesopotamia for everyone

T : Is this going to be an exhibit for scholars or for everyone?

AA : For everyone. It is not going to be a scholarly exhibit.

T: And that's the final product?

A: Yes. You can see it over here.

T: Are you going to paint it?

A: Yes, I pre-primed the mold. And I will paint on top the look of faux-stone because we will be exhibiting some authentic pieces nearby so there will be not a big color difference.

T: Thank you, Adam. Good luck with the exhibit. I look forward to it.

AA: Thank you. I hope it will open next year.



*The curator at work
Photo: Melissa Aja*

200 out of 1000 – Many of the world's most beautiful objects come from the Penn

Julian Siggers has been the Williams Director of Penn Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology since July 2012. He talks about his experience with museums in the UK, Canada and the US. A network of research and science museums that reach out to the general public. To make beautiful ancient complicated objects accessible to everyone is one of the main challenges of the university museums.

T: Do you enjoy working here?

JS: This is a fantastic museum; I am having a great time. Before that, I was at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto in Canada, and before that at the Science Museum in London in the UK.

T: Are you from England?

JS: Yes, I am from the UK originally, but I have spent a very long time in Canada.

T: Tell me a little about how the Penn Museum works.

128 years

JS: This museum is a fairly unique one in the States, so it has been around for 128 years now. It started with a series of excavations in the Near East, one in particular at the Mesopotamian site of Nippur. The University of Pennsylvania, before the museum was even built, sent a team to excavate this ancient city and back then, excavations were a very difficult thing, especially in that region, so they had many adventures there. They found over ten thousand cuneiform tablets that they brought back to Philadelphia. The university decided to build a purposeful museum on land given to them by the city.

T: Who decided that?

JS: The provost or the president of the university. There was a museum here beforehand, but this big discovery prompted the university to build this research museum. Which is unusual, because usually the university museum is an art museum. There are other archaeology museums like the Kelsey at the University of Michigan, or the Oriental Institute in Chicago we work with very closely. Many of our curators were trained in Chicago, and vice versa. This museum has had over 300 expeditions all over the world since its creation, so we have a large collection from Egypt, Africa, from the Americas of course, about 40 percent from North, Meso- and South America, we have excavations in South East Asia as well, and a large Chinese collection, which unlike the rest of the collection is purchased. We always had the triple mission of a research, teaching institution that is being committed to being a public museum; the public mandate is very strong with us.

Over 300
expeditions

T: How was the museum created and how is it administered?

JS: There were five different building episodes, in the museum, since the museum was opened. The anthropology department sits within the museum as well. The curators are half faculty, half museum

Five building
episodes



*The Penn Museum:
On the threshold*

The most
phenomenal
collections

appointed. Anthropology is an obvious one. But we also have faculty curators in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, and East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Classics Department, Art History. So we have curators from all those departments that work here.

T: What do the curators do precisely?

JS: The curators look after the collections, but they also work on allowing and facilitating access to the collections for researchers all over the world, they work on publishing the collections, and curating exhibitions as well. That can be temporary exhibitions or traveling exhibitions, or what we are really focused on now is the permanent galleries.

This museum has the most phenomenal collections. The Smithsonian in Washington published a book which is a history of the world in a thousand objects, and they came and photographed many of our pieces. They also went to the Met, Cleveland, Boston, ...

T: This is in Washington? And they also have objects?

JS: Yes, mostly from the New World. For the thousand objects they have selected over 200 from this museum.

T: Impressive.

JS: Our museum has been mainly focused on research and teaching. So many of our galleries have remained the same for years and years. But we are about to embark on a whole scale renovation of our galleries, both of the huge Egyptian galleries, the Chinese gallery and the Near Eastern collections as well. And we are about to start the first phase of the renovation this month. That's the very unglamorous part, the facilities. The first phase puts air-conditioning in the bulk of the galleries, but also renovates the building itself, puts in new washrooms, new elevators, new lighting systems, a lot of it behind the scenes. That sets the stage for the new galleries to be installed.

T: Do you have designers?

