

**Chapter 1 : from\_the\_workshop\_of\_the\_chicago\_assyrian\_dictionary\_studies\_presented\_to\_robert\_d\_biggs**

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A collaborative project intended to focus ideas and thoughts on the history of the Oriental Institute of The University of Chicago. This version includes a few minor corrections, and appears in print on pages xi - xxxiii of *Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs*, June 4, Roth, Walter Farber, Matthew W. Stolper and Paula von Bechtolsheim, eds. This volume is available for purchase from Oxbow Books and David Brown Book Company, and is also available online free of charge from the Oriental Institute. Like many other immigrant families from Scandinavia, they settled in a farming community peopled mainly by fellow Danes, first in Colorado, and subsequently near St. Andrews in central Washington State. My interest in languages arose early. My Danish grandmother, who was in her mid-thirties when she came to America, learned to understand English and to speak a heavily accented English, but never learned to write in English. In the days before many farm families had telephones, family members wrote to one another a couple of times a week. With the help of a small Danish-English dictionary and an elementary grammar that my mother had, I learned Danish vocabulary and Danish grammar well enough to understand her letters. At that time, hardly anyone – certainly not of their generation or even the next – in rural Denmark studied English, so I attempted to write to them in Danish. I certainly made many mistakes, but apparently they were able to understand what I wrote, and I could understand their responses. In my parents moved from the small town of Hunters near the Columbia River and across the river from the Colville Indian Reservation to a acre farm in Spokane County, Washington. We had no electricity or running water water was pumped from a well by a windmill or by a hand pump. We children attended the local two-room school that was two miles away, but in our school district was split and consolidated with two schools in nearby towns. Our new school in Medical Lake was still small – two grades to each room. In high school, I had an opportunity to study Spanish – the only language offered at first. This was a lot of fun. The next year several of us who were interested asked the teacher of Spanish if she would also offer Latin. I did not realize at the time what an added burden that was, but she took it on cheerfully and offered us two years of Latin. In my junior and senior years, the same teacher offered German to a small class of about five of us, with textbooks that used the old German Gothic script. I knew that I did not want a future life as a farmer. Especially in retrospect, I treasure some of the experiences of farm life, but the drudgery of twice-a-day milking and feeding of cows, the care of other animals, the discomforts of putting up hay in the summertime, the dustiness of planting and tilling and wheat harvesting, building barbed-wire fences, and such did not appeal to me. I definitely wanted something different in my future. At that time, it was possible to get part-time work on campus that paid enough to cover room and board the pay was 80 cents an hour. One year I worked in the college library, the next year on the grounds crew raking leaves, chipping ice off sidewalks, digging ditches, etc. I also earned extra money by editing and typing the term papers of other students for fifty cents a page. I was excited by the opportunities to study languages in college. My Spanish was good enough that I could immediately take advanced classes. In my first year, I also began the study of French and Russian. Russian seemed a timely language to study, and, indeed, the leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, died in during the year I studied Russian. Unfortunately the professor of Russian he was a native of Russia, but taught in the economics department did not return the following year, so I had to give up on Russian. Hoping to be able to teach Spanish and French at the high-school level, I pursued a degree in education. Most of the men working in the pea harvest were from Mexico they were called *braceros* in Spanish, and I got acquainted with several of them. They appreciated having an American who was reasonably fluent in their language and who enjoyed the Mexican music with them on the jukebox in one of the local taverns. In my first years at Green Giant, I had relatively low-skill jobs such as handling the empty wooden boxes that the peas were hauled to the cannery in. Eventually I had a much more responsible job – processing the peas in huge retorts with steam. About a dozen of these retorts were arranged in a circle. A

