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INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

Newsletter 15 Spring 2016



NYU | ISAW

From the Director

There is a certain appropriateness in announcing our next exhibition, "Time and Cosmos in Greco-Roman Antiquity" (p. 8), in an issue of the Newsletter otherwise entirely devoted to evidence of time's dominion. It was enormously gratifying to be able to mark the end of my final semester as ISAW's Leon Levy Founding Director with the graduation of our first three doctorates, all of whom obeyed the discipline of time to degree and finished within the canonical seven years. One of my first actions in the fall of 2007 was to sit down and write the guidelines for a new kind of doctoral program, and now we have the first fruits of the labors of our students and faculty. In my remarks below (p. 6) I have tried to express my admiration for and gratitude to these three pioneers in showing how a broader approach to the ancient world could produce new types of scholarship without sacrificing traditional rigor. I was a member of the dissertation committee for two of them and enjoyed very much being stretched into areas I didn't know much about. That is what ISAW is like on a daily basis, and it's a joy to be part of it.

Even though I step down as director this summer (p. 5), I do plan to continue as an active member of this community. I have always found the administrative roles that I have played very satisfying and far from irrelevant to my scholarship, but there is a point in the cyclical time of academe when change is good for all concerned. Both individual and institution can benefit from fresh energy and ideas. I am looking forward to having fewer meetings and more time to read and reflect, among other benefits of retirement—which include the opportunity to enjoy the company of our faculty, visiting scholars, staff, and students, a wonderful group.

At the end of August, Alexander Jones will take up the interim directorship for the coming year (p. 4). At press time, President Hamilton was still at work on recruiting the next permanent director, who is likely to arrive next summer. Alex was our first faculty appointment and has been a superb colleague and contributor to ISAW's development over the last eight years; and—an unexpected bonus—he has turned out to be a talented guest curator of exhibitions as well. He will make sure that we lose no momentum as we look ahead to a new director.

I want to conclude by thanking all those who have made this great adventure possible and who have taken part in building this unique institution as a gift to generations to come. Our Founder, Shelby White, occupies a unique place, of course, with her vision and generosity. But all of you have had a share in creating this precious community: faculty, staff, visiting scholars, students, senior fellows, participants in lectures and conferences, contributors. You have made our common life a rewarding one and the director's role a happy and fulfilling one. Thank you.

Roger Bagnall
Leon Levy Director

ABOUT ISAW

The creation of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World (ISAW) at New York University had its roots in the passion of Shelby White and Leon Levy for the art and history of the ancient world, which led them to envision an institute that would encourage the study of the economic, religious, political, and cultural connections among ancient civilizations across geographic, chronological, and disciplinary boundaries.

The Institute, established in 2006, is an independent center for scholarly research and graduate education.



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Interim Director Announcement



NYU President Andrew Hamilton and Provost David McLaughlin have announced that Alexander Jones, ISAW's Professor of the History of the Exact Sciences in Antiquity, will serve as Interim Director as of September 1. Alexander Jones previously served as Acting Director of ISAW in Spring 2013 and as Vice Director in academic year 2013-14. Founder Shelby White comments, "Alexander Jones was ISAW's first faculty

member. He brings to the role of interim director not only his unique scholarship in the history of science, his dedication to his graduate students, but also his continued participation in ISAW's ground breaking exhibitions program. He has a great depth of knowledge of ISAW and will be an outstanding interim director."

Alexander Jones' work centers on the history and transmission of the mathematical sciences, especially astronomy. He is a member of the American Philosophical Society, a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a full member of the Académie Internationale d'Histoire des Sciences, and recipient of several awards and honors including a Guggenheim fellowship and the Francis Bacon Award in the History of Science. Before coming to NYU in 2008, he was on the faculty for sixteen years in the Department of Classics and the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology at the University of Toronto.

He is the author of several editions of Greek scientific texts, among them Pappus of Alexandria's commentary on the corpus of Hellenistic geometrical treatises known as the "Treasury of Analysis"; an anonymous Byzantine astronomical handbook based on Islamic sources; and a collection of about two hundred fragmentary astronomical texts, tables, and horoscopes from the papyri excavated a century ago by Grenfell and Hunt at Oxyrhynchus. His current research interests include the contacts between Babylonian and Greco-Roman astronomy and astrology, the Antikythera Mechanism and other artifacts of Hellenistic and Roman period astronomy, and the scientific work of Claudius Ptolemy.