JS: For the Near Eastern gallery, the first one, we have written out to about ten design companies. But we have an in house team as well; it is not a very large exhibitions team. It is about eight people. They will be continuing to work on the temporary galleries, we put on a few every year, like the show from Central America, "Beneath the Surface." And we also have a huge exhibition coming in from Turkey in February 2016. We have been excavating for over 50 years in Central Turkey at a site that is called Gordion, the ancient Phrygian capital, around 800 BC, and we were never able to bring the material back, but the Turkish have loaned us some incredible stuff from the site for a year, so we are very excited to finally be able to show this.

T: Is the space ready?

JS: Yes, that space has already been renovated. It is empty now, but this is where the Near Eastern gallery will be permanently. The gallery has a lot of material from Ur that we excavated with the British Museum in the 1920's and 1930's.

T: Do you share the objects?

JS: In those days, there was the partage system. The British Museum got a quarter, we got another quarter and the Iraqi government got half. It was very fairly split up. We got remarkable pieces. We are pleased to display those.

T: That's the immediate plan then.

JS: Yes, that involves a lot of money, but we have a good headway already. This will take us through 2017. It will take a while but it is going to transform this museum.

T: Are you going to add other buildings?

JS: We are not. That is a deliberate thing. We have a lot of floor space that is not used in the best way possible. We have even unused space, yes. We were very keen on not doing an addition. Largely because additions really increase your operating expenditure and I have seen so many museums have ambitious

Bringing the
building to its
former glory

plans for extensions, only to face crushing new costs, which they haven't factored in to their operating budget with fairly disastrous consequences. So we wanted to bring up the beautiful building to its former glory.

T: How about the teaching aspect of your institutions, any new plans there?

JS: Yes, we are very serious about our teaching mandate as well. So a year ago we opened a lab in a newly restored part of the building, the Center of Analysis of Archaeological Material (CAAM). We just started the second year, and it is amazing to see the number of students who apply to do these courses. One of the goals is to draw people into archaeology. The Penn Museum has always been very strong in the study of the Ancient World and we wanted to enhance that, and it is something only a museum can do. The undergraduates have access to these vast collections to work on and hopefully publish.

T: They are not all published.

JS: Oh no, only a fraction of the collections is published. The volumes you see here are reports from the sites. And sometimes excavations get passed along to another group as people retire. So I think there are around fifty projects right now that are open and still being worked on. Just this last summer, we had a field fund at the museum and we gave the seed money for over twenty excavations around the world, it is very exciting when they come back.

T: So they stay for the summer only?

JS: Well, this is one of the downsides of working within the confines of the academic year. Often they dig in the summer. For the Near East, it can be the worst time to go because it is so hot. So they try to go in April or May. They have to get up early and stop around mid-day. We have two projects in Egypt as well.

JS: Whom else are you speaking to?

T: I will speak with Dan Rahimi.

JS: Dan is Executive Director of Galleries. Dan had I have actually worked together at the Royal Ontario Museum.

T: Can you tell me a little about that museum? Is it a university museum as well?

JS: It started out as a university of museum in Toronto but then went on to be a public museum and broke away from the university and became Canada's largest museum. So there has always been between the Peabody, the Oriental Institute, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the Penn Museum because we have grown up at around the same time and we have shared scholars. The big difference to us is that the ROM is also Natural History which is unusual for a museum, they usually split apart, but there they have kept both halves together in one building, so it is dinosaurs – and mummies.

T: At Harvard there is also the Natural History Museum that is closely connected to the Peabody.

JS: Yes, but the ROM is vast, it has 400 employees. It is second in size to the Natural History Museum in London.

T: Is this your first university museum?

JS: Well, it is the first true university museum that is so connected to the university and I really like that. The scholarly aspect is far more pronounced than in other museums I have worked in. But there is also a strong commitment to teaching the public as well, informing.

T: Adults you mean, or children?

JS: We have around 30,000 school kids who come here on tours every year. So we have always done that. The full time staff here is about 110, 60 to 80 part time.