crane lowered three large steel baskets filled with cans of peas into each retort, which was then clamped shut. My job was to turn on the steam, bring the temperature to a certain degree, and to cook the peas for a specified length of time. So it was a matter of keeping an eye on six or eight retorts at a time, both for temperature and timing, all a few minutes apart. Luckily, I never blew the top off a retort or overcooked a load of peas. To this day, the smell of canned peas reminds me of my years working for the Jolly Green Giant. When the pea-canning season was finished, I usually drove a truck in the wheat harvest for farmers in the area hauling a truck load of threshed wheat to the nearest grain elevator, about 20 miles away, thus earning money for clothing and books for the coming college year. Driving a wheat truck is not as easy as it sounds. The threshed wheat is held in a large hopper on the combine until it is nearly full. A man on the combine signals the truck driver, who drives so that an auger moves the wheat through what looks like a huge spout and into the bed of the truck. So as not to lose any time, the combine does not stop or slow down, so the truck must keep the same speed. The driver has to be careful to keep the spout over the bed of the truck and also not to drive into the combine. This gets tricky on the rolling hills of the Dayton area. The combine has a leveling device that keeps the body of the combine level even on a hillside and they do tip over occasionally nevertheless, but it can be a bit scary for a truck driver. Depending on the distance to the grain elevator and whether there was a line of trucks waiting to unload, there was often some time to read a bit between runs. Thus I had a chance to read several French novels, the memoirs of Simone de Beauvoir, and Shakespeare plays while I waited. For recreational reading in my college years, I followed up on a youthful interest in ancient Egypt and its pyramids and mummies. I was fascinated by the thought of someone being able to read cuneiform and to read something that no one had read in thousands of years. It was also then that I first read *W*. I wondered if I was foolish to think of trying to study the ancient Near East seriously. I became active in student government, particularly in my junior and senior years. In the summer of I was a delegate to the national meeting of the National Student Association at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The plenary sessions lasted late into the evening, with especially heated discussions on foreign policy matters. In I applied to attend a six-week seminar of the organization devoted to issues of foreign policy as they affected students. I was among those selected to attend the seminar, held at Harvard University. It was only many years later that it was disclosed that these seminars were secretly funded by the United States government through the Central Intelligence Agency. In my senior year of college, my French teacher encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship to study for a year in France. To my great surprise, I was awarded both a Danforth to pursue a higher degree and a Fulbright. Since the Fulbright was for only one year, it was agreed that I should take up the Fulbright first. Once in Toulouse, it was made clear to me that I was not obliged to pursue the course of study originally proposed, so I registered for a course in Greek and Roman art, and then I learned that across town there was the Institut Catholique where one could study Hebrew, Arabic, and even Akkadian! While I kept up with the other students in the classes, I have to confess that I did not learn a great deal beyond the scripts and rudimentary grammar. Hebrew and Arabic use alphabetic scripts, so the script is not a real hurdle to learning the languages. Cuneiform is another matter. As the name implies, the script is made up of wedge-shaped marks. In the case of clay, the wedges are made with a reed stylus in the damp clay. In the case of stone, the wedges need to be chiseled into the stone. Cuneiform is a script that has been used to write many different languages, the first of which was Sumerian, the language of ancient Sumer that is unrelated to any other known language. Later, it was adapted, and somewhat modified, to write Akkadian the term used to include both Babylonian and Assyrian. The script utilizes several hundred signs. While I was in Toulouse, I had an opportunity to meet with Professor Georges Boyer, an elderly historian of law who was also a scholar of cuneiform. He was then preparing an edition of legal texts discovered by French excavators at the Syrian site of Mari and which appeared in as *Textes juridiques* in the series *Archives Royales de Mari*. He was the first professional Assyriologist I ever met. Being in Europe meant it was possible to make brief visits to other areas of France. I was also able to make two trips to Spain, one to central Spain where there were lots of remnants of the Roman period. In the spring I hitchhiked with a German girl to Barcelona where we were able to get a boat to Palma de Mallorca. Even though the Fulbright paid enough for living expenses and a bit of travel, more extensive travel required other strategies. In Trieste, Italy, I was able to get a visa to travel through Yugoslavia. I had no concept of how little

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

### Chapter 2 : Hursag - Wikipedia

*AS Studies Presented to Robert D. Biggs, June 4, From the Workshop of the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary, Volume 2 Martha T. Roth, Walter Farber, Matthew W. Stolper and Paula von Bechtolsheim, eds.*

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