

OBITUARY

EDMOND SOLLBERGER

(1920–1989)

The death of Edmond Sollberger on June 21, 1989, was a loss for the community of scholars specializing in ancient Mesopotamia, and a particular loss to The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project. Dr. Sollberger was a founding member of the RIM team and became its first Editor-in-Chief as well as Editor-in-Charge of Early Periods. In the formative years of the Project he took an active, often leading, role and because of his acute perception of what the Project should be he left a permanent stamp on its aims and infrastructure. Unfortunately the illness which plagued him in his final years prevented him from continuing in an active role and deprived the Project of the benefit of his wisdom.

Dr. Sollberger's involvement with the RIM Project, as his involvement with the Ebla Publication Committee, came at the end of a distinguished career. Born in 'Constantinople' (to use his term) he received his early education there before proceeding to study at the University of Geneva (1940–1945). Switzerland was a natural choice since he held Swiss citizenship by birth. During these years he travelled regularly on the Orient Express between Geneva and Istanbul, where his family still lived, and recalled with disgust the war-torn scenes which he witnessed.

By this time he had become seriously interested in cuneiform studies, specifically Sumerology, and on his own initiative went to the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome where he studied privately with Anton Deimel. Eventually he received the Doctorat ès Lettres at Geneva (1952) and he held various positions at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (1949–1961). In Geneva he met and married Ariane Zender and in due course she gave birth to two daughters, Nicole and Josette. In 1962 he accepted a position at the British Museum in London and remained there, eventually becoming Keeper of Western Asiatic Antiquities, until his retirement.

By the time he moved to London, Dr. Sollberger had gained an enviable reputation as a Sumerologist, primarily through the publication of two books based on his research on the Pre-Sargonic royal inscriptions from Lagash. He continued active research thereafter and by the end of his career had

published six further monographs and over seventy articles. The most important aspect of his approach to research and publication was his fascination with new, significant, or unusual cuneiform inscriptions and this is reflected in the number of texts which he published for the first time. At the same time he recognized this characteristic in other scholars and in his official capacity at the British Museum opened up the vast collections of cuneiform inscriptions to serious-minded, qualified scholars. This liberality afforded numerous researchers the opportunity to study and publish original documents and thus make serious contributions to our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamian civilization.

Edmond Sollberger was a scholar's scholar, dedicated to his profession and to the furtherance of scholarly interests. At the same time he enjoyed company and he and his wife Ariane were hospitable in entertaining scholars in their home and in stimulating conversations on subjects ranging from Mesopotamia, the latest play, good food, to current politics. Because of his cosmopolitan background and fluency in numerous languages — French, English, Greek, Italian, Turkish, etc. — he knew much about people with various ethnic origins and had a passion for travel. He contributed much and therein has left his own memorial.

A. Kirk Grayson