University
museums and
public
programs

A funerary post as souvenir and a Guanyin: layers of stories

Chatting with Dan Rahimi, Executive Director of Galleries at the Penn Museum, Philadelphia

The Penn Museum is the largest university museum in America, but it displays only one percent of their million objects. The arcane nature of the objects is often emphasized by the requirements of the installations and the visitor often has trouble making out what the labels say or even what the objects are exactly. In the Egyptian Gallery, the visitor is invited in a dark room with high ceilings where you can easily imagine pharaohs sitting on thrones. The columns are brighter than the gallery. Inscriptions can hardly be deciphered and the explorer feeling is authentic.

Dan Rahimi has worked at the Penn Museum as Executive Director of Galleries for a year, after being Vice President of Gallery Development at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto for 28 years. The current director of the Penn Museum, Julian Siggers, asked Dan to come work with him in Philadelphia.

Dan showed me around the storage area of the museum, and as we walked through the Oceania section, we came across a conservator who was working on a funerary post from

**From Wikipedia: Guanyin is an East Asian deity of mercy, and a bodhisattva associated with compassion as venerated by Mahayana Buddhists. The name Guanyin is short for Guanshiyin, which means "Perceiving the Sounds (or Cries) of the World".*

Borneo. Dan asked her about the provenance of the piece and this triggered thoughts about authenticity and traceability.

He now works with a team of archeologists, epigraphers, anthropologists and ethnographers to trace the multiple stories the objects tell. He marvels at each one of them. “We might not be able to tell one true story, because there is no single story to be told, but layers of stories instead.” In keeping with Michel Foucault’s *Archeology of Knowledge*, Dan Rahimi recognizes the “discursive practice that has its own levels, its own thresholds, its own various ruptures.” With a little nostalgia about the authenticity of the moment, he feels that museums succeed better at recreating space than time.

T: Tell me a little about your background.

DR: My father was Iranian and came from the town of Mashhad, the holy city in Northern Iran where there was a forced conversion of the Jews to Islam. At the end of the nineteenth century they lived their lives as Jews at home and Muslims on the street.

T: And you did too?

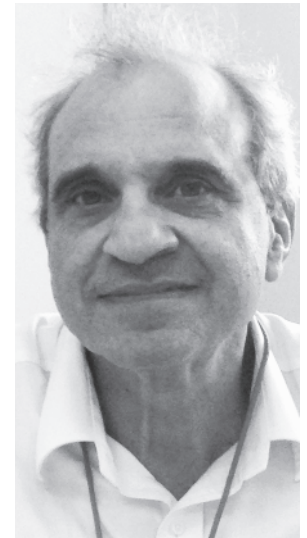
DR: No. I was born in Jerusalem, and my mother was German. I lived a deracinated life. My father’s family immigrated in the nineteen thirties. My mother was an *Aliat Hano’ar* in 1933, a movement that saved children from Nazi Germany and arranged for them to settle in a kibbutz, to find a home.

T: Well, my father was born in Tel-Aviv.

DR: Oh, really?

T: Yes, they left Austria. But my part of the family moved back. Most of the others went to the States, or China, or England.

DR: So in what year did your father’s family go back to Austria?



*Dan Rahimi, Executive
Director of Galleries at the
Penn Museum*

A deracinated life



Conservation lab in the Egypt Gallery at the Penn Museum

One percent on display

T: I like things that are in-between. Liminal things. I read on your website that you have only 1 percent of your objects on display.

R: That is about right. It is a big collection. It is more than a million objects. So yes, probably less than one percent. The full storage is only shown to scholars.

T: It's a shame. Or maybe it isn't? If people can come and look at it.

DR: Scholars can come and study these things. The general public can't. The collection I just took you in, Oceania, is really beautiful and many of these objects could be on display.

That post we were looking at may well have been made for Western consumption.

A funerary post –
an authentic
souvenir?

T: Like a souvenir, you mean?

DR: Exactly. That was my assumption. My subtle way of asking her (the conservator) that question.

T: When my father was a child, in 1948/49.