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Together with Visiting Research Scholar Christine Proust, he curated ISAW's 2011 exhibition on Babylonian Mathematics, *Before Pythagoras*, and he is also curating the forthcoming ISAW exhibition *Time and Cosmos in Greco-Roman Antiquity* opening October 19th, 2016 (page 8).

Please join the ISAW community in congratulating Alexander Jones on this significant appointment.



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Interim Director Alexander Jones and Leon Levy Director Roger Bagnall

Roger Bagnall's Retirement

As has been announced, Roger Bagnall, Leon Levy (founding) Director of the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, is stepping down and returning to the faculty and full-time scholarship in September 2016.

Founder Shelby White remarks, "In 2006, ISAW was an idea, a dream, that my late husband Leon Levy and I had, to create an Institute to change the way the ancient world was studied and foster scholarship across academic disciplines and geographic boundaries. Roger Bagnall has fulfilled those hopes. Congratulations on a wonderful nine years."



Left to Right: NYU President Emeritus John Sexton, ISAW Leon Levy Director Roger Bagnall, ISAW Founder Shelby White, and NYU President Andrew Hamilton

ISAW PhD Candidate Irene Soto says, "I first started collaborating with Roger right at the beginning of his directorship at ISAW. During that summer of 2009, I worked as his research assistant using the growing library of the Institute. The sixth floor had not been remodeled to house the exhibition offices, the Oak library, while still beautiful, was devoid of books and substantial seating, and the population of ISAW was about a quarter of the seventy people it now houses.

Under nine years of Roger's leadership, ISAW has become the center of interdisciplinary research for the ancient world that it was set out to be. He has excelled as Director in hiring faculty, expanding the visiting research scholar program, advising students, teaching, and serving in numerous committees because of his innate sense that our field is one of collaboration, and as such, it relies on fostering a healthy academic community.



Leon Levy Director Roger Bagnall and ISAW PhD Candidate Irene Soto

Under every decision, whether it is tea times and lunches, or hosting lectures or selecting Visiting Scholars, Roger's perennial vision was to nurture an academically diverse community under one roof. Through ISAW's numerous lectures, workshops, and even ongoing quotidian activities, he laid down the blueprints to build connections with the rest of the scholarly world.

As a student at the Institute I have benefitted socially and intellectually from daily interactions with visiting scholars, which often lead to larger collaborative projects, working with the exhibitions department in shows, and even getting involved with archaeological projects that expand my usual academic horizons. The environment at ISAW has been one of opportunities, and it is thanks to Roger's vision for the Institute and his hard work that ISAW has become the dynamic center for advanced study, research, and graduate education that it is. His legacy of openness and collaboration will undoubtedly continue and we at ISAW are grateful for his years of care and dedication."



Commencement 2016

Roger Bagnall

Leon Levy Director and Professor of Ancient History

Commencement Address

May 17th, 2016

The past nine years have been the era of the invention of ISAW, in which every year brought some “first” in our institutional life, from the first public event (the first Leon Levy Lecture, in the fall of 2007, given by Glen Bowersock), down to today—the celebration of our first completed doctorates, following on our first round of successful dissertation defenses. The three young scholars we gather to celebrate have been true pioneers, members of the first two cohorts to apply and be admitted to the doctoral program—in the case of Mehrnoush Soroush, who was part of the first group, fearlessly applying to a program that was what in the digital world could have

been called vaporware: it didn't really exist except as a concept and a promise. Taking students into doctoral programs is always a matter of risk-taking by both sides, but in this case it was truly the student who was taking the larger risk. For that courage, I salute and thank all of our graduates. They bet on ISAW when it barely had come into existence, when it did not yet have all of the faculty they would need to complete their degrees. But we also thank them for the quality of their work and for its fulfillment of ISAW's mission to cross all sorts of lines and find connections and comparisons that otherwise would not have been visible.