DR: But why? Why did they move back?

T: I think because they were homesick, they missed their habits. And they wanted to make sure that things went back to normal, that the whole Nazi episode was like a bad dream, like “kids misbehaving” as my grandfather sometimes said. I had my own discovery trip to Israel, that's why I speak Hebrew too. Because I wanted to know.

DR: I know, I had the exact same experience. I went to Germany, because I wanted to know. My mother was from a town called Treysa, a little town near Marburg. Anyway...Why you are going to these university museums? What are you interested in?

T: But it would have been a very large souvenir.

DR: Yes, but that's precisely the sort of thing that could have been made for a World's Fair and sold afterwards. We always question the authenticity of cultural objects in museums like ours. And I always want to know the provenance of the objects and when and why they were made. There is a legitimate trade in cultural objects. I think she said it was a funerary post from Borneo, but you immediately think that this has been used as a funerary post. It is clear to me though that it hasn't. So was it made as a funerary post? For someone? But then it wasn't used? Or was it made to be sold to tourists? I don't know the answer.

T: Could it be the copy of one that was actually used?

DR: Could be.

T: What would that indicate? What would that say about the object? Would that change something?

DR: There is a wonderful exhibit right now at the Metropolitan Museum in New York about art from Congo. They have these "power figures," the ones with nails in them, the Nkisi, vessels that contain spiritual forces. When these were collected very often people would remove the powerful things from them. So, to answer your question: here, this object might have been desanctified, if it were real. Or, it may never have been sanctified in the first place.

T: Do you put these things on the label?

DR: I would actually, for sure. I want to know exactly where the things come from, who made it and how, and how it was collected, if we know the answer. These questions are huge problems for all the museums that you are working with. Part of these problems is legal: can we establish that we legally own these things? Part of the problem is ethical: do we have the right to own these things? Or should they be returned to their countries of origin, maybe not by law but by the ethics of our profession. And then if I can answer those two questions, say, ok, there is no problem, then I am comfortable displaying them.

**Desacralizing
objects**

Ethical questions

Interpreting the
ideas of
archaeology for
the public

DR: Julian (Julian Siggers, the director of the Penn Museum) – invited me to come work here and he said “Look, you know the collection” which I do – I know the Near Eastern collections – “and you know how good the collection is and we want to build galleries at the highest level of exhibit design, and we’ll spend the money that we need to make them public museums.” And that’s my deep interest. I believe that whatever we do in a museum either as archaeologists, as philologists, or as anthropologists has to be communicated to the public.

And in the university, we have an academic audience; it is just the nature of it. But in a museum we have the opportunity to interpret the ideas of archaeology for the public and help them understand what we do and why it’s important and why it should be meaningful to their lives as well. So, in deciding to renovate the galleries here, we consciously decided to take a much more public approach than an academic one. We essentially do not believe that no one cares about what we do, we believe that everyone cares about what we do, they just don’t know it yet.

T: Yes, I agree. And how you do to make people see that?

Living in cities for
5000 years

DR: Let me illustrate this for you. We are working on the gallery of the Ancient Near East and most of our collection is from classic Mesopotamian city sites like Ur and Nippur, that then became the empires of the Middle East, which is a phenomenally urban society. All these city-states were urban environments. Most people were not living as fellahin in the hinterland, but they really were urban dwellers for the past 5000 years. The estimate is that 80 percent of the people in Mesopotamia in the Bronze Age lived in cities. The same number as today in the United States. I am really interested in the concept of the city, how do we define them, how do we relate to cities as urban people. And most people living in Philadelphia today can relate to that. So that’s my deep wish, I want the visitor to come in and look at the display and say, “That’s just like us, look! You know it’s a 5000 year old house but I could live in that house!”, so that’s what I am trying to do here.

T: Are you preparing a specific exhibit about this?

DR: We are preparing a major gallery. It will be very long term and it will cost about 5 million dollars to do this one display. Then we'll do Egypt and then China.

T: And the first one will be Israel?

DR: The Near East. Actually very little from Israel, there will be a smaller gallery that looks at the Eastern Mediterranean, which will be Israel and its relations with Egypt and Mesopotamia and Syria and Turkey and other places. We call it the Crossroads gallery. Mesopotamia was very separate from Israel in many respects. I think in terms of religion and mythology there are actually very important connections. So this gallery is mostly Mesopotamia, the other smaller gallery will be about the Eastern Mediterranean. Steve Tinney is the chief curator of the Near Eastern gallery project. He is the Deputy Director of the Penn Museum and Associate Curator in charge of the Babylonian section and also a faculty member in the department of Near Eastern languages and civilizations at the University of Pennsylvania. I felt we needed one intellectual leader of the group and I asked him. In this project on the Near East, we work with 10 scholars. And there is only one gap in Syria-Palestine; I will have to hire a curator for two years to cover that area. But apart from that, we are really self-sufficient.

T: But do you work with other museums?

DR: There are academic connections in every field. The scholars who do cuneiform have very strong connections with their other colleagues in other museums. At the academic level they do a lot of work together, conferences and papers. And then at the other end of things,



Egyptian columns in the Egypt gallery at the Penn Museum



*Wooden statue of Guanyin,
Bodhisattva of compassion,
seated with arm on knee, China
ca. 12th century 152569,
Courtesy of Penn Museum*

we do a lot of loans; we lend and borrow stuff for exhibitions so that kind of good relationship with other museums, yes. But at the level of developing galleries and possible public programs, we actually don't do a lot with other museums, it is quite separate. Even from the Oriental Institute in Chicago, which is another very similar kind of museum.

T: In a museum, everybody works on the threshold because you have to translate all the time between the things that you hide and the things that you show.

DR: Oh, I like that. It is true. We do things very metaphorically too in some respect. I am working with a great, young scholar, Adam Smith, on the China gallery. What he studies is how the first writing in China developed in the Bronze Age. The museum has always displayed the China collection in a kind of haphazard way. So he and I discussed this a lot and we proposed that we create a new gallery about how to look at Buddhism as it left India and went to Mongolia and down into China and then into South East Asia. The metaphor we used for this was that of translation. We trace how Buddhism changed by being translated into the idiom of each of these countries, spiritually and artistically.

T: That sounds exciting. How many new projects do you have?

DR: Three. Egypt, China and the Near East. But we have to renovate one of the buildings first. For China and Egypt. That's going to be three years before the building is ready, so the galleries won't be ready before five years.

T: I saw a lot of Egyptian things.

DR: Yes, those are the rooms we have to renovate.

T: They look fine to me. What do you have to renovate?

DR: Have you been to Philadelphia in the summer? It can be really hot. 35 degrees and 100 percent humidity. And those rooms aren't air conditioned at all. Though the renovation won't change the rooms physically, it will provide heating and air condition.

T: Would you like to show me one object in particular?

DR: In the Asia gallery, there is a Guanyin figure from the 12th century I have always loved, whose languid pose is not accidental. This one has been painted many times since it was made, with this gold paint probably applied in the 19th century. But if you look at her right knee, where the paint is chipped, you will see the most beautiful paint below: a white ground, raised lines painted pink, gilding (with gold leaf) and burnish. Some conservators would want to restore it to its original paint and remove the layers that are applied on top of the first one.

T: Is it possible to strip exactly the paint that was applied at a later date?

DR: Yes, there are techniques to identify which layer is more ancient. When you look at the knee, where a piece is broken off, the different layers reveal different colors, different aesthetic tastes. In a museum, you have to decide which authenticity you want to restore. And also, how much you expose. The pieces are fragile, and can't be touched too often, the touch removes paint, also light is dangerous. That's why the gallery must be kept darker.

T: So the museum shows objects, but they can't always be seen clearly.

DR: Yes, all the layers tell a story about the object, about its history. I contend that all – the early paint, the gold, and other painted layers in-between – are authentic, valid, important. Each tells different stories, all worthy of researching and re-telling. There is not one truth here, but many.

T: Thank you, Dan.