Like scholarly publishing, doctoral study in humanistic disciplines seems always to be in crisis. I'm sure that everyone here is aware of the constant barrage of debate over its future in an era when the ability of graduates to find suitable positions is uncertain and when society seems gripped by a coarse utilitarianism concerning education in general. A difficult employment situation for PhDs is in fact also a hardy perennial; it was only in a couple of exceptional postwar decades of expansion that academic jobs were plentiful. But the habits of mind developed by doctoral education are not narrowly limited to the academic world. We cannot foresee what further upheaval will



Leon Levy Director Roger Bagnall with the first graduates of ISAW's doctoral program. Left to Right: Randolph Ford, Mehrnoush Soroush, Roger Bagnall, and Erik Hermans

come from the transformation of the entire system by which information and knowledge are distributed in our society. But the abilities to do research, to think, to write, and to communicate in speech are not about to become obsolete.

What we do is more than the acquisition of skills, however, even though those are important. Our mission has to do with what we use these for, namely the attempt to understand humanity and its interaction with the world environment over long stretches of the deep past. The conviction that this type of understanding, and the innate curiosity that drives such inquiry, are fundamental to what it means to be human was at the root of ISAW's foundation. We give a central place to free inquiry not restricted by the artificial boundaries of modern disciplines or by the possessiveness of national, ethnic, or religious identity politics. Behind the specific dissertation topics of each of our graduates lie human beings trying to make their way in the world, to manage their natural environment, to feed themselves and their families, to transmit culture and knowledge to their young, and to make sense of the world in which they live. These people are our underlying subject.

Our Graduates

Prior to enrolling in the doctoral program at ISAW, **Randolph Ford** received his BA and MA in Scandinavian Studies with a focus on Old Icelandic/Old English Literature from the University of Wisconsin, where he also completed coursework in Classics and East Asian Studies. His doctoral dissertation, entitled "Ethnographic Identities and the Politics of Legitimacy in Late Roman and Early Medieval Chinese Historiography," Randolph successfully defended his dissertation at ISAW on November 20, 2015.

Before arriving at ISAW, **Erik Hermans** received his BA and MPhil in Greek and Latin Literature and Ancient History from the Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. He also studied at the University of Amsterdam, the University of Ghent (Belgium), and the

University of Oxford. His doctoral dissertation, which he defended at ISAW on December 15, 2015, is entitled "Aristotle from York to Basra: An Investigation into the Simultaneous Study of Aristotle's Categories in the Carolingian, the Byzantine and the Abbasid Worlds."

Mehrnoush Soroush received her MA in Architecture from the University of Tehran, Iran, with an emphasis on the management and rehabilitation of historic urban quarters. After her graduation, she worked for several years in projects aimed at the conservation and management of cultural heritage in Iran before pursuing her degree at ISAW starting in 2009. Mehrnoush defended her dissertation, "Irrigated Landscapes Beyond Political Dynamics: Long Term Water Management Strategies on the Miyanab Plain of Khuzistan (Iran)" on April 4th, 2016.



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Time and Cosmos in Greco-Roman Antiquity

October 19, 2016 - April 23, 2017

Rachel Herschman, Curatorial Assistant

The ancient Greeks and Romans contributed more than any other past civilization to the rise of time's dominion over individual and public life. Adapting ideas from Egypt and Babylonia, they divided the day into hours, and invented sophisticated instruments and devices to mark their passage.

Time and Cosmos in Greco-Roman Antiquity explores the ways that time was organized and kept track of in the Greco-Roman world, and how it was conceived in relation to the Cosmos. The displayed objects will include artifacts illustrating the technology of ancient time reckoning and the social role, perception, and visualization of time and cosmos; the selection will also highlight the contrasting formative roles of indigenous Greek and Roman cultural practices and contact with the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt as well as the peoples of northwest Europe. The exhibition will be organized around two themes: the *Tools of Time Reckoning*, exploring the material resources that gave temporal structure of the daily life of private individuals and the community in public spheres such as religion, commerce, and law, and *Reflections of Time and Cosmos*, concerning ancient representations of time, the universe, and their power to shape the environment and human destiny.



Portable Universal Sundial
Bronze, H. 6.4 cm; W. 6.1 cm; D. 2.5 cm
Near Bratislava (?), ca. 250 CE
Museum of the History of Science, Oxford: 51358