Renovating the galleries for new shows



The Guanyan figure has been painted many times

Quand j'imagine un lion, il a l'air tout aussi réel que lorsqu'il est en face de moi

Nous ne pouvons pas penser tous les états possibles d'une chose à la fois. Nous pouvons juste supposer qu'il y a un certain nombre d'états dans lesquels la maison n'est pas à ce moment précis, mais qui peuvent cependant exister, justement parce que l'état actuel exclut tous les autres états possibles. Cependant, l'état actuellement perçu est plutôt un aspect qu'un état dans lequel la maison se trouve. Cet aspect est un des aspects possibles, donc il peut être réel à un moment précis qui se trouve par ailleurs être le moment présent. Mais le moment présent est perçu subjectivement, et diffère pour chacun. Si je vois la maison en revenant de la course, je fais le tour d'un côté, mais de l'autre côté, je ne vois pas ce qui se passe. Un lapin pourrait courir ou des enfants pourraient sauter dans la piscine. Et même dans mon propre point de vue, je remarque seulement des aspects choisis de la maison qui n'englobent certainement pas sa présence totale. Mais dans chaque point de vue que j'adopte, l'intention de la totalité est toujours donnée.

Lorsqu'on considère la multiplication des états identitaires de la maison, on se rend bien compte qu'il est impossible de réduire l'état de la maison à une idée ou à un concept. Ici, la philosophie du langage est indispensable. Elle permet de distinguer une dénotation d'une référence et d'une « dépicition ». Les travaux de Nelson Goodman à ce sujet ont permis de rapprocher le concept et l'idée des objets en question. En effet, une représentation a plusieurs sens. On peut parler de représentation lorsque quelqu'un est absent et a besoin d'un représentant. En même temps, on parle de représentation quand quelque chose d'une nature différente peut être mise à la place d'une autre chose, ceci vaut notamment pour des images, des tableaux, des sculptures ou généralement pour tous les symboles. Toutes ces représentations renvoient à une autre chose absente pour le moment et sont de nature différente que la chose en question. Un tableau représentant un prince ne pourra pas faire de voyage à sa place mais permet de reconnaître l'aspect du prince en question.

Husserl a contribué à ces distinctions en mettant l'image en rapport avec l'intention. Si l'image est le signe d'un absent, elle renvoie à une réalité qui diffère d'elle dans son essence, mais l'illusion est difficile à distinguer de la perception d'une chose effectivement présente. Husserl met en rapport l'image et l'absence de l'objet représenté, ainsi que la perception passée de certains éléments dont on se souvient et qui forment par cette absence une forme de négation. Quand j'imagine un lion, il a l'air tout aussi réel que lorsqu'il est en face de moi dans une cage, parce que l'image formée est de la même nature, c'est seulement l'être présent effectif qui diffère. Husserl distingue aussi l'image elle-même et l'attention à la formation d'une telle image. Logiquement, l'image du lion et la présence du lion évoquent en moi le même contenu imaginé. L'image est devenue un contenu à elle seule, elle se détache de l'occurrence réelle. Il faut selon Husserl distinguer la simple image du lion qui se forme et le fait que je représente un lion dans mon imagination. Ces deux opérations ne sont pas semblables, et mettent l'objet à distance. Ce n'est pas seulement l'image qui compte mais tout l'événement de la vie qui se met ensemble par la variété des points de vue perçus à la fois dans le temps et dans l'espace. Husserl parle aussi de la représentation de tout ce qui entoure le lion comme son environnement naturel qui est représenté avec lui.

La possibilité d'un lion dans un couloir de métro sera très réduite, mais évidemment pas impossible, donc, si nous voyons un lion sur notre trajet, nous pouvons d'abord faire comme si de rien n'était, ou prendre la fuite, selon d'autres facteurs qui s'imposeront pour vérifier l'expérience du lion ou l'imagination d'un lion. Il peut rugir par exemple, ce qui le rendra certainement plus crédible. Mais le sens du réel n'est pas donné par l'image pure, il est donné par la richesse des expériences qui forment dans l'instant à chaque fois une expérience complète.

Husserl mentionne aussi l'absence des couleurs et des objets dans le souvenir d'un moment passé. On le recrée par la pensée et en faisant cela, on dédouble l'actuel perçu puisqu'on y introduit une autre dimension, passée, qui se superpose au présent. Le facteur temporel du rappel et de la re-création d'un état passé dans le présent rend le rapport à la négation multiforme et permet ainsi de situer l'événement négatif dans une dialectique temporelle.

Hugh Bear
Chapter 17 of
"The mystery of
the planet Alas-K"
by Tatjana
Barazon
Illustrated by
Van Troi Tran

You know the bears on the planet Alas-K, the planet of bears?

In his teddy bear shop "Hugh Bear", Hugh suddenly noticed a change in the appearance of his usually perfectly shaped teddy bears. Their nose seemed to have moved to the side, the ears seemed to be misplaced. And very quickly, people gathered in his store and started yelling at him, waving bizarrely shaped bears at him, and Hugh did not understand what was happening.

"Look at the bear! Look! What is happening to him?" A mother screamed.

"This is not a perfectly shaped teddy bear! We have always relied on your perfect bears!" A father said, very annoyed.

"Please calm down, people. I don't know what is happening!"

Anton looked down at Nelson, his favorite bear. His nose had moved to the back of his head, and doing the Nuzzle with the Muzzle seemed quite impossible for him now. Anton started sobbing, and Hugh looked at his son, and then at the people in his shop, took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes, and sighed. He didn't know what to do.

"Daddy, don't worry." Anton said between two sobs. "I know Faufur and the Knight of the Round Ear will find a way to make everything right again."

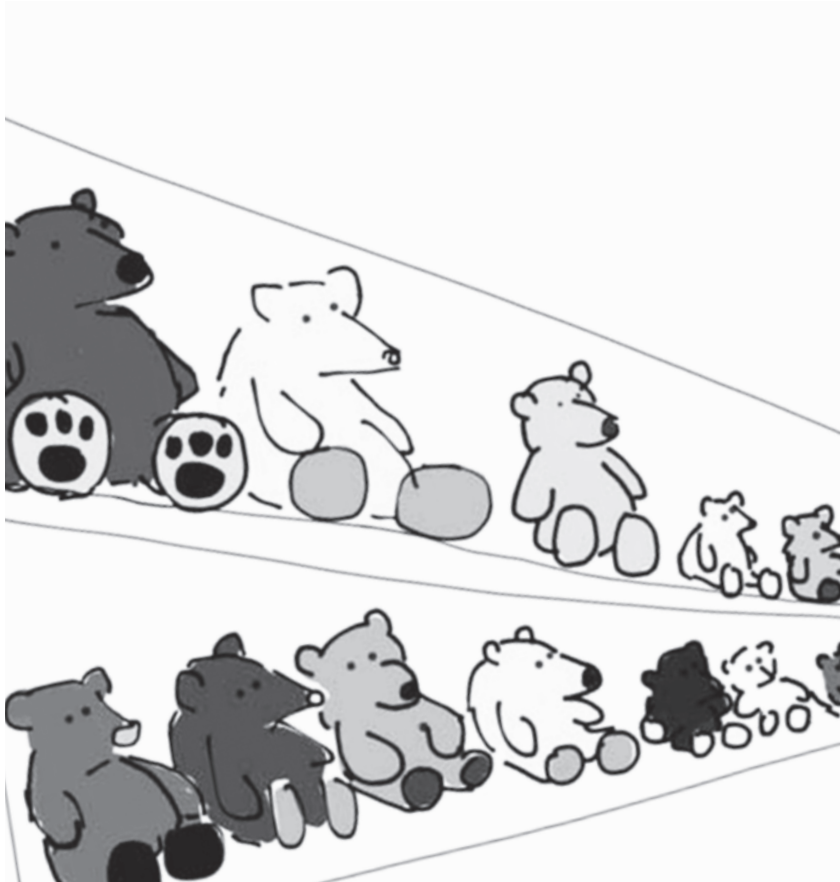
"Who are these people, my darling?" Hugh asked his son, still rubbing his eyes.

"You know the bears on the planet Alas-K, the planet of bears."

Hugh looked at his son and had a sudden recollection. Faufur, ... "Yes, I remember a bear called Faufur."

"Yes, Faufur is in charge of the teddy bears that arrive on Earth and fall asleep. He ships them to us."

And then, Hugh suddenly remembered. The teddy bears he sold in his shop came from



another planet. He wondered if he should try and call Faufur.

The children in his bear shop cried and screamed louder and louder. The parents yelled at him. Hugh lost his patience.

“Please, you have to leave now. We will fix this. The bears will be restored, don’t worry.”

“But look at them, what’s wrong with them?” The parents insisted.

“Please, please, I need to think. You really need to leave now!”

And he motioned the angry parents with their children out of his shop in an energetic manner.

“My bear!” A little girl moaned while Hugh pushed her gently but decisively out of his shop.

“Don’t worry, it will be ok. The bears are going to be fine.”

“Please, Mister Hugh, do something. We can’t go on like that.”

“I know.” Hugh said. “And neither can I” he added, mumbling to himself.

When the last angry customer had finally left his shop, he sank down next to his son and sighed. “Anton, what are we going to do?”

IMPRESSUM

Die Zeitschrift
SOGLITUDES fördert
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Verbreitung von aktuel-
len Entdeckungen auf
Deutsch, Französisch
und Englisch.
Volkswirtschaftliche
Verlags GmbH,
Schottenfeldgasse 93,
1070 WIEN.
FN 128722y
UID: ATU 148909.
ISSN2412-415X
soglitudes@gmail.com

Subscription: Austria:
33,40 Euro inkl. Mwst
International: 35 €,
38,50 \$
per issue:
8 Euro incl. Mwst
International: 9,00 €,
10 \$ (no VAT)
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SOGLITUDES behandelt Themen, die den Übergang von einem Zustand in einen anderen beschreiben. Von „soglia“, italienisch für Schwelle, und solitude, französisch für Einsamkeit, denn an der Schwelle ist niemand einsam.

This journal contains interviews, articles and reviews that report on the cultural developments in Europe and the Americas from the point of view of threshold philosophy. Passages and liminal situations that can be noticed in vision and perception. The mind switches from one detail like a pencil to a whole room, moving on the threshold of thought. “Change blindness” or “Multiple Object Tracking” are examples for the many words in cognitive psychology to describe threshold states.

L'inspiration principale vient d'Ulysse de James Joyce, d'Alice de Lewis Carroll et du texte de Kafka „Devant la Loi.“ L'homme est toujours au seuil d'un nouveau commencement et décide du chemin que prend sa vie. Dans chacun de ces moments a lieu un passage d'une partie à un tout que l'on ne perçoit jamais tout à fait. En anthropologie il s'agit de rites et de cérémonies qui célèbrent le passage d'un état à un autre, décrits par Victor Turner comme „liminalité“. En littérature c'est souvent l'amour qui révèle des situations-limite. Orphée veut sauver sa bien-aimée Eurydice du monde souterrain, mais il doute au dernier moment et la perd sur le seuil de la lumière. Parfois c'est une décision difficile qui nous laisse demeurer sur le seuil, faute de reconnaître le meilleur moment pour agir.

Diese philosophische Zeitschrift enthält Beiträge, die das philosophische und kulturelle Geschehen in Europa und Amerika vorwiegend aus der Sicht der Schwellenphilosophie betrachtet. Die Hauptinspiration kommt von James Joyces „Ulysses“, Lewis Carrolls „Alice“ und Kafkas „Türengleichnis“.

Die Beiträge werden in Form von Unterredungen mit führenden Experten in Philosophie, Literatur, Psychologie, Archäologie und Geschichte die Hauptthemen illustrieren.

SOGLITUDES enthält Beiträge auf Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch.

SOGLITUDES erscheint vier Mal im Jahr, online und print.

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